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Your right to know

Of king's party and campaign finance

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I am a Pakistani-American, one who straddles two distinct cultures. Living in both Pakistan and America, my take home lesson about politics in both countries is this; the power systems on both sides have the ultimate power over all that matters. In July, there was an opinion piece published in the *New York Times*, which alleges that the powerful establishment led by the Army in Pakistan has always created a king's party to further their agenda and smash the party the establishment didn't like. The author goes on to suggest based on-for lack of a better word-whim, that PTI is the King's party today.

Most of the noise on social media is made by the PTI stalwarts — who obviously deny being the King's party — and those journalists, anchors, and book authors who regard the Times article as a Godsend for their ritualistic Imran Khan bashing. On social media, they are usually referred to as *lifafa* journalists. *The Times* article is interesting not for what it says, but for what it doesn't say. Conspicuous by its absence from the Times article is the issue of campaign finance in American elections.

All cultures and races have different versions of the same thing. Some are visible to the naked eye, others can only be seen with eyes closed. In America, the caucasians smoke Marlboro lights while African-Americans smoke menthol cigarettes. Pakistani doctors drive BMWs or Mercedes and so do the Arabs, who smoke shisha with their food, while Pakistanis drink black tea with theirs. The point is that everyone has a unique manner of doing things. In America, I have worked at gas stations and have taught at colleges. I have dealt with people stealing soda cans and I have also sat down one on one with Noam Chomsky. Having seen many layers of American society, I know that America too has King's parties. The Republican and the Democratic parties are King's parties. Their Kings are the rich corporations.

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The role of money is not new in American politics. However, in the wake of the US supreme Court decision in the Citizens United v FEC case in 2010, it has become legal for unlimited cash to manipulate American elections. In the 5-4 court decision, the majority opinion argues that corporations have the same First Amendment rights as individuals. Political Action Committees (PACs) existed before with some limitations on their donations. But Citizens United case paved the way for Super PACs with virtually no limitations on the size of donation to a candidate during an election campaign.

The new normal is for corporations to drench the election campaign with massive amounts of cash using Super PACs to influence elections. Positive campaign ads for the blue eyed candidate are aired, while at the same time malicious ads are aired targeting the opponent. The candidate with more money at his disposal usually wins. The winner then has to put his weight behind the kind of legislation that will help the ‘sugar daddy’ corporation. The vicious cycle goes on. In the meantime, the biggest losers are the American public and the American democracy. The only winner is the King. The people’s speech is just words while the corporations’ speech is cash. Guess who is going to win, cash or words?

Many Super PACs make hefty donations to election campaigns of the Republicans, the party that worships the Second Amendment right: the right to bear arms. The National Rifle Association (NRA) spends a stupendous amount of money in creating ‘awareness’ about the importance of self-defense and the Second Amendment. The irony is that gun violence claims more American lives than terrorism, yet the Super PACs supporting gun rights are not deemed dangerous.

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According to a 2016 study by Alex Nowrasteh at the Cato Institute, about 3,024 Americans have died from 1975 through 2015 due to foreign born terrorists. This number includes the 2,983 deaths from 9/11. In the same period, guns claimed 1.34 million American lives. That’s about as many Americans as died in all the wars in American history since the American Revolution. Notwithstanding, the mindset is: foreign terrorists are more dangerous than the domestic shooter.

Similarly, domestic buying of the White House, which I will discuss shortly, isn’t considered detrimental to American democracy. However, foreign (Russian) meddling to influence the election outcome is deemed a more sinister plot to harm America and its democracy. Strange logic!

In 2008, Obama raised roughly \$750 million. In 2012, Obama raised \$1.123 billion, while Romney raised \$ 1.019 billion. Every subsequent election is costlier than the previous one. The 2008 election spending was \$5.3 billion, \$6 billion in 2012, and \$6.6 billion in 2016. American Kings have their free speech and their favorite party. The interesting part is that they don’t even hide in plain sight. It is deeply internalised that money is needed for campaigns and corporations’ free speech ought to be respected. I would like to point out that Pakistani Kings try their best to hide, knowing full well that Pakistanis know what the truth is. American Kings don’t have to hide because they have blunted the free speech of the American people by controlling their minds. That is a more sinister plot than the one that encourages a party — called the King’s party.