

North Carolina Center for Voter Education

Campaign Reform 2001: Examining Issues, Quashing Myths, and Understanding the Nature of North Carolina Voters

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Introduction & Methodology

The North Carolina Center for Voter Education contracted with Public Opinion Strategies, a nationally respected public opinion research firm to conduct a scientific poll of likely North Carolina voters to explore attitudes toward various campaign reform issues. Public Opinion Strategies conducted a telephone survey of six hundred registered voters in the state of North Carolina who were screened for likelihood of participation in the next General Election. The margin of error for this survey is plus or minus four percent. The survey was conducted March 27-29, 2001. The sample was carefully selected in proportion to voter registration figures in each county of the state. The results of the poll and this report are being provided to the public as a service of the NC Center for Voter Education. Sam Watts, Senior Research Fellow at the Center compiled this report.

Executive Summary

- 91% of respondents think that money from campaign contributors influence public policy decisions their elected officials make, while 72% think that politicians spend more time raising money than they do solving the problems of average North Carolinians.
- 62% want to see the Governor and legislature address campaign finance reform before the next election in 2002
- 61% favor fixing the campaign finance system before the state is beset by the campaign finance scandals that have plagued other states
- 47% of voters would chose a publicly-funded candidate over a special interest-funded candidate, while only 35% would choose the special interest candidate, if all other factors were equal.
- 72% of respondents favor limiting so-called “soft money.”
- 77% of respondents would support four-year legislative terms if combined with public funding of campaigns.

Voters have concluded that the amount of money and the time spent raising that money are making their government less representative, and would like to see some reforms before we face more significant scandal and corruption problems. They are receptive to public funding of elections, contribution limits, four-year terms for legislators, and limits on soft money. The issue of judicial election reform does not currently engage voters, but they do not rule out necessity of reform in that area.

Issue Climate

In 1775, the year before the American Declaration of Independence, Edmund Burke, a member of the British Parliament and astute observer of American culture delivered a famous speech titled *Conciliation with America* in which he succinctly identified the reasons that England should address American demands for representation in Parliament. Burke concluded that it was not necessarily the specific policies of the English government that were creating the troubled climate with the colonies, but that the Americans were largely upset because their views were not being represented in Parliament.

Burke wrote:

“In this character of the Americans a love of freedom is the predominating feature which marks and distinguishes the whole: and as ardent is always a jealous affection, your colonies become suspicious, restive, and untractable, whenever they see the least attempt to wrest from them by force or shuffle from them by chicane what they think is the only advantage worth living for. This fierce spirit of liberty is stronger in the English colonies probably than in any other people of the earth; and this from a great variety of powerful causes, which, to understand the true temper of their minds and the direction which this spirit takes, it will not be amiss to lay open somewhat more largely.”

For better or worse, the history of our nation would be quite different if King George III had listened to Burke’s warning and given the American colonies representation in Parliament. The central lesson of Burke’s speech holds true today; Americans may disagree on specific issues, but they agree that their views must be represented in their government.

Public opinion research on the topic of campaign finance reform teaches us that voters believe money in politics is standing in the way of their views being represented by their elected officials in their government.

Let’s begin on a topic on which nearly all North Carolina voters agree:

Voters believe that money from campaign contributors affect public policy decisions.

Question 16, asked:

And, how much influence would you say campaign contributors have on the decisions made by elected officials...(ROTATE TOP TO BOTTOM, BOTTOM TO TOP)

56% A great deal of influence	92% ¹ Net Influence
35% A moderate amount of influence	
5% Not much influence ...or...	
2% No influence at all	7% Net Not Influence
1% DON’T KNOW (DO NOT READ)	
* REFUSED (DO NOT READ)	

Stunningly, 92% of likely voters in North Carolina believe that campaign contributors either have a moderate or great deal of influence over decisions made by elected officials. The response to this question is consistent across all demographic sub-groups examined in the study. The near unanimity of voter opinion on this question is irrefutable evidence that voters have a somewhat cynical view of the manner in which campaigns are funded.

Question 17 asked:

Do you think candidates for public office spend more time...(ROTATE)

72% Raising money for their campaigns ...or...

24% Solving the problems of average North Carolinians

4% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)

* REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

Question 17 offers some clarification of the cynicism in the response to the previous question. 72% of likely voters believe that elected officials spend more time raising money for their campaigns than solving the problems of average North Carolinians.

