

CSAI – Escalating Inequality

Session #6 – Conventional Attempts at Reform

UUCF – October 19, 2015

Presenter: Terry Steichen

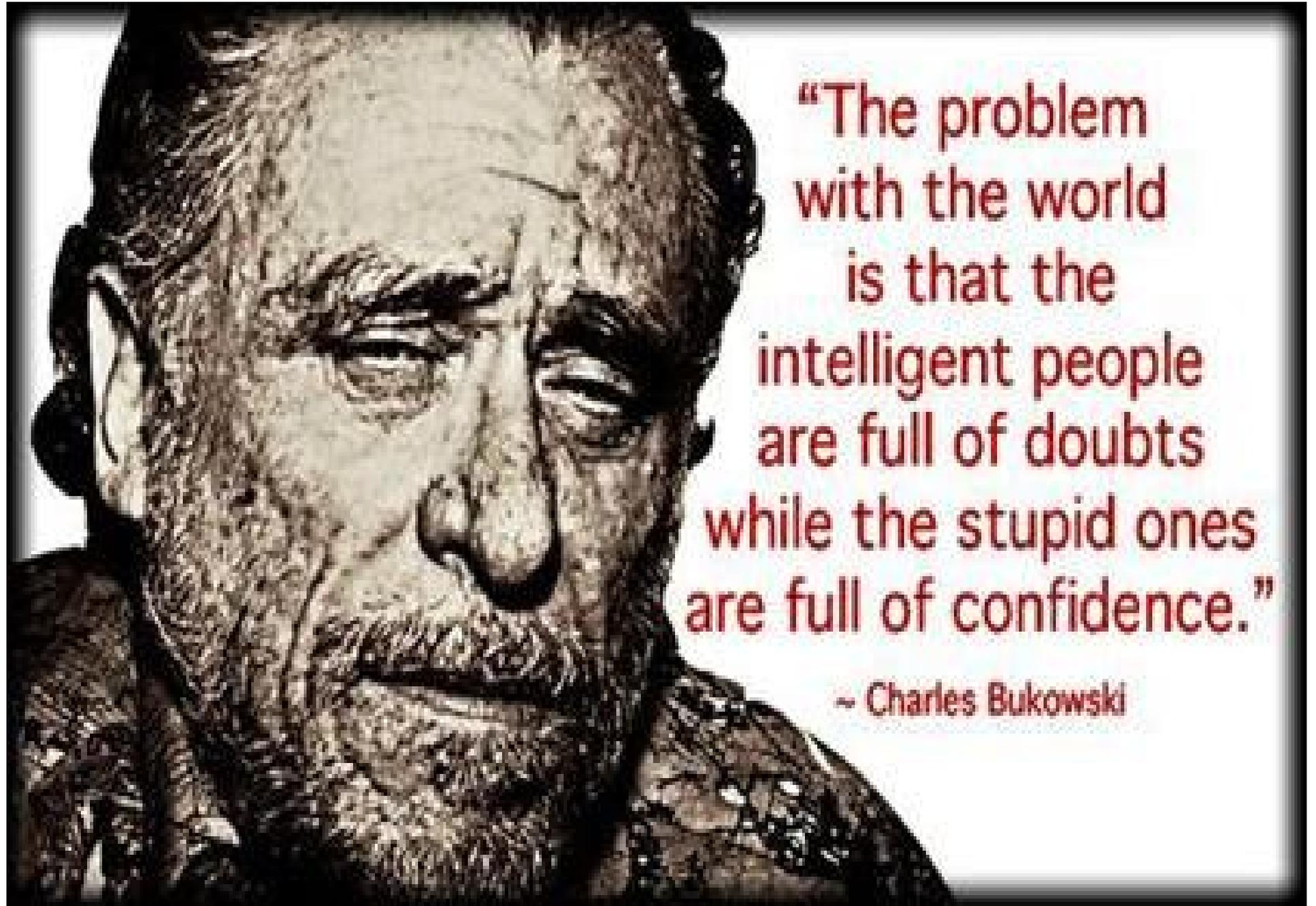
What is a CSAI?

