



Justice at Stake
c a m p a i g n

MARCH 2004 SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

AMERICANS SPEAK OUT ON JUDICIAL ELECTIONS

Problems

Courtroom Decisions Influenced by Campaign Money?

A strong majority of Americans – nearly 71 percent – believe that campaign contributions from interest groups have at least some influence on judges’ decisions in the courtroom. Over 80 percent of African Americans expressed this view, including a majority (51 percent) who said contributions carried a “great deal” of influence.

Will Special Interest Groups Take Judges Hostage?

More than four in five respondents (82 percent) are very or somewhat concerned that the decision in *Republican Party of Minnesota v. White* (permitting candidates for judicial office to announce views on disputed issues) will result in special interest groups pressuring judicial candidates to stake out positions on controversial issues. More than 70 percent in every demographic subgroup are somewhat or very concerned. Those most concerned include Americans over 50 years of age, residents of Southern states, and those who are strongly ideological (progressive and very conservative).

Solutions

Voters Want More Information

Previous public opinion research has documented that voters are starved for information about judicial candidates. More than 67 percent of those surveyed said that receiving a nonpartisan voter guide containing background information on judicial candidates would make them more likely to vote in judicial elections. Only 27 percent said voter guides would make no difference to them. While support for guides was strong across the political spectrum, Republican support was strongest, with 75 percent saying receiving a nonpartisan guide would make them more likely to vote in judicial elections.

BCRA-Style State Disclosure Laws are Strongly Supported

The stricter disclosure laws for electioneering ads contained within the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) of 2002 provide a model that Americans would overwhelmingly like to see emulated for their state elections, including judicial elections. By a margin of nearly six-to-one (82 percent favor, 14 percent oppose), Americans support the idea that sponsors of TV ads be required to disclose their list of donors so that the public can learn who paid for them.

From a nationwide survey of 1,204 adult Americans conducted March 17-19, 2004, by Zogby International for the Justice at Stake Campaign. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.9 percentage points (higher in sub-groups).