Believing that elected officials spend more time raising money than solving the problems of average North Carolinians is tantamount to voters believing their interests are simply not being represented. Voters have concluded that the time spent on raising money for campaigns is standing in the way of their elected officials addressing their interests.

Not only do voters believe campaign money affects public policy, and the time elected officials spend raising that money stands in the way of their interests, they also dislike negative campaigning paid for with this money.

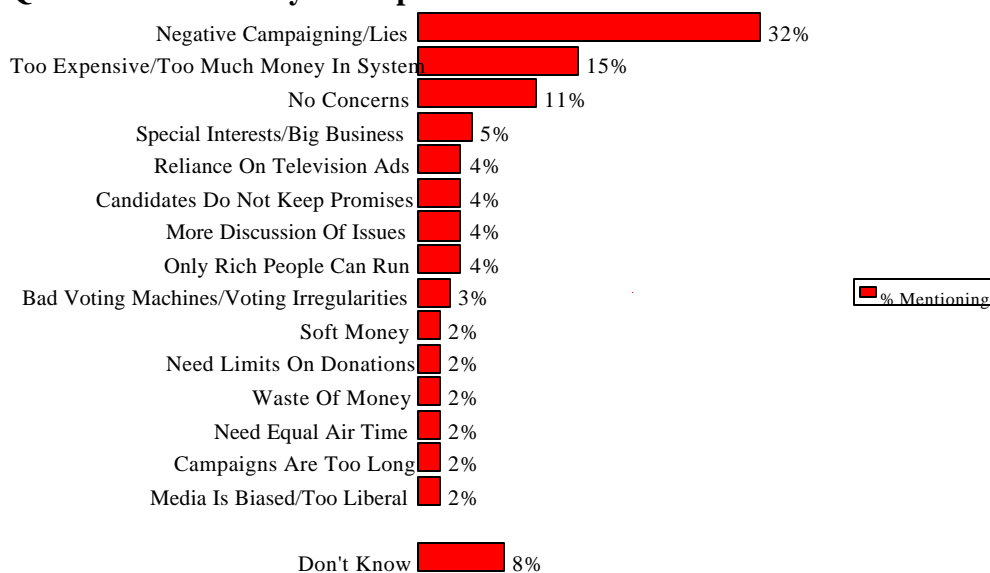
Question 7, the open-ended question, speaks to voter frustration with not only the current conduct of campaigns, but also the amount of money involved.

Question 7, asked:

Now, thinking about political campaigns in North Carolina...what one thing is most concerning to you about the way campaigns are conducted in North Carolina? (PROBE:) What else can you tell me about that? RECORD RESPONSE VERBATIM

In open-ended comments, voters are most concerned about negative campaigning, followed by the amount of money in politics.

Question 7: Summary of Responses:



In question 8, voters were asked what item from a list of concerns about the way campaigns are conducted they would consider most important.

Question 8, asked:

Now, I would like to read you some things that some people have said are a problem and need to be changed about the way political campaigns are financed in North Carolina. Please tell me which one you think is most important. (RANDOMIZE)

- 32% The high cost of campaigns preventing average citizens from running
- 31% Special interest groups giving contributions to gain influence with candidates
- 18% Individuals, corporations, and unions giving unlimited contributions to political parties
- 14% Wealthy candidates being able to spend unlimited amounts of their own money on elections
- 3% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)
- 1% REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

The 32% of voters who said high campaign cost prevents average citizens from running and the 31% who want less special interest money in politics are expressing an opinion that the amount of money in campaigns is not only affecting the way we conduct those campaigns, but it's also making the outcome of those campaigns, our government, less representative of the wishes of average citizens.

To that end, voters express a great deal of interest in the idea of decreasing the amount of money involved in campaigns by limiting spending.

Question 9 gave voters an opportunity to rate proposed changes:

Now, I am going to read you some proposed changes to reform the way political campaigns are financed in North Carolina. Please tell me which one you think is most important...(RANDOMIZE)

- 29% Limiting the amount of money candidates can spend in an election
- 9% Providing public funding of campaigns to candidates who do not accept contributions from individuals, unions, or special interest groups
- 19% Requiring immediate, full public disclosure of all campaign contributions
- 11% Limiting the amount of personal money that candidates can spend on their own campaign
- 10% Banning unlimited contributions to political parties
- 7% Banning PACs, or political action committees, from giving money
- 13% Prohibiting campaign contributions from out-of-state
- 1% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)
- * REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

Limiting the amount of money candidates can spend tops the list of proposed changes at 29%.

