



The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

AMERICANS' VIEWS ON MONEY IN POLITICS

Most Americans say campaign contributions directly influence politicians, yet there is little encouragement from the public to change the current system. The latest Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll finds tepid backing for limits on campaign fund raising and spending, and strong attitudes against using the tax payers' money to fund campaigns.

The public favors the current system of campaign funding—candidates raising money through donations. But when asked specifically about political action committees, Americans are less enthusiastic. A political action committee, or PAC, pools campaign contributions and donates the funds to campaign for or against a candidate, ballot initiative, or legislation. One type of PAC known as a Super PAC may not make contributions directly to a candidate or political party, but can spend unlimited funds independently. Unlike traditional PACs, there is no limit on the size of donations to Super PACs.

The public is closely divided on PACs in general: 44 percent consider PACs an acceptable method of political fund raising. However, only a third say the same about Super PACs.

The nationwide poll was conducted November 12-17, 2015, using the AmeriSpeak Panel, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,011 adults.

Some of the poll's key findings are:

- More than 4 in 5 Americans—Republicans and Democrats alike—say campaign donations impact the decisions made by elected officials, and half of them say that impact is large.
- At least half of the public says several measures would be effective in limiting the influence of money in politics, including limiting the spending of outside groups, political parties, and the candidates themselves.



© 2011 AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

Three Things You Should Know

About the AP-NORC Poll on Campaign Finance among all American adults:

- 1) More than 80 percent of the public, regardless of party identification, say campaign contributions directly influence the decisions of elected officials, and half say the influence is large.
- 2) The public is divided on whether campaign contributions are a form of free speech: 50 percent say yes and 48 percent say no.
- 3) Sixty percent say compelling the disclosure of all campaign contributors would be effective in reducing the influence of money in politics.

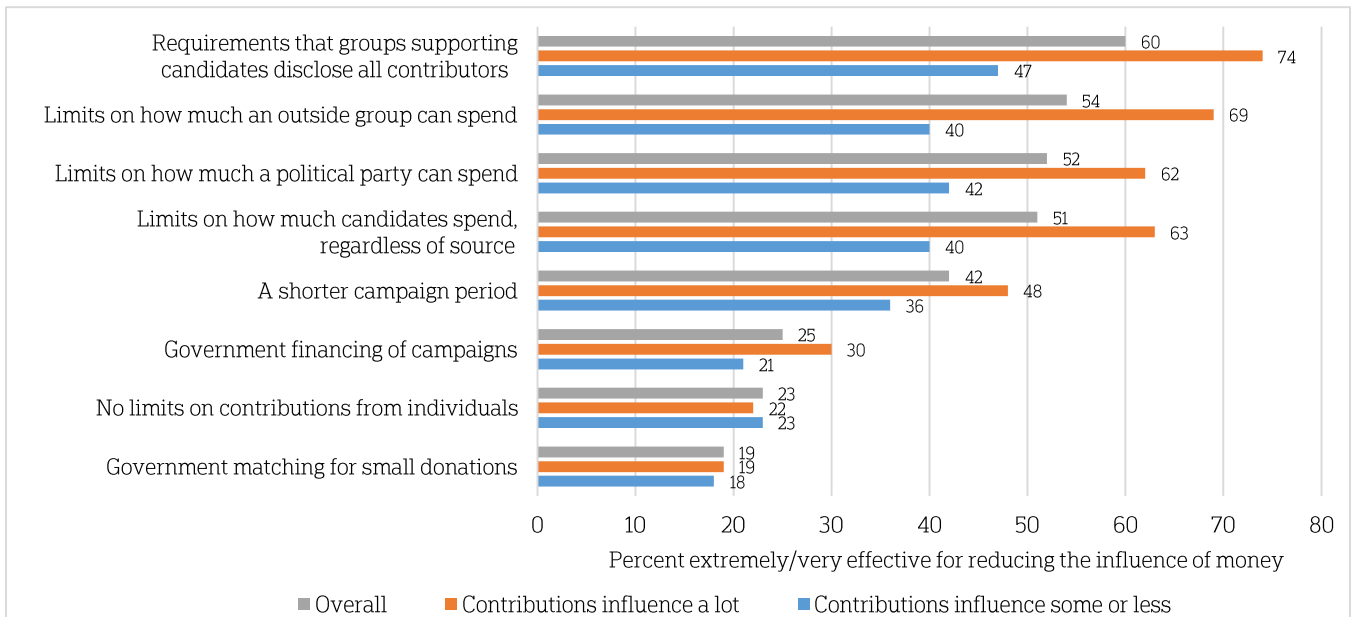
- Regardless of party identification, more than three-quarters of the public approve of compelling the disclosure of campaign contributions to Super PACs, and 60 percent say that revealing contributors to all groups would be effective in reducing the influence of money in politics.
- However, only about a quarter of the public, including about a third of Democrats, favor public financing of presidential campaigns.
- Republicans and Democrats are divided on the argument that political money is a form of speech protected by the First Amendment: 61 percent of Republicans agree campaign contributions are free speech while 53 percent of Democrats disagree.

