

AMERICANS EVALUATE CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM



A Survey of Voters Nationwide

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OVERVIEW

Numerous polls have found extremely high levels of dissatisfaction with the Federal government, especially Congress. Research has shown that this dissatisfaction is closely related to a widespread public perception that elected officials in Washington do not serve the common good of the people, but rather special interests, corporations, and the wealthy. The mechanism for the influence of special interests, corporations, and the wealthy is widely seen as being campaign donations. This perception has only been enhanced by the extraordinary increase in the amount of money flowing into Congressional and presidential campaigns over the last decades. Few observers contest the public's perception of the linkage between campaign donations and influence over elected officials.

The amount of campaign-related money and the perception of the influence of money on elected officials was further enhanced by the US Supreme Court's 2010 decision, generally known as *Citizens United*, which opened up new channels for donations, especially through organizations called 'Super PACs.'

In response to this widespread concern about the influence of campaign donations on elected officials, members of Congress have put forward numerous legislative proposals. The aim of this study is to give a representative sample of voters an opportunity to evaluate the currently proposed Congressional legislation to reduce or counter the influence of campaign donations.

Development of the Survey

For this type of topic, standard polls are inadequate as few citizens have sufficient information about the legislative proposals to provide meaningful input, though they do have values and priorities that very much apply to those proposals. Thus, this study employs a survey method that takes respondents through a process called a policymaking simulation. For each proposal, the respondent is given a briefing and is asked to evaluate arguments for and against each proposal before making their final recommendation for how they think their Member of Congress should vote.

The policymaking simulation on immigration reform was developed by the Program for Public Consultation of the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland.

Congressional testimony, Executive Branch statements and other sources were used to help formulate the background and rationale for the proposed Congressional legislation as well as the key arguments for and against each option.

The draft text was reviewed by experts including ones who favor and who oppose the proposed reforms to ensure that the briefings were accurate and balanced, and that the arguments presented were the strongest ones being made. Changes were made in response to feedback.



Congressional Proposals Considered

Constitutional Amendment Allowing Greater Regulation of Campaign Financing (Overturning Citizens United)

- S. J. Res. 8 and H.J. Res. 31- sponsored by Sen. Tom Udall and Rep. Theodore Deutch

Increasing Disclosure Requirements for Campaign-Related Donations

- H.R. 1439 - sponsored by Rep. Ben Lujan
- H.R. 1134 - sponsored by Rep. David Cicilline
- H.R. 1341 and S. 1660 – sponsored by Paul Gosar and Amy Klobuchar

Promoting Donations by Small Donors

- H.R. 20 - sponsored by Rep. John Sarbanes
- S. 1640 - sponsored by Sen. Dick Durbin

Prohibiting One-on-One Fundraising by Members of Congress

- H.R. 528 - Stop Act Sponsored by Rep. Brendan Boyle

Many advocates of campaign finance reform have stressed the value of public financing of presidential campaigns. The existing program for such public financing has, however, fallen on hard times as presidential campaigns have opted to forego the relatively limited funds available through the public financing program because of the limits it imposes. Two current bills that call for ending the program were also tested: H.R. 133, sponsored by Rep. Tom Cole, and H.R. 2008 by Barbara Comstock.

Fielding of Survey

The survey was fielded online with a national sample of registered voters provided by Nielsen-Scarborough from its larger sample, which is recruited by telephone and mail from a random sample of households.

Responses were subsequently weighted by age, income, gender, education, race and geographic region. Benchmarks for weights were obtained from the US Census' Current Populations Survey of Registered Voters. The sample was also weighted by partisan affiliation.

The survey was conducted in three waves:

Wave 1: August 3-16, 2017: 3,045 registered voters (margin of error +/-1.8%)

Wave 2: September 7 - October 3, 2017: 2,482 registered voters (margin of error +/-2.0%).

Wave 3: September 22 - October 17, 2017: 2,569 registered voters (margin of error +/-1.9%).



KEY FINDINGS

Perceived Importance of Offsetting Big Campaign Donors

Overwhelming bipartisan majorities said it as important to reduce or counterbalance the influence of big campaign donors on the Federal government.

Constitutional Amendment to Allow Limits on Campaign Funding

A very large bipartisan majority favored a Constitutional amendment that would effectively overturn the 'Citizens United' decision by allowing Congress and the states to regulate and set reasonable limits on the raising and spending of money by candidates and others who seek to influence elections. They would also be able to distinguish between people and corporations or other organizations, thus allowing legislators to restrict or prohibit corporations and other organizations from spending money to influence elections. Large majorities believe this would be effective in offsetting the influence of big campaign donors.

Increasing Disclosure Requirements for Political Donations

Overwhelming bipartisan majorities approved a variety of proposals requiring greater disclosure of campaign-related donations. Large majorities believed that such requirements would be effective at offsetting the influence of large donors. These proposals included:

- requiring that all individuals or organizations that donate or receive a total of \$10,000 or more for campaign-related activities promptly register with the FEC, have their name and the amount of the donations listed on the Commission's website;
- requiring that independent campaign-related expenditures by corporations, unions, and other groups promptly report such spending to shareholders, members, and the general public, as well as the FEC;
- requiring that names of significant donors paying for TV or radio ads in support of candidates or related to controversial issues be publicly disclosed;
- requiring donors using credit cards to provide the address in which they are registered to vote in the US, to get the CVV on all online donations, and to get and report the address of all credit card donors, not just those giving \$50 or more as currently required by law.

Promoting Donations by Small Donors

Respondents evaluated several proposals that seek to offset the influence of big campaign donors by promoting more donations by small donors. Six in ten favor a proposal to promote donations by small donors by providing a tax credit for donations limited to \$50 per candidate. However, less than half believed that it will be significantly effective to counter the influence of large campaign donors. Six in ten also favor a plan to provide a six-to-one match for small donations up to \$150 as well as large grants for media ads to candidates who agree to not take any donations over \$1,000. The source of the funds would be a small charge on large federal contractors. Respondents also evaluated a similar proposal for matching small donations, except this one would be funded by government funds; this proposal was opposed by a large majority.

Prohibiting One-on-One Fundraising by Members of Congress

A majority, with Republicans divided, favors a proposal to prohibit Members of Congress from personally asking for donations; though speaking at fundraising events would still be allowed. However, there was little optimism that this prohibition would be effective in offsetting the influence of big campaign donors.

Public Funding of Presidential Campaigns

In light of the fact that the Federal program for providing public funding for presidential campaigns has not been used by any presidential candidates for some time, a large majority supported ending it and directing the unused funds to pediatric research or deficit reduction.

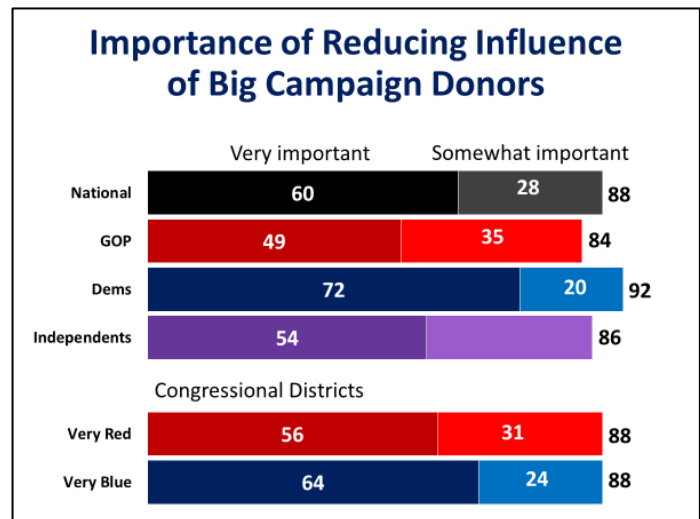
FINDINGS

Perceived Importance of Offsetting Big Campaign Donors

Overwhelming bipartisan majorities said it as important to reduce or counterbalance the influence of big campaign donors on the Federal government.

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were told that they would be considering a number of proposals that would have the goal to “reduce or counterbalance the influence of big campaign donors—including special interests, corporations and wealthy people—on the Federal government.” Respondents were asked how important this goal was to them.

An overwhelming majority of 88% said that it was important (60% very). Just 12% said it was slightly (9%) or not at all (3%) important. Eighty four percent of Republicans and 92% of Democrats said that this was very or somewhat important. However, Democrats were substantially more likely to say it was very important (72%) than were Republicans (49%).



Constitutional Amendment to Allow Limits on Campaign Funding

A very large bipartisan majority favored a Constitutional amendment that would effectively overturn the ‘Citizens United’ decision by allowing Congress and the states to regulate and set reasonable limits on the raising and spending of money by candidates and others who seek to influence elections. They would also be able to distinguish between people and corporations or other organizations, thus allowing legislators to restrict or prohibit corporations and other organizations from spending money to influence elections. Large majorities believe this would be effective in offsetting the influence of big campaign donors.

Respondents were told that in order for Congress to limit all forms of campaign-related donations, a new Constitutional amendment would be required to override the Supreme Court’s past decisions on this subject, including ‘Citizens United,’ and prevent the courts from striking down campaign finance laws in the future.

They were presented the amendment, based on S8 and H.R.31, in two parts, with the first part presented as follows:

The proposed Constitutional amendment would say Congress and the states may regulate and set reasonable limits on the raising and spending of money by candidates and others seeking to influence elections.

Presented with an argument in favor of this part of the amendment, a large bipartisan majority found it convincing (81%), including 75% of Republicans and 87% Democrats.

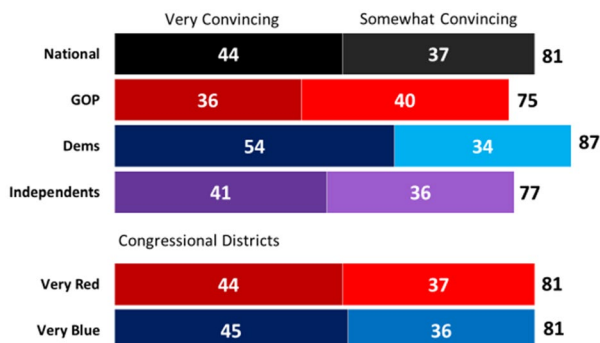


Presented with an argument against this proposal, less than half (47%) found it convincing. Republicans were much more likely to find it convincing (56%) than Democrats (38%).