- “Congregational Study/Action Issue”
- Bi-annual selection by UU General Assembly
- Usually leads to “Statement of Conscience”
- Four year duration (3 plus SOC)
- Recent CSAIs:
 - Escalating Inequality (2014; est 2017 SOC)
 - Reproductive Justice (2012; 2015 SOC)
 - Immigration as a Moral Issue (2010; 2013 SOC)
 - Ethical Eating (2008; 2011 SOC)
 - Creating Peace (2006; 2010 SOC)



Not everything that is faced can be changed, but
nothing can be changed until it is faced.

(James Baldwin)



“The problem with the world is that the intelligent people are full of doubts while the stupid ones are full of confidence.”

~ Charles Bukowski

Escalating Inequality – Cross-cutting Scope

In your opinion, which of the following are the most serious long-term issues facing this country? (Check all that apply)

Economy & jobs	61%	Global poverty	25%
Health care costs	55%	Nuclear war	22%
Healthcare	48%	Alzheimer's and other	
National security	47%	Dreaded Diseases	20%
International Terrorism	42%	Global economic competition	20%
Income inequality	33%	Population growth	19%
Climate change	32%	Ocean extinctions and fishing	
Environmental degradation	28%	colony collapses	17%
Falling US high school		Robot outsourcing of jobs	14%
science & math rankings		Another issue	9%
compared to other countries	27%	None of these	8%
Clean water	27%		
Mental health	25%		

Source: A Research!America and ScienceDebate.org poll of U.S. adults conducted in partnership with Zogby Analytics in September 2015.

Top 10 Fears for 2015*

- **Corruption of government officials (58.0%)**
- Cyber-terrorism (44.8%)
- Corporate tracking of personal information (44.6%)
- Terrorist attacks (44.4%)
- Government tracking of personal information (41.4%)
- Bio-warfare (40.9%)
- Identity theft (39.6%)
- Economic collapse (39.2%)
- Running out of money in the future (37.4%)
- Credit card fraud (36.9%)

Seminar Session Overview

- ~~Scope of Escalating Inequality (EI)~~
- ~~Economic and non-Economic Consequences of EI~~
- ~~(Inadequate) Conventional Explanations of EI~~
- ~~Deeper Reasons for EI~~
- ~~Powerful Role of Myths in Perpetuating EI~~
- Past Reform Attempts and Results
 - Lessons Learned (what doesn't work)
 - Identifying Parameters of Possible Solution(s)
 - Identifying and Zeroing in on Solution(s)
 - Advocating for Chosen Solution(s)
 - External (good governance) groups
 - Grassroots - UUCF->UU->Faith

Key Misconceptions about Escalating Inequality

Concern about inequality is just envy of the rich

- No. it's about the spread between the wealthy and the non-wealthy

The poor are actually much better off than in the past

- No, people today cannot live comfortably, even if they're fully employed

Social welfare programs haven't worked because same % poor

- Wrong. Without these programs, the poor would be much worse off.

Escalating inequality is the same as inequality

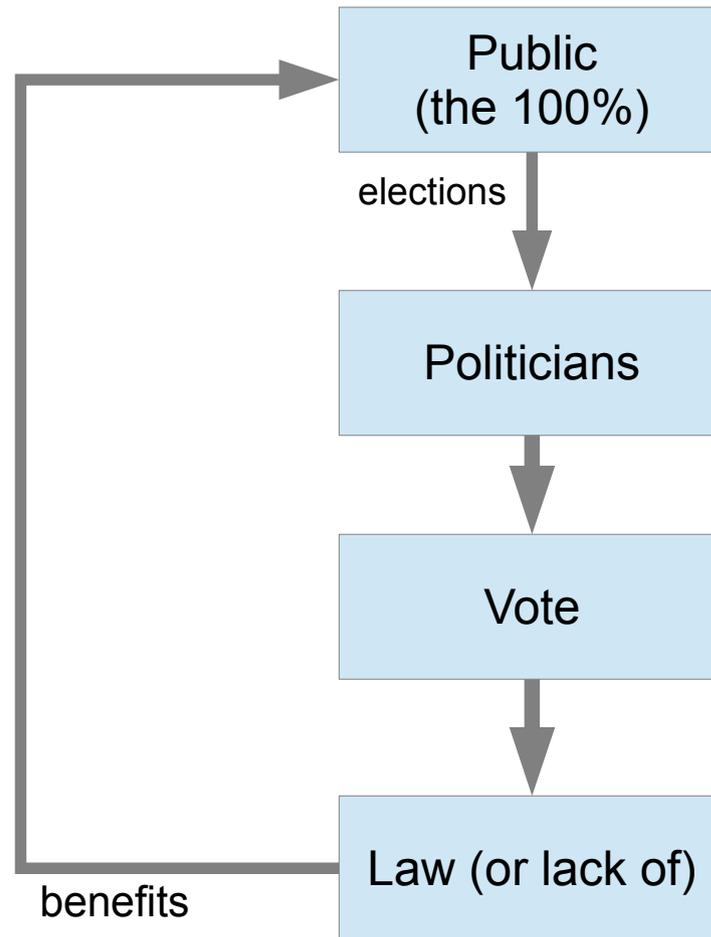
- No. Escalating inequality dynamics are new and ongoing
- No. Basic inequality is an entirely different topic.

