

**MARYLANDERS' OPINIONS OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE
AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM**

**A Report Commissioned by The Study Commission on Public Funding
of Campaigns in Maryland, Dr. Carl Stenberg, Chair**

Produced by

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Executive Summary

- Nearly all Marylanders believe that campaign contributions influence the policies supported by state elected officials.
- Most believe that fundraising is a major source of political corruption.
- Most also believe that contributing is legitimate form of political participation.
- About three-quarters of Marylanders believe that public funding would make government work more in the interests of the people.
- 55 percent approve of public funding as a reform proposal.
- Only 29 percent approve of funding election campaigns out of tax revenue.
- Women and especially minorities are more likely to believe that fundraising discourages members of these traditionally underrepresented groups from running than are men and whites.
- Democrats and liberals are more likely to believe that fundraising discourages members of these traditionally underrepresented groups from running than are Republicans, moderates, and conservatives.
- The two most popular reform proposals are limiting candidate spending and eliminating unregulated “soft money” contributions.
- Most Marylanders oppose allowing political parties or individuals to make larger contributions.
- Partisanship and ideology had a significant impact on respondents’ opinions of most campaign finance reforms.

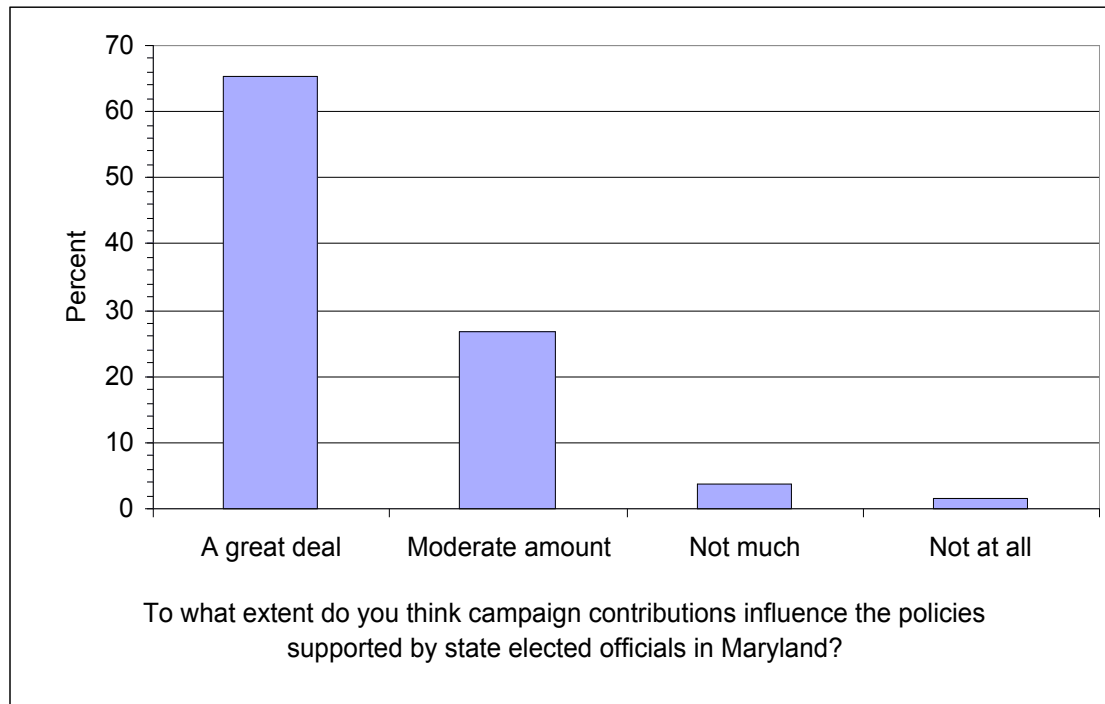
Introduction

The Study Commission on Public Funding of Campaigns in Maryland, commonly referred to as the Stenberg Commission, after commission chair, Dr. Carl Stenberg, commissioned the Center of American Politics and Citizenship of the University of Maryland and the Schaefer Center of the University of Baltimore to conduct a survey of Marylanders to ascertain their views about campaign finance and campaign finance reform. The telephone survey was conducted between December 9 and December 14, 2002 by Survey Sampling, Inc. of Fairfield, Conn. The survey produced a representative sample of 804 citizens of the State of Maryland.