Money Is Influential In Politics, But Support For Change Is Mixed

Eighty-two percent say contributions by corporations, special interest groups, and individuals influence the decisions of those elected officials. Among those saying contributions influence decisions, 59 percent say they influence decisions a lot.

However, Americans have mixed views on how effective several potential changes would be in curbing the influence of money in politics. Small majorities favor set limits on spending, but few feel the same about government involvement.

Americans see some potential solutions to reducing the influence of money in politics, with those who think money has a large influence being more favorable on many of them.



Source: National poll conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, Nov. 12-17, 2015, with 1,011 adults; margin of sampling error +/- 3.9 percentage points.

Question: Here are some possible ways to change the current system of financing political campaigns in the United States. How effective do you think each of the following would be in reducing the influence of money in politics?

Those who say campaign contributions hold a lot of influence on the decisions of elected officials are especially likely to say many of these reforms would be effective compared to the rest of the public.

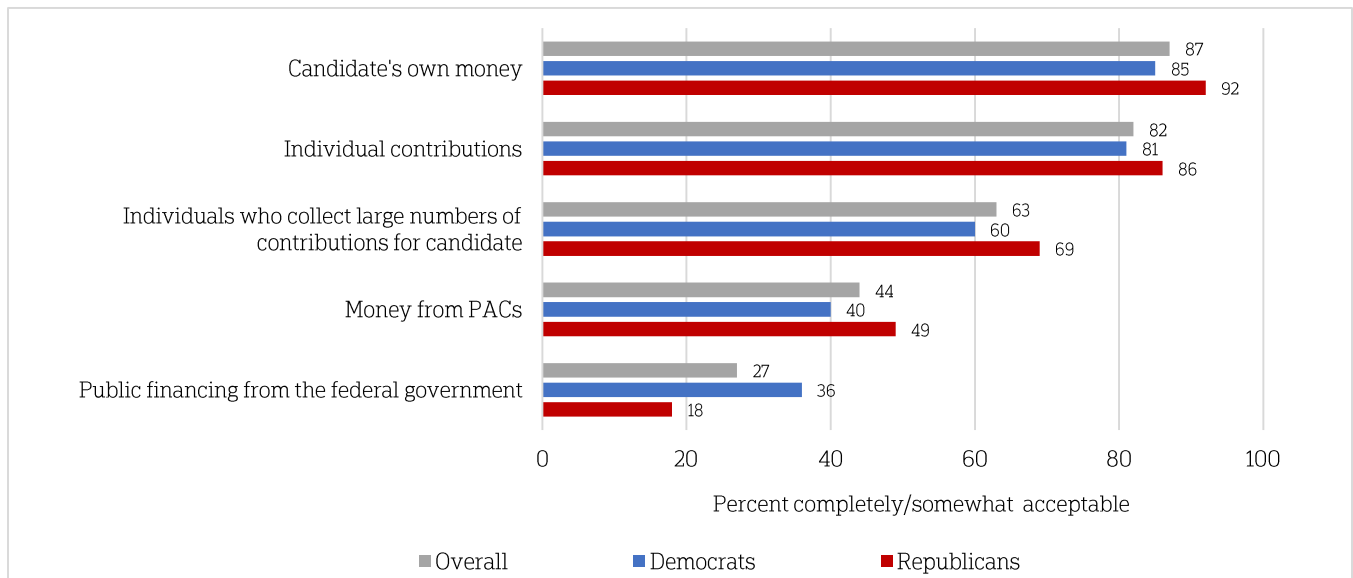
Partisans do not differ on these issues with one exception: Republicans are significantly more likely to say that eliminating limits on contributions from individuals to candidates would help reduce the influence (30 percent vs. 18 percent).