Constitutional Amendment to Overturn Citizens United Congress May Regulate Campaign Financing (Part 1)

Pro Argument:

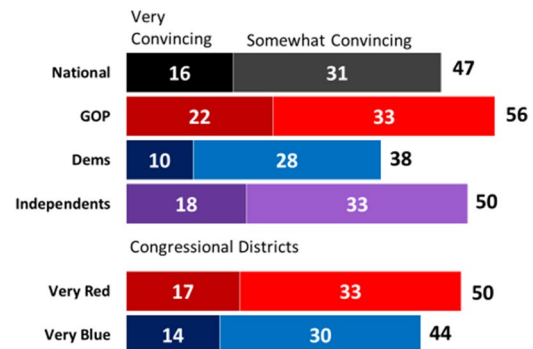
Clearly, we cannot go on letting people and organizations use the cover of the First Amendment to allow what is essentially bribery of Members of Congress. Since the recent Supreme Court decision to allow unlimited contributions, there has been a flood of money pouring into organizations seeking to influence elections. The rich should not have more influence just because they have more money. They are drowning out the voice of most ordinary voters. The Founders would be horrified by the amount of money in elections and this is just the kind of problem that they established the Constitutional amendment process to address. Congress should be able to set reasonable limits on political spending.



Constitutional Amendment to Overturn Citizens United Congress May Regulate Campaign Financing (Part 1)

Con Argument:

This proposal is an end run around Constitutional principles—practically an attempt to repeal the First Amendment. If people want to spend money making their views heard about a candidate, the government should not have the right to stop them. Should we assume that the government knows what the right amount of free speech is? Real freedom of speech is often inconvenient for somebody. You can't just pick and choose where you want it to apply. Tampering with the Constitution is a risky idea. Once you start limiting some forms of speech it becomes a slippery slope toward more and more limits on our freedoms.



When they were asked how acceptable this part of the constitutional amendment would be to them, just 20% found it unacceptable, including just 28% of Republicans and 13% of Democrats. 64% of respondents found it acceptable with another 15% finding it 'tolerable'.

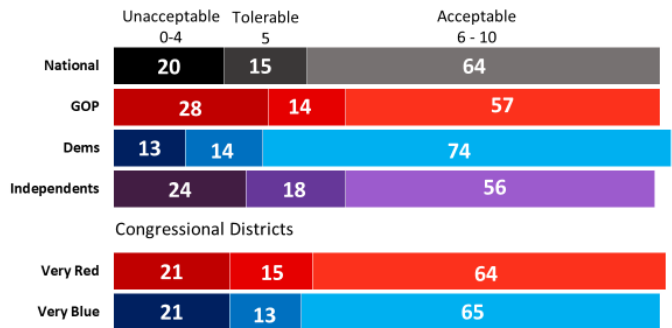
Respondents were then introduced to the second part of the proposed constitutional amendment which said that:

... in writing campaign finance laws, Congress would have the right to treat corporations and other organizations differently from 'natural persons.' This would allow Congress to restrict or even prohibit corporations and other organizations from spending money to influence elections.

Constitutional Amendment to Overturn Citizens United Congress May Regulate Campaign Financing (Part 1)

Assessment:

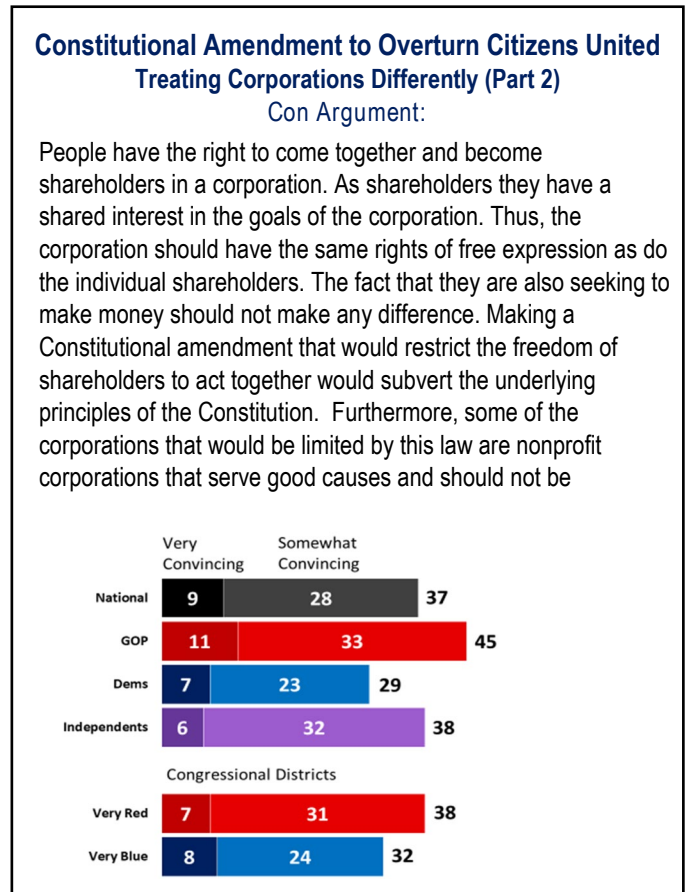
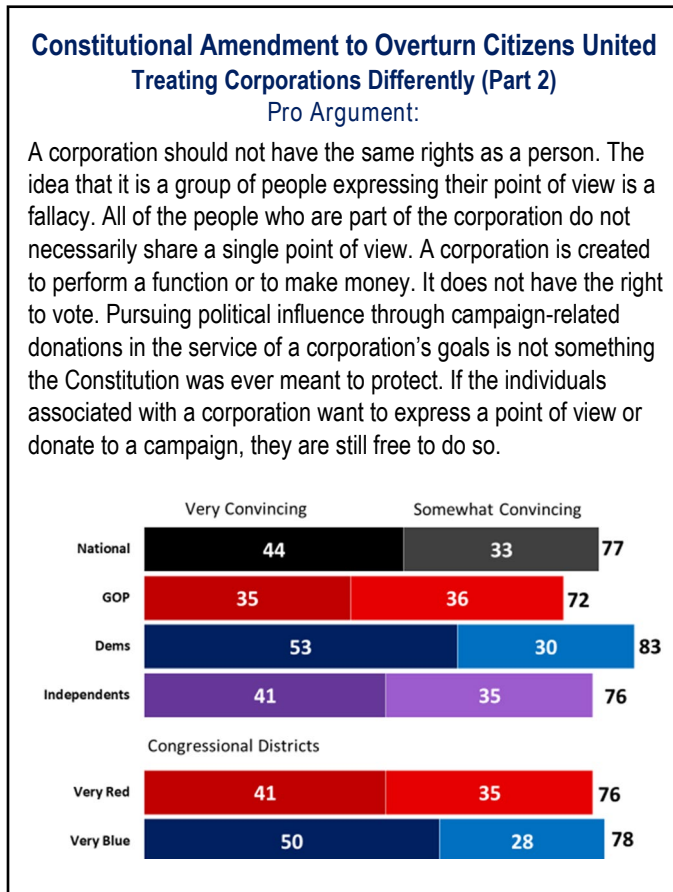
A new Constitutional amendment that would say Congress and the states may regulate and set reasonable limits on the raising and spending of money by candidates and others to influence elections.



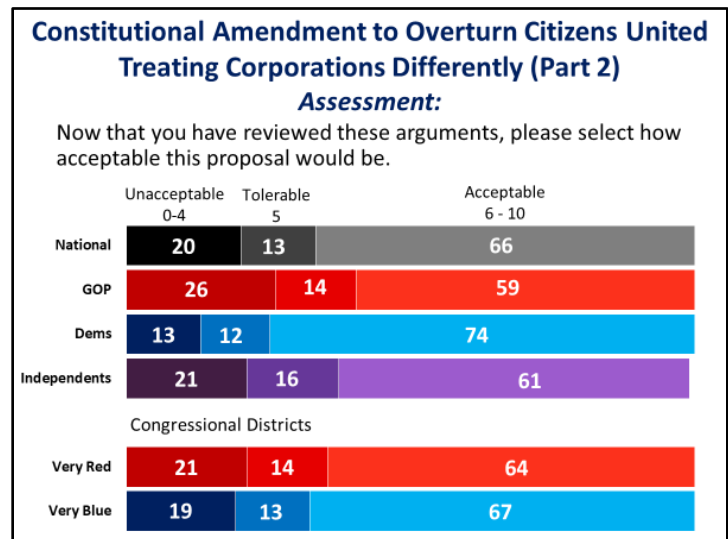
The argument in favor of the second part of the amendment was found convincing by 77% of respondents, including overwhelming majorities of Republicans (72%) and Democrats (83%).



The argument against, on the other hand, was not as well-received, just 37% of respondents found it convincing, including 45% of Republicans and 29% of Democrats.



When they were asked how acceptable they found this part of the constitutional amendment, just 20% found it unacceptable, including just 26% of Republicans and 13% of Democrats. On the other hand, 66% of respondents found it acceptable with another 13% finding it 'tolerable'.

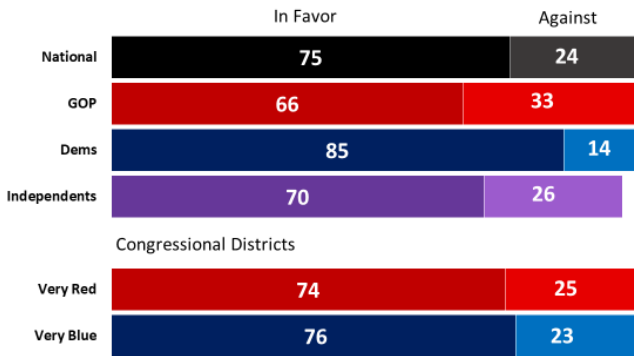




In the end, respondents were asked if their Member of Congress should vote in favor or against this two-part constitutional amendment. A clear bipartisan majority of 75% came out in favor, including 66% of Republicans and 85% of Democrats.

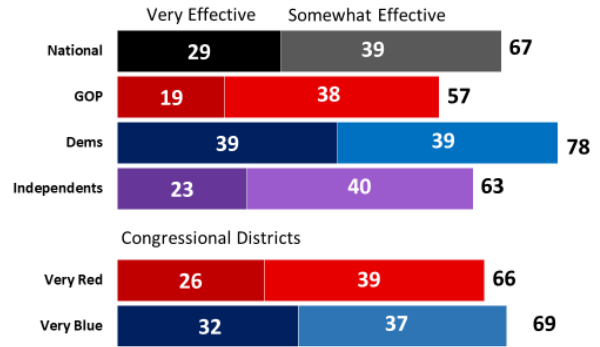
Constitutional Amendment to Overturn Citizens United
Final Recommendation

So, would you recommend that your Members of Congress vote in favor of or against this proposal?



Effectiveness

How effective do you think this Constitutional amendment would likely be in reducing or counterbalancing the influence of big campaign donors?





