



SMALL-DONOR BASED FAIR ELECTIONS

The Problem of Big Money in Politics

American democracy is based on the ideal of one person, one vote. But it's harder and harder for that promise to be met with a political system increasingly dominated by millionaires, billionaires, lobbyists, and big money interest groups. This current system creates a political inequality that skews public policy toward those able to write big checks and away from ordinary Americans. And Americans know it:

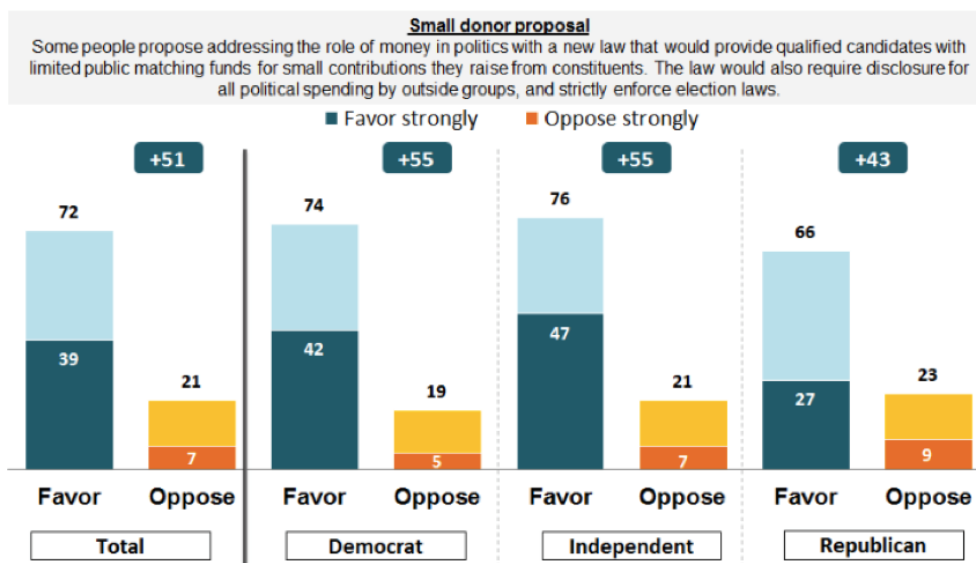
- Eighty-four percent of Americans believe money has too much influence in politics, according to a CBS News poll.
- Three-quarters of the American people believe their government is corrupt, according to Gallup.
- Trust in government is at the lowest levels in 50 years, Pew Research Center found in a recent study, though people do have a desire to make it work.
- Seventy-four percent say elected officials “don’t care what people like me think,” according to Pew Research Center.

Broad Voter Support for Small-Donor Based Fair Elections

A 2014 Greenberg Quinlan Rosner poll showed that 60% of voters think that reducing the influence of big money in politics should be lawmakers’ at or near the top of lawmakers’ priorities:

- 18% said it should be the single highest priority.
- 17% said it should be one of the top few priorities.
- 25% said it should be near the top of the list.
- Only 14% said it should be near the bottom of the list and 24% said it should be in the middle.

Small-donor based fair elections are favored to fix the money in politics problem by 72% of voters and has high support across the political spectrum: 74% of Democrats, 76% of Independents, and 66% of Republicans (according to a recent poll by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner).



Principles of Small Donor Reforms

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1. They empower ordinary Americans. These systems give ordinary Americans a more robust voice in the political process by incentivizing candidates to rely on a broad base of small donations.
2. They increase political participation. Small donor based fair elections programs encourage candidates to build a large grassroots base of supporters and bring more people into the political process.
3. They reduce the influence of big donors. With Fair Elections-style reform, candidates can always vote in alignment with their own values and in the interest of their constituents and small donor base, without worrying about how this will jeopardize how they will raise funds to run for re-election.

Components of a Successful System:

These voluntary programs generally employ one or more of the following methods to substitute public funds for private contributions. They are:

- *Matching funds. In New York City, council and mayoral candidates have their small donations matched on a six-to-one basis. A \$25 contribution becomes \$175. The program has diversified candidates, broadened the donor base, and increased competition in city elections. These programs also help candidates build a base of grassroots support to go back to if they face a big-spending opponent or independent expenditure campaign.*
- *Grants. In Arizona, Connecticut, and Maine, candidates who show a threshold level of community support by collecting a large number of small donations, and agree to give up further private fundraising, can qualify to receive a grant to fund their campaign. After a series of Supreme Court cases undermined the Maine law, voters approved a fix to the law in November 2015 and now 75% of candidates are using Maine small donor system to run. In Connecticut's 2014 elections, 84 percent of winning state candidates used the state's Citizens' Election Program and both the Democratic and Republican nominees for Governor used the program.*
- *Democracy Vouchers. Voters in Seattle, Washington, approved a first-in-the-nation system in which the elections office sends registered voters four \$25 vouchers that voters can send to their campaigns of choice. Campaigns can cash the vouchers in if they agree to raise money only from small donors and vouchers. This policy will be implemented in 2017 and its goal is to expand the base of small donors for candidates and increase political engagement, especially among people of more modest means. Every Voice is watching implementation closely to determine whether this program achieves the intended outcomes.*