

Money in the 2018 Oregon Elections

Money in politics influences who runs for office, who they talk to when they're running, who wins, and how lawmakers make policy once in office. In Oregon, there are no limits on how much money an individual or organization can contribute to a candidate or ballot measure campaign. This lack of contribution limits allows campaign donors to have disproportionate influence on state politics.

MapLight analyzed itemized monetary contributions (donations over \$100) to candidates for state offices, including governor, State House, and State Senate, as well as statewide ballot measures in the 2017-2018 election cycle. Our findings show that campaign spending in Oregon is concentrated in the hands of a narrow group of wealthy individuals and special interests.

Key Findings:

- **Sixty percent** of candidates' funding came from businesses, labor groups, and other organizations; only **34%** came from individual donors. For ballot measures, **89%** of all funding came from organizations, and only **9%** came from individuals.
- In candidate races, **57%** of money from itemized individual donors came from individuals giving over \$5,000, and just **7%** came from small donors. In ballot measure races, **80%** of all money from individuals came from just 22 large donors, while just **4%** came from small donors.
- **Fourteen** megadonors donated over \$100,000 to candidates, adding up to **25%** of all candidate funding from individuals.
- **Sixty percent** of contributions to statewide candidates from individuals (\$9.1 million) came from just **20 zip codes**, which represent **less than 15%** of the state's population.

Contributing to campaigns can be an important form of political participation. Policies that limit the disproportionate influence of wealth in politics and encourage diverse, grassroots small donor participation can help to make state democracy more responsive to the people.

Election Overview

Candidates for state office cumulatively raised \$54 million in the last election.

The race for governor was particularly pricy: the 14 candidates who reported contributions cumulatively raised \$33.6 million. Most of the money went to the major-party general election candidates: Knute Buehler (R) raised \$17.4 million, while Kate Brown (D) raised \$15.8 million and won. The average size of an itemized contribution was \$853.

The 47 State Senate candidates – competing for 17 seats – raised \$6.6 million, an average of \$140,000 per candidate. The average itemized contribution to these candidates was \$1,138.

132 candidates ran for State Representative, across 60 seats. Cumulatively, they raised \$13.8 million, averaging \$105,000 per candidate. The average itemized contribution was \$1,012.

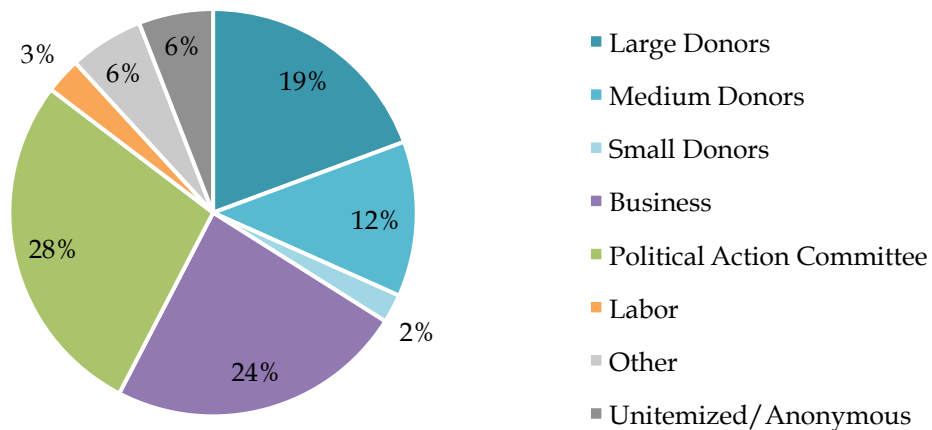
Committees that supported or opposed the six statewide ballot measures up for vote in 2018 raised \$39.2 million.

Special Interest Money

Most of the money in statewide races came from organizations, including businesses, political action committees (PACs), labor, and other groups. Party committees gave negligible amounts.

