YouGov

From: YouGov
To: Issue One
Re: National survey results on campaign finance reform
Date: October 28, 2025

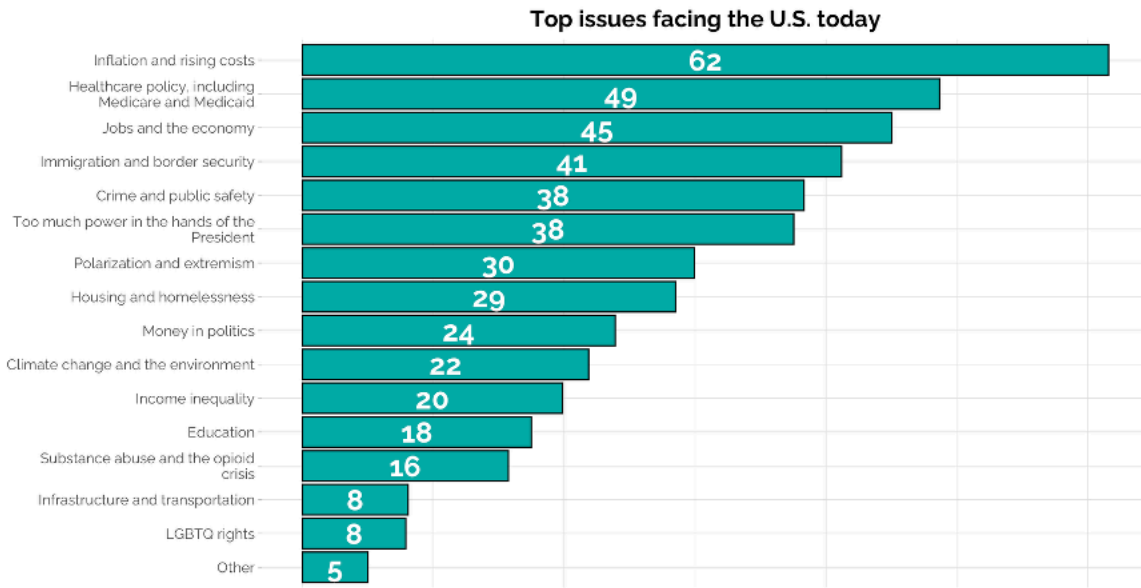
On behalf of Issue One, YouGov fielded a sample of 1,036 U.S. registered voters. The survey fielded from October 7 to October 15, 2025. The survey included measures of voters' general priorities, their views toward the role of money in politics, and their views on a hypothetical state-level reform on this subject. This memo briefly summarizes the results.

Executive Summary

- Voters do not initially list money in politics among their most pressing daily concerns. Issues such as the cost of living, housing, jobs, and healthcare continue to dominate personal and political priorities.
- But when tested directly, **voters across the political spectrum express overwhelming concern about the influence of money in politics** and strong support for reforms to reduce corporate and dark money spending in elections.
  - Voters across the political spectrum **disagree with key assumptions** made by the U.S Supreme Court in its 2010 *Citizens United* decision. In particular, Americans broadly believe that large-scale political spending by corporations and wealthy donors **undermines democracy, creates the appearance of corruption, and reduces public trust in government**. These attitudes persist even when voters are reminded that proposed reforms to curb unlimited corporate and dark money spending in elections could apply to their own preferred groups or raise free speech concerns.
- Initially, a potential state-level reform to eliminate corporate and dark money spending in elections received **58% support**, compared to 13% opposition. Yet after respondents were exposed to messaging from both supporters and opponents, support for the measure **rose to 72%**. Majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents backed the proposal, as did majorities across gender, race, and educational groups.
- Finally, while money in politics is not a top-tier "kitchen table" issue, it nonetheless has clear electoral salience: **A majority (58%) of voters say they would be more likely to support a gubernatorial candidate who endorsed reforms to eliminate corporate and dark money spending in elections.**

Views on Money in Politics and *Citizens United*

When asked to name the top issues facing the United States today, voters were far more likely to cite economic and cost-of-living concerns than campaign finance. The following chart breaks out the top issues voters say they face in daily life. Voters remain chiefly concerned by the cost of living, jobs and the economy, housing availability, and access to healthcare.

