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Four In Ten Believe Elections Are “Rigged” In Favor Of The Big Donors

Huge Majorities Favor Election Finance Reforms

Phoenix, Arizona, February 04, 2016. Four of ten Arizonans say that they vote less these days because they believe elections in this country are “rigged.” This view in turn appears linked to broadly-held views that campaign finance laws have been modified in recent years to such an extent that wealthy donors, including individuals, corporations and labor unions have undue influence on the outcome of elections because of their ability to make large and sometimes secret donations to candidates through political action committees known as PACs. The rising visibility of huge donations to political campaigns from so-called Super PACs linked to billionaires such as conservatives Charles and David Koch and liberals such as Tom Steyer and George Soros may add some political fuel to the Honest and Open Disclosure ballot measure that would require public disclosure of the original source of any campaign contribution source of \$10,000 or more. The general electorate appears unimpressed by the argument that constitutional freedom of speech protects the rights of the wealthy to use big campaign donations to tip election outcomes in favor of their point of view.

Belief in Arizona that elections are rigged is strongest among citizens under 55 years of age, within families earning under \$100,000 per year and among registered Democrats, but is not without standing among upper income groups, where 18 percent deem the system to be rigged, as do 21 percent of Republicans, 18 percent of registered Independents and 28 percent of people over 55 years of age.

Among citizens who have simply walked away from even registering to vote, fully a third say they believe the electoral system is “rigged.”

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Given that such large percentages of people deem the electoral system to be stacked in favor of the wealthy by permitting unlimited and secret donations via PACs, it is perhaps not surprising that even bigger percentages of the public and registered voters now favor reforming campaign elections laws to take big money out of elections and return more closely to a “one man one vote” principle, and to require that big donations be made public as soon as they are received by candidates. Reforms that command the biggest support include repeal of laws that permit secret donations (72%), requiring immediate internet posting of contributions (80%), capping how much money individuals can donate (76%), and requiring both corporations and unions to have the approval of their stockholders or members for donations to specific candidates.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>
<i>“Voters have a right to know who is putting big money into elections. All donations should be posted prominently on the internet the day they are received.”</i>	80%	12%	8%
<i>“We should return to earlier laws that limited how much money individuals can contribute to campaigns.”</i>	76	16	8
<i>“Laws that allow people to secretly donate to elections should be repealed.”</i>	72	19	9
<i>“Laws which allow people to secretly donate to candidates undermine the one-man one-vote principle.”</i>	64	19	17
<i>“Elections are rigged in this country and that is why I vote less than I used to.”</i>	38	49	13

Wall Street, Labor Unions and Big Business seen as part of the problem

The strong showing of Bernie Sanders in the Iowa caucuses may be a reflection that he is tapping into growing beliefs that campaign finance laws need reform. For example, seventy-seven percent of Arizonans believe that big business and Wall Street have too great an influence on the outcome of elections. Fifty-two percent hold the same view as regards the influence labor unions have on elections. Voters and the public back up these views by saying that neither corporations (78%) nor labor unions (81%) should be allowed to contribute to candidates without the approval of a majority of their stockholders or members.

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And finally, when asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement that there should be no limits on how much money an individual can contribute to a political campaign, 55 percent of the public register in the “disagree” column. Forty percent think it is okay that there be no limit on individual contributions. Republicans are the most likely to favor no limits on individual contributions, but even in their case, half disagree.

	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
These days big business and Wall Street have too much influence on elections	77%	14%	9%
These days labor unions have too much influence on elections	52	29	19
Labor unions should not be allowed to contribute to specific candidates without the approval of a majority of their members.	81	14	5
Corporations should not be allowed to contribute to specific candidates without the approval of a majority of their stockholders.	78	15	7
There should be no limit on how much money an individual can contribute to a political candidate.	40	55	5

EDITOR’S NOTE: This Rocky Mountain Poll - Arizona (2016-I-02), is based on 700 interviews with adult heads of household statewide, conducted between January 6 and 17, 2016. Interviewing was conducted in English or Spanish by professional interviewers of the Behavior Research Center on both land lines and cell phones. Where necessary, figures for age, sex, and race were weighted to bring them into line with their actual proportion in the population. In a sample of this size, one can say with a 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 3.8 percent of what they would have been had the entire adult population been surveyed. The Rocky Mountain Poll is conducted by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona and is an independent and non-partisan research program sponsored by the Center.

This statement conforms to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

Question Language

“A principle of U.S. elections is the concept of one-man, one-vote. In recent years election finance laws have been changed to permit wealthy individuals to secretly donate millions of dollars to political action committees known as PACs. Some say this change undermines the one-man one-vote concept by giving millionaires undue influence over the outcome of elections. Others who favor secret donations say allowing large donations is protected by the freedom of speech principles in the US Constitution. Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about campaign finance laws.” (SEQUENCE ROTATED AT RANDOM)

There should be no limits on how much money an individual can contribute to a political candidate.

Voters have a right to know who is putting big money into elections. All donations should be posted prominently on the Internet the day they are received.

These days big business and Wall Street have too much influence on elections.

These days labor unions have too much influence on elections.

Corporations should not be allowed to contribute to specific candidates without the approval of a majority of their stockholders.

Labor unions should not be allowed to contribute to specific candidates without the approval of a majority of their members.

Elections are rigged in this country and that is why I vote less than I used to.

We should return to earlier election laws that limited how much money individuals can contribute to campaigns.

Laws that allow people to secretly donate to elections should be repealed.

Laws that allow people to secretly donate large amounts to candidates undermine the one man one vote principle.

Further Note on Behavior Research Center

In 2014, Nate Silver of the website fivethirtyeight.com rated BRC as one of the top 15 percent of political polling firms in the nation for methodology and accuracy, giving BRC an “A-“rating. Mr. Silver and his website have correctly predicted national and state election outcomes in recent election cycles by aggregating polling results from multiple research firms.