I. Marylanders' Opinions about Campaign Finance

Nearly all Marylanders believe that campaign contributions influence the policies supported by state elected officials. Sixty-five percent believe that contributions influence elected officials a great deal, and 27 percent believe that contributions have a moderate influence on elected officials (see Figure 1). Only 4 percent felt that contributions do not have much influence, and 2 percent felt that contributions have no influence at all.

Figure 1. The Influence of Campaign Contributions on Elected Officials

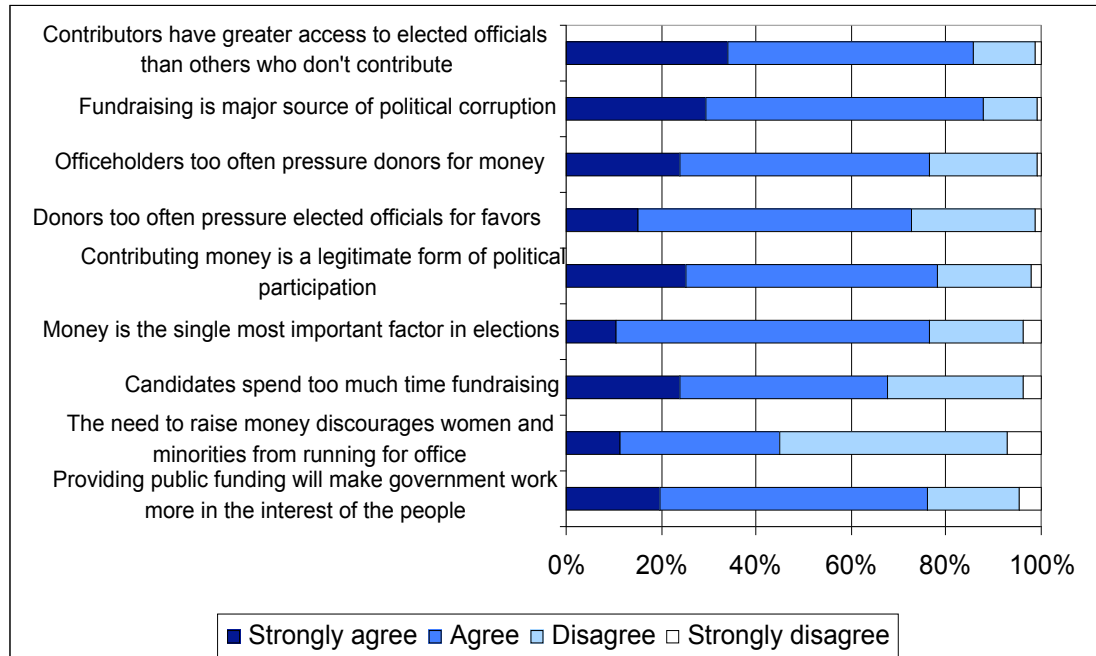


Contributors are more likely to believe that contributions influence elected officials than are non-contributors. Eighty-five percent of those who had given money to a political campaign in the last four years reported that contributions have a great deal or a moderate amount of influence on elected officials, compared to 71 percent of those who had not contributed to a political campaign during the last four years.

These impressions about the influence of contributions raise concerns among the public. One-third of the respondents strongly agreed and half the respondents agreed that contributors have

greater access to elected officials than others who do not contribute (see Figure 2). Twelve percent strongly agree and 47 percent agree that office holders too often pressure donors for money. Twenty-seven percent of the survey respondents strongly agreed and 53 percent agreed that donors too often pressure elected officials for favors. These concerns result in a marked skepticism about the role of money in politics. Twenty-four percent strongly agreed and 51 percent agreed that money is a major source of political corruption.