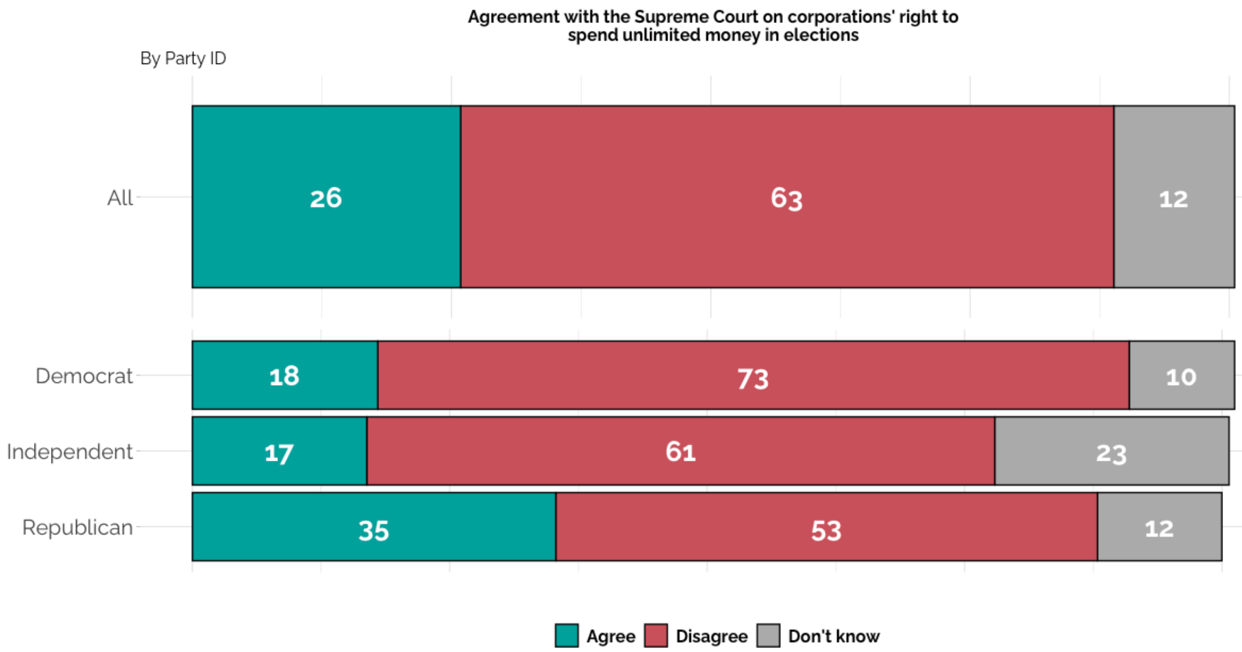


This pattern holds at the state level as well, where campaign finance reform ranked well below economic and quality-of-life concerns. Yet despite ranking as a “second-tier” issue, **nearly 1 in 4 voters nationwide still identified money in politics as a top national issue**.

Although voters generally rank money in politics below immediate economic concerns, subsequent survey items indicate that the subject carries significant weight when respondents are asked to evaluate it directly. **Across party lines, voters express consistent concern about the influence of money in politics and indicate support for potential reforms.**

When asked about the Supreme Court’s decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*, which held that corporations and labor unions have a First Amendment right to spend unlimited money to influence elections, **63% of voters said they disagreed**.