Increasing Disclosure Requirements for Political Donations

Overwhelming bipartisan majorities approved a variety of proposals requiring greater disclosure of campaign-related donations. Large majorities believed that such requirements would be effective at offsetting the influence of large donors. These proposals included:

- **requiring that all individuals or organizations that donate or receive a total of \$10,000 or more for campaign-related activities promptly register with the FEC, have their name and the amount of the donations listed on the Commission’s website;**
- **requiring that independent campaign-related expenditures by corporations, unions, and other groups promptly report such spending to shareholders, members, and the general public, as well as the FEC;**
- **requiring that names of significant donors paying for TV or radio ads in support of candidates or related to controversial issues be publicly disclosed;**
- **requiring donors using credit cards to provide the address in which they are registered to vote in the US, to get the CVV on all online donations, and to get and report the address of all credit card donors, not just those giving \$50 or more as currently required by law.**

Respondents were presented the broader idea of increasing disclosure requirements for political donations as follows:

...(an) idea for reducing or counterbalancing the influence of big donors is to require that donations to candidates and political causes be publicly disclosed or made more transparent.

While many forms of campaign-related donations and spending are required to be publicly disclosed, there are donations that can be made anonymously to certain organizations that can support candidates and political causes. Critics of this kind of giving call it ‘dark money’ because it is anonymous.

Until recently, the amount that could be donated to such organizations was limited, but with the U.S. Supreme Court’s “Citizens United” decision, these limits were removed as an interference with free speech. Since then, the amount of such anonymous donations has gone up dramatically.

There are a number of proposals for requiring that such donations be publicly disclosed. There is also a debate about whether there should be greater public disclosure of campaign-related donations.

Before being presented specific proposals for addressing this issue, respondents were first presented two general arguments in favor of and two general arguments against increasing disclosure of campaign-related contributions and activities.

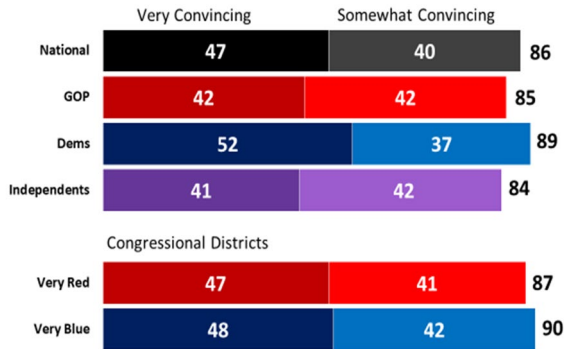
The arguments in favor of greater disclosure did very well with more than 8 in 10 respondents finding both pro arguments convincing.



Greater Public Disclosure of Campaign-Related Donations

Pro Argument 1:

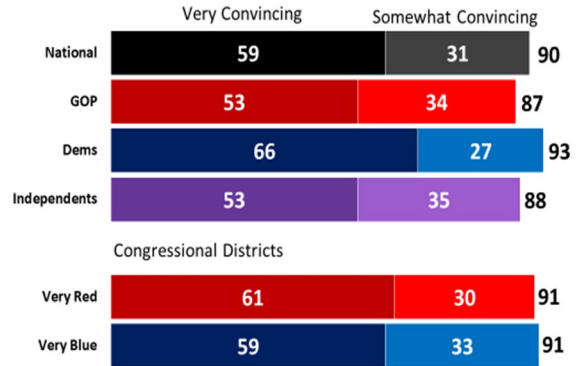
When campaign-related donations are fully disclosed, it makes it more difficult for elected officials to do favors, taking actions that serve the interests of the donor, rather than the common good. If the donation is disclosed, the public, the media, and watchdog groups can question whether an action was a favor in exchange for a donation. This will create political costs for the elected official as well as discourage donors from seeking favors through donations.



Greater Public Disclosure of Campaign-Related Donations

Pro Argument 2:

When judging a candidate people have a right to know who is providing money in support of the candidate. Voters can get a better sense of the allegiances that the candidate might have and the interests they might support.

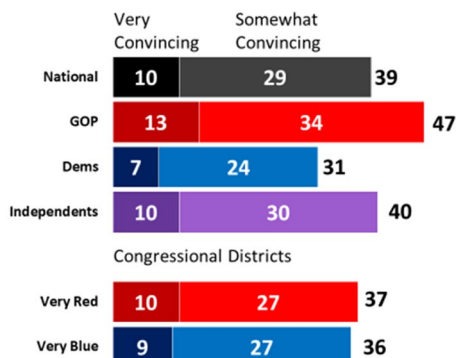


Respondents were less convinced by arguments opposed to increasing disclosures. Only one was found convincing by a (slight) majority, while the other was found convincing by just four in ten. Republicans were substantially more convinced than Democrats.

Greater Public Disclosure of Campaign-Related Donations

Con Argument 1:

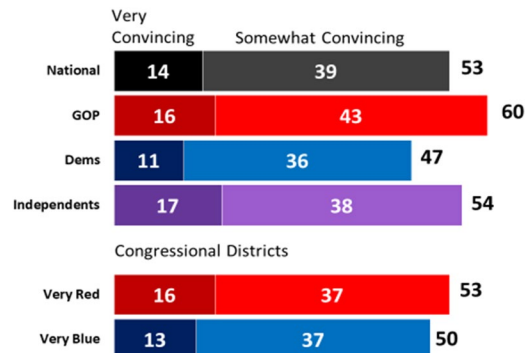
Making a campaign donation has been established by the U.S. Supreme Court as a basic right as part of the principle of free speech. If every donation is subject to public scrutiny, it can lead to claims that it was basically a bribe, when in fact it might not be at all. People may also get harassed or threatened for making donations. This will discourage people from making such donations, including completely legitimate ones.



Greater Public Disclosure of Campaign-Related Donations

Con Argument 2:

Public disclosure is not going to prevent elected officials from doing favors in exchange for financial support. Even if elected officials are, in fact, taking a position to serve the interests of a donor (in exchange for support), the officials can simply say that they think the position is the right one--and there's no way to prove they don't think that. Furthermore, in some cases the politician may genuinely support the position. Disclosure will not clarify what's really going on.



Disclosing Names of Large Donors for Campaign-Related Efforts

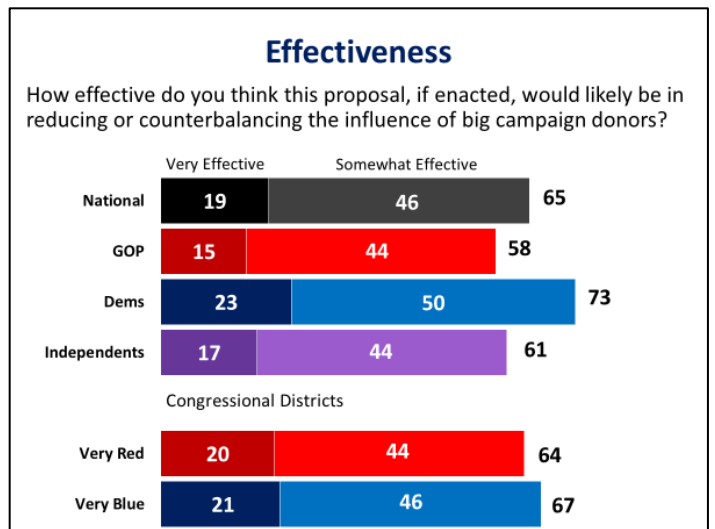
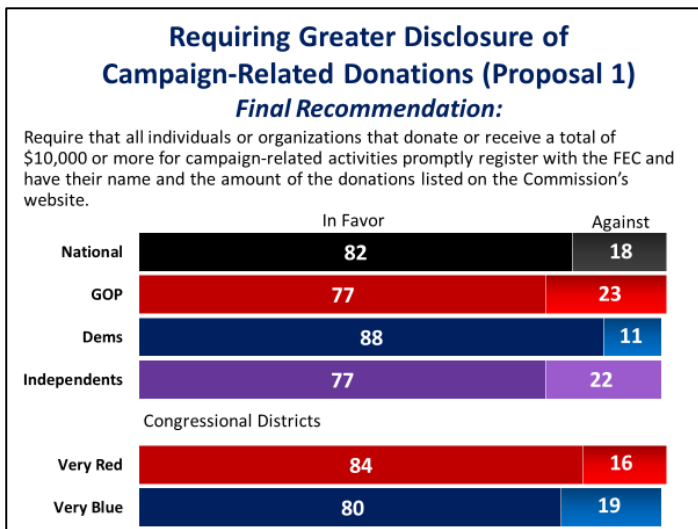
Turning to the specific reform proposals for greater disclosure, respondents were told:

Currently, all donations made directly to campaigns must be made public, but there is no requirement for a variety of organizations that spend money on campaign-related efforts to disclose the names of their donors and the amounts donated.

They then evaluated a proposal requiring that when donors make a contribution of at least \$10,000 they must immediately register with the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and have their name and the amount of the donations listed on the Commission’s website. This proposal is based on the Disclose Act (H.R. 1134) sponsored by Rep. David Cicilline.

An overwhelming and bipartisan majority said they would recommend that their Member vote in favor of the proposal. Democrats were somewhat more likely to take this position (88%) than Republicans (77%).

There was substantial optimism that this measure would be effective. Asked, “How effective do you think this proposal, if enacted, would likely be in reducing or counterbalancing the influence of big campaign donors,” 65% said they thought it would be effective (very 19%). Democrats were more likely to believe it would be effective (73%, very 23%) than Republicans (58%, very 15%).



Independent Campaign-Related Activity By Corporations, Unions and Other Groups

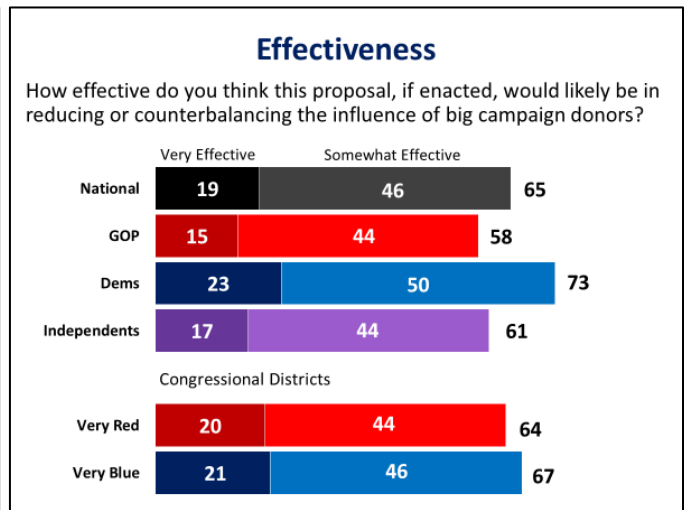
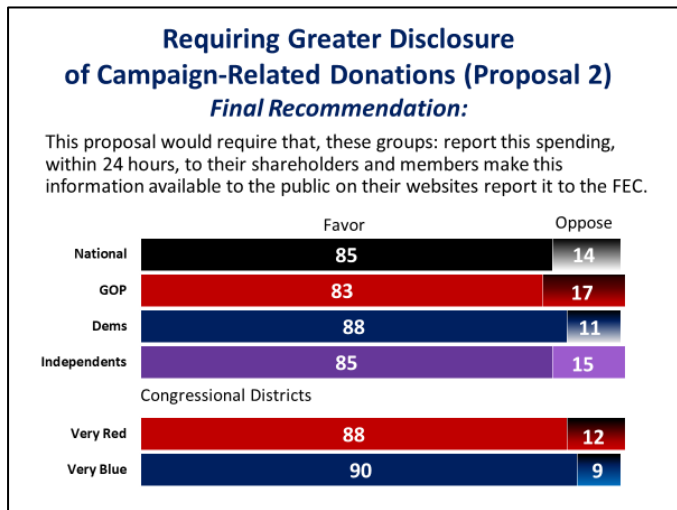
Respondents were told that, “currently, when corporations, unions, and other groups spend money on their own campaign-related activity, such as running a TV ad that is supportive of a candidate, they do not have to report it.” They were then presented a proposal requiring these groups to:

- report campaign-related spending to their shareholders and members;
- make such information available to the public on their websites; and
- report such information to the FEC.