An overriding point: concern about escalating inequality should not be read as envy of wealth. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with having wealth. The problem comes when there's too much spread in income and wealth. Here's now the recent Nobel Laureate Angus Deaton put it in his 2013 book "The Great Escape: Health, Wealth and the Origins of Inequality:

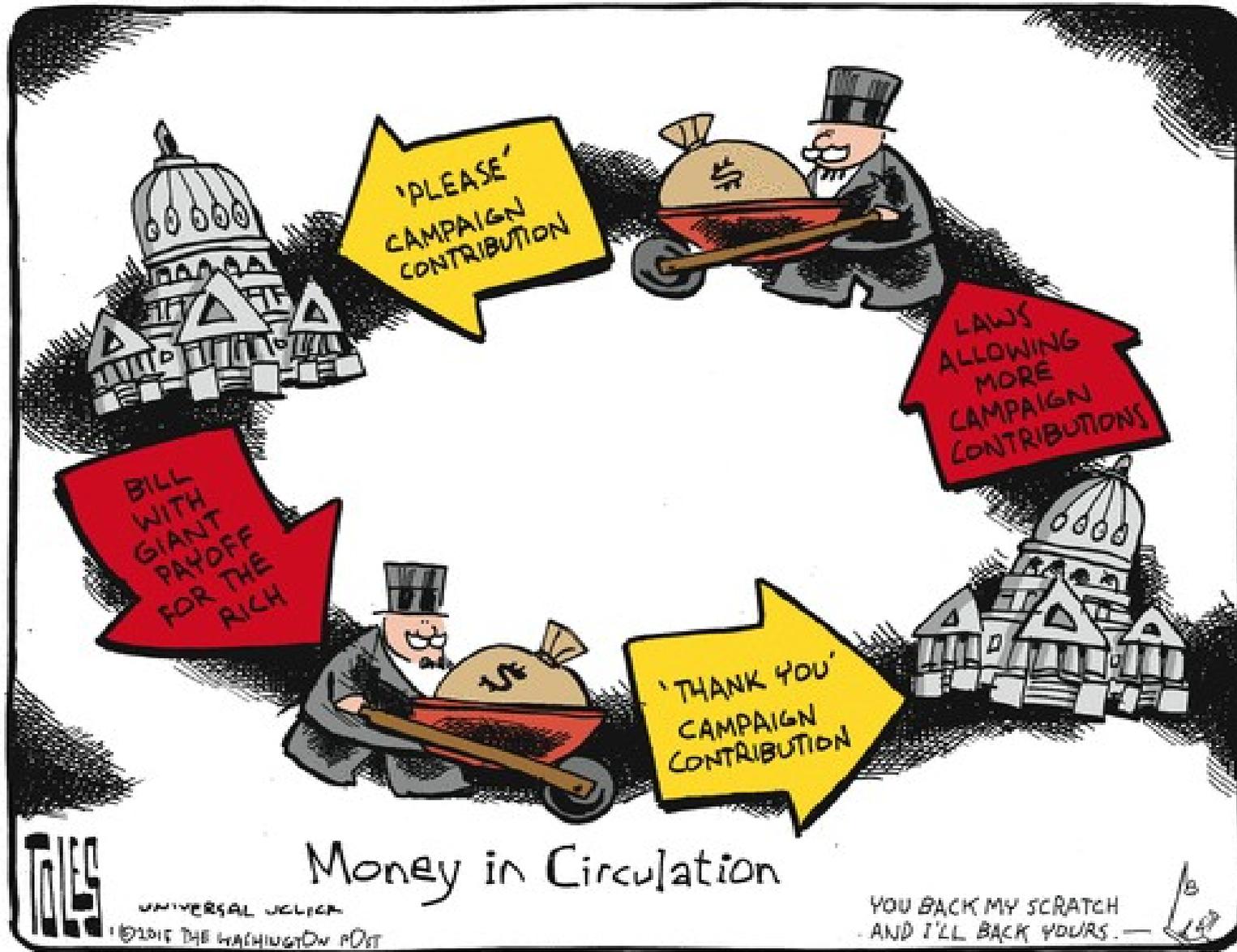
“The political equality that is required by democracy is always under threat from economic inequality, and the more extreme the economic inequality, the greater the threat to democracy. If democracy is compromised, there is a direct loss of wellbeing because people have good reason to value their ability to participate in political life, and the loss of that ability is instrumental in threatening other harm.