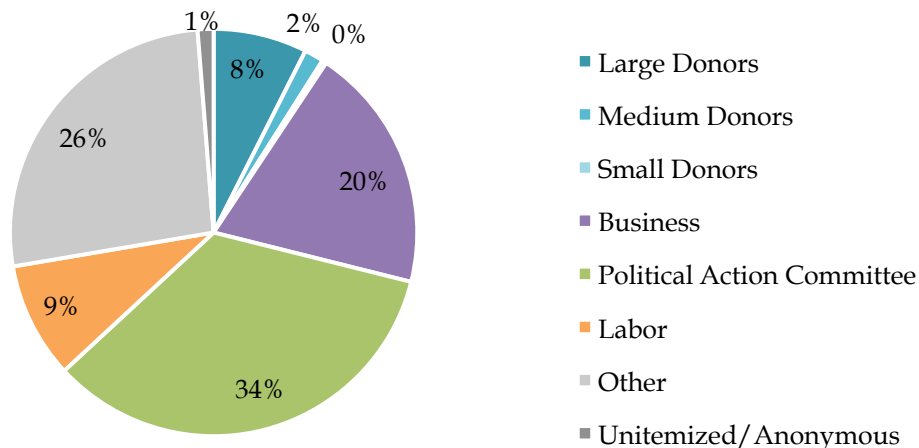
Thirty-four percent (\$18.3 million) of candidates' funding came from individual donors, while 60% (\$35.6 million) came from organizations (Figure 1). PACs accounted for 28% of the total, while businesses contributed 24%, and labor was responsible for 3%. The category of "Other," which includes organizations such as nonprofits, comprised 6% of contributions to candidates. The remaining 6% (\$3.2 million) of candidate contributions were unitemized (i.e. they totaled \$100 or less per contributor per recipient, and so donors' identities were not disclosed).

Figure 1: Donors to Candidates by Type



In ballot measure races, 89% of all funding (\$35 million) came from organizations, and only 9% (\$3.7 million) came from individuals (Figure 2). PACs were responsible for 34% of contributions, while 26% came from "Other" organizations such as nonprofits, and 20% came from businesses. Labor accounted for 9% of ballot measure contributions. Unitemized contributions accounted for 1% (\$494,000).

Figure 2: Donors to Ballot Measures by Type



Small vs. Large Donors

The majority of campaign contributions in Oregon state elections came from a narrow pool of large donors. We define “large donors” as individuals who contributed more than \$5,000 across all state candidate or statewide ballot measure races. “Small donors” are those who contributed \$250 or less in total. All other individuals are classed as “medium donors.”

One limitation of our analysis is that in Oregon, candidate and ballot measure campaigns are not required to disclose the identities of donors making contributions of \$100 or less. Much of this unitemized money likely comes from individuals – many of whom might be small donors – but this is not possible to determine from the data. Unitemized contributions could have come from organizations or individuals, and individuals who made contributions of \$100 or less to multiple recipients could be small, medium, or large donors by our definition.

In candidate races, 57% of money from individuals came from large donors, and just 7% came from small donors (Figure 3). There were 421 large donors active in candidate races; these individuals cumulatively donated \$10.4 million to candidates. The 6,520 medium donors collectively accounted for about \$6.7 million. Meanwhile, 8,429 small donors only assembled \$1.2 million total. Large donors contributed \$24,815 to candidates on average. Medium donors averaged \$1,020, and small donors averaged \$146. Most individuals were located in Oregon: 83% of the contributions from large and medium donors and 88% of contributions from small donors came from in state.

In ballot measure races, the difference was even starker: 80% of all money from individuals came from large donors, while just 4% came from small donors (Figure 4). Just 22 people accounted for \$2.9 million in large donations, while 655 medium donors contributed about \$602,000, and 842 small donors were responsible for just \$133,000. Large donors contributed \$132,742 to ballot measures on average, while medium donors averaged \$919, and small donors averaged \$158.

Adding in the \$3.2 million of unitemized candidate contributions as an upper limit for total possible candidate contributions from small donors, we find that 49% of candidates’ funding came from large donors, and up to 21% came from small donors. Including the \$494,000 of unitemized ballot measure contributions in the small donor category suggests that 70% of contributions came from large donors, while small donors accounted for up to 15%.