This proposal is also based on the Disclose Act (H.R. 1134).



An overwhelmingly bipartisan majority (85%) recommended that their Member of Congress vote favorably on this proposal (85%). Minimal partisan differences existed, with 83% of Republicans recommending a favorable vote and 88% of Democrats.

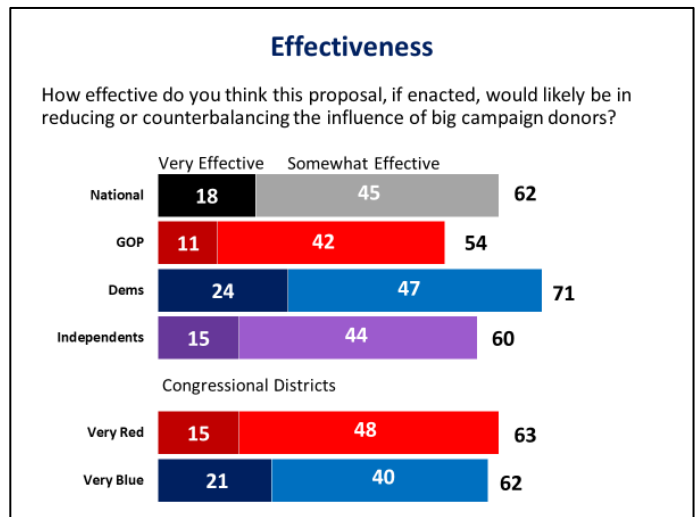
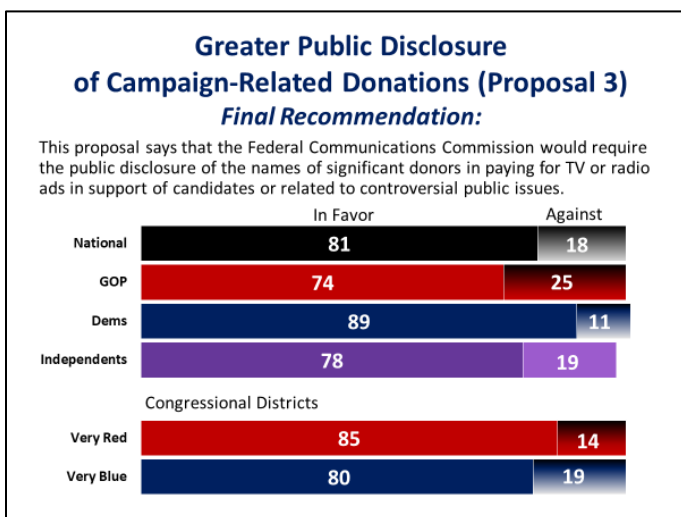


Here too there was optimism that this measure would be effective “in reducing or counterbalancing the influence of big campaign donors.” Two thirds (65%) said they thought it would be effective (very 20%). Democrats were slightly more likely to believe it would be effective (69%, very 22%) than Republicans (63%, very 21%).

Donors Who Support Independent TV and Radio Ads

Respondents were informed that individuals spending their own money on campaign-related TV or radio ads are not required to report that information. They were then presented a proposal saying that, “the Federal Communications Commission would require the public disclosure of the names of significant donors in paying for TV or radio ads in support of candidates or related to controversial public issues.” This proposal is based on H.R. 1134 by Rep. Ben Lujan and H.R. 1439 by Rep. David Cicilline.

Eight in ten (81%) recommended that their Member of Congress vote in favor of this proposal, including 74% of Republicans and 89% of Democrats. Once again, they were optimistic about how effective this would be. Asked, “How effective do you think this proposal, if enacted, would likely be in reducing or

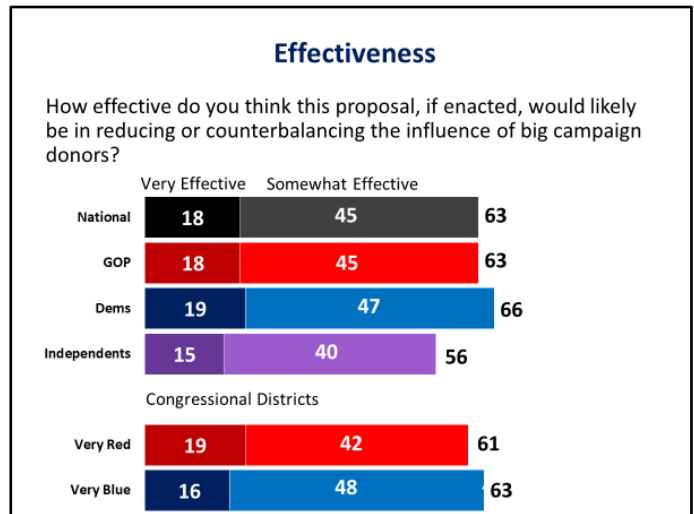
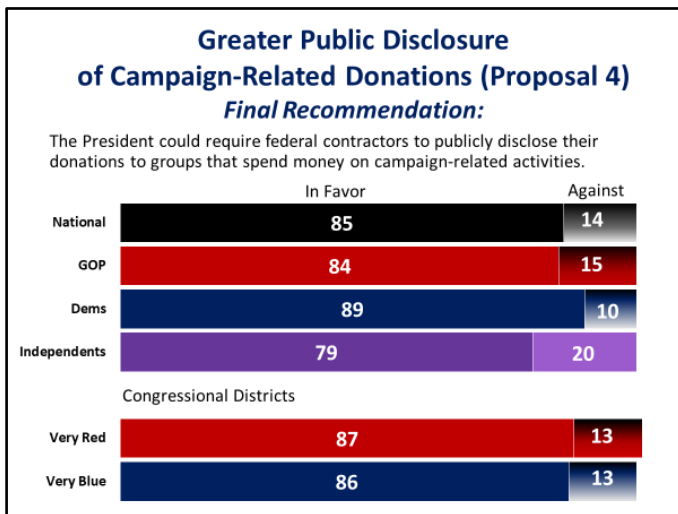


counterbalancing the influence of big campaign donors,” 62% said they thought it would be effective (very 18%). Republicans were less likely to believe the proposal would be effective (54%, very 11%) than Democrats (71%, very 24%).

Respondents were also presented an alternative proposal that could be enacted by the President if Congress failed to pass the former disclosure proposals. Under this proposal, the “President could require federal contractors to publicly disclose their donations to groups that spend money on campaign-related activities.” This was based on an Executive Order that President Obama proposed at one point but never enacted.

An overwhelmingly bipartisan majority (85%) recommended their Member of Congress vote in favor of this proposal, including 84% of Republicans and 89% of Democrats.

Asked, “How effective do you think this proposal, if enacted, would likely be in reducing or counterbalancing the influence of big campaign donors?” 63% said they thought it would be effective (very 18%).



Online Credit Card Donations

Respondents were given the following information about two bills in Congress that address online credit card donations: H.R. 1341 and S. 1660 – sponsored by Paul Gosar and Amy Klobuchar.

Currently, there is a bill in Congress that proponents say will reduce the possibility of illegal online donations to Federal campaigns made by foreigners, in excess of legal limits, or with stolen credit cards. Opponents say there is no evidence these are real problems and that the proposed solutions discourage people from making donations.

They were informed that, “it is illegal for foreign sources—individuals or organizations—to make contributions to US campaigns. However, Americans living abroad may make such donations.”

Respondents were then presented two proposals related to credit-card donations. They first evaluated each one separately and then the bill as a whole.

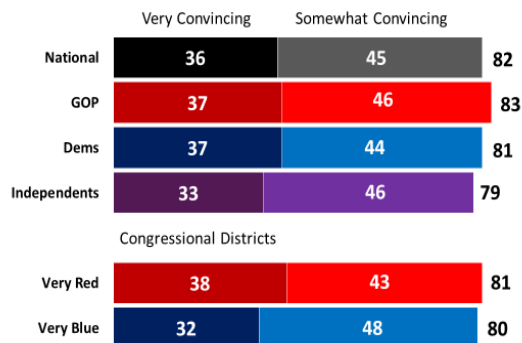


The first proposal requires, “that donors to Federal campaigns who make online credit card donations from abroad are not only US citizens, but also registered voters and that they provide their US voting address.”

Given an argument in favor of this proposal emphasizing the potential for foreigners making illegal donations, an overwhelmingly bipartisan majority (82%) found it convincing. Responses between Republicans (83%) and Democrats (81%) were practically the same. Less than half of respondents (43%) found the counter argument convincing. More Democrats found it convincing (47%) than Republicans (38%). Similarly, significantly more people in very blue districts (51%) found it convincing than in very red districts (36%).

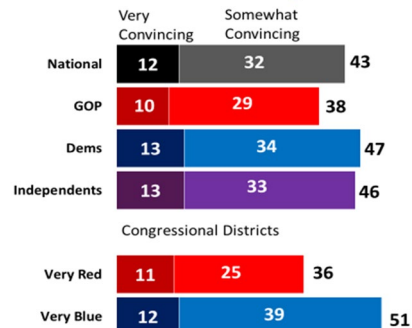
Online Credit Card Donations: Donations from Abroad Pro Argument

We need to ensure that foreigners are not influencing our Federal election process by making illegal contributions. If online credit card donors are required to provide the billing address and the CVV code of the credit cards they are using, it will be harder for foreign sources to make campaign donations. If a foreign source gives a false U.S. address, the CVV code would help identify this misinformation.



