

CITIZEN DISILLUSIONMENT OVER THE INFLUENCE OF MONEY IN POLITICS

This article reports examples of civil disobedience used to express dismay and anger over the influence of money in politics. Some poll results show the opinion of Americans about campaign financing since the 2010 Citizens United ruling.

Civil Disobedience as a Tool to Express Disillusionment.

Civil disobedience is a tool of social protest that involves breaking the law to call attention to the perceived immorality or illegitimacy of a particular law or set of laws. Two examples of civil disobedience are illustrated in two recent protests over the influence of money in politics as a direct result of the 2010 *Citizens United* Supreme Court of the United States ruling.

On January 21, 2015, a group of eight people called 99Rise protested at a hearing of the US Supreme Court to mark the fifth anniversary of the *Citizens United* ruling. They brought in a camera to video tape their protests in the Supreme Court. They shouted one-by-one, “*Money out of politics, one person one vote, separate wealth from State, we are 99%*” before they were arrested.¹

On April 15, 2015, another act of civil disobedience was undertaken by a 61-year-old Florida postal worker, Doug Hughes, in Washington, D.C. Risking his life, Mr. Hughes illegally flew and landed his homemade gyrocopter on the lawn of the Capitol building to protest government inaction to regulate campaign financing². He wanted to deliver letters to each member of Congress stating his objection to the *Citizens United* ruling in 2010 and its impact on campaign finance laws. He was arrested and put under house-arrest. He was indicted for six federal charges and appeared in the D. C. court on May 21, 2015³. He pleaded not guilty for two felony charges of flying without proper certification and violating aircraft registration requirements, and misdemeanor counts of violating national defense airspace and operating a vehicle falsely labeled as a postal carrier. He rejected a plea offer at the status hearing on June 22⁴.

These ordinary citizens took extreme measures to send their message to Congress that it has not been functioning for the people⁵. The sentiments are not isolated phenomena. There has been a growing

¹ Cohen, Rick. "Civil Disobedience at the U.S. Supreme Court." *NonProfit Quarterly/ABC News*, 26 Jan. 2015. Web. 15 Aug. 2015, <http://nonprofitquarterly.org/2015/01/26/civil-disobedience-at-the-u-s-supreme-court/>, viewed 01/16/16

² Joel Landau, “Florida mailman who flew gyrocopter on Capitol lawn said he expected to be stopped”, *New York Daily News*, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/fla-man-flew-gyrocopter-capitol-thought-fail-article-1.2190691>, viewed 01/16/16

³ Sanchez, Nick. "Pilot Doug Hughes Indicted for Flying Gyrocopter to Capitol." *NewsMax*, 21 May 2015. Web. 15 Aug. 2015, <http://www.newsmax.com/TheWire/pilot-doug-hughes-indicted--gyrocopter/2015/05/21/id/645985/>

⁴ “Man Who Landed Gyrocopter at the US Capitol Rejects Deal.” *Associated Press/WFLA*, 22 June 2015. Web. 15 Aug. 2015, <http://wfla.com/2015/06/22/man-who-landed-gyrocopter-at-the-us-capitol-rejects-deal/>, viewed 01/16/16

⁵ Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens”, *Perspectives on Politics*, Volume 12 / Issue 03 / September 2014, pp 564-581

feeling of alienation and disenfranchisement among many ordinary citizens^{6, 7, 8}. The people are losing confidence in Congress because they perceive that money is influencing elections and corrupting the political system^{9, 10}. This sentiment was expressed in two recent polls shown below.

Disillusionment Expressed through Polls.

In April 2014, *Reason-Pure* interviewed 1,003 adults by phone. The poll indicated that Americans hold the following opinions¹¹:

- 75% of all politicians are “corrupted” by campaign donations and lobbyists.
- 70% of politicians use their political power to help their friends and hurt their enemies.

Another poll in 2013 conducted by Tulchin Research Polling Strategic Consulting for a Represent.Us project funded by United Republic (www.Represent.Us.org) came up with similar findings¹²:

- 60% of Americans would support “a federal law that imposes tough, new campaign finance laws for politicians, lobbyists and super PACs.”
- 75% of Americans more strongly support “tough, new anti-corruption laws” instead of campaign finance laws.

From the “Represent.Us” project, the Center of Public Integrity also reported that “a vast majority of poll respondents thought many groups wield too much influence over the country’s government, including “labor union”(61.4%), “special interest group”(76.5%), “super PAC” (77%), “the wealthiest 1%” (77.2%). “Wall Street and corporations” (81.2%), “lobbyists” (82.9%) and “Big Money”(88.3%)”^{13, 14}.

⁶ “April 2014 National Telephone Survey, Reason Poll Result”, *Reason.com*, 03 Apr. 2014. Web. 15 Aug. 2015, <http://reason.com/poll/2014/04/03/april-2014-national-telephone-survey>, viewed 01/16/16

⁷ Harrelson, Jeff, “National Voter Survey Findings (Insider Analysis) for Represent.Us/United Republic”, *Tulchin Research Polling Strategic Consulting* 2013, http://www.lwvtoolkit.org/RepresentUs_FullAnalysis.pdf, viewed 5/23/16

https://web.mail.comcast.net/service/home/~/?auth=co&loc=en_US&id=818359&part=2, viewed 02/14/16

⁸ Beckel, Michael, “Don’t Support ‘campaign finance reform’? Try combating ‘corruption’”, *Public Integrity*, May 12, 2014, <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2013/12/03/13943/don-t-support-campaign-finance-reform-try-combating-corruption>, viewed 01/16/16

⁹ “April 2014 National Telephone Survey, Reason Poll Result”, *Reason.com*, April 3, 2014, <http://reason.com/poll/2014/04/03/april-2014-national-telephone-survey>, viewed 01/16/16

¹⁰ Harrelson, Jeff, op. cit.

¹¹ “April 2014 National Telephone Survey, Reason Poll Result”, *Reason.com*, April 3, 2014, <http://reason.com/poll/2014/04/03/april-2014-national-telephone-survey>, viewed 01/16/16

¹² Harrelson, Jeff, op. cit.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Beckel, Michael, Op. Cit.