

Campaign Finance Institute

Historical Database of State Campaign Finance Laws

Abridged Codebook

The Campaign Finance Institute has released a 43-page codebook to accompany its Historical Database of State Campaign Finance Laws. This codebook describes each of the hundreds of variables in the full database.

This abridged codebook describes only that small percentage of the full database that was included in the database's visualization tool. The list and description of these variables is preceded by the full introduction from the unabridged codebook, slightly revised.

Introduction

Anyone with a serious interest in political finance is likely to have heard, made, debunked, or wondered about claims that campaign finance laws “make a difference”. These claims may be about the influence that money has on who decides to run, how candidates campaign, who wins, how they behave in office, which donors or spending organizations wield power in the political system, and what policies come out in the end. These outcomes may be related to the laws for contributions, disclosure, public financing, or any of the dozens of the other provisions that may govern money in politics. Assessing the claims rigorously will often require a researcher to consider the way the rules in multiple jurisdictions have worked over time. Scholars typically have gathered information about the laws on an *ad hoc* basis to serve the needs of specific projects. These efforts can be time consuming, and the resulting collections are often not quite what the next scholar needs for the next research question – which typically means the next scholar will have to start over again.

The CFI historical database of state laws is meant to make such research easier. It is an extensive summary of the provisions in each of the fifty states’ campaign finance laws since 1996. (When combined with an earlier database for legislative elections constructed by Keith Hamm and Robert Hogan, some of the information can be taken back to 1976. More information about the Hamm and Hogan data set is available on the same website page as this codebook.) The summaries in this database take the form of hundreds of fields for each of the states, every two years. They include citations to the then-contemporary state codes for those who want to consult the underlying text, but the database standardizes most fields to facilitate comparative research. The fields themselves are descriptions of the statute law in effect for the election to be held that year or the state’s next regular election year. (For states with odd-numbered year elections, the laws in effect for an election will be listed with the preceding even-numbered year.)

The effort in this project was to present the facial meanings of statutes and not to rely on administrative interpretations. A lawyer advising a client therefore will normally need more detailed information than is available here. Judicial interpretations also are not included, with the exception of definitive rulings declaring a provision to be unconstitutional. If a law passed and was declared unconstitutional before an election, the law that was actually in effect for the election appears in the database.

The unabridged codebook describes all of the fields in the full database, which is available at no charge for downloading in standard electronic formats. A subset of the full database is also available in a visualized format on the Campaign Finance Institute’s website. The data behind these visualized components may also be downloaded in standard formats, in much smaller files. Visualized fields appear in the sections of the full codebook for Contribution Limits, Other Restrictions, Disclosure, and Public Financing/Tax Credits. There were no visualizations for the codebook’s first section (Definitions) or last (Agencies).

The fields in the full database come in six major sections:

(a) Definitions [no visualizations]

This section offers definitions of many of the key technical terms used in campaign finance law – such as what counts as a contribution or expenditure in each state, what is a political committee or what is a political party. This is the most text-heavy section of the database. Because the entries do not lend themselves readily to shorthand summaries or yes/no answers, none of these appear in the online visualized version of the database.

(b) Contribution limits

This section is the longest in the codebook. It includes limits on contributions that come FROM individuals, political parties, political action committees (PACs), and others, and that go TO candidates (legislative and gubernatorial), political parties, PACs and others. It also includes prohibitions on corporate and labor contributions.

(c) Other restrictions

This section includes prohibitions on *expenditures* by corporations and labor unions, other prohibitions, and rules for contributions during a legislative session and for contributions by donors who do business with the state.

(d) Disclosure – by whom and of what

This section describes who is required to disclose the sources of their money and how they spend it, as well as the thresholds for reporting a specific donor's name, address and employer. It includes the requirements for candidates, parties, PACs and ballot initiative committees. Disclosure rules for independent spending and electioneering are included, as are the rules for mandatory electronic filing, advertising disclaimers, and disclosure to corporate shareholders.

(e) Public financing and tax credits.

Included here is the type of public funding available to candidates and political parties (if any) and associated spending limits (if any). Also included are fields describing tax deductions for political contributions, tax credits, or refunds/rebates.

