MONEY AND POLITICS: PACS AND PUBLIC FINANCING OF CAMPAIGNS

New Jerseyans are concerned about the influence of money in politics. Most residents think that campaign contributions make their representatives feel obligated to those who give them money, according to a recent Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll. In addition, more feel that Political Action Committees, known as PACs, exert a bad rather than good influence on the political process.

The survey was conducted between April 29 and May 8 with a random sample of 500 state residents. Among its main findings are:

-- While there is strong support for public financing as a way of checking the power of special interests, the vast majority of the public does not think that political campaigns should be entirely public funded.

-- There is strong support for limitations on how much campaigns may raise and spend, and on how much any one group may give to a candidate.

-- Most New Jerseyans say they haven't heard anything about Political Action Committees, but large majorities feel that PACs gain too much control over candidates through contributions, and that PACs benefit the already powerful at the expense of average citizens.

-- The public has clearly different attitudes toward campaign contributions from various interest groups. Consumer and environmental groups, teacher organizations, and women's political groups are seen as a good influence on politics and government by about two-thirds of the public. About one-half, however, feel that large companies, real estate interests, religious organizations, bankers and insurance groups have a bad influence.

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Direct citizen participation in politics is not widespread. Two-thirds said they contributed money to a charity or voluntary organization in 1984. Less than two-in-ten, however, said that in the last year they have contributed money to a candidate, helped in someone's campaign, gone to a political rally or government meeting, or contacted a public official about some problem.

Just over one-half of New Jerseyans said their state legislators are "very" or "somewhat obligated" to the people who give them contributions, while one-third said they are "not too obligated," and the remainder expressed no opinion. About one-third also said that this obligation causes legislators to favor contributors when voting on legislation, compared to a bare majority of 51 percent which did not think contributors received favored treatment.

The survey found evidence of public concern with the costs of campaigns and the influence of contributions from special interest groups. Eighty percent said there should be maximum limits on how much campaigns may raise and spend in an election. However, 69 percent also agreed that it is all right for candidates to raise as much money as they can provided they publicly disclose who contributed how much. In addition, just over one-half said there should be some limits on how much any one group can give a candidate.

When asked about public financing of campaigns, only two-in-ten agreed they should be funded entirely by the public with general tax revenue. About six-in-ten, however, agreed that some public financing of campaigns would reduce the influence of special interest groups, and would give challengers a better chance of beating incumbents.

Less than one-third of New Jerseyans said they have heard anything about Political Action Committees or PACs. Overall, 42 percent thought PACs were bad for the political process, 36 percent said PACs were good, while 6 percent gave a mixed response. The remaining 16 percent offered no opinion. New Jersey residents also gave a number of positive and negative assessments of PACs. On the positive side:
-- 53 percent agreed that PACs are a good way to help finance campaigns.

-- 52 percent agreed that through contributions PACs give average citizens a way to make their voices heard.

On the negative side:

-- 73 percent agreed that PACs can gain too much control over candidates through their contributions.

-- 66 percent said that PACs benefit the already powerful at the expense of the average citizen.

-- 50 percent agreed that PACs promote corruption in government.

-- Only 37 percent agreed that PACs make sure all groups in society are represented and their interests looked out for.

Bob Carter, assistant director of the Poll, commented, "The fact that the public has distinctly positive and negative attitudes toward PACs seems somewhat inconsistent, and is probably due to the very low levels of knowledge about them. This makes it easier for an individual to hold seemingly contradictory views. On the other hand, the figures may simply reflect the fact that PACs have both positive and negative influences on the political process."

New Jerseyans also have differing views about campaign contributions from various interest groups. About two-thirds said contributions from consumer and environmental groups, teacher organizations, and women's political groups have a good influence on politics and government. Approximately one-half said contributions from state employee organizations, doctors and dentists, business associations, and labor unions have a good influence. Only four-in-ten said lawyers, large companies, real estate interests, religious organizations, bankers and insurance groups have a good influence, with more saying contributions from these groups were "bad" rather than "good."