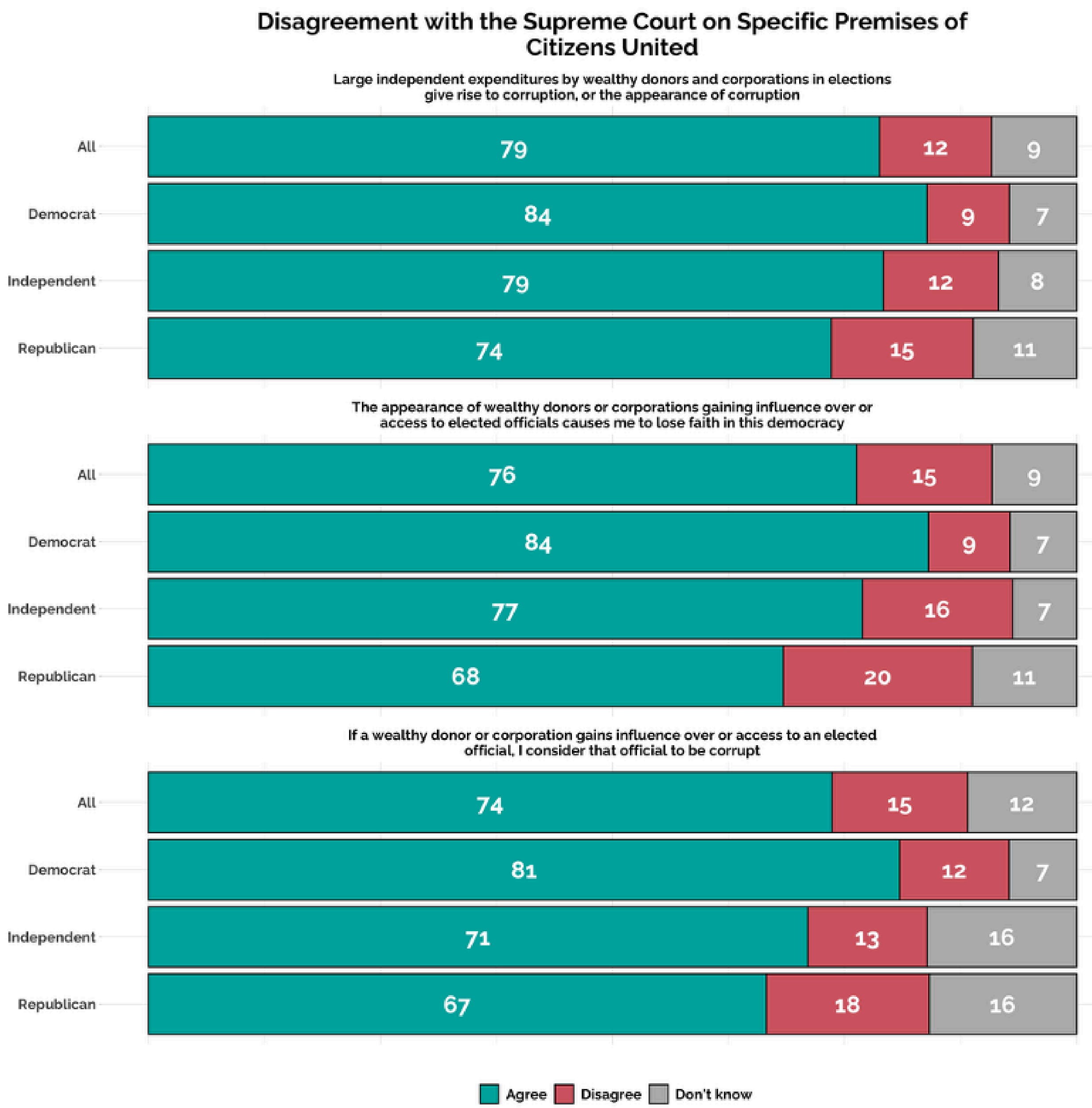
Disagreement was consistent across partisan groups.



Voters were also asked a series of questions designed to assess key assumptions underlying the *Citizens United* decision. The Court's majority opinion stated that independent expenditures do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption, and that such spending does not diminish public trust in government.

Survey results show broad, crosspartisan rejection of those assumptions:

- **79%** agreed that large independent expenditures by wealthy donors and corporations "give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption." This included 84% of Democrats, 79% of independents, and 74% of Republicans.
- **73%** agreed that "if a wealthy donor or corporation gains influence over or access to an elected official, I consider that official to be corrupt." This included 81% of Democrats, 71% of independents, and 67% of Republicans.
- **76%** agreed that "the appearance of wealthy donors or corporations gaining influence over or access to elected officials causes me to lose faith in this democracy." This included 84% of Democrats, 77% of independents, and 68% of Republicans.



To better understand where voters draw the line between legitimate influence and corruption, the survey also asked respondents what dollar amount would constitute a "bribe" if given to a politician. A **plurality (36%)** said that **any amount of money should be considered a bribe**, while only 8% said there is no amount of money that could constitute a bribe.