“The very wealthy have little need for state-provided education or health care... They have even less reason to support health insurance for everyone, or to worry about the low quality of public schools that plagues much of the country. They will oppose any regulation of banks that restricts profits, even if it helps those who cannot cover their mortgages or protects the public against predatory lending, deceptive advertising, or even a repetition of the financial crash. To worry about these consequences of extreme inequality has nothing to do with being envious of the rich and everything to do with the fear that rapidly growing top incomes are a threat to the wellbeing of everyone else. “

Representative Democracy: Civics 101

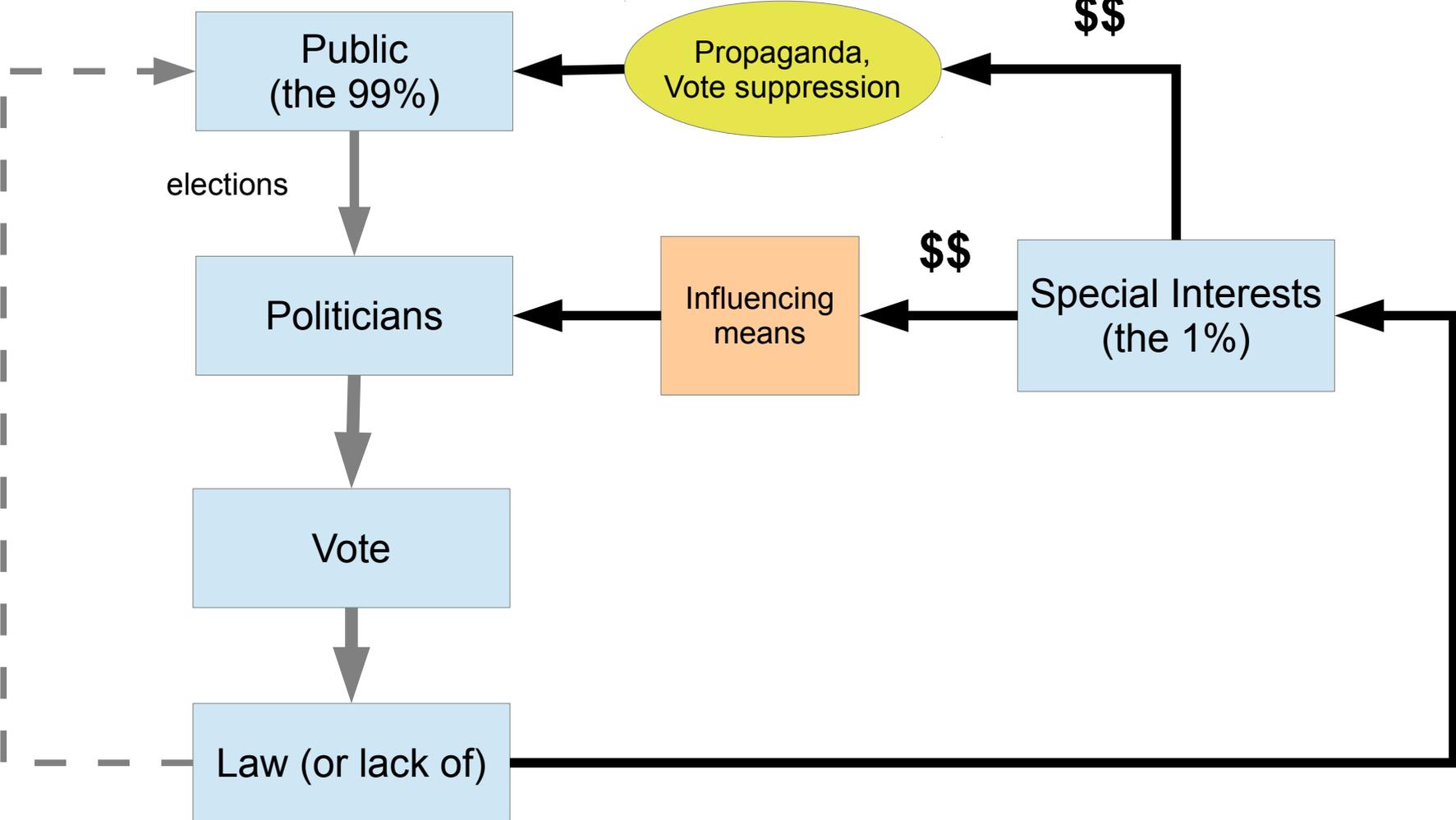


The "Real World" Works Somewhat Differently



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Representative Democracy: Civics Politics 101 102



Larry Lessig's Definition of the Core Problem: **“Dependency Corruption”**

When politicians pay more attention to special interests than to the public

Every bit as corrupting as outright bribery

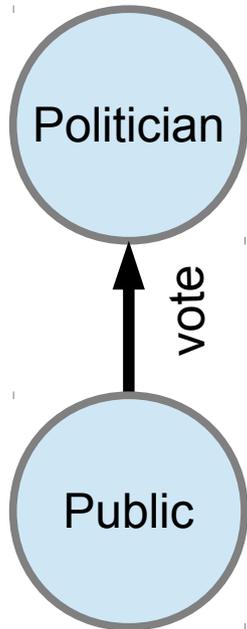
Special interest groups not evil or illegal – actually necessary.

They grant a wide range of favors to politicians.

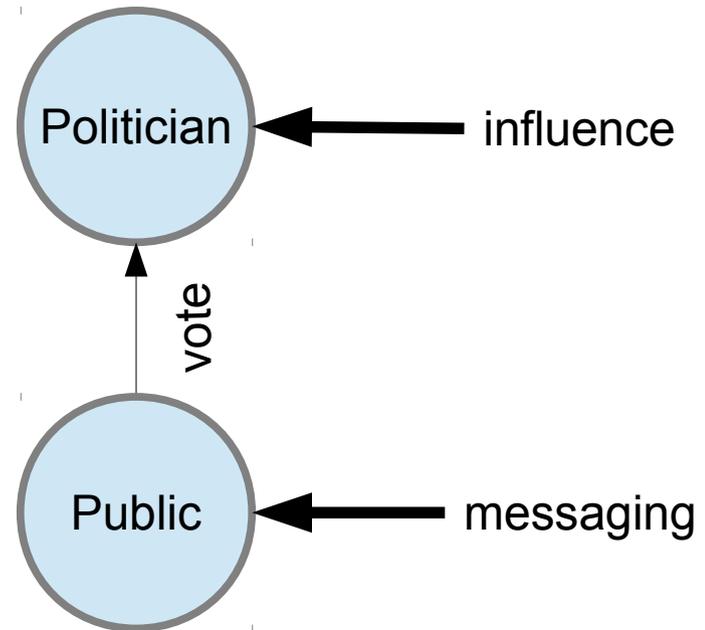
The problem is politicians feel obliged to return the 'favors'