Campaign Finance Reform

North Carolina voters have concluded that since money influences policy and forces elected officials to spend more time raising campaign money than helping people, limiting campaign spending will then allow elected officials to spend more time solving the problems they want solved, rather than the problems that special interests want solved. **North Carolina voters appear willing to accept public funding as a means to limit spending on campaigns.**

Question 11 explores support for public funding of campaigns in the context of voluntary spending limits:

As you may know, there is a proposal here in North Carolina to replace private contributions in campaigns with public funding for Governor, State Legislature, and other state campaigns if the candidates voluntarily agree to accept spending limits. Would you say you FAVOR or OPPOSE this proposal? (IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK:) Do you STRONGLY (favor/oppose) this proposal or just SOMEWHAT (favor/oppose) it?

- 25% Strongly Favor
- 35% Somewhat Favor
- 15% Somewhat Oppose
- 22% Strongly Oppose
- 3% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)
- * REFUSED (DO NOT READ)
- 60% Net Favor
- 37% Net Oppose

A total of 60% of North Carolina likely voters favor public funding of campaigns for governor, state legislature, and other state campaigns if they are tied to voluntary spending limitsⁱⁱ.

At this point it is appropriate to quash a few myths about public opinion that critics of public funding proposals purport to be factual.

Quashing Myths about Public Opinion on Campaign Finance Reform

Myth #1: Campaign Finance Reform is Not an Important Issue to Voters

False. Critics of public funding proposals often claim that campaign finance reform does not truly resonate with voters since it rarely shows up as the lead issue in saliency rankings or as the number one issue on top-of-mind issue rankings. As the next table demonstrates, they are correct that it rarely shows up in those rankings, but critics are incorrect when they say campaign finance reform is not an important issue to voters, as evidenced by the response to question 10.

Questions 3-6 ask voters to express their opinion on the importance of various issues using a ten-point scale and yielded the following results:

Now, I am going to read you a list of issues that may be addressed by the state legislature...Using a ten point scale, with one being an extremely low priority and ten being an extremely high priority, please tell me how important the following issues are to you personally... (RANDOMIZE) The (first/next) issue is... (RANDOMIZE) (RECORD EXACT NUMBER) (USE 99 FOR DON'T KNOW/REFUSED) (PROMPT, IF NECESSARY, AFTER READING ISSUE: On a scale of one to ten, with TEN being AN EXTREMELY HIGH PRIORITY and ONE being AN EXTREMELY LOW PRIORITY, how important is that issue to you personally?)ⁱⁱⁱ

Question Series 3-6 Issue Rankings						
	1-4	5-7	8-10	10	Average	Ranking
Improving Education	2%	11%	86%	61%	9.0	1
Improving the Economy and Jobs	5%	13%	82%	50%	8.6	2
Access to Health Care	5%	18%	76%	51%	8.5	3
Cutting Taxes	13%	23%	65%	43%	7.7	4
Growth and Development	11%	36%	51%	27%	7.2	5 (Tie)
Reducing State Spending	11%	36%	50%	29%	7.2	5 (Tie)
Reforming Campaign Financing	27%	34%	38%	21%	6.1	6

Education tops the ranking by a sizeable margin with the economy and health care in a close grouping for second and third. As is typical in this type of ranking, campaign finance reform does not fare well in the comparison to education, healthcare, and the economy.

However, voters were also asked whether the legislature should address the issue of campaign finance reform before the next election, even when there are more pressing problems to deal with.

Question 10, asked:

- Which comes closer to your point of view on campaign finance reform ...(ROTATE STATEMENTS)
- 62% The influence of large campaign contributions is so corrupting to campaigns and the democratic process that the Governor and the legislature need to address the issue before the next election....or...
- 36% The legislature and the Governor should not take the time to address campaign finance reform when there are more pressing problems to deal with. Which position comes closer to your point of view?
- 1% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)
- * REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

A clear majority, 62%, say that the issue should be dealt with before the next election, even in the face of unspecified “more pressing problems.”

