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Coordinated Party Expenditures: Policy Background

On June 30, 2026, in *National Republican Senatorial Committee v. Federal Election Commission (NRSC v. FEC)*, the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated federal statutory limits on a type of political party spending known as *coordinated party expenditures*. This CRS In Focus provides brief policy background on coordinated party expenditures and now-invalidated statutory limits. Potential campaign finance implications, discussed briefly, appear to be in flux. Another CRS product, cited below, provides legal analysis that is beyond the scope of this In Focus.

What Are Coordinated Party Expenditures?

The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) provides political parties with three major options for providing financial support to House, Senate, and presidential candidates: (1) contributions, (2) coordinated expenditures, and (3) independent expenditures. Party committees may contribute no more than \$5,000 per candidate, per election to candidate campaigns. Independent expenditures (IEs), which may not be coordinated with candidates, are not subject to limits. Coordinated expenditures, which apply during the general-election phase of the campaign, allow parties to buy goods or services on behalf of a campaign, and to discuss those expenditures with the campaign. Coordinated expenditures typically fund purchases such as political advertising or polling.

Now-Invalidated Statutory Limits on Coordinated Party Expenditures

For historical reference, this section briefly discusses the now-invalidated statutory limits on coordinated party expenditures. A formula specified in FECA sets state-specific limits based on office sought, a state's voting-age population (VAP), and the consumer price index. The FEC announces annual inflation adjustments to these limits. For 2026, parties could make coordinated expenditures up to the following amounts:

- \$130,600 for House candidates in single-district states;
- \$65,300 for House candidates in multiple-district states; and
- amounts between \$130,600 and approximately \$4.1 million, depending on state population, for Senate candidates.

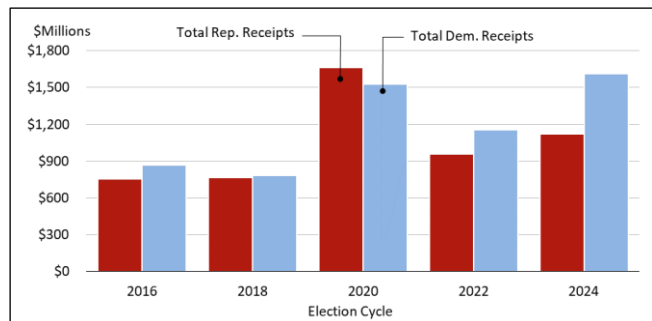
Parties also may make coordinated expenditures on behalf of their presidential nominees. In the most recent presidential election, 2024, the national limit was approximately \$32.4 million.

State party committees may authorize their national counterparts to make coordinated party expenditures on their behalf (or vice versa). If such agreements exist, the national party, for example, could assume the spending limit for a state party, in which case the national party could spend up to its own limit and up to the state party's limit.

Recent Coordinated Expenditures and IEs by the Two Major Parties, and Potential Implications

Some observers have argued that unlimited coordinated expenditures could help parties compete with the financial influence of super PACs or other entities making IEs. Others counter that unlimited coordinated expenditures could increase corruption risks in party fundraising. Because the 2026 election cycle is already well underway, it is possible that practical implications from the ruling could be more substantial in the 2028 election cycle and beyond.

Figure 1. Fundraising by the Democratic Party and by the Republican Party, 2016-2024



Source: CRS figure from data in FEC Party Table I.

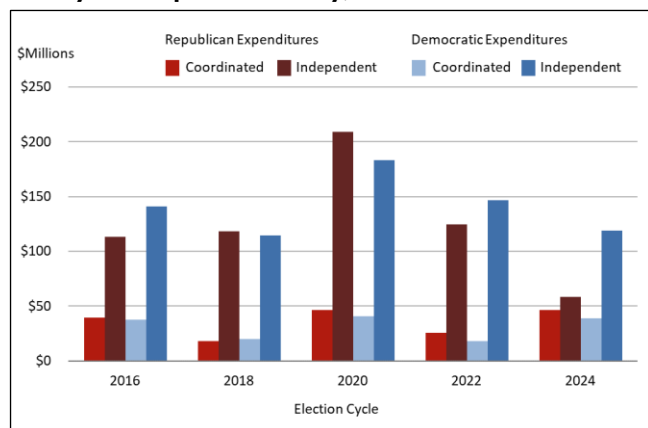
Notes: Data are subject to future amendments.

Figure 1 shows the state of fundraising for the major parties for the 2016 through 2024 cycles. In the most recent completed election cycles, the Democratic Party raised larger amounts than did the Republican Party in 2022 and 2024. In calendar year 2025 (not shown in the figure), Republican party committees outraised Democratic party committees (\$420.4 million compared with \$407.7 million). Republican committees also held more cash on hand at the end of 2025 (\$184.1 million compared with \$124.3 million). Unless Congress were to amend limits on contributions to parties, unlimited coordinated party expenditures, in and of themselves, would not change the amount of money that parties are permitted to raise.

