

POLITICS

The Incredible Rise in Campaign Spending

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The cost of running for Congress has increased more than 500 percent since 1984. Here's an interactive look at how campaign expenditures have outrun inflation, health care, and even the rising cost of college

Campaign Inflation Calculator

See how the total cost of running for Congress has ballooned in the past 30 years.

Party

All

▼

Cham

Both

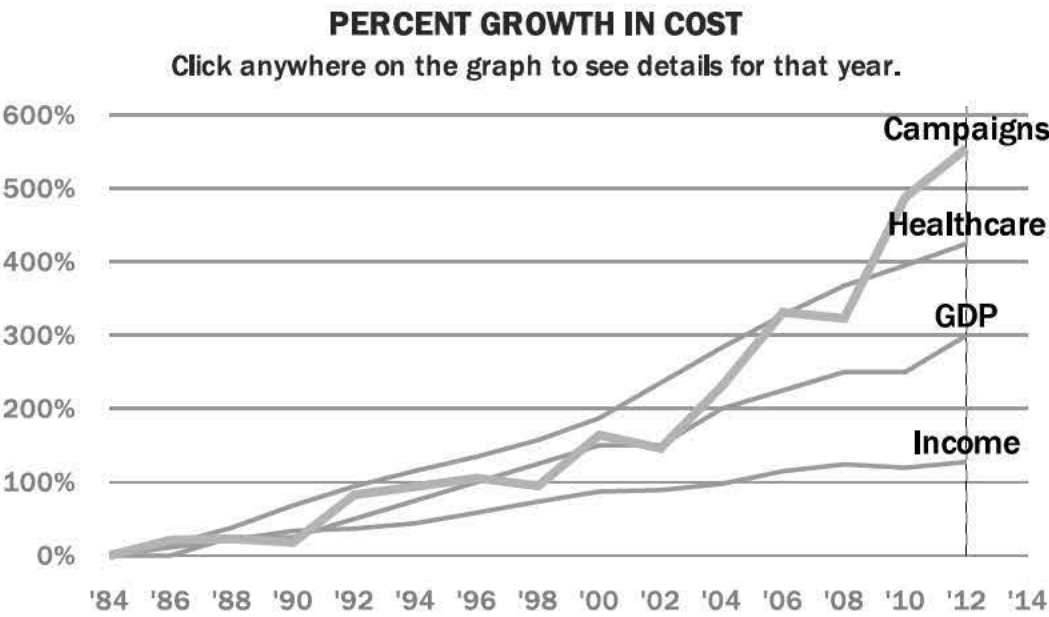
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Result

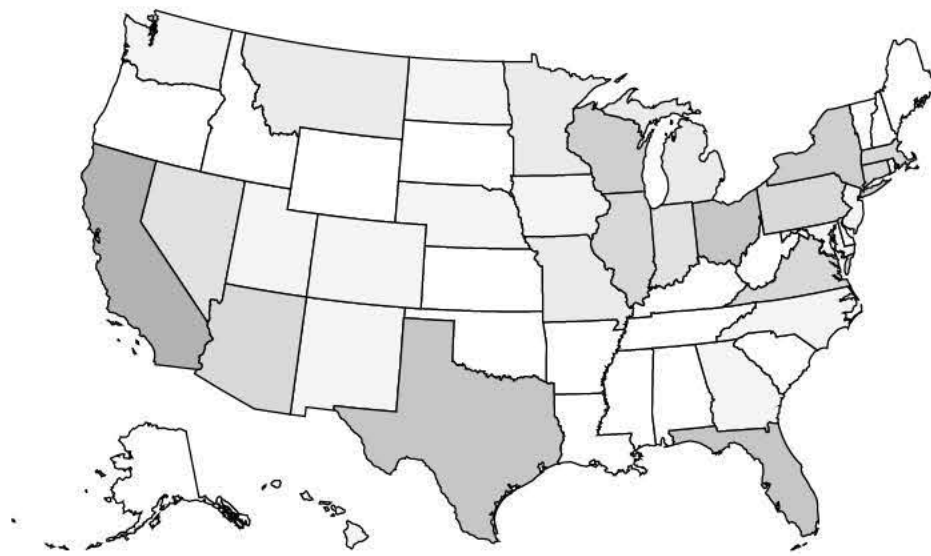
Any

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The cost of a bid for Congress rose 555% from 1984 to 2012. Household incomes rose 128%.



National Spending (2012): \$2,623,696,391



The NBC affiliate in Des Moines, Iowa, added an hour to its nightly newscast this year to profit from all the political ads ahead of the Nov. 4 midterm elections, but demand was still too great. “There is only so much inventory I have,” explains WHO-TV station manager Dale Woods. It is the same in tight races all across the country. Nearly bottomless campaign and super-PAC bank accounts have been unloaded on airtime, mailings and get-out-the-vote efforts. And in recent years, the spending growth has accelerated.

Since the mid-1980s, the amount dumped on elections by campaigns and outside groups, as measured by the Federal Election Commission, has grown 555 percent—faster than even the alarming increases in the costs of health care and private college tuition. The reasons, say political scientists, include growth in the national economy, the razor-thin margin determining congressional control and changes to campaign-finance rules. Expect the trend to continue. Senate races in North Carolina and Kentucky this year could cost more than \$100 million, and the estimated spending on TV ads in Alaska and Iowa already tops \$11 per eligible voter.

Methodology

Sources for interactive: Federal Election Commission summary files; Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; U.S. Census Bureau; St. Louis Fed; National Center for Education Statistics. Outside spending data for the years 2006-2012, which are missing from FEC summary reports, are courtesy of the Center for Responsive Politics.

The total value of an election is calculated in two parts: Campaign spending and outside spending. Campaign spending consists of all expenditures except authorized transfers of funds to other committees, as well as party-coordinated spending, and includes primary elections. Outside Spending encompasses third-party expenditures that are made without the knowledge or consent of the candidates, but only includes transactions that are explicitly used to advocate for or against a candidate.

PHOTOS: MEET AMERICA'S TOP 10 POLITICAL FAMILIES



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The Bush family dynasty begins with Prescott S. Bush, who represented Connecticut in the Senate from 1952 to 1963. His son George H. W. Bush served as Vice President, Director of the CIA, and President from 1989 to 1993. His son George W. Bush was governor of Texas and, from 2001 to 2009... [MORE](#)

