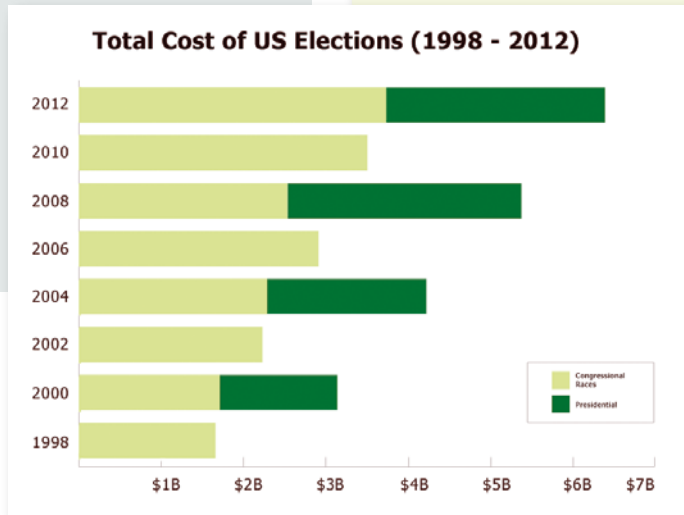


WARM UP

1 Look at the chart of the cost of the US elections. How much money was spent in 2012? What is the trend?



THE COST OF US ELECTIONS

The 2012 US elections were the most expensive ever, with a total price tag of over \$6 billion for the race for the presidency, House of Representatives and Senate. The Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks campaign spending, had originally predicted only a slightly higher total cost than that spent on the 2008 elections, but then had to revise its forecast as spending rocketed past expectations. In particular,

the total cost of the presidential election is surprising, given that only the Republican Party held presidential primaries, unlike in 2008 when both Republicans and Democrats had expensive contests to find a candidate. Candidates naturally used the money to pay for things like staff and travel, but about half was spent on advertising. That was good news for TV networks like CBS, ABC and Fox News, especially in the hardest fought states and areas with competitive Senate and House races where the ads are densely targeted.

The trend over recent decades has been for US election costs to increase, but this was also the first presidential race since the landmark 'Citizens United' 2010 Supreme Court ruling, which ended most restrictions on donations by corporations and unions. This encouraged the creation of Super PACs [political action committees], fundraising committees that can raise unlimited sums of money from

corporations, unions, associations and individuals and then spend unlimited amounts to support a candidate but cannot officially coordinate with campaigns. These Super PACs, which raised millions of dollars for both the Republicans and Democrats in 2012, have worried some activists who claim that the increased leverage and power of big donors limit the influence of average voters on politics.

Source: www.reuters.com

MORE ABOUT...

The spending on US elections makes that in the UK look microscopic. A total of £31m was spent by all UK parties in the general election in 2010. Another big difference is TV campaign ads. In the UK, the airtime for political campaign ads is free and it is strictly regulated, with no possibility to buy additional airtime. In the last general election the two main parties - Labour and Conservative - were each allowed 4 or 5 party political broadcasts in England and 6 between Scotland and Wales. In the USA there are hundreds of thousands of campaign ads on TV, many of which are extremely negative about the opposition.

Source - BBC news - ©2012 BBC

READING COMPREHENSION

2 FCE Read the text and choose the correct option.

- 1 The Center for Responsive Politics...
 - A decides where campaign money is spent.
 - B follows the amount spent on campaigns.
 - C limits where campaign money is spent.
 - D manages the amount spent on campaigns.

- 2 Both Republicans and Democrats...
 - A were surprised at the cost of primaries.
 - B spent the same amount on primaries.
 - C had primaries in 2012.
 - D had primaries in 2008.

- 3 Approximately 50% of campaign money...
 - A was spent on travelling to competitive states.
 - B was given to three TV networks for advertising.
 - C was spent on advertising.
 - D was spent on staff costs.

- 4 Why was the Supreme Court ruling important?
 - A It stopped most limits on the amount of money given by companies and unions to campaigns.
 - B It allowed businesses to coordinate with election campaigns.
 - C It prohibited companies and unions from donating money to campaigns.
 - D It imposed restrictions on the amount of money donated by businesses to campaigns.

- 5 Why can Super PACs be a problem for elections?
 - A The money cannot be spent on official campaigns.
 - B The big contributors could have too much influence.
 - C There are no restrictions on the amount of money.
 - D The average voters do not like them.

SPEAKING

3 Have a class debate on the following statement.

The sky's the limit. It is perfectly acceptable to spend unlimited amounts on an election campaign.