Direct participation or involvement in politics among New Jersey residents is not widespread. Two-thirds said they contributed money to a charity or voluntary
organization in 1984, while one-third donated their time to such organizations. Less than two-in-ten said that in the last year they had worked with others in their community to solve a local problem, contacted a public official about some problem, gone to a political rally or government meeting, or contributed money to a candidate. One-in-ten said they had helped in someone's campaign or given money to an interest group or political cause in 1984. Only 14 percent said they have ever written a letter to the editor of a newspaper, with only 5 percent saying they had done so in 1984.
The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll was conducted between April 29 and May 8. A total of 1,000 respondents, representing a cross-section of the New Jersey public, were interviewed by telephone. The results reported here are based on a sub-sample of 500 persons, and have a sampling error of ±4.5 percent. Sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The questions and figures referred to in this release are as follows:

"As you know, candidates running for Governor, the State Legislature, and other offices have to raise money in order to pay for campaign costs.

How obligated do you think that the people representing your district in the State Legislature are to the people who give them campaign contributions? Are they very obligated, somewhat obligated or not too obligated?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very obligated</th>
<th>Somewhat obligated</th>
<th>Not too obligated</th>
<th>Depends</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(500)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Do you think this causes them (state legislators) to favor campaign contributors so much that their votes on legislation are unfair to the average person in their district, or not?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>101%</td>
<td>(500)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Have you heard or read anything about a type of organization called a 'Political Action Committee'--often referred to as a PAC?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(499)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Have you given money to a PAC or some kind of interest group in the last 12 months?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>101%</td>
<td>(499)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Well (as you know), a political action committee is an organization formed by corporations, labor unions, trade associations or other groups to raise money that is then donated to political parties or candidates. In general, do you feel that PACs are a good thing or a bad thing for the political process?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Both/Depends</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"I'm going to read you some statements about PACs. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Depends/no opinion</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PACs can gain too much control over candidates because of the money they contribute during campaigns.</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because they have more money to give, PACs benefit the already-powerful at the expense of the average citizen.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACs are a good way to help finance campaigns.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>101%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACs make sure all groups in society are represented, and that their interests are looked out for.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Action Committees promote corruption in government.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through contributions, PACs give average citizens a way to make their voices heard.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Let me ask you about different interest groups that contribute money to political campaigns. For each one, tell me if you feel that their contributing money to a campaign has a good influence or a bad influence on politics and government. What about... Do you think their contributions to a campaign have a good influence or bad influence on politics and government?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest Group</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Both/Depends</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumer groups</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Groups</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations representing teachers</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's political organizations</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State employee organizations</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors and dentists</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and trade associations</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor unions</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large companies</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate interests and builders</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>101%</td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious organizations</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankers and insurance groups</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"I'm going to read you some statements about the financing of political campaigns. Please just tell me if you agree or disagree with each."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political campaigns should be funded entirely by the public using general tax money.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be a maximum limit on the amount of money that campaigns can raise and spend in an election.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>(500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is all right for candidates to raise as much money as they can as long as they publicly disclose who contributed how much during the campaign.</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A restriction on what candidates are allowed to spend would limit their ability to communicate with voters.</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(499)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There shouldn't be any limit put on how much any one group can give a candidate.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public financing of campaigns would give challengers a better chance of beating incumbents.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public financing of campaigns would reduce the influence of special interest groups.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(500)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"On a different subject, there are a number of ways a person can get involved in politics.

I'm going to read you a list of some. Please tell me if you have ever:"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Percent &quot;Yes, done in 1984&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributed money to a charity or voluntary organization</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donated your time to some voluntary organization</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked with others in your community to solve a local problem</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted or written a public official about some problem</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gone to a political rally or government meeting</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed money to a political candidate</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped in someone's campaign for public office</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given money to a PAC, interest group or political cause</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written a letter to the editor of a newspaper</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Does your household recycle newspapers, bottles or cans? Is this something you do all the time, pretty often, sometimes or just once in a while?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Pretty often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Once in a while</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>