

How Much Does Your Vote Cost?

by Edwin Bender

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Candidates for state legislative and statewide offices raised more than \$1.4 billion during the 1998 election cycle, according to data compiled by the National Institute on Money in State Politics. This translates to an average contribution-dollar-per-voter figure of \$20.44.*

The Institute, a non-partisan organization that collects and examines campaign finance information related to state races, found that, not surprisingly, some of the countrys biggest states had the most expensive elections. New York ranked first at \$56.69 raised per voter; California was fifth at \$35.60; Texas was sixth at \$29.21, and Illinois was eighth at \$27.13.

But voter-turnout numbers in these states indicate that large amounts of campaign cash do not translate directly into large numbers of voters at the polls come Election Day. In the 1998 elections, Texas was near the bottom of the list for voter turnout, ranking 42nd among all states. California fared slightly better, with a ranking of 33. New York was 29th on the list and Illinois was 23rd.

A broad range of factors affect voter turnout, of course, and money is just one of them. The candidates and their messages, the amount of negative advertising, the level of media interest, and even the weather may drive people to or away from the polls on Election Day. Overall, the 29 states that had average or better voter turnout, candidates raised an average of \$20.37 per voter, a few cents below the national average, while candidates in the 16 states with the lowest turnout rates raised slightly more, an average of \$20.53.

The dollar-per-vote average increases slightly -- to \$21.43 -- when the 24 states with more than a million voters are examined. The average drops to \$14.90 when the 21 states with fewer than a million voters are examined. Contribution totals were not available in five states.

The Institute's analysis of the contribution totals and voter-turnout figures shows that the cost of campaigning differs dramatically from state to state, from a high of \$56.69 raised per voter (New York) to a low of only \$1.01 per voter in North Dakota.

The average voter-turnout for the 45 states studied for 1998 was 36.3 percent. Minnesota was first on the list with a 60 percent voter-turnout rate. Candidates in that state raised a relatively low \$8.42 per voter (nearly 60 percent less than the national average), placing it at 33 on the dollar-per-voter list. Montana, with a dollars-per-voter figure of \$4.45 (nearly 80 percent less than average), had the second-highest turnout in the country at 51.5 percent.

In fact, of the 10 states with the highest voter turnout, all but two are near the bottom of the dollars-per-voter list. The exceptions are Alaska, which ranks third in both turnout and dollars raised per voter, and Hawaii, which ranks seventh in voter turnout and fourth in dollars raised per

voter. Both are states with low populations and few competitive media markets, which likely drove up the cost of attracting the attention of voters.

Of the 10 states with the highest dollars-per-voter figures, only Alaska and Hawaii are above the national average for voter turnout.

**The total and average are based on contributions to statewide and legislative candidates during the 1997-98 election cycle. The offices up for election in any given cycle are different from state to state. Some states held only legislative elections or gubernatorial elections during the period studied, while the majority of states held both. In New Jersey and Louisiana, which hold elections in odd years, the Institute used data from the most recent complete cycle. In several cases where official data was not available, the Institute relied on totals reported in the press. In five states, the Institute could not determine a total from any source, including disclosure agencies, press accounts or other unofficial sources.*

About The Institute

The National Institute on Money in State Politics is a non-partisan non-profit organization that collects and analyzes state-level campaign contribution. It will soon have 1998 data from legislative and statewide campaigns in more than 40 states available on its web site, www.followthemoney.org. It plans to compile databases for all 50 states for the 2000 election cycle. In several Northwest states, the Institute has data from five election cycles computerized and available on its site.

State Campaign-Finance Totals for the 1998 Election Cycle

Sorted by Dollars per Voter

	State	Total \$	\$ Per Voter	Voting %	Legislative or Statewide Races
1.	New York	\$282,887,424	\$56.69	36.7%	Legislative
2.	Nevada	\$19,104,000	\$43.84	33.2%	Both
3.	Alaska	\$8,513,602	\$38.38	50.8%	Both
4.	Hawaii	\$14,382,498	\$36.13	45.3%	Both
5.	California	\$296,011,525	\$35.60	35.1%	Both
6.	Texas	\$109,197,298	\$29.21	26.1%	Both
7.	Alabama	\$36,468,742	\$27.67	40.0%	Both
8.	Illinois	\$92,079,562	\$27.13	38.8%	Both

9.	Virginia	\$45,256,190	\$23.60	37.1%	Legislative
10.	New Mexico	\$9,473,900	\$19.00	39.9%	Both
11.	Louisiana	\$17,789,830	\$18.36	30.8%	Both
12.	South Carolina	\$18,999,326	\$17.78	37.0%	Both
13.	West Virginia	\$6,201,771	\$17.65	25.0%	Legislative
14.	Iowa	\$15,541,737	\$16.40	43.9%	Both
15.	Ohio	\$54,035,387	\$15.87	40.5%	Both
16.	Connecticut	\$15,196,541	\$15.76	39.1%	Both
17.	Wyoming	\$2,636,368	\$15.07	49.4%	Both
18.	Georgia	\$26,079,575	\$14.87	30.9%	Both
19.	Oregon	\$16,180,860	\$14.48	45.0%	Both
20.	New Hampshire	\$4,539,835	\$14.41	35.4%	Both
21.	Michigan	\$42,594,667	\$14.07	41.7%	Both
22.	Florida	\$53,777,251	\$13.79	34.3%	Both
23.	Tennessee	\$13,447,405	\$13.77	23.7%	Both
24.	Massachusetts	\$25,465,005	\$13.16	40.9%	Both
25.	New Jersey	\$22,919,493	\$12.62	29.9%	Both
26.	Arizona	\$12,546,359	\$12.38	28.6%	Both
27.	Washington	\$22,622,161	\$11.98	44.4%	Both
28.	Idaho	\$4,438,319	\$11.74	42.6%	Both
29.	Vermont	\$2,322,058	\$10.85	47.8%	Both
30.	Indiana	\$16,028,245	\$10.09	36.0%	Both
31.	Kansas	\$7,202,364	\$09.90	37.8%	Both

32.	Maine	\$4,105,228	\$09.75	44.0%	Both
33.	Missouri	\$14,159,861	\$08.98	39.0%	Both
34.	Minnesota	\$17,608,341	\$08.42	60.1%	Both
35.	Mississippi	\$4,285,391	\$08.29	25.7%	Both
36.	Pennsylvania	\$23,819,507	\$08.05	32.4%	Legislative
37.	Colorado	\$9,438,862	\$07.11	44.8%	Both
38.	Wisconsin	\$10,096,195	\$05.73	45.4%	Both
39.	Utah	\$2,737,158	\$05.53	34.6%	Legislative
40.	Kentucky	\$6,305,071	\$05.50	38.3%	Legislative
41.	North Carolina	\$11,037,583	\$05.49	35.4%	Legislative
42.	Montana	\$1,507,465	\$04.45	51.5%	Both
43.	Rhode Island	\$1,355,731	\$04.42	40.8%	Both
44.	Arkansas	\$2,389,356	\$03.41	37.2%	Governor only
45.	North Dakota	\$216,021	\$01.01	44.8%	Legislative
		\$1,423,001,068	\$20.44	36.3%	

Total contributions received by candidates, dollars-per-voter and percentage turnout figures, and whether contribution data was from legislative and/or statewide candidates. Data not available for five states: Delaware, Maryland, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and South Dakota.