



### [Growing Concern Over AIPAC Dark Money Influence Ahead of the 2026 Midterm Elections](#)

With the 2026 U.S. midterm elections on the horizon, special interest groups like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) have increasingly come under criticism for their attempts to influence elections. Voters across the country are seeing how these types of efforts without donor disclosure can shape races, often without the public knowing who is behind the spending. In recent months, we have seen this issue in New Jersey's Democratic primary. A pro-Israel super PAC has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars backing one candidate and opposing another, even as local activists question whether outside spending should have this level of influence. The group's spending is unusually high for a primary and has become a point of criticism from grassroots organizers, who argue that the scale of outside intervention risks overwhelming local voices and distorting what should be a community-driven contest.

This concern also echoes some events we saw in Illinois earlier this year. Reporting detailed how AIPAC took an unusual step of directly coordinating campaign operations in several legislative races, including volunteer recruitment, donor bundling, and messaging strategy. In multiple House primary contests, allied super PACs and affiliated groups poured substantial sums into down-ballot races that historically would not have drawn that level of outside attention. In some districts, millions of dollars were spent on television advertising and mailers supporting preferred candidates and opposing others, dramatically increasing the cost and intensity of what are typically lower-profile contests.

In Illinois, the scale and organization of the effort raised additional questions. Large networks of donors reportedly gave in coordinated patterns through super PAC structures, allowing significant financial backing to flow into targeted races while limiting public visibility into the original sources of funding. Funds were deployed early and aggressively, in some cases before full donor disclosures were due, meaning voters encountered heavy advertising without clear information about who was financing it. That level of involvement by a major lobbying group in state legislative races raised alarms among progressives who see it as another example of dark money or, at the very least, the exercise of shadowy political influence that voters cannot easily trace.

The Illinois effort was not isolated. During the 2024 federal election cycle, pro-Israel political action committees and affiliated organizations collectively spent well over 100 million dollars

nationwide, combining direct campaign contributions with independent expenditures. Much of that spending was concentrated in Democratic primaries, where outside advertising campaigns sought to influence the outcome of competitive House races. The scale of these expenditures made the network one of the largest outside spenders in the country during the cycle. Critics understandably contend that the magnitude of the financial intervention gives a small set of well-funded interests disproportionate sway over candidate viability and messaging.

This opaque funding can come through super PACs, nonprofits under section 501(c)(4) of the tax code, and other organizations that spend on political messaging without revealing the sources of their funds. Dark money surged after the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*, which allowed unlimited independent expenditures in elections. Spending by groups that hide their donors reached record levels in recent federal races, with close to \$2 billion reported in the 2024 cycle alone. Analysts note that this figure does not fully capture all politically active nonprofit spending, meaning the true scope of undisclosed influence may be even greater.

For many voters, the result is familiar: politicians spend more time courting wealthy donors and special interest groups than negotiating with everyday constituents, and hence this is problematic. When outside organizations can inject millions of dollars into a primary, candidates are forced to respond to advertising blitzes and fundraising pressures that may have little to do with local priorities. Even when the spending is technically legal, the perception that powerful interests can effectively choose viable candidates before voters weigh in contributes to public frustration.

Politicians from both parties regularly call for fixing this problem, but there has been little progress at the federal level. Legislative proposals to strengthen disclosure requirements or limit certain forms of outside spending have stalled in Congress. At the same time, public dissatisfaction with how money influences elections has continued to grow. A national poll by Issue One and YouGov found that nearly 8 in 10 Americans agree that large independent expenditures by wealthy donors and corporations give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption. This view spans all party lines, with 84 percent of Democrats, 74 percent of Republicans, and 79 percent of independents agreeing. A similar share says that the appearance of wealthy donors gaining influence over elected officials causes them to lose faith in democracy. Voters were also polled on a hypothetical ballot measure to eliminate dark money spending; about 72 percent said they would support such a reform if it had a chance on the ballot.

As debates over influence in New Jersey and Illinois continue, these numbers suggest that frustration with opaque political spending is not confined to one party or ideology. Whether the issue involves pro-Israel advocacy groups, corporate interests, labor organizations, or any other well-funded entity, the broader concern remains the same: when voters cannot easily trace who is paying for the messages shaping their elections, confidence in democratic institutions erodes.