Most Americans support the current structure of financing political campaigns through donations. Large majorities find the current means of campaign fundraising acceptable, including individual contributions made by citizens and money from individuals who bundle large numbers of contributions on the candidates' behalf. The public also strongly approves of candidates using their own money.

Americans are less positive about the use of money from PACs, which pool campaign contributions and use those funds to campaign for or against candidates. Even fewer—just about a quarter—find public financing of campaigns by the federal government an acceptable approach to financing campaigns.

Strong differences emerge between Democrats and Republicans on these issues. Democrats are significantly more likely than Republicans to favor the financing of campaigns by the federal government, while Republicans are more likely to support self-financed campaigns, bundlers, and contributions by PACs.

Americans support many of the ways presidential candidates could finance their campaigns, though most oppose financing from the federal government.



Source: National poll conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, Nov. 12-17, 2015, with 1,011 adults; margin of sampling error +/- 3.9 percentage points.

Question: There are many different ways in which presidential candidates can finance their campaigns. Do you think each of the following is an acceptable or unacceptable way for a presidential candidate to raise money for a campaign?

Those who say they are very or extremely likely to give a political contribution to a candidate, party, or PAC during the 2016 campaign period are more likely to support public financing of campaigns and less likely to favor raising money through PACs than those unlikely to contribute. Americans who have participated in a political activity like attending a political rally or displaying a bumper sticker or yard sign are more likely than others to approve of both tax-payer and self-financed campaigns.

Americans are closely divided on whether corporations and labor unions should be limited in the amount of money they can contribute to a political campaign. The public is slightly less supportive of restrictions on

individuals. In addition, sizeable minorities of between 20 and 30 percent say these groups should not be allowed to finance political campaigns at all. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support limits to individuals' contributions and less likely to support unlimited spending by corporations. There is no substantial difference between Republicans and Democrats regarding limits on campaign spending by labor unions.

Is Campaign Financing A First Amendment Issue?

In 2014, the Supreme Court struck down the decades-old limit on the total amount any individual can donate¹ to federal candidates in a two-year cycle, much in the same way the 2010 Citizens United² decision eliminated any cap on independent campaign spending by corporations and unions. This was done citing the First Amendment to the Constitution, with the Court ruling that caps on campaign donations amounted to an unconstitutional restriction on speech. Last year's decision did not affect the limits on contributions from an individual to a candidate. Rather, the Court decided that a limit on contributions to all federal candidates every two years violated the First Amendment, as did limits on contributions to PACs.

The American public is divided sharply over whether it sees money given to political candidates as a form of free speech protected by the Constitution. Fifty percent say it is a form of free speech while 48 percent say it is not. A majority of Republicans (61 percent) consider giving money to political candidates as a form of free speech versus less than a majority of Democrats (45 percent) or independents (39 percent).

Still, there is strong support for a requirement that groups that raise and spend unlimited money should be required to publically disclose their contributors. Three-quarters support such a requirement while a quarter say it is okay for that information to remain private. Those who think contributions influence elected officials a lot are especially likely to support a public disclosure requirement (91 percent) compared to those who think contributions have less influence over decisions (63 percent). However, those who plan to donate to a PAC during the 2016 campaign season are less likely to favor public disclosure compared to those who are not.

While about 4 in 10 Americans say how candidates raise money for their campaigns is an important issue to them, most Americans (53 percent) say they know little or nothing about the subject.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Panel, which is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger omnibus survey that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face).

Interviews for this survey were conducted between November 12-17, 2015, with adults age 18 and over from the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from the AmeriSpeak Panel, and 1,011 completed the survey—769 via the web and 242 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 29.5

¹ http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/13pdf/12-536_elpf.pdf

² <http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/09pdf/08-205.pdf>

percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 36.8 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 99 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 10.7 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.9 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data has been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, Census division, race/ethnicity, and household phone status. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHERS

From NORC at the University of Chicago

Marjorie Connelly
Dan Malato
Jennifer Benz
Trevor Tompson
Nada Ganesh
Emily Alvarez
Brian Kirchhoff
Becky Reimer
David Sterrett
Ivana Cvarkovic
Jennifer Titus

From The Associated Press

Emily Swanson

About The Associated Press–Norc Center For Public Affairs Research

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

The Associated Press (AP) is the world's essential news organization, bringing fast, unbiased news to all media platforms and formats.

NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.