Favors come in the form of legislation that's passed (or blocked)

A Simplified Picture of Our Dilemma

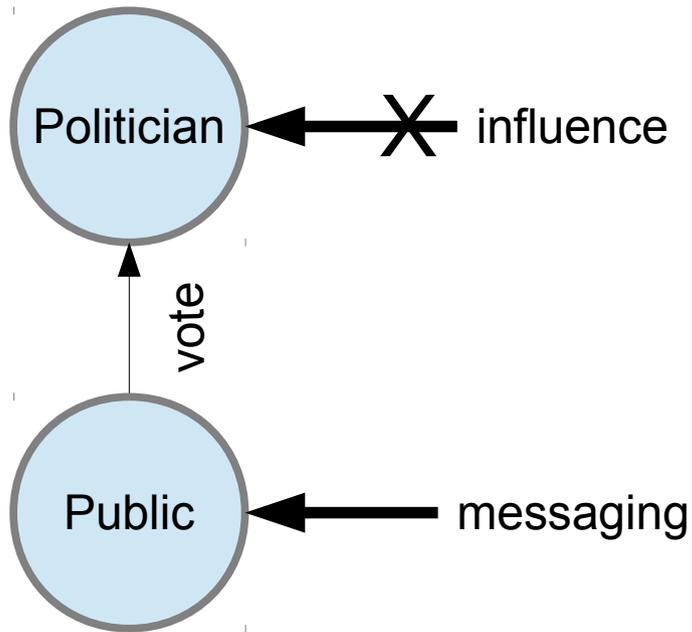


**Here's what
we want...**

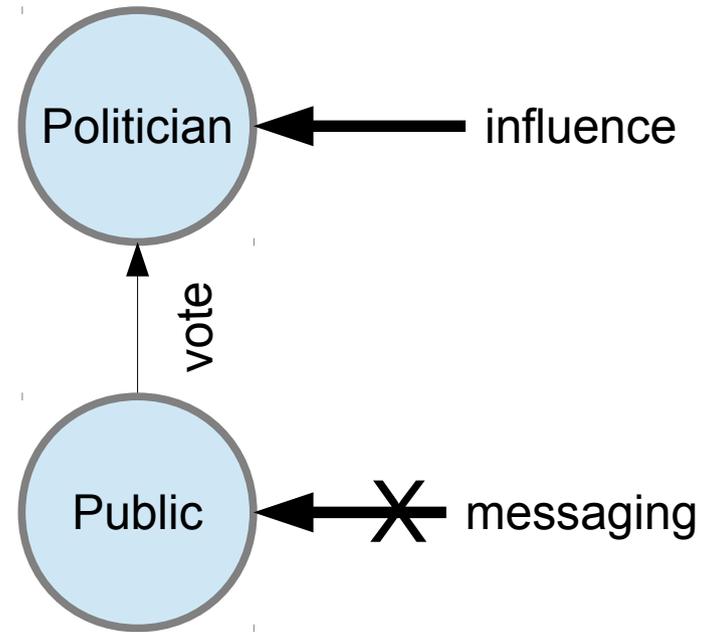


**..but, here's
what we have**