Figure 3: Candidate Contributions from Individuals

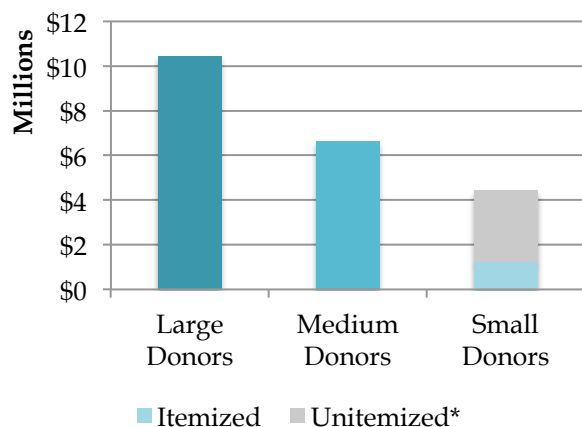
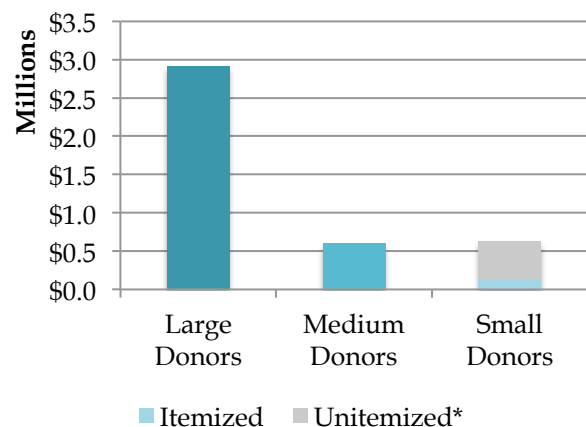


Figure 4: Ballot Measure Contributions from Individuals



* Note: unitemized contributions are included here as the upper limit of all contributions that could potentially fall under the small donor category; the actual total is likely lower.

Megadonors

Within the pool of donors giving above \$5,000 to candidates, there is an even narrower pool of “megadonors”: individuals donating more than \$100,000. Fourteen individuals donated \$100,000 or more to candidates (Table 1). Cumulatively, their contributions added up to 25% of all the money raised by candidates from individuals (\$4.7 million). Most of their contributions were directed towards the gubernatorial race.

Table 1: Megadonor Contributions to Candidates

Contributor	Total Contributions to All Candidates	Contributions to Brown	Contributions to Buehler
Philip H. Knight	\$2,500,000		\$2,500,000
George Austin, Jr.	\$510,250	\$105,000	\$340,000
Henry T. Swigert	\$258,400		\$258,200
Barbara Lee	\$160,000	\$160,000	
James Young	\$156,250		\$150,000
Thomas Cook	\$150,000		\$150,000
William C. Pierce	\$147,500		\$15,000
Mike Shirtcliff	\$130,000		\$85,000
Selma Pierce	\$125,500		
Dan D. Harmon	\$115,000		\$100,000
Karen DeBoer	\$110,000	\$10,000	\$50,000
Sidney DeBoer	\$107,000		\$52,000
Mark J. Burnham	\$106,000		\$101,000
Steve Silberstein	\$100,000	\$100,000	
Total	\$4,675,900	\$375,000	\$3,801,200

Buehler’s campaign received 10 times more money from megadonors than Brown’s campaign did; megadonor support accounted for over 20% of the money Buehler raised from individuals and organizations. The top megadonor was Phil Knight, who gave \$2.5 million to Buehler’s gubernatorial campaign; Knight provided 14% of the contributions that Buehler received.

One individual – George Austin, Jr. – donated more than \$100,000 to both Brown, the Democrat, and Buehler, the Republican. A deeper dive into Austin’s contributions reveals that he initially contributed a small amount (\$5,000) to Brown’s campaign in September 2017, and then supported Buehler with \$340,000 through October 2018. Directly after the election, Austin followed up with another \$100,000 to the victorious Brown.

Money alone may not have won the gubernatorial race. Nonetheless, the involvement of megadonors (including some playing both sides) suggests that wealthy individuals seek undue influence in key Oregon elections.

Donor Class

Looking at the 20 zip codes with the most money from individuals to candidates suggests that there is a distinct “donor class” in Oregon. Candidates likely spend time cultivating these donors at the expense of connecting with the state’s grassroots base.

