

Impressions Of The Citizens United Decision And A Proposed Constitutional Amendment To Overturn It

*Findings from a national survey of registered voters
conducted by Hart Research Associates*

Key findings from this survey

American democracy is an amazing and responsive form of government. For all the Sturm and Drang that surrounds our political system, the American public instinctively seems to know when things have gone too far or the system is out of balance. It does not take a tragedy like Tucson to know when the dialogue needs to be recalibrated.

This survey measures American attitudes toward the January 2010 Supreme Court ruling in the Citizens United case that said corporations have the same rights as individuals and that limiting corporate spending on elections would be a violation of corporations' freedom of speech. It shows that the American public instinctively feels this ruling is a step too far and destabilizing for our democratic system. **Nearly four in five (79%) Americans support passage of an amendment to overturn the decision and make clear that corporations do *not* have the same rights as people, thus giving Congress the authority to limit the amount of money corporations can spend on elections.**

Dissatisfaction With The Political System And The Advantage That Corporations Have Over Average Citizens

The public has a low level of confidence in and satisfaction with all central elements of our political system. A mere 14% of voters have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in the political system, and 52% have little confidence. Just 20% of voters are satisfied with the current U.S. political system, while 57% are dissatisfied. Voters are dissatisfied with several elements related to the nation's political system, but they are most dissatisfied with the ability of special interests and corporations to affect the outcome of elections, as well as with political advertising and the amount of money spent on campaigns.

Just as there is little confidence in our political system, the public also has little confidence in corporations today: 14% have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in corporations, whereas 46% have little confidence in them. Underscoring this lack of trust is that better than four in five (82%) Americans feel corporations care mostly about profits, cut corners on services, overcharge on prices, and do not treat their customers well.

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The public feels that the current system is out of balance, and there is a desire to figure out how to reestablish a balance between business interests and the interests of individual citizens. Currently 77% of voters feel that corporations have the advantage over average citizens in our political system.

This sense of imbalance is perceived not only in the way corporations impact campaigns and elections, but also in corporations' sway over legislation, regulations, and enforcement. Just 5% of voters think that the current rules and regulations controlling the influence of large corporations on legislation and enforcement are working well, while 57% think they are working extremely or very bad. Additionally, 61% worry a great deal or quite a bit that corporations have too much influence and control over government rules and regulations.

Unfavorable Impressions Of The Citizens United Decision

Awareness of the Citizens United decision is low (just 22% of voters have heard about it), but public reaction is overwhelmingly negative. Among those who have heard of it, 64% disapprove, including 55% who strongly disapprove of it. When those who are not familiar with it read a brief description of it, they have an unfavorable reaction to it by more than five to one (13% favorable, 67% unfavorable).

More than four in five (82%) voters think Congress should take action to limit the amount corporations can spend on elections, and nearly as many (79%) believe that the Citizens United ruling is quite significant.

Support For A Constitutional Amendment To Make Clear That Corporations Do Not Have The Same Rights As People

Fully 79% of voters support passage of a Constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United case and make clear that corporations do not have the same rights as people, including 42% who would definitely support it. Just 21% are opposed. Large majorities of Democrats (87%), independents (82%), and Republicans (68%) support passage of the amendment.

Each of the arguments in favor of passing a Constitutional amendment to overturn the Citizens United decision is more convincing than *any* of the arguments against it, and the least effective argument against passage is that it will take too long and is not a good use of Congress's time.

In many different ways, the American public makes clear its disapproval of the ruling in the Citizens United case and signals its broad support for a Constitutional amendment to overturn this decision and make clear that corporations do not have the same rights as people. There is a clear desire to readjust the level of influence that corporations have in the nation's political, legislative, and regulatory systems.

From December 27, 2010, to January 3, 2011, Hart Research Associates conducted a survey among 500 registered voters on behalf of Free Speech For People with support from the Nathan Cummings Foundation. The interviews were conducted online among a nationally representative sample of voters.