Figure 2. Views on the Campaign Finance System



Despite these misgivings, the public is not patently opposed to campaign contributions. Ten percent strongly agreed and 63 percent agreed that contributing money is a legitimate form of political participation. Not surprisingly, contributors were more likely to hold this view than noncontributors by a margin of 85 percent to 71 percent.

Whether viewed as a source of corruption or a form of legitimate political participation, most people believe that money has a profound impact on elections. Twenty-four percent strongly agreed and 43 percent strongly agreed that money is the most important factor in elections. While the candidate with the most money may not always win, it is difficult to run a competitive campaign without raising substantial sums.

Marylanders believe that the importance of money to election outcomes drives candidates to place too much emphasis on fundraising and discourages some otherwise qualified people from running for office. Twenty-two percent strongly agreed and 47 percent agreed that candidates and elected officials spend too much time fundraising. A total of 21 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this position, and about 10 percent voiced no opinion on the issue.

There was less of a consensus on the impact of fundraising on the candidacies of women and minorities. Ten percent strongly agreed and 31 percent agreed that the current system for funding political campaigns discourages members of these underrepresented groups from running for office.

There are racial, gender, partisan, and ideological differences on this issue. Sixty-three percent of African Americans believe that fundraising discourages women and minorities from running for office compared to 40 percent of whites. Forty-eight percent of all women believe fundraising discourages members of these underrepresented groups from running, as opposed 41 percent of all men.

Fifty-seven percent of the Democrats believe that fundraising discourages women and minority candidates from running for office compared to 26 percent of the Republicans and 39 percent of the independents. Similarly, 62 percent of the liberals hold this view as opposed to approximately 38 percent of the moderates and conservatives.

Most people agreed the statement that providing public funding to candidates for statewide office or the general assembly who voluntarily agreed to limits on their funding would make government work more in the interests of the people. Eighteen percent strongly agreed and 52 percent agreed with this statement. Only twenty-two percent disagreed.

Despite the existence of a strong consensus on this issue, there are some partisan and ideological differences on the effects of public funding. Seven-nine percent of the Democrats hold believe it would make government work more in the interest of the people, as compared to 66 percent of the Republicans, and 83 percent of the independents. Similarly, 90 percent of the liberals, 76 of the moderates, and 69 percent of the conservatives believed that public funding would improve the workings of government.

II. Opinions on Campaign Finance Reform

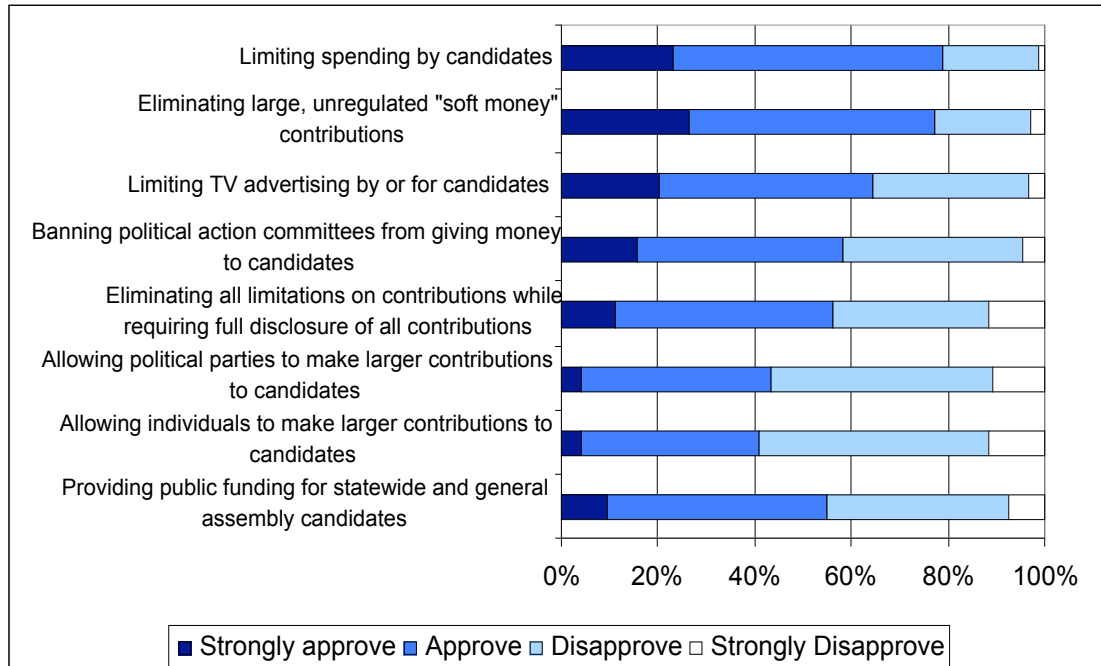
We asked respondents whether they strongly approve, approve, disapprove, or strongly disapprove of eight different proposals for campaign finance reform. The survey results demonstrate strong support for three of the proposals: limiting candidate spending, eliminating “soft money,” and limiting television advertising. Twenty-two percent strongly approve and 54 percent approve of limiting spending by candidates (see Figure 3).