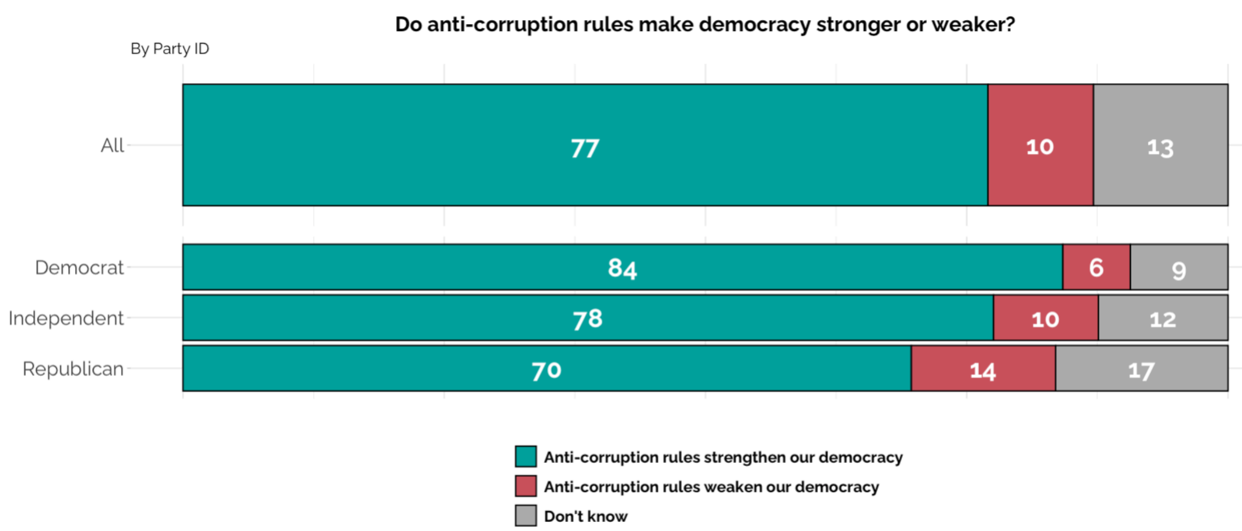
Importantly, voters also reject the argument — central to the Supreme Court's reasoning in *Citizens United* — that unrestricted political spending strengthens democracy by protecting free speech. Specifically, they were asked:

Even if it isn't exactly right, which of the following is closer to your view?

- Allowing people and organizations to spend unlimited amounts of money in our elections makes our democracy weaker, because it gives wealthy special interests too much influence over the decisions our politicians make
- Allowing people and organizations to spend unlimited amounts of money in our elections makes our democracy stronger, because it protects the constitutional right to free speech
- Not sure

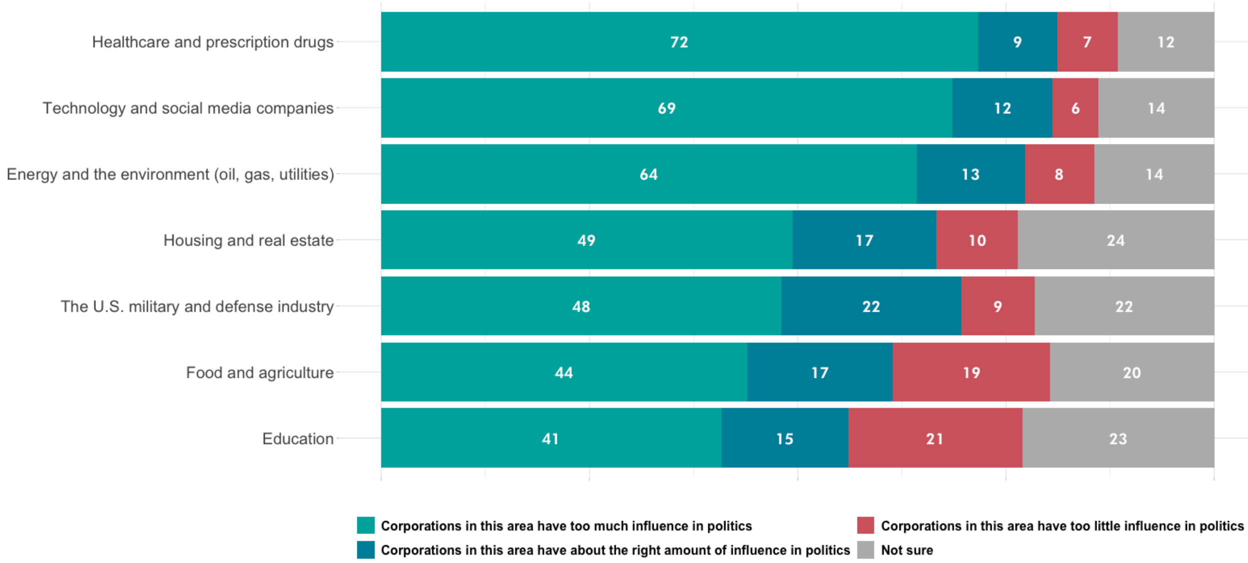
In response, **75% said unlimited spending in elections makes our democracy weaker** because it gives wealthy special interests too much influence over elected officials, including 84% of Democrats, 73% of independents, and 65% of Republicans. **Only 13%** of respondents said unlimited spending by corporations and wealthy individuals makes our democracy stronger by protecting the constitutional right to free speech.