A Simplified Overview of the Challenge

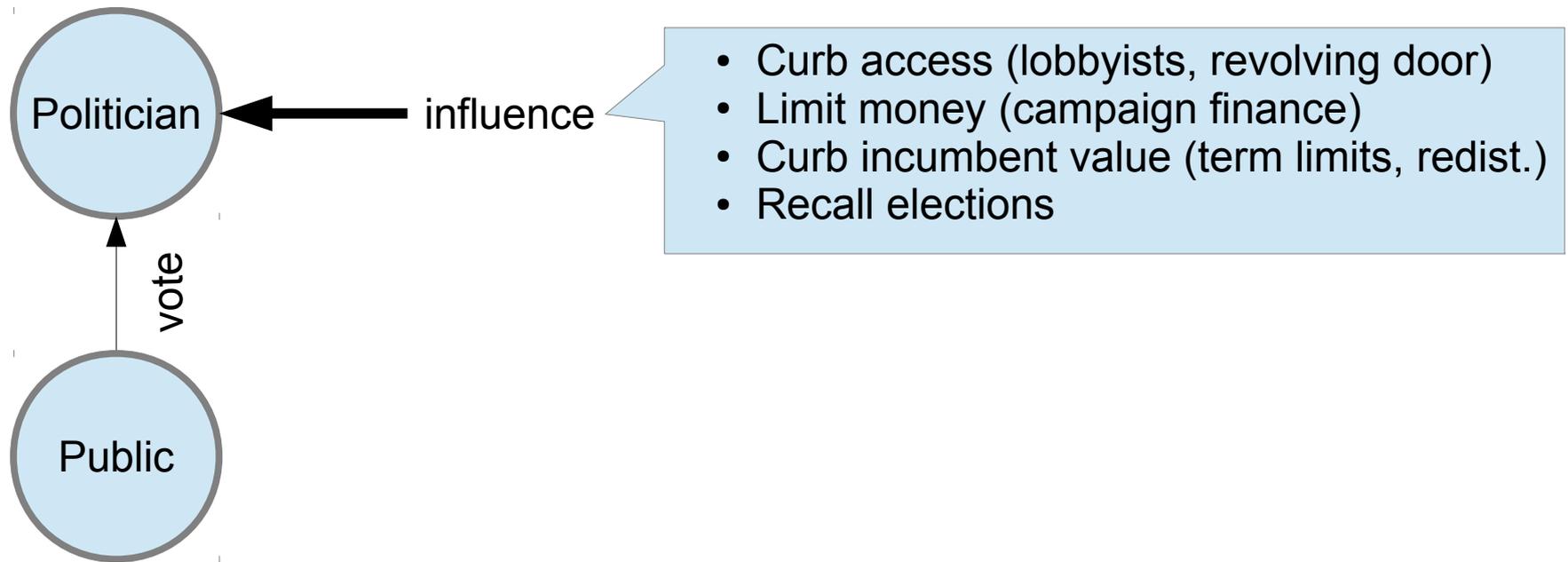


**Here's the
reforms we've
tried..**



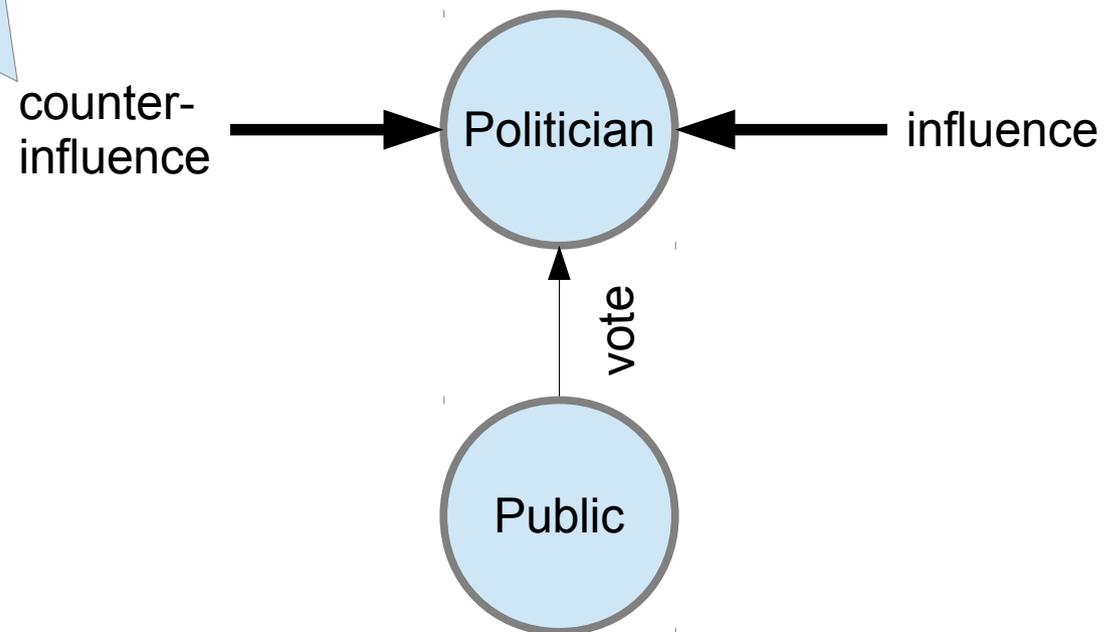
**..and here's where
we can't go**

Here are the influence-based reforms we've tried..