Eliminating large, unregulated “soft money” contributions is another very popular reform proposal. Twenty-four percent strongly approve and 46 percent approve of banning soft money contributions. The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 prohibit soft money contributions at the federal level, but party committees and political action committees in Maryland can still accept soft money contributions.

Marylanders divide somewhat along racial, partisan, and ideological lines on this issue. Eighty percent of all whites favored eliminating soft money, as opposed to 67 percent of all blacks; eighty percent of the Democrats and 81 percent of the independents favored this reform measure as opposed to 73 of the Republicans. Eighty-six percent of all liberals and moderates also favored this reform in contrast with 68 percent of all conservatives.

There is also strong public support for limiting television advertising. Twenty percent strongly approve and 43 percent approve of limiting television advertising by or for candidates. Television is perhaps the most expensive advertising medium for campaigns, so limiting the use of television in campaigns could reduce the pressure to raise money, especially in gubernatorial elections. However, few state legislative candidates use television advertising because it is so expensive.

Figure 3. Views on Reform Proposals



A majority of respondents indicated support for banning PAC contributions, eliminating all limits while requiring full disclosure, and providing public funding. Fifteen percent strongly approve and 40 percent approve of banning PAC contributions. PACs are currently allowed to give up to \$6,000 to a candidate.

Eleven percent strongly approve and 43 percent approve of eliminating all contribution limits while requiring full disclosure of all contributions. The largest subgroup differences are among ideological groups. Sixty-four percent of all conservatives supported this reform, as opposed to 51 percent of all liberals and 56 percent of all moderates.

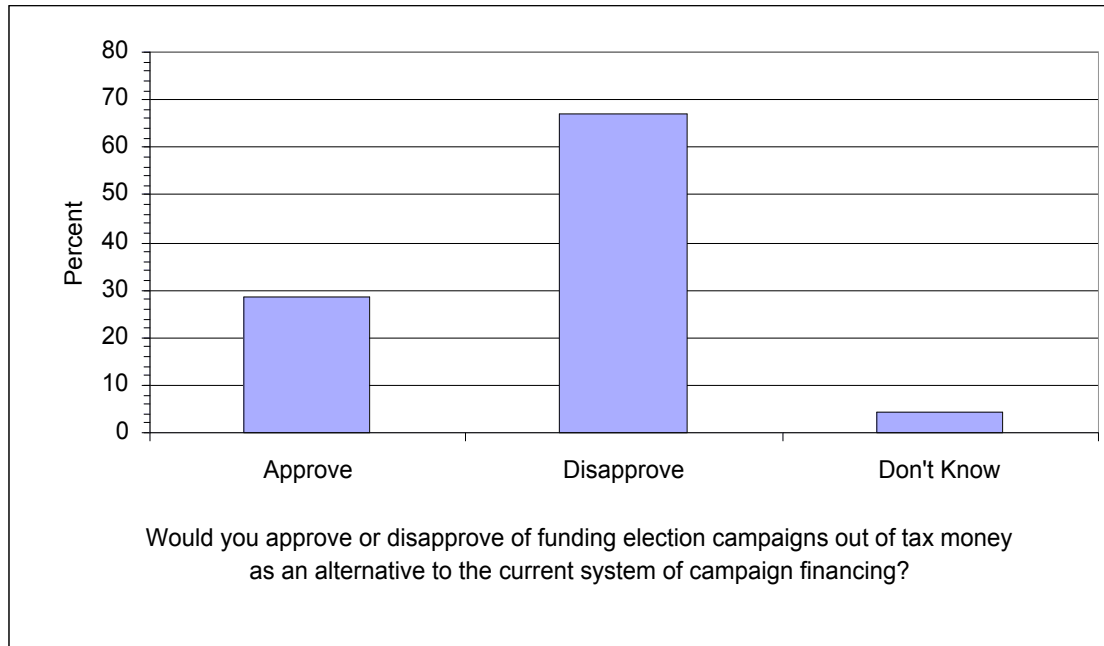
Less than half the respondents support increasing the limits on the amounts political parties or individuals can contribute to candidates. Currently, political parties currently can give up to \$6,000 to a candidate, and individuals can give up to \$4,000 to candidate.