Online Credit Card Donations: Donations from Abroad Con Argument

This bill is a solution without a problem. The Federal Election Commission has not reported any significant problem of online credit cards being used by foreign sources to make illegal contributions. The bill would create a new limitation on Americans living abroad by requiring that they be currently registered to vote and have a US address—something that people living abroad may not be able to do.

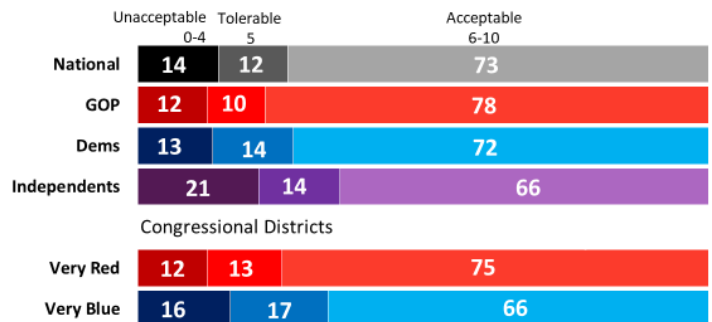


Respondents were then presented with the details of the proposal and asked to rate its acceptability on a 0-10 scale. Just 14% found it unacceptable, with 86% finding it acceptable (73%), or tolerable (13%). Republicans found it just as unacceptable (12%) as Democrats (13%), nearly twice as many independents (21%) found it unacceptable.

Turning to the second proposal, respondents were first informed that: “Currently, when campaigns receive donations of \$50 or more, they are required to get the donor’s address, but this is not required if donations are under \$50.”

Online Credit Card Donations: Donations from Abroad Assessment

Require that donors to Federal campaigns who make online credit card donations from abroad are not only US citizens, but also registered voters and that they provide their US voting address.

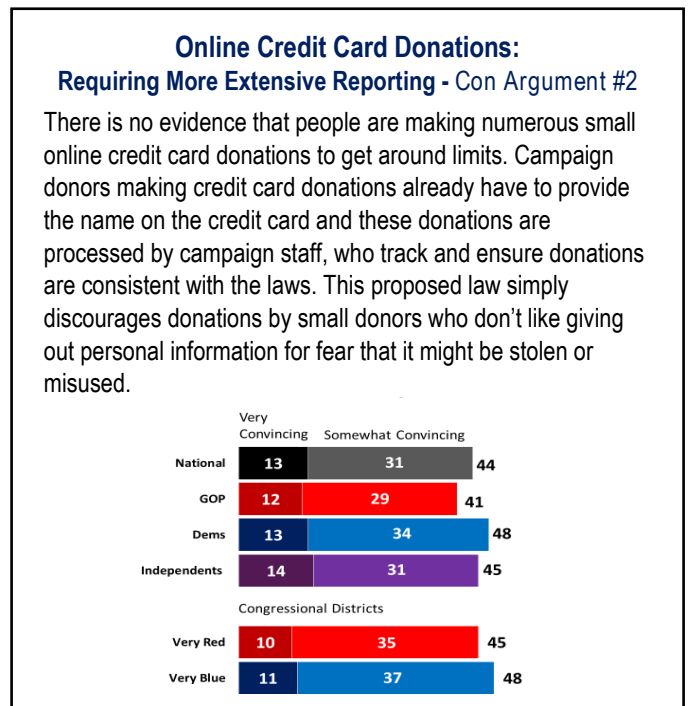
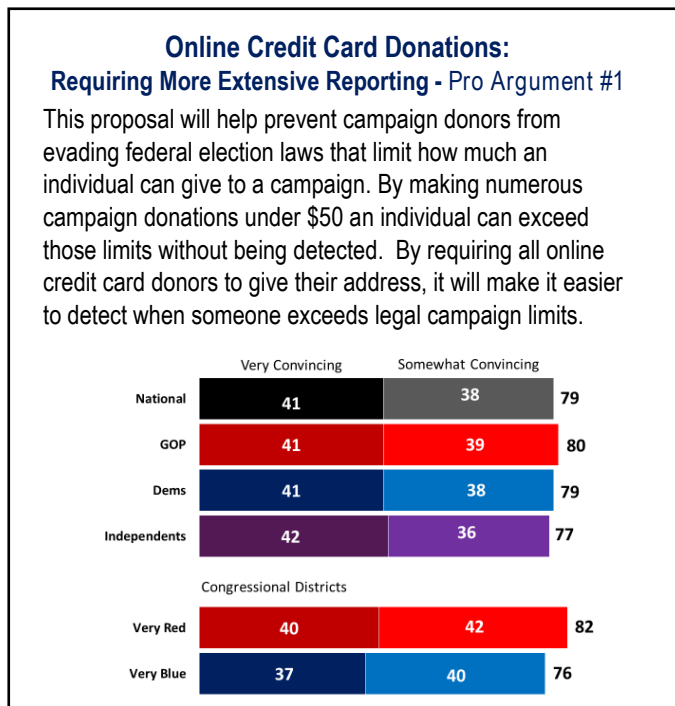


They were then presented the proposal that would:

- require that when campaigns get online credit card donations:
 - in all cases, including those under \$50, they must get and report the donor’s address,
 - they must also always get the CVV code on the credit card.

For the argument in favor of this proposal, a large bipartisan majority found it convincing (79%). There were no real differences between Republicans (80%) and Democrats (79%).

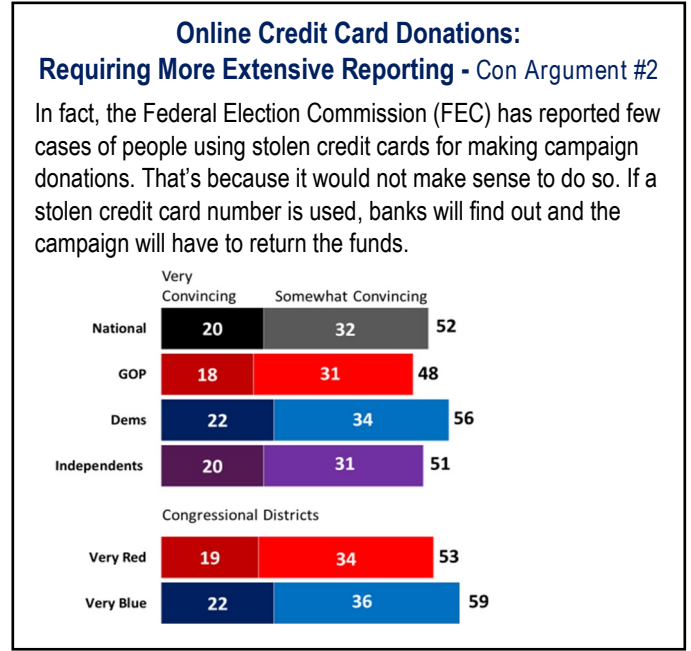
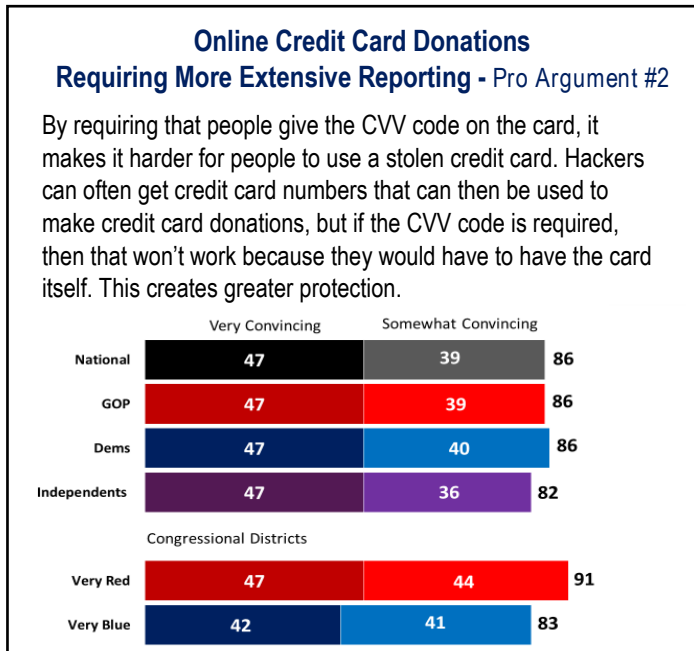
Presented a counter argument, less than half--44%-- found it convincing. Republicans were less likely to find it convincing (41%) than Democrats who were more divided (48%).



Respondents were then given another set of arguments focusing on the potential for the use of stolen credit cards. The pro argument was found convincing by an overwhelming 86%, with the same level of support from Republicans and Democrats. The counter argument found more division, with 52% finding it convincing. Republicans were fairly evenly divided with Democrats leaning toward being convinced (56%).

Donate by Credit Card

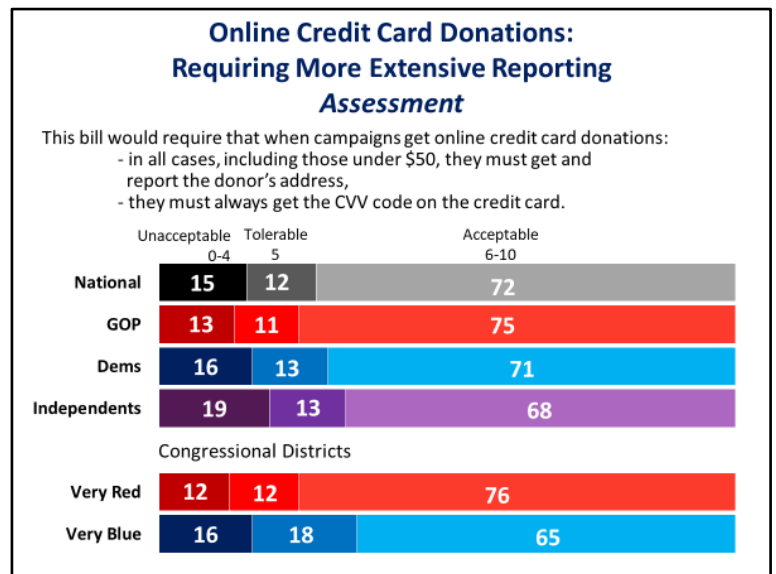




The details of the bill as a whole were presented and respondents were asked to rate its acceptability. Overall, 84% found it acceptable (72%) or tolerable (12%) with just 15% finding it unacceptable.

Unacceptability was similar between Republicans (13%) and Democrats (16%). Once again, independents were the most likely to find it unacceptable (19%).

Respondents were then presented with “broader arguments” for and against the bill as a whole. The first argument was against the bill and was found convincing by 50% of respondents. There were slight partisan differences, with fewer Republicans finding it convincing (48%) than Democrats (53%).

