

# Tennessee



16

Overall Rank

C+

Overall Grade

Tennessee	Overall Rank	To Governor	To State Senate	To State House	To Parties	To PACs
Individual Giving	20	38	41	38	1	1
		\$3,900/election	\$1,500/election	\$1,500/election	Unlimited	Unlimited
PAC Giving	15	21	17	18	1	
		\$11,500/election	\$11,500/election	\$7,600/election	Unlimited	
Party Giving	31	32	27	29		
		\$383,000/election	\$61,300/election	\$30,700/election		
Union Giving	50	50	50	50		
		Prohibited*	Prohibited*	Prohibited*		
Corporate Giving	25	25	24	24		
		\$250/quarter*	\$250/quarter*	\$250/quarter*		

**Inflation Adjustment: Yes**

\*Unions are allowed to contribute to candidates only if they register as PACs themselves. We treat this in the same manner as unions that are allowed to give to PACs but not to candidates and, as such, we list union contributions as prohibited. Likewise, corporations in Tennessee are permitted to give \$250/quarter to candidates directly, in aggregate. To give more the corporation must register as a PAC.

Among states that have limits on contributions from individuals, parties, and political committees to candidates, Tennessee ranks fifth in the Free Speech Index. However, 11 states have no such limits, including three of Tennessee’s neighbors – Alabama, Mississippi, and Virginia. Tennesseans should look to these states as models of free political speech.

On a more positive note, in 2011, the Tennessee Legislature passed a measure eliminating the state’s prohibition on direct giving by businesses to candidates in order to more equitably align state campaign finance statutes permitting unions to donate directly to candidates, albeit through an onerous process in

which a union must register itself as a PAC in order to contribute. Currently, Tennessee restricts businesses to giving no more than \$250 in aggregate to all candidates per quarter. Such a provision leaves Tennessee as one of only two states (New Hampshire) to allow direct corporate giving to candidates but prohibit all direct union contributions to candidates. Although both unions and corporations are able to give in greater amounts by registering as PACs in Tennessee, the bureaucratic red tape required to do so is a deterrent to many smaller entities who may wish to speak. Abolishing this arbitrary rule would allow even greater political freedom in the Volunteer State.