Some opponents of campaign finance reform even go so far as to say that in the face of more pressing problems the legislature would be putting itself at a political risk of alienating voters by dealing with the issue. That assertion is clearly wrong. Voters believe that campaign finance reform should be addressed and clearly express no negative sentiment toward reform efforts.

Myth #2: If it’s not broken don’t fix it.

False. Opponents of campaign finance reform in North Carolina often say that there is no imperative to “fix” the campaign funding system. They say we have not reached the level of scandal and corruption that is common in some states; therefore the system is not “broken.”

The study explored whether voters want to “fix” the system to avoid corruption scandals or whether they think that the system is not “broken” and therefore shouldn’t be changed.

Question 13, asked:

Still thinking about the proposal to provide for public funding of political campaigns...(DO NOT ROTATE)

61% Some people say that we need to adopt a public funding proposal to avoid corruption scandals that have occurred in other states....while...

30% Other people say that we don’t have a corruption problem here in North Carolina, and since we don’t have a problem, there is no point in fixing something that isn’t broken. Which position comes closer to your point of view?

7% DON’T KNOW (DO NOT READ)

1% REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

Clearly likely voters in North Carolina would prefer to have campaign finance reform enacted, the system “fixed,” before we have a number of corruption scandals rather than as a result of those scandals.

Burke’s *Conciliation with America* also talks about this American desire to “fix” problems before the system is “broken:”

“In other countries the people, more simple and of less mercurial cast, judge of an ill principle in government by an actual grievance; here they anticipate the evil and judge of the pressure of the grievance by the badness of the principle. They augur misgovernment at a distance and snuff the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze.”

Myth #3: Voters would oppose a candidate for using public funds.

False. Critics often say that voters would vote against a candidate for accepting public funds. In fact, the study shows the opposite. All else being equal, voters indicate a preference for a publicly funded candidate over one who accepts money from special interest groups.

Question 14, asked:

If the only difference between two candidates for public office was that one was using taxpayer money to fund his or her campaign and the other was using special interest money, which would you vote for? (IF VOTE FOR NEITHER, PROBE:) If you just had to make a choice, which would you vote for?

47% Candidate using taxpayers’ money

35% Candidate using special interest money

9% NEITHER (DO NOT READ)

8% DON’T KNOW (DO NOT READ)

1% REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

If the legislature enacted a system of voluntary public funding it may actually become a negative to continue to accept special interest money in an election when public funding is available.

Myth #4: Public support for campaign finance reform evaporates when voters are forced to choose between it and their top-of-mind priorities.

False. Question 12 forced voters to make choice between using money for public funding of campaigns and using money for education and health care and the results came back as a virtual tie.

Question 12, asked:

Now, I would like to read you two statements on this public funding proposal and please tell me which one comes closer to your point of view...(ROTATE STATEMENTS)

48% (Some/other) people say that public funding ensures that all qualified candidates will have access to campaign funding, even if they are not wealthy. It also means that elected leaders will be able to spend more time solving problems for average North Carolinians instead of doing favors for special interests....while...

49% (Other/some) people say that limiting campaign spending actually limits free speech in the election process. They also say that using taxpayer funding for campaigns is wrong and prevents money from being used for other priorities like education and health care. Which position comes closer to your point of view?

2% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)

* REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

Even when forced to choose between public funding of campaigns and funding for the top-of-mind priorities, education and health care, half of decided respondents still preferred public funding. Notably, some demographic sub-groups express a strong level of support for public funding even on this trade-off question. Specifically, on question 12, likely voters in the Asheville media market chose money for public funding for campaigns over money for education and healthcare by a margin of 62% to 38%, Republican men over age 65 chose public funding by a margin of 57% to 43%, independent (Unaffiliated) men chose public funding 56% to 42%, and men with college degrees also chose public funding by a margin of 57% to 43%.

Contribution Limits are Too High

62% of likely North Carolina voters would support lowering the state campaign contribution limits from \$4,000 per election to \$1,000 per election.

Question 15, asked:

Right now, individuals are allowed to give a candidate for state public office in North Carolina four thousand dollars in a primary election and four thousand dollars in a general election for a total of eight thousand dollars each election year. Would you favor or oppose reducing the amount an individual can give to one thousand dollars for a primary election and one thousand dollars for a general election, for a total of two thousand dollars each election year? (IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK:) Do you STRONGLY (favor/oppose) this proposal or just SOMEWHAT (favor/oppose) it?

