



Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010): Lesson Plan

Topic	
<p>In a 5-4 decision, the Court held that the First Amendment protects the right of free speech regardless of whether the speaker is a mere citizen or large corporation. The ruling decided that corporations and other groups can freely advocate during elections. However, the Court found that the disclosure requirements on donations were constitutional. The <i>Citizens United</i> decision is incredibly controversial and went against precedent. Also, super political action committees, or super PACs, have been created as a result of the <i>Citizens United</i> decision.</p>	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civics • History • Social Studies 	30-45 minutes
Video link:	
https://academy4sc.org/topic/citizens-united-v-federal-election-commission-2010-supreme-court-cases-series-academy-4-social-change/	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
<p>By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. • Explain the majority decision in <i>Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission</i>. • Describe the rise of super PACs and dark money in politics. 	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Hillary Rodham Clinton, expenditures, President Barack Obama	
Materials Needed	



Worksheet, Optional Internet Access

Before you watch

Turn and Talk: What role do you think money plays in American politics? Discuss with a partner.

While you watch

Complete the Worksheet.

After you watch/discussion questions

1. Should corporations have the same rights as people? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of other ways Congress can limit the power money has over our politicians?
3. What is the danger of allowing foreign money in American elections?

Activity Ideas

- Research super PACs. Look at both [positive](#) viewpoints and [negative](#) viewpoints. Read about previous democratic primary candidate [Elizabeth Warren](#) changing her position on super PACs. Write a short essay on whether you think super PACs are positive or negative. Can you understand why candidates need them? Write a 3-5 paragraph response.
- Debate: Should donating money count as an expression of free speech? Why or why not? Pick a position and form an argument taking counterarguments into account. Then debate amongst classmates. Assign students to positions if needed.

Sources/places to learn more

1. "Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission." Oyez, www.oyez.org/cases/2008/08-205.
2. Gillman, Howard. American Constitutionalism, Second Edition. Volume II Rights and Liberties. [Virtual Source Bookshelf].
3. Lau, Tim. "Citizens United Explained." *Brennan Center For Justice* (12 December 2019). <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/citizens-united-explained>.