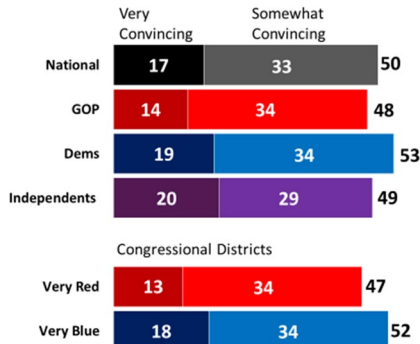


Presented with a counter argument in favor of the bill, a large bipartisan majority (82%) found it convincing, including 86% of Republicans and 80% of Democrats.



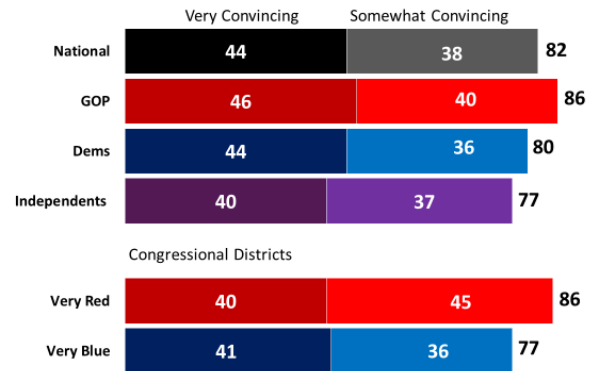
Online Credit Card Donations: Critique of Bill Con Argument

What this bill really does is impose costly and burdensome reporting requirements on campaigns, especially ones that rely on small donors. It discourages people from donating because giving their address and CVV code increases the likelihood that this information will be hacked and used to steal their identity. It also makes it more complicated for Americans living abroad to make donations, because they have to be registered to vote and have a US address they can provide.



Online Credit Card Donations: Defense of Bill Pro Argument

It is reasonable to require that people provide their address and their CVV code: people do it all the time when they are making an online purchase, so they should be willing to do it when making a campaign contribution. It may not be the perfect solution to all the possible misuses of credit cards, but it does provide greater protection.



Respondents were then presented all of the proposals in the bill at once, saying that it would require that:

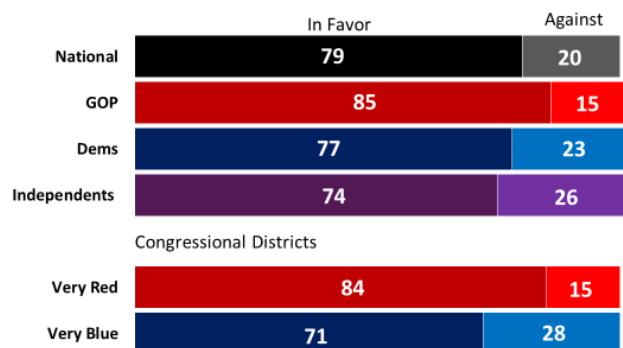
- when campaigns get online credit card donations, in all cases, including those under \$50, they must get and report the donor’s address;
- campaigns must also get from online credit card donations the CVV code on the credit card;
- donors who make online credit card donations from abroad be a registered voter in the US and provide their US voting address.

Finally, they were asked whether they would recommend their Member of Congress vote in favor of or against the bill. Eight in ten respondents (79%) recommended that their Member of Congress vote in favor. Republicans were more likely to take this position (85%) than Democrats (77%).

There was a significant difference between districts with very red districts (84%) being more supportive than very blue districts (71%).

Online Credit Card Donations Final Recommendation

So, would you recommend that your Members of Congress vote in favor or against this proposal?





Promoting Donations by Small Donors

Respondents evaluated several proposals that seek to offset the influence of big campaign donors by promoting more donations by small donors. Six in ten favored a proposal to promote donations by small donors by providing a tax credit for donations limited to \$50 per candidate. However, less than half believe that it will be significantly effective to counter the influence of large campaign donors. Six in ten also favor a plan to provide a six-to-one match for small donations up to \$150 as well as large grants for media ads to candidates who agree to not take any donations over \$1,000. The source of the funds would be a small charge on large federal contractors. Respondents also evaluated a similar proposal for matching small donations, except this one would be funded by government funds; this proposal was opposed by a large majority.

Respondents were presented a set of proposals to reduce or counter-balance the influence of big donors by reducing the percentage of donations that come from big donors and increasing the percentage that comes from small donors. These proposals are based on provisions in S. 1538 (sponsored by Sen. Dick Durbin) and H.R. 20 (sponsored by Rep. John Sarbanes).

Tax Credits for Small Donations by Small Donors

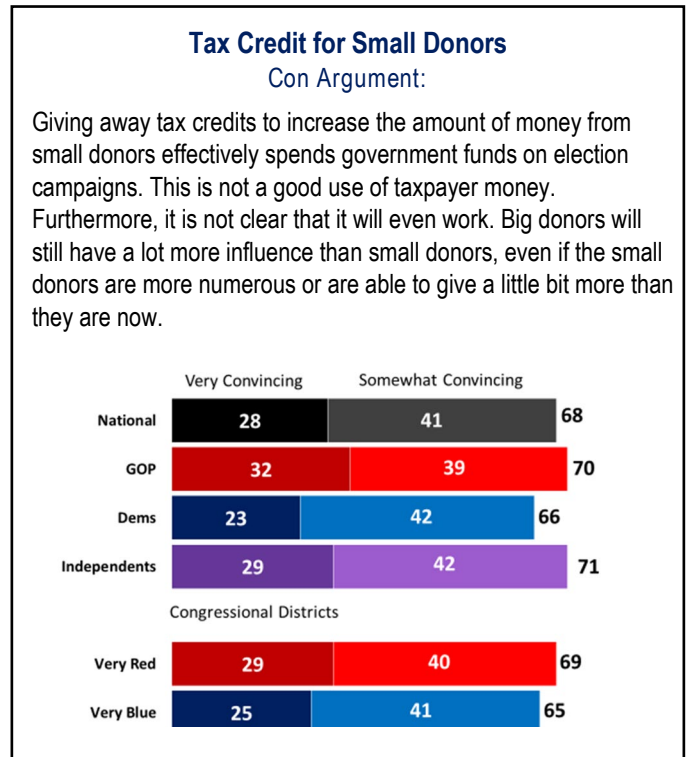
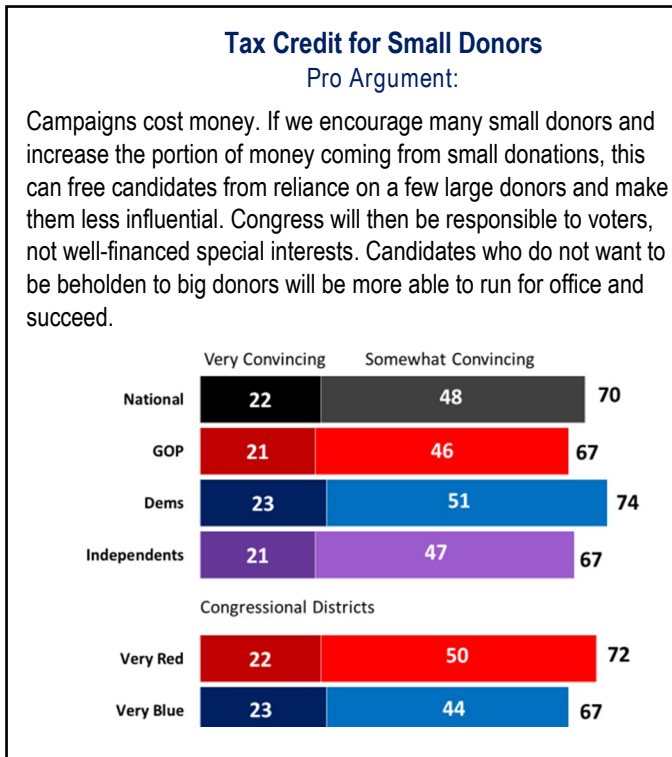
Respondents were first presented a proposal from both S. 1538 and H.R. 20 based on the idea that “by reducing the cost of making donations, more citizens will make donations and small donors will make somewhat larger donations, thus increasing the total amount coming from small donors.” More specifically the proposal was:

When a citizen contributes up to \$50 to a specific candidate, half of the contribution would be refundable in the form of a tax credit. This would be limited to small donors, which would be people whose donations to that candidate are no more than \$300.

The argument in favor was found convincing by a large, bipartisan majority (70%), including two-thirds of Republicans and three-fourths of Democrats.

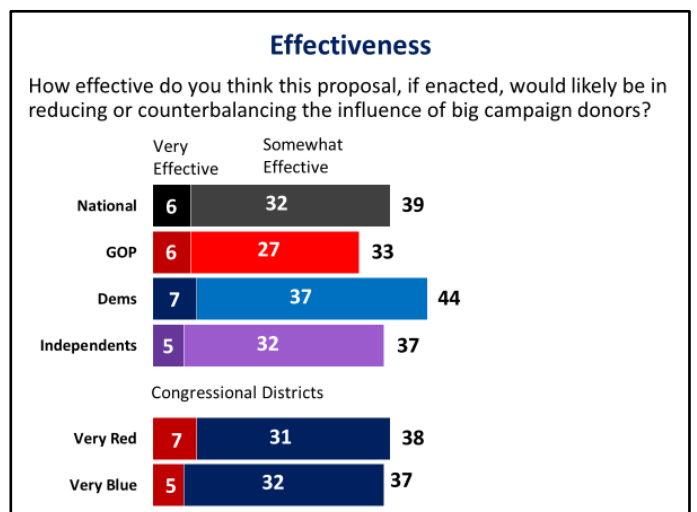
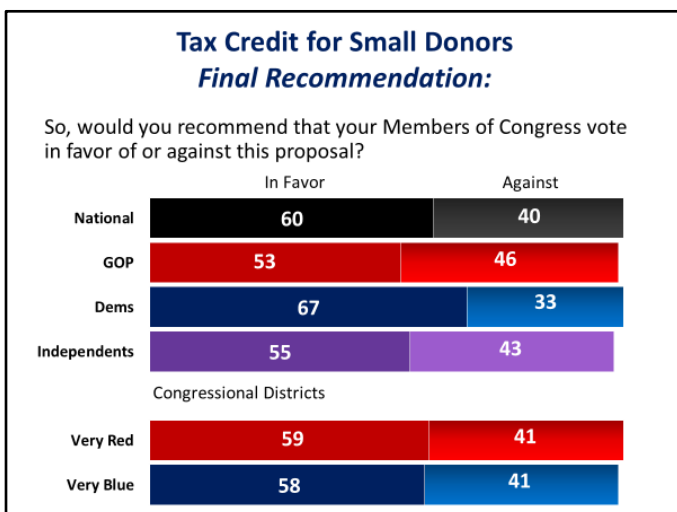


Presented an argument against this proposal, a similarly large bipartisan majority found it convincing (68%), including seven-in-ten Republicans and two-thirds of Democrats.