Sixty percent of contributions to candidates from individuals (\$9.1 million) came from just 20 zip codes, which represent less than 15% of the state’s population (Table 2). The top 10 zip codes account for 43% of all contributions to candidates. Twelve of the top 20 are located in the Portland metropolitan area (Figure 5). This geographic concentration of campaign contributions suggests that candidates may concentrate on Portland-area donors – regardless of whom they are campaigning to represent.

Table 2: Top 20 Zip Codes for Candidate Contributions from Individuals

Zip Code	Total Contributions from Individuals	Number of Contributions	Average Contribution
97005	\$2,535,671	157	\$16,151
97201	\$613,161	505	\$1,214
97132	\$574,350	227	\$2,519
97701	\$445,479	1301	\$342
97405	\$426,082	966	\$441
97703	\$412,624	1012	\$408
97520	\$388,622	637	\$610
97219	\$365,977	844	\$434
97304	\$356,864	464	\$769
97302	\$349,672	991	\$353
97702	\$338,543	1257	\$269
97034	\$335,610	687	\$489
97210	\$318,737	545	\$585
97068	\$266,199	474	\$562
97209	\$265,918	421	\$632
97221	\$264,948	597	\$444
97212	\$232,853	736	\$316
97229	\$217,219	771	\$282
97756	\$205,134	586	\$350
97225	\$192,276	575	\$334

Contribution sizes from the top 20 zip codes averaged \$662, compared to \$394 across all zip codes. Household income in these top 20 zip codes averaged \$74,000, compared to \$56,000 for the state overall, suggesting that campaign donors in Oregon come from wealthier than average neighborhoods. Plotting zip codes by their median household income and total candidate contributions shows a positive relationship, further indicating that donors from wealthy neighborhoods are spending more in state elections (Figure 6). In all of the top 20 zip codes, the population is majority white (86%) – as, indeed, is the state as a whole (85%).

Figure 5: Individual Contributions by Zip Code

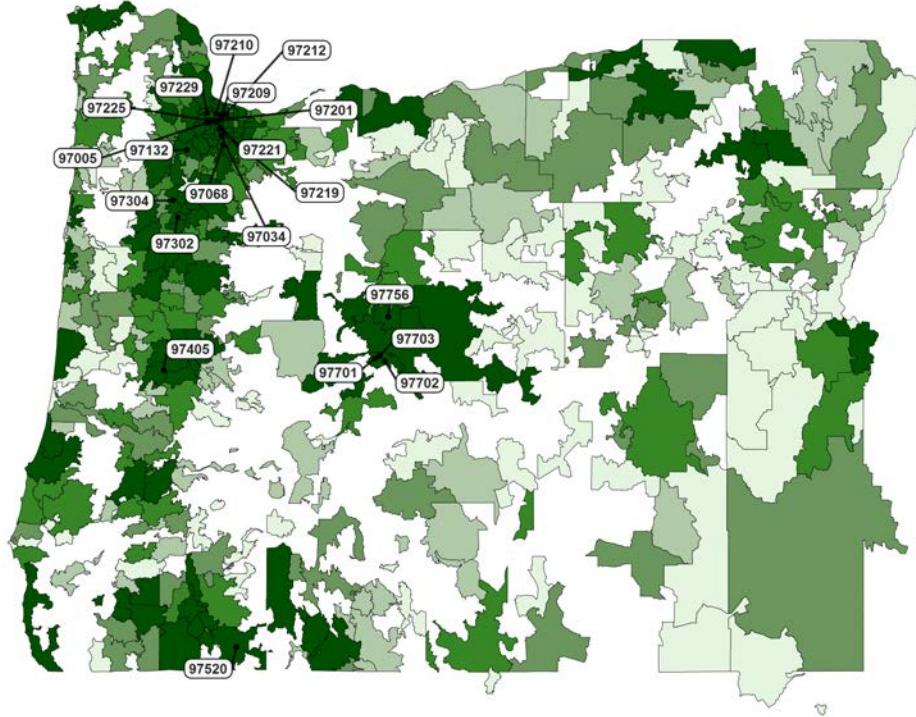
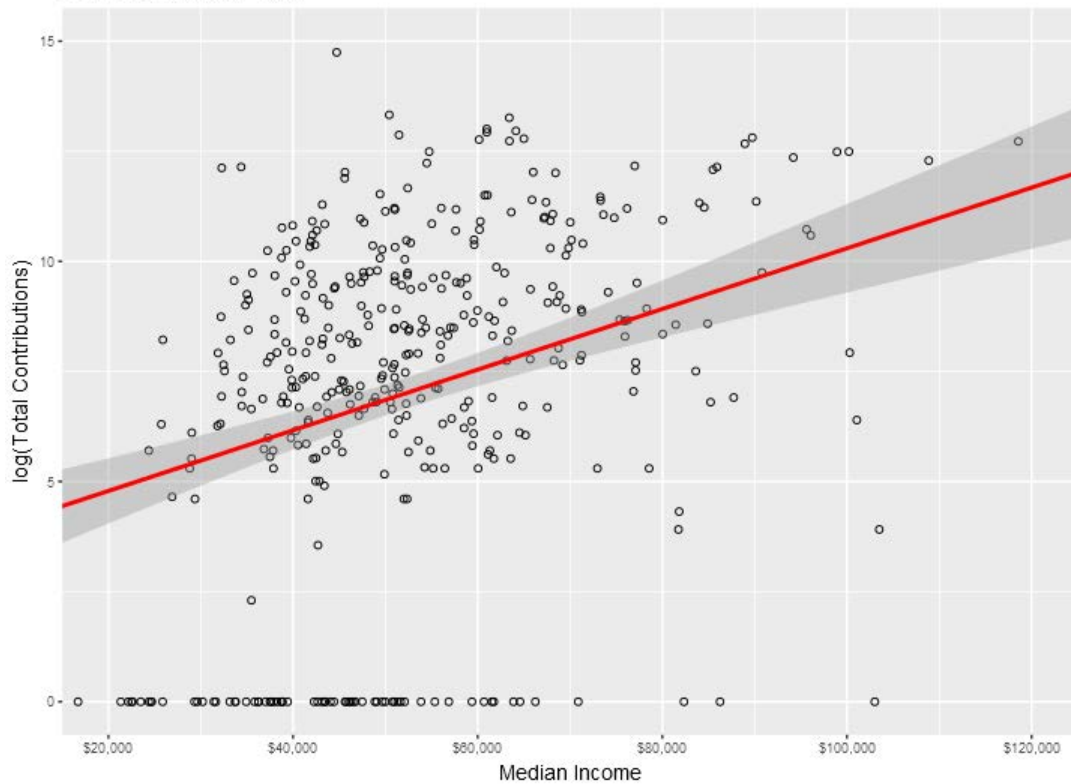