Similarly, **77%** of Americans — including 84% of Democrats, 70% of Republicans, and 78% of independents — agreed that anti-corruption rules strengthen our democracy and constitutional rights by ensuring everyone has equal political representation, regardless of money.



Beyond general attitudes toward political spending, voters also perceive widespread corporate influence across major areas of American life. When asked whether corporations have too much, too little, or about the right amount of influence in politics across specific industries, large majorities said corporate influence is excessive in most sectors tested.

Appearance of corruption in campaign finance



These findings indicate that concerns about money in politics are not confined to elections alone. Voters perceive corporate political power as extending across many industries that touch daily life.

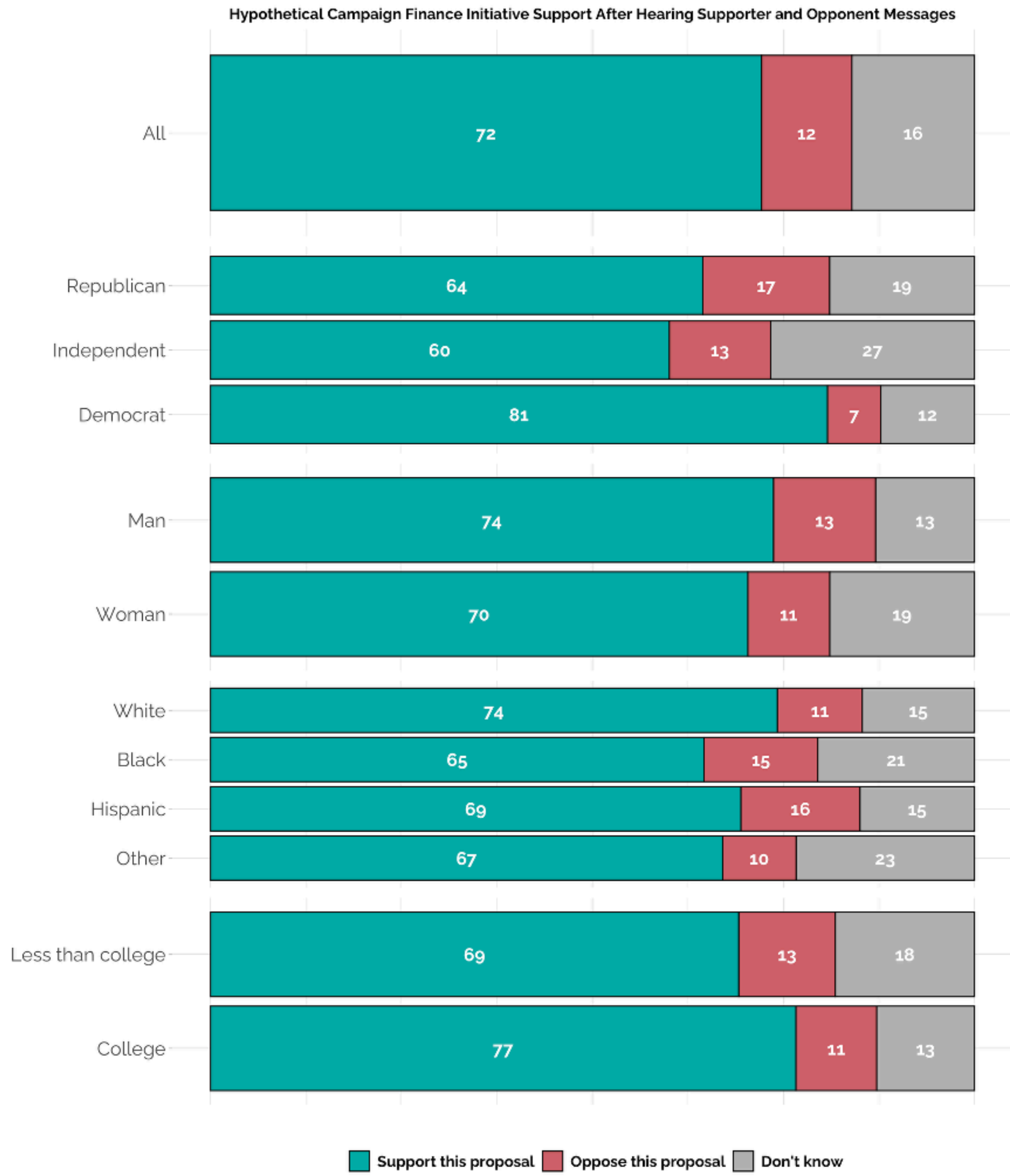
Views on Reform

Building on these attitudes, the survey tested a hypothetical state-level reform effort to eliminate corporate and dark money spending in elections by amending state laws governing corporate charters. Specifically, they were asked:

> *Next we are going to ask you about a new campaign finance proposal being considered in [respondent's state of residence]:*
>
> *A change is being considered that would amend state law in [respondent's state of residence] to define the powers of artificial persons, including corporations, as only those the state expressly grants and provide that artificial persons have no power to spend money