Asked for their final recommendation, six in ten recommended that their Member of Congress vote in favor of this proposal. For Republicans, a more modest majority was in favor (53%), while among Democrats, two-thirds recommended the proposal.

Asked how effective this proposal would be in reducing or counterbalancing the influence of big campaign donors, a relatively modest 39% said they thought it would be effective, including 33% of Republicans and 44% of Democrats.





Providing a Six to One Match for Small Donations

Two proposals were presented for matching small donations to different samples. Though the proposals were quite similar, the response was very different.

The 'Durbin' Plan

The proposal for increasing the percentage of donations that come from small donors from Sen Durbin's S. 1538 was presented as follows:

The idea is to create a program that provides financial support to US Senate candidates who agree to limit their fundraising to small donors. Here is how it would work:

A candidate who chooses to participate must:

- agree not to take donations of more than \$150 from any donor for an election.
- demonstrate their viability as a candidate by raising a substantial number of small donations from in-state donors.

The candidate would then receive additional funds as follows:

- a six-to-one match of each small donation (e.g. if someone were to make a donation of \$100, the candidate would receive an additional \$600)
- a grant and credits for media ads, totaling approximately \$1-\$14 million, depending on the population of their state

The program would be funded by a new fee paid by companies who do large contract work for the federal government. They would be charged a fee of 0.5% on the amount of each contract over \$10 million.

When asked to evaluate pro and con arguments, the argument in favor was found convincing by an overwhelming 80% of respondents including 75% of Republicans and 85% of Democrats. The argument against did much less well with only a slight majority of 52% finding it convincing, including 58% of Republicans and just 48% of Democrats.

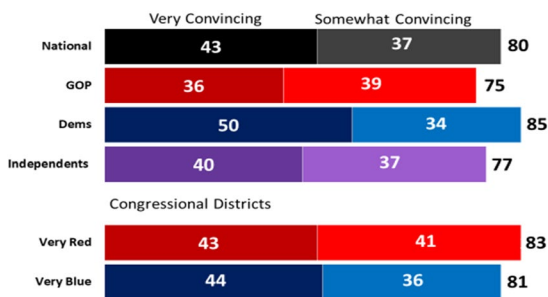




Government Matching Small Donations (Durbin Plan)

Pro Argument:

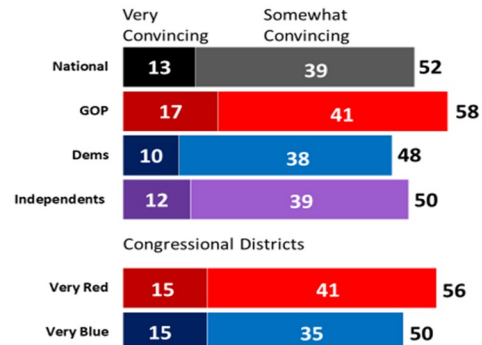
By limiting Senate candidates to small donors, big donors will have less influence on the Senators once they are in office. Rather than spending much of their time trying to woo big donors they will spend more time getting to know a wider range of people in their state. Senators will then be more likely to be responsive to their constituents, as a whole, not just well-financed special interests. Candidates who do not want to be beholden to big donors will be more able to run for office and succeed. This program won't add to the deficit and will improve the quality of American democracy.



Government Matching Small Donations (Durbin Plan)

Con Argument:

While the program would be funded by charging a fee to federal contractors, they would simply add that cost to their contract; so taxpayers would still end up paying for it. Giving money to any Senate candidate—just because they have a substantial following of small donors—won't necessarily produce good candidates. This will give fringe candidates who are not electable a government-funded platform for furthering their extreme ideas. Finally, ideas like this have been tried in some states and there's no clear evidence they have diminished the influence of special interests.

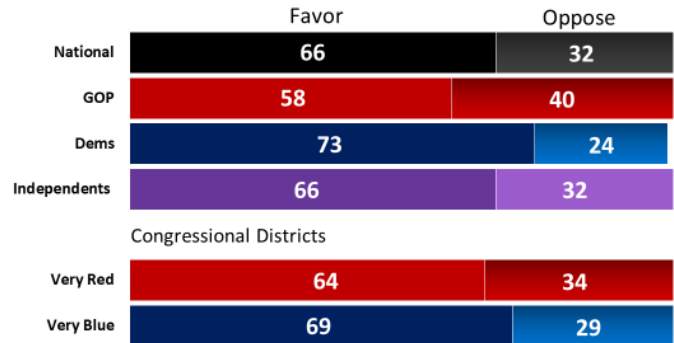


Respondents were then presented with the details of the proposal and asked to rate its acceptability. Just 22% found it unacceptable, with 78% finding it acceptable (56%), or tolerable (22%). Republicans found it almost twice as unacceptable (29%) as Democrats (16%), with independents in the middle (20%).

Ultimately, six in ten supported their Member of Congress voting in support of the proposal, including 58% of Republicans and 73% of Democrats.

Gov't Matching Small Donations (Durbin Plan) Final Recommendation

The program would be funded by a new fee paid by companies who do large contract work for the federal government. They would be charged a fee of 0.5% on the amount of each contract over \$10 million. Would you recommend that your Members of Congress vote in favor of or against this proposal?





The 'Sarbanes' Plan

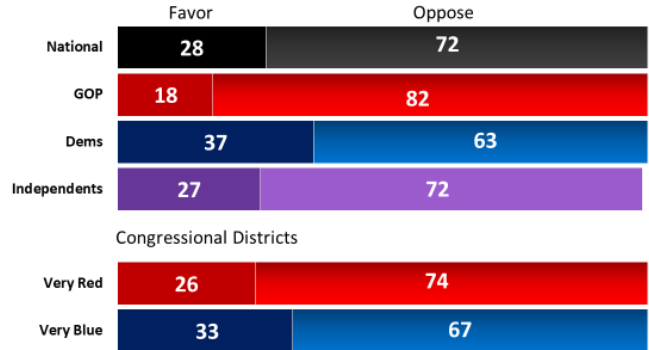
A different sample of respondents evaluated another proposal from Congress: H.R. 20. Like S. 1538, H.R. 20 provides a six to one match to candidates for each small donation to their campaign. However, the source of the funds would be general government revenues rather than a special charge on federal contractors. Also, the limit on the amount the candidate can get from a particular donor is \$1,000 rather than \$150 as in S. 1538.

Asked for their final recommendation, support was far lower than for S. 1538. Just 28% favored it with 72% opposed. Among Republicans, 82% were opposed as were 63% of Democrats. Asked how acceptable the idea was, a very large 63% gave it an unacceptable rating, including 74% of Republicans and 51% of Democrats.

Gov't Matching Small Donations (Sarbanes Plan)

Final Recommendation:

So, would you recommend that your Members of Congress vote in favor of or against this proposal?



Prohibiting One-on-One Fundraising by Members of Congress

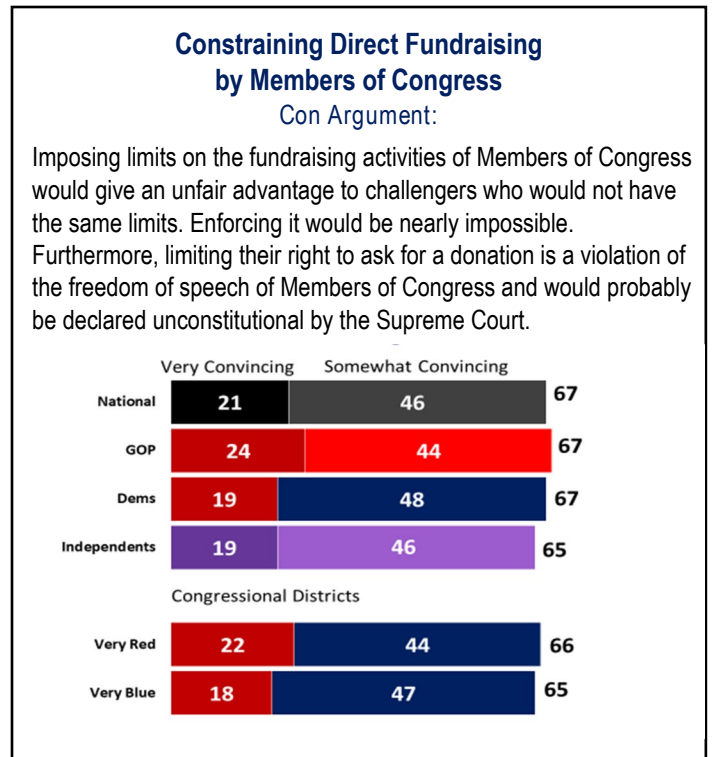
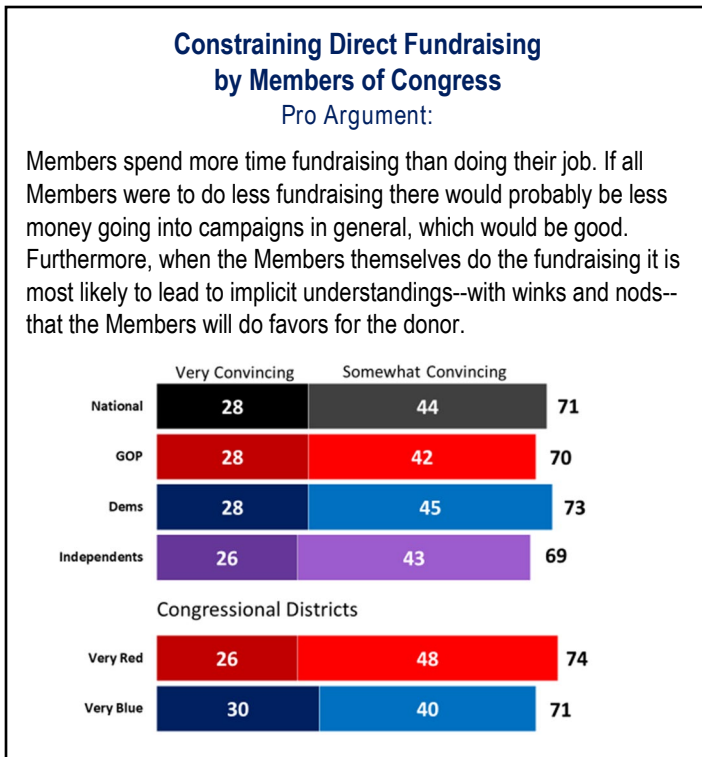
A majority, with Republicans divided, favored a proposal to prohibit Members of Congress from personally asking for donations; though speaking at fundraising events would still be allowed. However, there was little optimism that this prohibition would be effective in offsetting the influence of big campaign donors.

