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## SOCIAL ISSUES

For Immediate Release

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### Marylanders Deeply Skeptical of Campaign Financing System

COLLEGE PARK, Md. - Marylanders overwhelmingly believe large campaign contributors buy political influence, yet see smaller political donations as legitimate and important, according to a new study from the University of Maryland and the University of Baltimore.

The results of the statewide poll also show that a substantial majority favors some reform measures in Maryland regulating contributions and spending. While a majority favors public funding of campaigns, only 29 percent were willing to use tax dollars to implement such a plan.

"The distrust of the system is so widespread that it largely cuts across ideology and political affiliations," says Paul Herrnson, director of the [Center for American Politics and Citizenship](#) at the University of Maryland, who analyzed the results. "Three out of four Marylanders see the current system as corrupt, and the vast majority embrace at least some reforms."

At the request of the [State Commission on Public Funding of Campaigns in Maryland](#), the survey questions were added to a more comprehensive poll on political attitudes conducted by the [Schaefer Center for Public Policy](#), University of Baltimore.

Participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the impact of political contributions and possible reforms. The telephone survey of 804 Marylanders was conducted last December and has an error rate of plus or minus 4 percent.

### Attitudes Toward Campaign Finance System

Marylanders expressed what the study calls a "marked skepticism" toward the current fundraising system. Among the findings:

- Contributions influence elected officials: 94 percent agree or strongly agree.
- Contributors have greater access to elected officials: 84 percent agree or strongly agree.
- Donors too often pressure office holders for favors: 80 percent agree or strongly agree.
- Office holders too often pressure donors for money: 59 percent agree or strongly agree.
- Money is a major source of political corruption: 75 percent agree or strongly agree.
- Money is the most important factor in elections: 67 percent agree or strongly agree.
- Candidates/elected officials spend too much time fundraising: 69 percent agree or strongly agree.

Yet the survey respondents did not wholly reject the notion of campaign contributions: 73 percent agreed or strongly agreed that contributions represent legitimate political involvement.

Contributors were more likely than non-contributors to believe giving money to a campaign influenced elected officials. Of those who gave to a campaign in the past four years, 85 percent said contributions have a moderate or great deal of influence on elected officials. But 71 percent of those who did not give thought contributions have a moderate or great deal of influence.

There was substantial disagreement - along racial, gender, political and ideological lines - concerning the impact of campaign financing on the candidacies of women and minorities.

### Attitudes Toward Reform Proposals

The survey revealed strong support for some reform proposals, including

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## MARYLAND IN THE NEWS

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Center for Study of Terrorism's Gary LaFree Comments on Dilemma: Academic Freedom vs. Security in an Age of Terrorism (*Science*)

elimination of "soft money" contributions. The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 prohibited such contributions at the federal level, but party and political action committees in Maryland can still accept them. Among the findings:

- Limit spending by candidates: 76 percent approve or strongly approve.
- Ban soft money contributions: 70 percent approve or strongly approve.
- Limit TV advertising by or for candidates: 63 percent approve or strongly approve.
- Ban contributions by political action committees: 55 percent approve or strongly approve.
- Public funding for statewide and General Assembly candidates: 53 percent approve or strongly approve.

Opinions on soft money divided along racial, partisan and ideological lines. Blacks favored a soft money ban in Maryland far more than whites - 80 percent versus 60 percent. Liberals and moderates favored a ban more than conservatives - 86 percent versus 68 percent.

Less than a majority would support increasing limits on the amounts political parties or individuals can contribute to candidates. Parties can now give up to \$6,000, individuals up to \$4,000.

Support for public funding of campaigns varied widely by ideology and party. A majority of Democrats (57 percent) favored the idea, but only a minority of Republicans (47 percent). More liberals (70 percent) approved than conservatives (55 percent). But when the question was phrased in terms of using tax money to support campaign costs, overall approval dropped to only 29 percent.

An executive summary of the report is available online at <http://www.capc.umd.edu/rpts/MDCampFinSrvy.pdf>. Herrnson has conducted a series of studies over the past several years tracking campaign finance in Maryland. These are available online at <http://www.capc.umd.edu/research.asp>.

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