or anything of value on elections or ballot issues. This proposal affirms that the people of [state of residence] did not intend for artificial persons to have the power to spend on elections or ballot issues. This proposal provides that actions beyond those expressly granted powers are void. The proposal provides that political committees may be granted the power to spend on elections and ballot issues. It allows enforcement through forfeiture of state-conferred privileges. The proposal includes a severability clause that ensures that valid portions of the proposal remain effective if other parts are invalidated.*
>
> *Do you [support or oppose] this proposal?*

In response, **58%** of voters said they would support the measure, while **13%** said they would oppose it, and **29%** were unsure.

After being exposed to messaging from both supporters and opponents of the proposal, support for the measure increased to **72%**, with majorities in favor across major partisan and demographic subgroups. This included support from 81% of Democrats, 60% of independents, and 64% of Republicans.



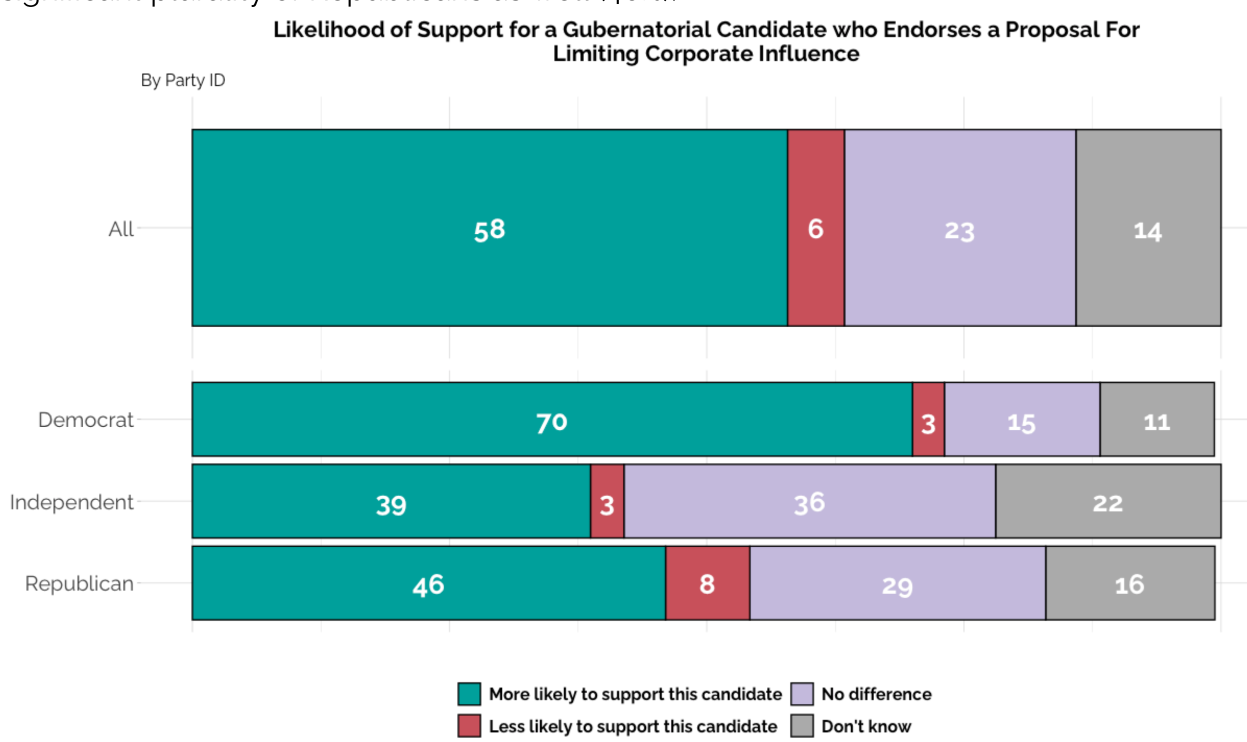
The data indicate that support for such a reform remains strong even when voters are presented with common counterarguments and tradeoffs. When reminded that the same restrictions could apply to labor unions as well as corporations, **51%** said this would make *no difference* in their view of the proposal, **32%** said it would make them *more comfortable*, and only **17%** said it would make them *less comfortable*.

