



Super PACs Enhance Democracy

By [John Samples](#)

Everyone loves to hate super PACs. One critic said they were "a new political animal that is ugly, loud, anti-democratic." In fact, super PACs enhance democracy.

What's so "super" about a super PAC? A political action committee raises and contributes legally limited sums to candidates for office. Super PACs are not limited in how much money they can raise or spend during an election. Why not? They do not contribute to candidates. No contribution, no quid pro quo with officeholders—hence no corruption.

Consider what super PACs actually do. In Iowa, a super PAC associated with Mitt Romney charged Newt Gingrich with ethical lapses and hypocrisy. In the upcoming South Carolina fight, a Gingrich super PAC is using a \$5 million donation to accuse Romney of destroying jobs.

In other words, super PACs fund political speech. The First Amendment protects such speech.

Are these charges against Gingrich and Romney correct? That's the wrong question. If government could suppress "false" speech, the First Amendment would be meaningless. Those in power would find that their critics are lying and suppress their criticisms.

A better question: Do super PACs inform voters? Romney's attack on Gingrich questions his fitness for the GOP nomination and for office. Gingrich's response raises questions about Romney's character and his competence. The information is relevant. Voters must decide if the criticisms are true.

Studies show high spending on negative ads increases voter knowledge and turnout. Those who have the least knowledge at the start of a campaign benefit the most.

But don't big donations mean the rich buy elections? The large donation to Gingrich kept him in the fight long enough to air his critique of Romney. It bought Gingrich more time to make his case, not a lock in the nomination.

Candidates for office do not like to be criticized. Who does? But voters need to hear the worst about candidates to make the best choice now and in November.