Here are the 'fight-fire-with-fire' reforms we've tried..

- Outgunned (skills, resources, 'threat')
- Fragmented (by policy area, focus)
- Different agendas



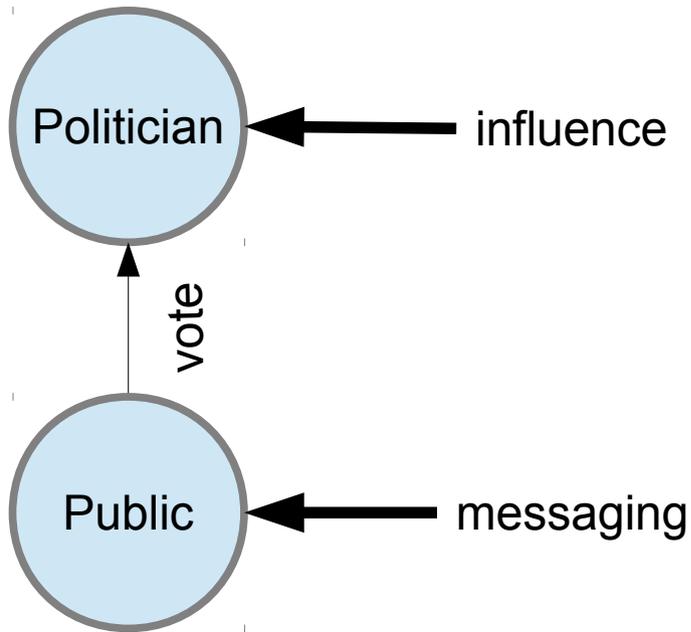
Lessig: Strategy Evaluations

- 1) Anonymous donations
Appealing but self-limiting
rejects: unworkable
- 2) Transparency/Accountability
Appealing but limited (using official data)
rejects: unworkable
- 3) Legislated “opt-in” public financing
requires Congress to reform itself - Catch-22
rejects: unrealizable
- 4) Election of non-politicians
disrupt nominating process till proper candidates emerge
rejects: unlikely to happen
- 5) Election of small donation candidates
once in office they quit (so they don't get corrupted)
rejects: unlikely to happen
- 6) Constitutional Convention with Deliberative Polling
Bypasses the Catch-22
accepts: unlikely, but best possible bet

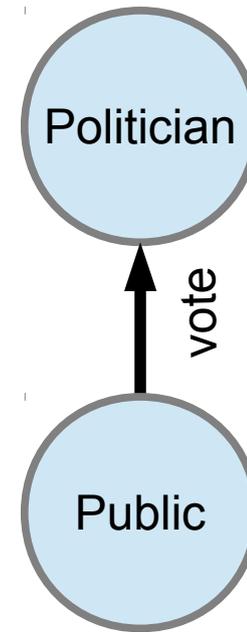
“Stealth Democracy”- American's Beliefs:

- hold the government in very low regard
- dislike politics and the political process (other than "usual suspects" who love it)
- believe politicians are inherently untrustworthy and hold them in very low esteem
- believe that political divisiveness and conflict are largely manufactured (by politicians) and a waste of time
- believe that the public's views on many key issues are pretty close - not a consensus, but often a majority or even supermajority
- believe that the attitudes of the "powers that be" sharply conflict with the general public's views on these key issues
- most of all, dislike being "taken for a sucker" by politicians who enrich themselves at the public's expense
- want a way to remove misbehaving politicians from office, to be invoked if and when needed - not all the time
- not want businessmen per se to run the country (as some have claimed) - just want leaders to be competent, honest and non-ideological
- focused at most only on a few issues, but by no means all.
- on those on issues, doesn't feel it has much of an opportunity to have their voices heard because the barriers are too high

Repeat: A Simplified Picture of Our Dilemma



**Here's
what we have**



**Here's what
we want**

Discussion