Parties could choose to spend some amounts previously dedicated to IEs on coordinated expenditures. As **Figure 2** below shows, and as might be expected given the unlimited

nature of IEs, both parties chose to make far larger amounts of IEs rather than of coordinated expenditures in the 2016 through 2024 election cycles. During the 2024 cycle, Democratic parties spent more than twice as much on IEs (approximately \$118.6 million) than did Republican party committees (approximately \$58.6 million).

Figure 2. Coordinated Party Expenditures and Independent Expenditures by the Democratic Party and by the Republican Party, 2016-2024



Source: CRS figure from data in FEC Party Table 1.

Notes: Data are subject to future amendments.

Party committees were reportedly reconsidering their operations in the immediate aftermath of *NRSC v. FEC*. For example, on June 30, the NRSC announced that it was “sunsetting its traditional [IE] unit” and would shift some activities to coordinated expenditures.

Both spending options—coordinated and independent—would appear to retain unique characteristics, and the two options are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Parties might continue to choose IEs if they wish not to consult with campaigns, such as to distance campaigns from purchases that might be controversial (e.g., for political advertising attacking opponents). Coordinated expenditures could be more attractive for parties if they view such spending as more strategically or financially efficient than IEs. Unlimited coordinated expenditures might also provide parties with additional resources to compete against independent expenditures from super PACs or other “outside” groups. It is also possible that the ability to make unlimited coordinated expenditures could obligate candidates to adopt parties’ preferred campaign strategies as a condition of such spending. Depending on one’s perspective, such an outcome might be viewed as strengthening parties as institutions, or as weakening the candidate-centered nature of modern campaigns.

Another potential implication concerns political advertising purchases. Some media accounts have noted that unlimited coordinated party expenditures could essentially provide parties and their nominees with cheaper access to broadcast advertising time if such purchases were made as coordinated party expenditures using a provision known as the lowest unit charge (LUC, also called the lowest unit rate). Candidates may purchase such broadcast advertising time at the most favorable rates provided to commercial

advertisers for the same class of time. It is unclear whether that scenario will develop, and litigation regarding the LUC, which is beyond the scope of this In Focus, is ongoing.

Other implications for parties, donors, and campaigns remain to be seen, and could develop in unexpected ways over time. Potential questions include whether donors might change their giving preferences; whether parties will change their fundraising strategies (e.g., through joint fundraising committees that permit participating entities to share resources in permissible amounts); and how super PACs or other groups might respond if parties take on increased financial roles in campaigns.

Potential Policy Considerations for Congress

Legislation concerning coordinated party expenditure limits has been introduced in recent Congresses, although it has not been a major focus of legislative activity. Some such proposals (e.g., H.R. 4563 and H.R. 4472 in the 118th Congress) would have repealed the statutory limits. Other bills (e.g., H.R. 9354 in the 119th Congress and H.R. 8572 and S. 2344 in the 118th Congress) would have addressed coordinated party expenditures in the context of proposed public financing programs.

Those who wish to maintain the status quo might choose not to pursue any legislative change, or to codify the *NRSC* ruling by amending FECA to remove the references to existing limits. If Congress wanted to permit parties to raise additional amounts in response to unlimited coordinated expenditures, it could amend FECA’s contribution limits. Limits also could be lowered if Congress determined that a greater corruption risk in party fundraising exists post-*NRSC*. Coordinated party expenditures are already disclosed in reports filed with the FEC; Congress also could consider new or different disclosure requirements. Congress also could consider a constitutional amendment providing greater authority to regulate political fundraising and spending generally. Several such amendments have been introduced in recent Congresses (e.g., H.J.Res. 121, H.J.Res. 122, S.J.Res. 43, and S.J.Res. 78 in the 119th Congress).

Additional Reading

For background on the Supreme Court case invalidating coordinated party expenditure limits, see CRS Legal Sidebar LSB11358, *Campaign Finance: Supreme Court Scheduled to Consider Constitutionality of Coordinated Party Expenditure Limits*, by L. Paige Whitaker.

For additional discussion of campaign finance policy, see CRS Report R41542, *The State of Campaign Finance Policy: Recent Developments and Issues for Congress*, by R. Sam Garrett.

Parts of this In Focus are adapted from archived CRS Report RS22644, *Coordinated Party Expenditures in Federal Elections: An Overview*, by R. Sam Garrett and L. Paige Whitaker.

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