Similarly, when asked to consider whether restrictions might impact candidates or causes they personally support, **73%** said they would still support eliminating corporate campaign spending, even if doing so negatively affected their preferred candidates and ballot measures. Majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents — as well as majorities across every major age, race, gender, and education group — shared this view.

Electoral Implications

To assess the potential political salience of this issue, the survey also examined how support for campaign finance reform might influence voters' evaluations of candidates. Respondents were asked how they would react to a gubernatorial candidate who endorsed a proposal to eliminate corporate and dark money spending in elections.

A **majority (58%)** of voters said they would be *more likely* to support such a candidate, while only **5%** said they would be *less likely* to do so. Support was especially strong among Democrats (70% more likely), but substantial among independents (39%) and a significant plurality of Republicans as well (46%).



However, the data also indicate that the potential for large-scale vote-switching based on this issue alone is limited. Only about **4%** of voters who initially supported a Republican candidate said they would be willing to switch their support to a Democrat if the Democrat backed a reform proposal and the Republican did not. Conversely, about **7%** of Democrats said they would consider voting for a Republican if that candidate supported reform while the Democrat did not.

It is worth emphasizing that while respondents are often inclined to say an issue they feel strongly about has great influence over their vote, this is difficult to measure in practice.

Conclusion

Across multiple measures, voters express clear and consistent concern about the influence of money in politics. Large majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents disagree with the *Citizens United* decision and reject its key assumptions — that independent expenditures do not create corruption or the appearance of corruption, and that unlimited spending strengthens democracy.

Voters also show strong and resilient support for policies to limit corporate and dark money spending in elections, including under conditions that remind them such restrictions could affect groups on their own side or raise free speech concerns.

While economic issues remain the most salient in voters' daily lives, attitudes toward money in politics are deeply held and crosspartisan. The data indicate that reducing corporate and dark money influence is widely seen as a legitimate and desirable reform goal and can serve as a unifying issue in an otherwise polarized environment.

Methods statement

This survey is based on 1,036 interviews conducted by YouGov on the internet of registered voters. The sample was weighted according to gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and U.S. Census region based on voter registration lists, the U.S. Census American Community Survey, and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey, as well as 2020 Presidential vote and approximate 2024 Presidential vote based on available results. Respondents were selected from YouGov to be representative of registered voters. The weights range from 0.24 to 3.74 with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.39.

The margin of error (a 95% confidence interval) for a sample percentage p based upon the subsetted sample is approximately 3.3%. It is calculated using the formula:

$$\hat{p} \pm 100 \times \sqrt{\frac{1 + \mathrm{CV}^2}{n}}$$

where CV is the coefficient of variation of the sample weights and n is the sample size used to compute the proportion. This is a measure of sampling error (the average of all estimates obtained using the same sample selection and weighting procedures repeatedly). The sample estimate should differ from its expected value by less than margin of error in 95% of all samples. It does not reflect non-sampling errors, including potential selection bias in panel participation or in response to a particular survey.