Partisanship results in some differences of opinion on these reforms. Forty-seven percent of the Republicans support increasing contribution limits for parties, as opposed to 41 percent of the Democrats and 36 percent of the independents. Similarly, 46 percent of the Republicans support increasing contribution limits for individuals, as opposed to only 36 percent of the Democrats and 37 percent of the independents.

A final reform we asked Marylanders to consider was providing public funding for statewide and general assembly candidates. Over half of all respondents favor this measure: 9 percent strongly approve and 44 percent approve of this measure. Once again, partisanship and ideology had a significant impact on respondents answers. Fifty-seven percent of all Democrats favored this measure in contrast with 45 percent of all Republicans and 61 percent of the independents. Seven out of ten liberals favored the reform, as opposed to 55 percent of the moderates and 53 percent of the conservatives.

It is important to note that support for public funding drops substantially if it comes out of tax revenue. Only 29 percent would approve of public funding that uses tax money to finance political campaigns, whereas 67 percent disapprove (see Figure 4). The most significant differences are among voters of different ideologies and among contributors and noncontributors. Forty-two percent of all liberals continue to support public funding even when it is financed using tax revenues as opposed to 26 percent of all moderates and conservatives. Contributors are more supportive of this measure than noncontributors by 36 percent to 24 percent.

Figure 4. Support for Public Funding Using Tax Money



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Related Studies by the Center for American Politics and Citizenship Available Online:

- Fundraising by Maryland General Assembly Candidates in the 1998 Elections (<http://www.capc.umd.edu/rpts/MDGA98.FR.pdf>)
- Candidates Devote Substantial Time and Effort to Fundraising (<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/herrnson/reporttime.html>)
- State Legislative Candidates Support Campaign Reform (<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/herrnson/report.html>)
- See How They Run: State Legislative Candidates (<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/herrnson/art2.html>)
- Individual Congressional Campaign Contributors: Wealthy, Conservative, and Reform-Minded (<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/herrnson/indiv.html>)
- Outside Looking In: Views of Third Party and Independent Candidates (<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/herrnson/art3.html>)
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About the Center for American Politics and Citizenship

The Center for American Politics and Citizenship (CAPC) provides citizens and policy-makers with research on critical issues related to the nation's political institutions, processes, and policies. CAPC is a non-partisan, non-profit research institution within the Department of Government and Politics of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Maryland. For more information see <http://www.capc.umd.edu>.

About the Schaefer Center for Public Policy

The Schaefer Center for Public Policy was established in 1985 with a mission to bring the University's academic expertise to bear in solving problems faced by government and nonprofit organizations. The Center offers five primary services: program evaluation and analysis, opinion research, strategic planning, performance measurement, and management training. It is through the Schaefer Center that the University of Baltimore and the College of Liberal Arts meet one of the central components of the University's mission that of applied research and public service to the Baltimore Metropolitan Area and the State of Maryland.