(f) Agencies [no visualizations]

Included here are the agencies responsible for administering the campaign finance laws in each state. This could include separate bodies for regulation, compliance, public financing, disclosure and other functions.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE VISUALIZED FIELDS

1. CONTRIBUTION LIMITS TAB

LIMITS: Many states put limits on the amount of political campaign contributions that donors may give to recipients. These limits typically will be different for various categories of donors (such as individuals, political parties, or political committees). They also may vary for candidates running for different offices and they may vary if the recipient is a political committee or party. The standard field name for this long set of fields will follow this format: <LABEL FOR THE TYPE OF DONOR> TO <LABEL FOR THE TYPE OF RECIPIENT>.

TIME PERIODS AND STANDARDIZATION: Where limits exist, the statute typically will say that a recipient may accept no more than a specific amount in the aggregate from a particular donor over the course of designated time period. The law will then say whether the limit is per year, per election, or per election cycle. If a donor is allowed to give a certain amount *per year*, then the donor may give twice as much during a two year election cycle. The unabridged database presents all of this information. However, the database also creates a new field indicating the maximum amount that a donor may give over the course of a two-year election cycle during which there are two elections (a primary and general election, with no runoff or special election). The computed number lets the states' limits be compared directly to one another. This was the field chosen for visualization.

From individuals to candidates for the House/Assembly:

INDIVIDUALTOCANDLIMIT_H_MAX INTEGER

What is the maximum amount an individual may give to a House/Assembly candidate over the course of two years?

From individuals to Senate candidates:

INDIVIDUALTOCANDLIMIT_S_MAX INTEGER

What is the maximum amount an individual may give to a Senate candidate over the course of two years?

From individuals to gubernatorial candidates:

INDIVIDUALTOCANDLIMIT_G_MAX INTEGER

What is the maximum amount an individual may give to a gubernatorial candidate over the course of two years?

From PACs to candidates for the House/Assembly:

PACTOCANDLIMIT_H_MAX INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a PAC may give to a House/Assembly candidate over the course of two years?

From PACs to Senate candidates:

PACTOCANDLIMIT_S_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a PAC may give to a Senate candidate over the course of two years?

From PACs to Gubernatorial candidates:

PACTOCANDLIMIT_G_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a PAC may give to a gubernatorial candidate over the course of two years?

From corporations to candidates for the House/Assembly:

CORPTOCANDLIMIT_H_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a corporation may give from its treasury to a House/Assembly candidate over the course of two years?

From corporations to Senate candidates:

CORPTOCANDLIMIT_S_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a corporation may give from its treasury to a Senate candidate over the course of two years?

From corporations to gubernatorial candidates:

CORPTOCANDLIMIT_G_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a corporation may give from its treasury to a gubernatorial candidate over the course of two years?

From labor unions to candidates for the House/Assembly:

LABORTOCANDLIMIT_H_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a labor union may give from its treasury to a House/Assembly candidate over the course of two years?

From labor unions to Senate candidates:

LABORTOCANDLIMIT_S_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a labor union may give from its treasury to a Senate candidate over the course of two years?

From labor unions to gubernatorial candidates:

LABORTOCANDLIMIT_G_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a labor union may give from its treasury to a gubernatorial candidate over the course of two years?

From state parties to candidates for the House/Assembly:

STATEPTOCANDLIMIT_H_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a state political party may give to a House/Assembly candidate over the course of two years?

From state parties to Senate candidates:

STATEPTOCANDLIMIT_S_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a state political party may give to a Senate candidate over the course of two years?

From state parties to Gubernatorial candidates:

STATEPTOCANDLIMIT_G_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum amount a state political party may give to a gubernatorial candidate over the course of two years?

CONTRIBUTIONS TO POLITICAL PARTIES

INDIVIDUALTOPARTYLIMIT_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum an individual may give to a party over the course of two years?

PACTOPARTYLIMIT_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum a PAC may give to a party over the course of two years?

CORPTOPARTYLIMIT_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum a corporation may give from its treasury to a party over the course of two years?

LABORTOPARTYLIMIT_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum a labor union may give from its treasury to a party over the course of two years?

