

# When It Comes to Small Donations, Sanders Leaves Everyone in the Dust

He's raised more than Obama did in his first presidential bid and far more than any other candidate in this campaign.



AP Photo/John Minchill

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**B**ernie Sanders may not become the next president, but when it comes to raising money from small donors, he's already far exceeded Barack Obama's total in 2007 and almost matched the sitting president in his reelection bid in 2011.

Through the first seven months of his campaign, Sanders pulled in \$54 million from donors who gave less than \$200. His total with small donors is more than twice as much as Obama managed during his first run for president, when he raised \$24.5 million in small donations in 2007 versus \$77.6 million in large donations.

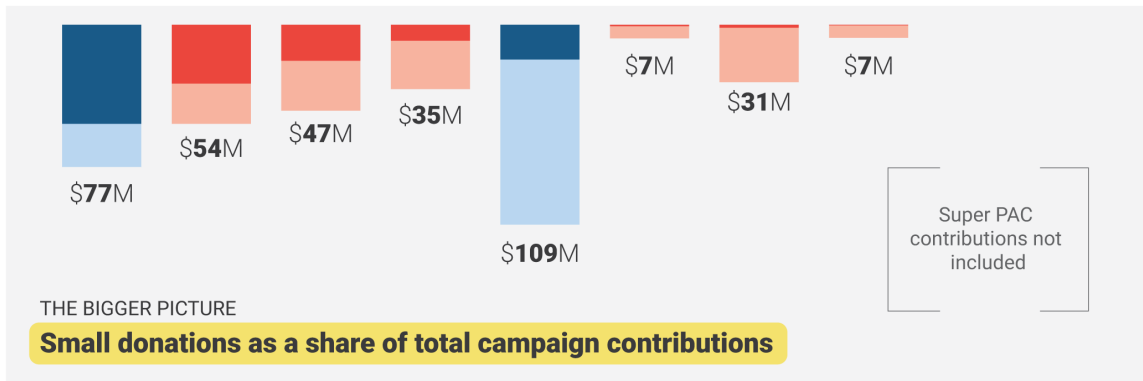
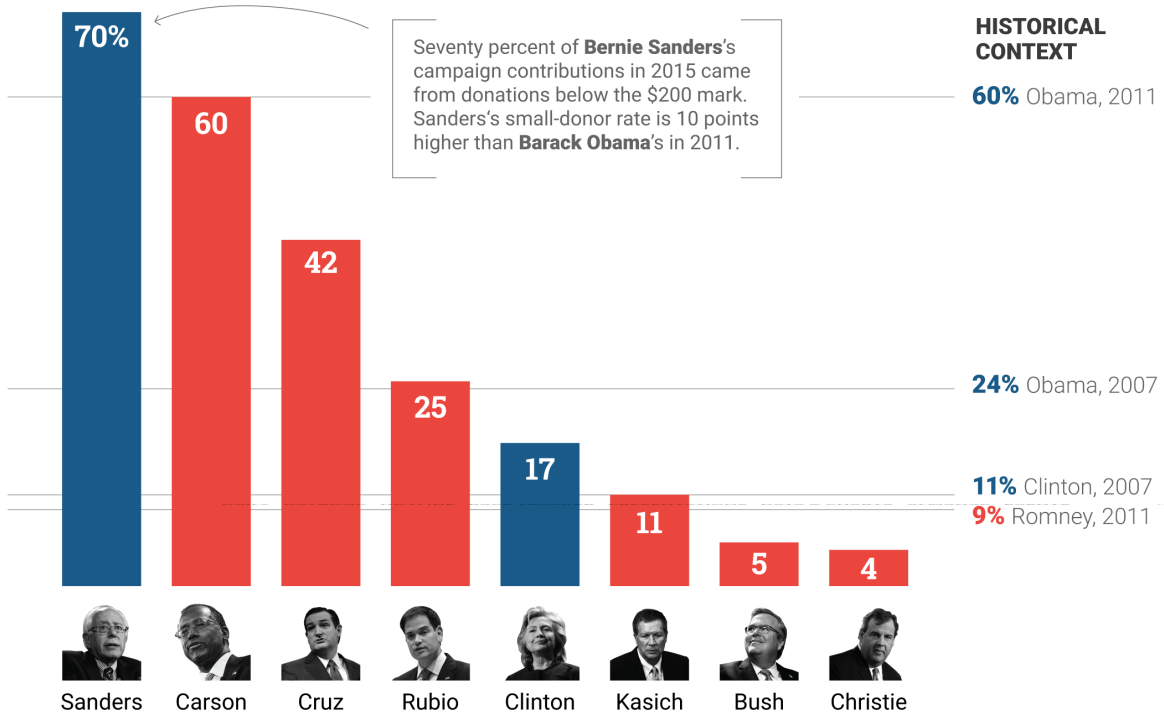
Obama, who revolutionized the business of small-donor online solicitations, only