33% Strongly Favor

62% Net Favor

29% Somewhat Favor

21% Somewhat Oppose

34% Net Oppose

13% Strongly Oppose

3% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)

1% REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

This support for lowering the state's maximum contribution limit is not surprising given the evidence from earlier questions that suggested voters have concluded that there is too much money in campaigns. Considering this mood, voters are probably more likely to support any proposal they view as solving part of the problem.

Interestingly, examining the demographic sub-groups on this question, voters over age 65 support lowering contribution limits by an especially large margin of 75% over 20%. Conversely, voters between the ages of 18 and 34 only support lowering limits by a margin of 51% over 43%.

Four Year Terms Could Get a Boost from Public Funding of Campaigns

The proposal to create four-year terms for legislators begins at a respectable level, 58% support, while 41% oppose, but the issue would gain popularity among voters if packaged with public funding of campaigns.

The initial question in this series tested the level of support for four-year legislative terms as a method to hold down campaign costs.

Question 25, asked:

There is a proposal to extend the terms of state legislators from two to four years...(ROTATE STATEMENTS) (Some/other) people say that lengthening terms for state legislators from two to four years will hold down campaign costs because they have to run only half as many campaigns. ...while... (Other/some) people say that lengthening terms for state legislators from two to four years will make them less accountable to voters because they will only have to run for election every four years. Having heard these arguments, do you favor or oppose extending the terms of state legislators from two to four years? (IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK:) Do you STRONGLY (favor/oppose) this proposal or just SOMEWHAT (favor/oppose) it?

36% Strongly Favor	58% Net Favor
22% Somewhat Favor	
14% Somewhat Oppose	41% Net Oppose
27% Strongly Oppose	
1% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)	* REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

The follow-up question was asked of only the 246 respondents who indicated in question 25 they oppose four-year terms. They were asked if they would change their mind about four-year terms if that proposal were combined with a proposal for public funding for legislative elections. Almost half, 47% changed their mind, yielding a net gain of +19% for four-year terms, bringing support for four year terms to a total of 77% of respondents.

Question 26, asked:

(OPPONENTS FROM QUESTION 25 ONLY) Would you favor or oppose four-year terms if it meant candidates would no longer receive money from special interest groups and it meant each candidate would receive a set amount of money from a publicly financed fund where spending by candidates would be limited to the money they receive from that fund? (IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK:) Do you STRONGLY (favor/oppose) this proposal or just SOMEWHAT (favor/oppose) it? (n=246)

21% Strongly Favor	47% Net Favor	+19% Net Gain for Four-year terms
26% Somewhat Favor		
19% Somewhat Oppose	50% Net Oppose	
31% Strongly Oppose		
3% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)		
1% REFUSED (DO NOT READ)		

Net Support for Four-Year Terms (Questions 25 & 26 Combined)

58% Support from Question 25
+19% Support from "Converted Opponents" in Question 26
=77% Net Support for Four-Year Terms

A proposal for four-year legislative terms could substantially benefit from being combined with a proposal for public funding of campaigns

Prohibit Out of State Donations and Limit Soft Money

When respondents were asked to express an opinion on whether candidates should be allowed to accept out of state money they said no, overwhelmingly. 67% of North Carolina voters think that candidates should not be allowed to take out of state money.

Question 20, asked:

Do you think candidates for state office should be allowed to accept money from people who live out of state?
31% Yes
67% No
2% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)
1% REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

Among demographic sub-groups, the strongest level of opposition to out of state money comes from men over age 65 who think it should not be allowed by a margin of 83% over 15%. Men disproportionately oppose out of state money by a margin of 73% over 25%.

We employed two questions in the study to examine so-called “soft money.” Soft money refers to loosely regulated, unlimited campaign contributions made to political parties, usually at the national level. Unlike contributions made directly to candidates, soft money given to parties is not subject to the normal financial contribution limits imposed by law. The first question we used on the topic asked about imposing federal limits, the second question asked about stopping its use entirely on the state level.