Respondents were presented with another proposal seeking to reduce the influence of big donors on politicians based on the H.R. 528, also known as the Stop Act sponsored by Rep. Brendan Boyle.

According to this proposal:

Members of Congress would be prohibited from personally asking a donor for money at any time. It allows them to attend and speak at fundraising events, but prohibits direct one-on-one appeals for donations.

A large bipartisan majority (71%) found convincing the argument in favor of this proposal, including 70% of Republicans and 73% of Democrats. However, nearly as many (67%) found the argument against it convincing, with this same percentage among Republicans and Democrats.

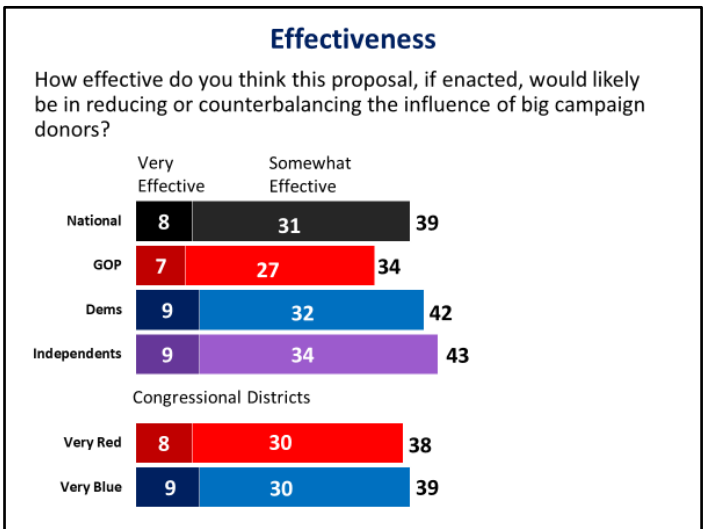
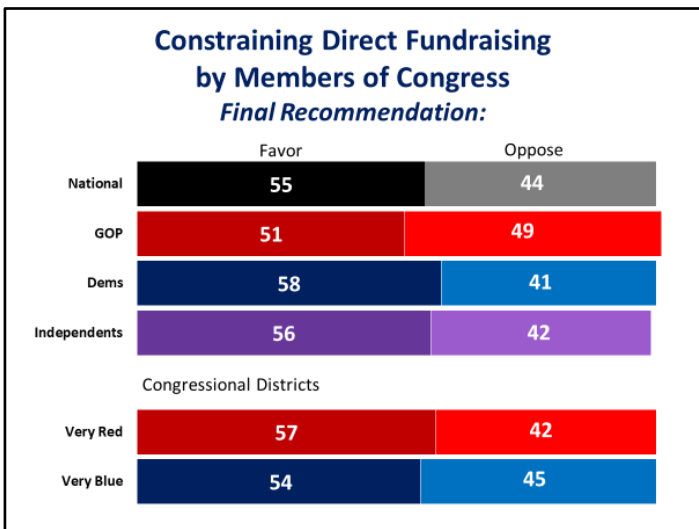
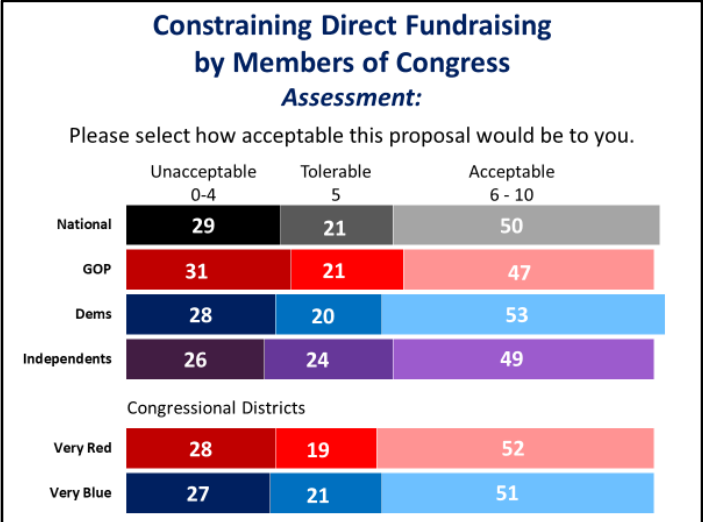


Asked, “How effective do you think this proposal, if enacted, would likely be in reducing or counterbalancing the influence of big campaign donors,” just 39% said they thought it would be effective (very 8%). Republicans were a bit less likely to think it would be effective (34%, very 7%) than Democrats (42%, very 9%).



Asked to rate the proposal’s acceptability, seven in ten found it acceptable (50%) or tolerable (21%), while just three in ten (29%) found it unacceptable. Republicans were slightly more likely to find it unacceptable (31%) than Democrats (28%).

Finally, a majority (55%) recommended that their Member of Congress vote in favor of this proposal. For Republicans this was a bare majority (51%), while Democrats it was nearly six in ten (58%).





Public Funding of Presidential Campaigns

In light of the fact that the Federal program for providing public funding for presidential campaigns has not been used by any presidential candidates for some time, a large majority supported ending it and directing the unused funds to pediatric research or deficit reduction.

Respondents were first presented the following information about the current federal program to fund presidential campaigns:

As you may know, in the 1970's, the federal government established a program to make presidential campaigns less dependent on private contributions by providing them government funds. Presidential campaigns receive these funds, though, only if they agree to limit the total amount of money they spend in their campaign, and the amount of money they get from private sources. The program is funded by taxpayers, who check a box on their IRS tax forms directing \$3 to the fund for this purpose. Contributing to the fund does not increase an individual's taxes or reduce any refund they are owed.

For some time, all major presidential candidates adhered to the spending limits and received the funding. With time, though, some candidates found they could raise so much more money through private sources that they chose not to accept the limits on their spending, even though they would have to forego the public funds. By the 2016 election, all of the major candidates chose to exceed the spending limits, foregoing the public funds. Thus, the fund has been rarely used and now has nearly \$300 million available.

There were then presented a proposal for ending this program based on H.R. 133:

The legislation proposes to end the Federal program providing public support for presidential campaigns. The \$3 check off on taxpayers' IRS forms would be ended and the unused funds would be directed to pediatric research or deficit reduction.

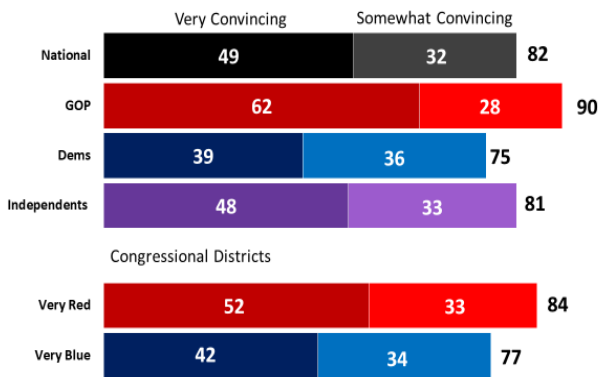
The argument in favor did very well with 82% of respondents finding it convincing including 90% of Republicans and 75% of Democrats. The argument against was found convincing by a substantial albeit smaller majority of 60%. Partisan differences were strong with slightly less than half of Republicans finding it convincing compared to seven in ten Democrats.



Redirecting Public Funding of Presidential Campaigns

Pro Argument:

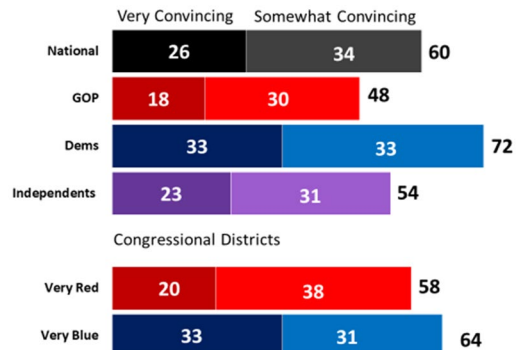
This program for public funding of presidential campaigns is clearly not working. The amount of private money flowing into the leading campaigns keeps going up. The only candidates using the public funds are ones who do not have a remote chance of winning. Furthermore, the whole idea of using taxpayer's money to subsidize presidential campaigns is a dubious idea to begin with. It's simply welfare for presidential candidates. It would be better for these tax dollars to go to something like pediatric research or deficit reduction.



Redirecting Public Funding of Presidential Campaigns

Con Argument:

It is critical that we limit the corrupting power of campaign donors in presidential races. Public financing can play a key role in counterbalancing their influence. For many years, this program was effective in helping presidential candidates be less dependent on big campaign donors and limiting the role of big money. It's true the current system is having some problems. But it can be fixed through raising the limits and making them more realistic in the current environment. We cannot wave the flag of surrender and let big special interests dominate elections and ultimately our government. We need to fix the program, not throw it out.

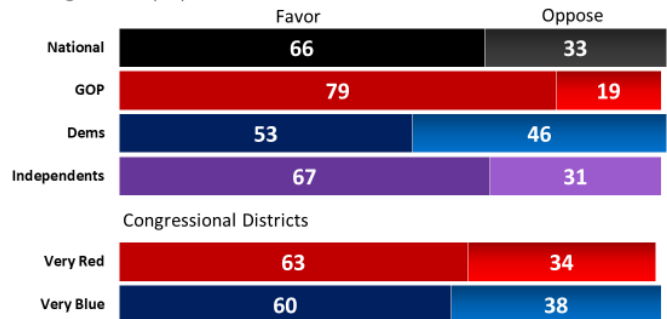


In the end, asked how their Member of Congress should vote, two-thirds said they should vote in favor of eliminating the program for public financing of presidential campaigns, including 79% of Republicans and 53% of Democrats.

Redirecting Public Funding of Presidential Campaigns

Final Recommendation

The bill proposes to end the Federal program providing public support for presidential campaigns. The \$3 check off on taxpayers' IRS forms would be ended and the unused funds would be directed to pediatric research or deficit reduction. Would you recommend that your Members of Congress vote in favor of or against this proposal?





Voice Of the People is a non-partisan organization that seeks to re-anchor our democracy in its founding principles by giving ‘We the People’ a greater role in government. VOP furthers the use of innovative methods and technology to give the American people a more effective voice in the policymaking process.

VOP is working to urge Congress to take these new methods to scale so that Members of Congress have a large, scientifically-selected, representative sample of their constituents—called a Citizen Cabinet—to be consulted on current issues and providing a voice that accurately reflects the values and priorities of their district or state.



PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

The **Program for Public Consultation** seeks to improve democratic governance by consulting the citizenry on key public policy issues governments face. It has developed innovative survey methods that simulate the process that policymakers go through—getting a briefing, hearing arguments, dealing with tradeoffs—before coming to their conclusion. It also uses surveys to help find common ground between conflicting parties. The Program for Public Consultation is part of the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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