

Center for American Progress Action Fund



NEW POLL: Bipartisan Support for Banning Corporate Spending in Elections by Foreign-Influenced U.S. Companies

A recent survey conducted by Civis Analytics on behalf of the Center for American Progress Action Fund found strong bipartisan support for banning corporate spending in elections if those U.S.-based companies have significant foreign ownership. Interestingly, 73% of Americans support limits on spending for companies that have any foreign ownership. This is likely because voters overwhelmingly believe that C.E.O.s of companies listen to their shareholders, including foreign ones.

Civis Analytics interviewed 2,633 voters nationally via representative web panels from November 2 - 8, 2019 to gauge their opinions about the influence of corporate money, especially from foreign sources, in American elections.

- **Voters believe that U.S. companies are allowed to spend money in U.S. elections while foreign ones are not.** Voters say by a 49-16 margin that U.S. companies are allowed to spend money and by a 39-17 margin that foreign ones are not; this is not significantly polarized by ideology.
- **Voters overwhelmingly believe that C.E.O.s listen to all their shareholders rather than customers or employees.** Importantly, 54% believe that C.E.O.s listen to all shareholders, including foreign ones, while an additional 19% believe that they only listen to American ones. Only 14% of voters believe that customers are the main influence on C.E.O.s, with 4% opting for workers.
- **Nearly all voters agree that corporate influence in elections is too high.** 67% of voters agree with the statement that corporations spend too much money on elections, only 11% disagree.
- **Opinions are stable regardless of how foreign ownership is framed.** Asked about spending limits on U.S. companies with foreign ownership, voters support it 73-11 for corporations with “significant” foreign ownership and by the same 73-11 margin for corporations with “any” foreign ownership. This demonstrates that there is strong support for drawing a clear bright line on this issue.
- **CAP’s policy proposal for banning corporate spending by foreign-influenced U.S. corporations has strong bipartisan support regardless of framing.** Voters overall support it by a margin of 58-24; with Trump voters in favor 52-30, despite the partisan framing; and Clinton voters in favor by a margin of 68-20. There was no statistically significant difference between the message frames tested, with the “Corporate Power” frame performing worst (-1.9%) and the “Level Playing Field” frame performing best (+1.5%), but neither of these effects are significant.

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1a. American Electioneering (Split)

(n=843)

To the best of your knowledge, are U.S. companies allowed to spend money in our elections to support the election of specific candidates?

- Yes - 49%
- No - 16%
- Not Sure - 35%

1b. Foreign Electioneering (Split)

(n=902)

To the best of your knowledge, are foreign-owned companies allowed to spend in our elections to support the election of specific candidates?

- Yes - 17%
- No - 39%
- Not Sure - 44%

1c. American Foreign-Owned Electioneering (Split)

(n=888)

To the best of your knowledge, are U.S. companies that have significant foreign ownership and investors allowed to spend money in our elections to support the election of specific candidates?

- Yes - 38%
- No - 19%
- Not Sure - 44%

2. Company Decisions

Who do you think the CEO of a U.S. company listens to the most when making decisions?

- Customers - 14%
- Only U.S. investors and shareholders - 19%
- All shareholders and investors, including foreign ones - 54%
- Their workers and employees - 4%
- Not Sure - 9%

3. Corporate Spending in Elections

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

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Corporations are spending too much money in our elections

- Strongly Agree - 38%
- Somewhat Agree - 29%
- Somewhat Disagree - 8%
- Strongly Disagree - 3%
- Not Sure - 22%

4a. New Policy

SPLIT A (n=1297): There should be new limits on U.S. corporations spending money in our elections, if the corporations have significant foreign ownership.

- Strongly Agree - 44%
- Somewhat Agree - 29%
- Somewhat Disagree - 8%
- Strongly Disagree - 3%
- Not Sure - 15%

4b. New Policy

SPLIT B (n=1331): There should be new limits on U.S. corporations spending money in our elections if the corporations have any foreign ownership.

- Strongly Agree - 42%
- Somewhat Agree - 31%
- Somewhat Disagree - 9%
- Strongly Disagree - 2%
- Not Sure - 16%

5a. Limits on Election Spending

SPLIT A: We should allow U.S. corporations to spend money in our elections but only if they are almost completely owned by American shareholders?

- Strongly Agree - 21%
- Somewhat Agree - 28%
- Somewhat Disagree - 18%
- Strongly Disagree - 13%
- Not Sure - 20%

5b. Limits on Election Spending

SPLIT B: CEOs of U.S. companies, who are accountable to foreign investors, should still be allowed to spend money in American elections.

- Strongly Agree - 14%

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- Somewhat Agree - 22%
- Somewhat Disagree - 21%
- Strongly Disagree - 20%
- Not Sure - 23%

6a. Foreign Investors and Election Spending

SPLIT A: Foreign governments or foreign corporations should be able to invest in U.S. companies, and then those same U.S. companies spend as much money as they want to influence our elections.

- Strongly Agree - 11%
- Somewhat Agree - 15%
- Somewhat Disagree - 18%
- Strongly Disagree - 37%
- Not Sure - 19%

6b. Foreign Investors and Election Spending

SPLIT B: It is ok for political candidates to ask for financial support in their election from corporations with significant foreign ownership.

- Strongly Agree - 10%
- Somewhat Agree - 17%
- Somewhat Disagree - 23%
- Strongly Disagree - 29%
- Not Sure - 20%

7. Argumentation

Some Democrats in Congress are proposing banning corporate spending in US elections if those corporations have a significant amount of foreign ownership.

Democrats say...

[SPLIT 1: VALUES] that only Americans should determine the outcome of American elections. That means foreign governments and companies that are significantly owned by foreign investors should be banned from spending money in our elections.

[SPLIT 2: LOOPHOLE] that allowing companies that are significantly owned by foreign investors to spend in our elections is a loophole that wealthy foreigners and foreign governments are exploiting to influence our elections.

[SPLIT 3: CORPORATE POWER] that corporations already have too much power and influence in our

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democracy. At the very least, we should be able to agree that companies that are significantly owned by foreign investors should be banned from influencing our elections.

[SPLIT 4: LEVEL PLAYING FIELD] the rules right now favor large multinational corporations who can spend unlimited amounts to influence our elections. We should level the playing field so that small businesses are not disadvantaged. This ban would mostly affect large companies that have significant foreign ownership.

Republicans say...

[SPLIT A: MOST ALREADY] that most companies in the world including American companies are almost all partly foreign-owned. Some of the most successful American companies would be limited from spending in our elections. If a majority of a company is owned by American investors, they should be allowed to spend in our elections, even if they have some foreign-ownership.

[SPLIT B: RIGHT TO SPEECH] that the U.S. Supreme Court has been clear that corporations have a right to spend in our elections. Limiting their spending is a violation of their freedom of speech and is just an anti-corporate effort by Democrats who don't like capitalism.

Do you support or oppose this policy?

- Strongly Support - 28%
- Somewhat Support - 30%
- Somewhat Oppose - 16%
- Strongly Oppose - 8%
- Not Sure - 18%