Question 18, asked:

As you may know, soft money is money raised in unlimited amounts by the political parties from individuals, businesses, and labor unions. Would you favor or oppose new federal laws limiting the amount of soft money that any individual or group can contribute to the national political parties? (IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK:) Do you STRONGLY (favor/oppose) this proposal or just SOMEWHAT (favor/oppose) it?
49% Strongly Favor
23% Somewhat Favor
12% Somewhat Oppose
13% Strongly Oppose
2% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ) * REFUSED (DO NOT READ)
72% Net¹ Favor
26% Net Oppose

72% of respondents favor federal legislation limiting soft money, while 26% oppose it. Results for this question are remarkably consistent across party affiliations, with 72% of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents supporting the notion of limiting soft money.

Question 19, asked:

Under current state law, national political parties can send unlimited amounts of soft money to North Carolina state political parties or candidates. Would you favor or oppose stopping national political parties from sending soft money to the North Carolina state political parties and candidates? (IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK:) Do you STRONGLY (favor/oppose) this proposal or just SOMEWHAT (favor/oppose) it?
30% Strongly Favor
23% Somewhat Favor
23% Somewhat Oppose
20% Strongly Oppose
3% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ) * REFUSED (DO NOT READ)
54% Net Favor
43% Net Oppose

54% of respondents favor a state law stopping national political parties from sending soft money to North Carolina. On the surface it would seem there is a contradiction between the responses to questions 18 and 19, but a closer examination reveals an interesting difference in the way the questions were asked. Language can make a big difference in question results. The word “stopping” is much more absolute than the notion of “limiting” used in question 18.

Judicial Election Reform

Overall, we did not find a tremendous amount of interest among respondents for reforming judicial elections. The poll employed questions on changing to non-partisan judicial elections, changing from elected to appointed judges, and whether or not judges should be allowed to receive campaign contributions. Additionally, we asked about the relative priority of judicial reform.

Question 21, asked:

Currently, local and state judges are elected positions and candidates are identified on the ballot by name and their political party affiliation– Republican, Democrat, or another party. Would you favor or oppose a proposal to make elections for judges non-partisan, that is, candidates would NOT be identified on the ballot by their political party affiliation? (IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK:) Do you STRONGLY (favor/oppose) this proposal or just SOMEWHAT (favor/oppose) it?

37% Strongly Favor	53% Net Favor
16% Somewhat Favor	
11% Somewhat Oppose	44% Net Oppose
33% Strongly Oppose	
2% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)	
1% REFUSED (DO NOT READ)	

53% of respondents favor the change from partisan to nonpartisan judicial elections, while 44% of respondents oppose. Interestingly, this is a polarizing issue when one examines party self-identification as a demographic. Not wanting to give the other party an upper hand, strong partisans on either side are most opposed to non-partisan judicial elections. Self-identified strong Republicans are opposed to non-partisan judicial elections by margin of 57% oppose over 43% support and strong Democrats show a margin of 49% oppose over 47% support. However, centrists exhibit a different pattern. Independents support non-partisan judicial elections by a margin of 55% support over 39% oppose, self-identified soft Republicans show 57% support over 43% oppose, and soft Democrats show 66% support over 31% oppose.

Given that both parties seek ways to appeal to centrist voters, this issue has potential benefits for one or both parties as a means to reach beyond their respective bases.

Question 22, asked:

Which would you prefer, having the Governor appoint judges or continuing to have judges run for election?

12% Governor Appoint Judges
86% Judges Run For Election
1% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ)
* REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

Overwhelmingly, voters do not want to relinquish their right to vote for judges. 86% of respondents prefer judicial elections to gubernatorial appointment. Voters tend to zealously guard their right to the ballot.

Burke's conciliation speech also speaks to this love of liberty as expressed by desire to have popularly elected government:

"Their governments are popular in a high degree: some are merely popular; in all the popular representative is the most weighty; and this share of the people in their ordinary government never fails to inspire them with lofty sentiments and with a strong aversion from whatever tends to deprive them of their chief importance."

The next question examined whether or not judges should be allowed to receive campaign contributions.

Question 23, asked:

In North Carolina, judges are allowed to receive campaign contributions....(ROTATE STATEMENTS)

43% (Some/other) people say this is wrong because some individuals who contribute to a judge's campaign may have to appear before them in court, which may compromise a judge's objectivity and give the impression justice is up for sale. ...while...

55% (Other/some) people say that judges may excuse themselves from cases where there may be a conflict of interest such as in the case of a campaign contributor, so there really is not a problem with the current system. Which position comes closer to your point of view?

1% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ) * REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

55% of respondents said there is not a problem with the current system that allows judges to receive campaign contributions from private sources. In essence, voters believe the integrity of judges holds them above potential conflicts from campaign contributions. The results for this question are consistent across party lines with 55% of Republicans, 58% of Independents, and 54% of Democrats agreeing that no changes are needed.

The final question in the judicial series examined the priority of judicial reform.

Question 24, asked:

Now, having heard some of the arguments for judicial reform, compared to other issues facing the Governor and the state legislature, would you say that judicial reform should be....(ROTATE TOP/BOTTOM, BOTTOM/TOP)

28% A High Priority Issue

55% A Medium Priority Issue

15% A Low Priority Issue

1% DON'T KNOW (DO NOT READ) * REFUSED (DO NOT READ)

The majority of respondents called judicial reform a medium priority issue. Voters are not currently engaged in the debate about judicial election reform, but in this final question we perhaps see some maneuvering room for proponents of reform. By calling this a medium priority issue, voters may be signaling that while they as of yet don't see the problem, they are willing to take the issue seriously and are not closing the door to hearing more arguments.

Conclusions

Voters have concluded that the amount of money and the time spent raising that money are making their government less representative, and would like to see some reforms before we face more significant scandal and corruption problems. They are receptive to public funding of elections, contribution limits, four-year terms for legislators, and limits on soft money. The issue of judicial election reform does not currently engage voters, but they do not rule out necessity of reform in that area.

Just as Edmund Burke explained in 1775, Americans, in this case specifically, North Carolinians, believe representative government is a cornerstone of liberty. When 92% voters believe that campaign contributions affect public policy and 72% believe elected officials spend more time raising campaign contributions to than solving their problems, they are rapidly coming to the conclusion that their government is not representing their views.

One final quote from Burke's *Conciliation with America*:

"The temper and character which prevail in our colonies are, I am afraid, unalterable by any human art. We cannot, I fear, falsify the pedigree of this fierce people and persuade them that they are not sprung from a nation in whose veins the blood of freedom circulates"

The NC Center For Voter Education

At the opening of the North Carolina Center for Voter Education, North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt declared “The arms race for money that drives our campaigns threatens the concept of one person, one vote.”

When North Carolina native, Elizabeth Dole, pulled out of the 2000 Republican Presidential primaries she said “Yet if there is a people’s campaign, there is also a pundit’s campaign. The latter pays little heed to grassroots Americans. It reserves its interest – not for the countless first-time voters you may be bringing into the process – but for the number of contributors you report to the FEC (Federal Elections Commission). No wonder so many Americans – who see the huge crowds and share the enthusiasm – feel alienated from a campaign process that treats them as spectators at a game rather than participants in the action. To put it bluntly, if I want to attend a horse race, I’ll go to the track.

Former US Senator from North Carolina and Chairman of the NC Center for Voter Education, Robert B. Morgan said in the News & Observer, “Quite frankly, voters are fed up. They know there is too much money influencing the system and they believe special interests have too much say in how elections turn out.” Exploding campaign costs, slash and burn negative advertising, low voter participation, high levels of cynicism, and a system relying on a small number of wealthy contributors: These problems threaten the future of our state’s election process.

An Organization Dedicated to Finding Solutions

The NC Center for Voter Education believes we can improve our election process, reduce the cost of running for office, restore people’s faith in our electoral system, and increase the number of people participating in the election system.

The Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to improving the quality and responsiveness of North Carolina’s election system. By examining our current system of campaign finance and election laws, and by promoting research and public discussion about the electoral process, the center hopes to raise citizen awareness and make the election process more inclusive, increasing participation in elections.

A cross section of concerned educational, political, and community leaders from across North Carolina established the Center. Its work has been made possible primarily through a grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. Former U.S. Senator Robert Morgan chairs the Center’s Board of Directors. The Executive Director is Chris Heagarty and its headquarters are in Raleigh.

You may contact Center Executive Director Chris Heagarty at:

NC Center for Voter Education
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ⁱ Due to rounding, some figures may be higher or lower than one-half of one percent.

ⁱⁱ Previous public polls from the center did not use the term “voluntary” as part of question wording.

ⁱⁱⁱ This question series used a split sample technique with both sub-samples asking reforming campaign financing and sample a (n=298) asking about education, taxes, and jobs, and sample b (n=302) asking about growth, spending and healthcare.