Figure 6: Contributions and Median Household Income by Zip Code



Zooming in on Portland shows that most of the state's top 20 zip codes that are located in the metro area are in higher-income parts of the city (Figure 7). These zip codes are also generally less racially diverse than the rest of the city; only three are less than 80% white (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Median Income by Zip Code and Top Contributing Zip Codes in Portland Metro Area

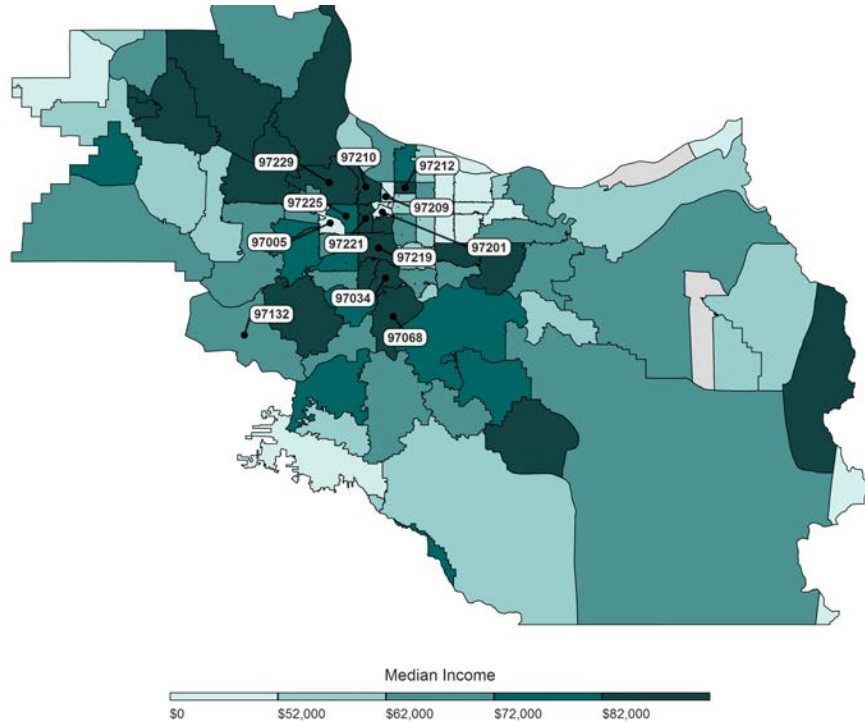
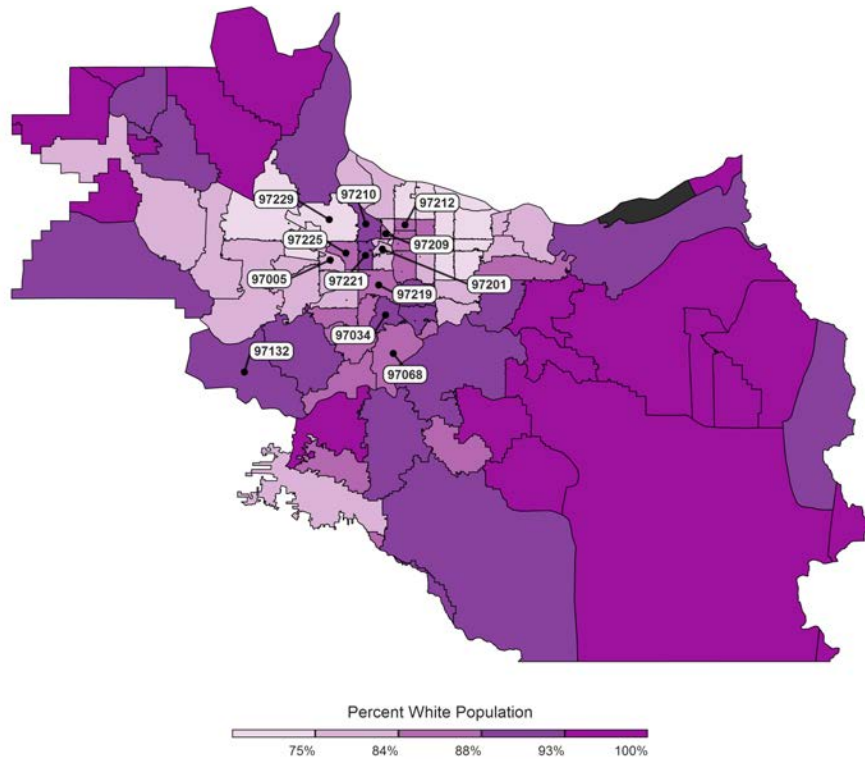


Figure 8: Percent White Population by Zip Code and Top Contributing Zip Codes in the Portland Metro Area



Methodology

MapLight sourced campaign contributions data for the 2017-2018 election cycle from the Oregon Secretary of State's Office. Our analysis focused on monetary contributions to candidates for state office (including governor, State House, and State Senate) and statewide ballot measures. It does not include in-kind donations.

For our analysis of small vs. large donors, we looked at individual contributors' donations to statewide races. We defined an individual contributor as a unique combination of name and address. We standardized contributors so that names reported with small differences – such as typos or leaving out a middle initial – were grouped together as a single contributor. Contributors were categorized as small, medium, or large donors based on the total amount they contributed across all state candidates or statewide ballot measures. As noted above, for the purpose of this analysis, we added unitemized contributions (donations under \$100) to the group of itemized small donors to identify an upper limit for the total contributions from small donors; however, it is not possible from the data to determine the number of individual contributors for those donations.

We sourced population, race/ethnicity, and median household income data where available from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017 American Community Survey for our breakdown of contributions by zip code. As part of this analysis, we mapped the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) ZIP Codes that are reported in Oregon campaign finance disclosures onto the ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) that the Census Bureau uses to aggregate demographic data. Not all ZCTAs have a one-to-one correspondence with USPS ZIP Codes; for USPS ZIP Codes that lack corresponding ZCTAs, we used demographic values from the ZCTA that covers the same geographic area.