raised slightly more than Sanders—\$58.5 million—in the first nine months of his reelection campaign in 2011.

Sanders’s success with small donors is far and away better than any other candidate, Republican or Democrat, running this year.

## Sanders’s Small-Donation Rate Passes Obama’s

How much of each candidate’s campaign haul in 2015 came from small donors?



### NOTES

- “Small donors,” for the purposes of this chart, are people who gave less than \$200 to a given candidate in a given year. (A donor who gave five \$50 donations would be considered a large donor.)
- The majority of Donald Trump’s campaign money has come from a series of loans from Trump himself, now totaling over \$12 million. And while he has technically “raised” \$5 million from small donors, in reality most of that is profit from the sale of hats and other campaign souvenirs.
- These charts look only at contributions from individual donors. Candidates may also benefit from spending by supportive PACs.

Source: Federal Election Commission

National Journal graphic | Libby Isenstein

That fact is a point of pride for Sanders, and a major campaign theme of his

speeches. He mentioned it Tuesday night, following his 22-point victory over erstwhile Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton in the New Hampshire primary, thanking his 1 million individual donors so far—and then making a play to recruit even more:

“I’m going to hold a fundraiser right here, right now, across America,” he said to cheers, and then asked his national TV audience to go to his website and give \$10 or \$20 or \$50. “Help us raise the money we need to take the fight to Nevada, South Carolina, and the states on Super Tuesday. So, there it is; that’s our fundraiser. Pretty quick.”

At the servers of the Democratic fundraising clearinghouse ActBlue, Sanders’s surprise pitch brought in 26,000 contributions in just 15 minutes. For a moment, the computers were logging 333,000 requests per minute through Sanders’s website. “Prior to last night, we’d never seen that number go above 40,000 rpm. So it was, in a word, unprecedented,” wrote ActBlue Executive Director Erin Hill on the company’s website.

In the final three months of 2015, Sanders reported \$23.4 million in “un-itemized contributions”—those below the \$200 reporting threshold. Yet a *National Journal* analysis of Sanders’s filings to the Federal Election Commission shows that even that figure understates the story.

In fact, 142,691 of the donors who gave enough to exceed the reporting threshold actually gave less than \$200 in that quarter—but those donations, which averaged \$38.45, were enough to push their total for the year above \$200. Which means the actual total in small donations to Sanders for the quarter was \$28.8 million.

In contrast, \$19 million of the \$109 million Clinton raised in 2015 came from donors who gave less than \$200. Among Republicans, Sen. Ted Cruz raised \$19.7 million of his \$46.8 million from small donors; Sen. Marco Rubio \$8.7 million of his \$35 million; and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush \$1.6 million of his \$31 million.

Retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson raised \$32 million of his \$54 million in under-\$200 donations, but his campaign spent 56 percent of that money paying the consultants who raised it. The campaign recently announced staff cuts, and Carson fared poorly in the first two GOP contests.

That enormous fundraising cost for Carson, according to *National Journal* analysis of his October FEC filings, contrasts sharply with how much Sanders pays to raise money. Nearly all of his online donations come in through ActBlue, which charges Democratic candidates and groups less than 4 percent for processing donors’ credit-card numbers and passing along the rest.

The organization works at the federal level as a political action committee and has 3,600 clients, from Sanders down to school-board candidates. Nothing analogous currently exists for Republicans on that scale—making their online fundraising

currently exists for Republicans on that score — making their entire fundraising more expensive.

Nate Thames, who runs the ActBlue’s Technical Services department, thought that might have to do with the culture among many Republican political consultants. “There isn’t much profit in this business,” he said. “I think they like getting rich more than we like getting rich.”

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