CONTRIBUTIONS TO POLITICAL COMMITTEES (PACs)

INDIVIDUALTOPACLIMIT_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum an individual may give a PAC over the course of two years?

PACTOPACLIMIT_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum a PAC may give another PAC over the course of two years?

CORPTOPACLIMIT_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum a corporation may give from its treasury to a PAC over the course of two years?

LABORTOPACLIMIT_MAX

INTEGER

What is the maximum a labor union may give to a PAC over the course of two years?

2. OTHER RESTRICTIONS TAB

NOTE: The first two and the last of the items appearing below (and under this tab in the visualization) all appear in the "Contribution Limits" section of the unabridged codebook.

DOINGBUSINESSLIMITS

TEXT

Are contribution limits lower for people or organizations doing business with the state?
The answer choices are yes or no.

LOBBYIST_LIMITS

TEXT

Does the law contain special contribution limits or prohibitions for lobbyists? The answer choices are yes or no.

CONTLEGISSESSION

TEXT

Are there restrictions on accepting contributions or holding fundraising event during the legislative session? The answer choices are yes or no.

CORPEXPENDPROHIBIT

TEXT

Are corporations prohibited from making political expenditures from their treasuries?
The answer choices are yes or no.

LABOREXPENDPROHIB

TEXT

Are labor unions prohibited from making political expenditures from their treasuries?
The answer choices are yes or no.

AGGCANDLIMIT

TEXT

Is there an aggregate limit on contributions from a donor to all candidates in the state in a given time period? The answer choices are yes or no.

3. DISCLOSURE TAB (INCLUDING INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES)

Disclosure by Candidates:

CANDDONOREXEMPTION

TEXT

What is the minimum aggregate of contributions from a donor that triggers mandatory disclosure of the donor's identity?

CANDFILE_ELECTRONIC

TEXT

Is the filer required to report electronically? The answer choices are yes or no.

Disclosure by Political Parties:

PARTYDONOREXEMPTION

TEXT

What is the minimum aggregate of contributions from a donor that triggers mandatory disclosure of donor information?

Disclosure by Political Committees (PACs):

PACDONOREXEMPTION

TEXT

What is the minimum aggregate of contributions from a donor that triggers mandatory disclosure of donor information?

Ballot Committee Disclosure:

BALLOTPROFILEEXEMPTION_AMOUNT

TEXT

If so, what is the minimum amount of receipts or expenditures that triggers mandatory disclosure from the ballot committee?

Independent Expenditures:

IE_REPORT_EXEMPTION_AMOUNT

TEXT

If yes, what is the minimum amount of aggregated expenditures that trigger disclosure?

IE_TARGET

TEXT

Must an IE report specify an IE's target (candidate or ballot proposition)? The answer choices are yes or no.

Electioneering Disclosure:

ELXNRGCATEGORY

TEXT

Are some forms of independent spending defined by another term in the law, with different definitions and requirements? The answer choices are yes or no.

SPONSORID

TEXT

Must an ad's sponsors be identified within the body of any ad? The answer choices are yes or no.

DISCLOSETOSHAREHOLDERS

TEXT

Does state law require corporate political expenditures to be disclosed to shareholders? The answer choices are yes or no.

4. PUBLIC FINANCING AND TAX CREDITS TAB

Public Financing for Candidates for the House of Representatives or Assembly:

PUBLICFUNDING_H_TYPE TEXT

If yes, is it full public financing, partial grant, matching funds, voucher, mixed, or other?

Public Financing for Candidates for the Senate:

PUBLICFUNDING_S_TYPE TEXT

If yes, is it full public financing, partial grant, matching funds, voucher, mixed, or other?

Public Financing for Candidates for Governor:

PUBLICFUNDING_G_TYPE TEXT

If yes, is it full public financing, partial grant, matching funds, voucher, mixed, or other?

Public Financing for Candidates for Political Parties:

PUBLICFUNDING_P TEXT

Does the state provide public funds to political parties? The answer choices are yes or no.

Tax Deductions, Tax Credits, and Refunds

REFUNDORTAXCREDITORTAXDEDUCTION TEXT

Does the state provide a refund or tax credit or tax deduction for political contributions?
None, Refund, Tax Credit, Tax Deduction.