

# How corporations influence the government

By Gale, Cengage Learning, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.13.17

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A protester holds Adbuster's "Corporate American" flag at George W. Bush's second inauguration in Washington, D.C., January 20, 2005. Photo by: Jonathan McIntosh/Wikimedia

Occupy Wall Street was a political and social movement. It started in November 2011. Thousands of people across the country joined protests. They were protesting the power and greed of American corporations.

Corporations have become very powerful in America. Wealthy businesses and businesspeople use their money to gain control over governments and laws. There is an extreme imbalance between rich and poor as a result.

This trend was not new at the time of the Occupy Wall Street protests. Its roots can be traced at least as far back as the Gilded Age. That was a period in American history from around 1877 to 1901.

During the Gilded Age, wealthy corporations, such as Standard Oil and Carnegie Steel, were extremely rich and powerful. It was a period of widespread corruption. In other words, people used the government to make money and used money to control the government.

## The Corruption Of William Tweed



Many lobbyists begin their career working in government. Some go directly into lobbying. In 2014, there were approximately 100,000 lobbyists.

There are many rules about government lobbying. Lobbyists and politicians are required to reveal some information about what they are doing, for example. Despite these rules, lobbying is seen by some as a major problem in American politics. Some think that it does not keep enough separation between businesses and government. Others believe that it gives corporations too much power.

The revolving door problem is particularly serious in the case of lobbying. Many private lobbyists switch to government jobs and vice versa.

Another complaint is that lobbying has caused politics to be dominated by wealthy businesses. The concerns and needs of regular citizens do not get heard because most people cannot afford to lobby the government. This is seen as an imbalance of power that favors the rich over the poor.

## Quiz

1 The word "corruption" is essential to understanding how the relationship between corporations and politicians can be a problem.

Which sentence from the article BEST explains what "corruption" means?

- (A) They were protesting the power and greed of American corporations.
- (B) Wealthy businesses and businesspeople use their money to gain control over governments and laws.
- (C) In America, people are allowed to make donations to politicians to help them pay for their campaigns.
- (D) However, they are often too friendly with the businesses they are supposed to watch over.

2 Read the selection from the section "Corporate Donations Can Influence Elections."

*This level of spending can affect who wins and loses. The corporations hope that their donations will buy them influence with the winning candidates. Indeed, politicians often go on to help the corporations that helped elect them.*

What does the author mean by "buy them influence"?

- (A) Corporations donate money so politicians can buy what they need.
- (B) Corporations donate money if they have more than they need.
- (C) Corporations donate money to give back to the politicians who helped them.
- (D) Corporations donate money so politicians will treat them favorably.

3 Read the following paragraphs from the section "The Corruption Of William Tweed."

*One of the most famous examples was New York City's Tammany Hall, headquarters of the Democratic Party in New York State. In 1861 William Tweed (1823–1878) became chairman of the Democratic Party. He became a state senator in 1868. He and his followers were known as the Tweed Ring.*

*In 1869, he passed a law giving him near-total control over the government. He went on to steal an estimated \$100 million from the city. He did this by controlling who got to fill government positions at both the local and state level. This was a system called patronage. The people he picked would vote according to Tweed's wishes. This let him pass laws that helped his businesses.*

Which answer choice BEST explains the structure of these paragraphs?

- (A) chronological order
- (B) cause and effect
- (C) order of importance
- (D) problem and solution

This article is organized by introducing the corruption that exists between corporations and governments and then giving examples of different types of corruption.

How would the article be different if it were organized using cause and effect?

- (A) The article would explain why corruption is illegal and harmful, then go on to suggest ways the laws could be changed to prevent further corruption from occurring.
- (B) The article would explain the processes involved in corrupt dealings between governments and businesses and how they avoid legal consequences.
- (C) The article would explain why businesses and governments are tempted by corruption and how corruption directly influences businesses and individuals.
- (D) The article would explain the origins of corruption in the history of the United States, then go on to analyze corruption in other governments around the world.