

The Washington Post

[Back to previous page](#)

Poll: Voters want super PACs to be illegal

By [Chris Cillizza](#) and [Aaron Blake](#),

Nearly seven in 10 registered voters would like super PACs to be illegal, including more than half who feel that way strongly, according to a [new Washington Post-ABC News poll](#).

Sixty-nine percent of all Americans and voters alike say super PACs, a fundraising vehicle that allows wealthy donors to make unlimited donations in support of a particular candidate or party, should be banned. Just 25 percent said they should remain legal.

Those numbers were even more startling among political independents, 78 percent (!) of whom say super PACs should be illegal. (Full question wording is at the end of this post.)

The widespread disgust directed toward super PACs from voters comes amid a Republican presidential primary election season in which these organizations have played an outsized role.

Restore Our Future, the super PAC supporting former Massachusetts governor **Mitt Romney**, has already spent nearly \$34 million in early presidential primary states on his behalf. Winning Our Future, a super PAC aligned with former House speaker **Newt Gingrich**, has already dropped \$16 million — most of which comes from the personal checkbook of casino mogul **Sheldon Adelson**. The Red, White & Blue Fund, a super PAC supporting former Pennsylvania senator **Rick Santorum**, has spent almost \$6 million.

All told, [super PACs have raised more than \\$130 million and spent \\$75 million](#) in the 2012 election cycle, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Given that the 2012 election isn't for another eight months or so and that [super PACs focused on House races have already begun to crop up](#), it's easy to see that number cresting \$500 million or even nearing \$1 billion before the election is over.

That super PACs are deeply unpopular shouldn't be all that surprising. Average people have long believed that the political system is awash with money and, as a result, those without money lack a voice in the process. The funding of super PACs by one rich individual has further reinforced the idea that politics is a wealthy man's game.

View Photo Gallery: Here are some of the biggest financiers of super PACs, the candidate-supporting organizations that can accept unlimited donations.

But to what end? Yes, all politicians pay lip service to the need to reform the campaign finance system (again), but when the money is on the table — literally — they take it.

Take Romney's approach to Restore Our Future. In an interview late last year on MSNBC's "Morning Joe," [Romney excoriated super PACs as a "disaster"](#) that have "made a mockery of our political campaign season." He added that "we really ought to let campaigns raise the money they need and just get rid of these super PACs."

Of course, Romney has also dodged the idea of calling on Restore Our Future to cease their spending, meaning that he gets to claim some moral high ground on the issue while simultaneously benefiting from the heavy spending by the group.

President Obama's approach isn't much different. He has repeatedly spoken out against massive outside spending in elections; heck, the White House even tried to make campaign finance a major argument in the 2010 midterm elections.

That changed last month when Obama campaign manager Jim Messina sent an email to supporters making clear the [president would be publicly supportive of a super PAC known as Priorities USA Action, which is run by two former White House aides](#). "We can't allow for two sets of rules in this election whereby the Republican nominee is the beneficiary of unlimited spending and Democrats unilaterally disarm," wrote Messina.

The simple political fact is that, while large majorities of people think super PACs should be illegal, far smaller numbers see campaign finance as a top-of-mind issue on which their vote hinges.

Yes, if you ask them they will tell you that super PACs are a very bad thing. But can you imagine a race between Obama and Romney being swung — or even heavily influenced — by the candidates' stances on super PACs and campaign finance reform more generally? Us neither.

Full question wording: "Organizations known as Super-PACS can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money on behalf of candidates they support. (Supporters say this is a form of free speech) while (opponents say this allows groups or wealthy individuals to have unfair influence.) Do you think it should be legal or illegal for these Super-PACS to operate?"

Romney says open convention would ruin GOP chances: Romney's opponents are making clear that their goal is to make it to the convention rather than win the nomination outright, but Romney said Monday it would undermine the party's efforts to defeat Obama.

“If we go all the way to a convention, we would be signaling our doom in terms of replacing President Obama,” Romney said during an interview on Fox Business Network.

On Monday, [BuzzFeed](#) produced a Santorum campaign memo in which consultant John Yob made the case for how Santorum could win at a convention. Gingrich and Rep. **Ron Paul** (R-Texas) have made little secret of their intentions to go deep into the race, as far as the convention.

<div id="pac-poll" class="quiz module img-border" data-id="257"><div class="container"></div><div class="links">DisclaimerThis is a non-scientific user poll. Results are not statistically valid and cannot be assumed to reflect the views of Washington Post users as a group or the general population.</div></div>

Fixbits:

Chuck Norris [robocalls](#) for Gingrich.

Jeff Foxworthy [needles](#) Mitt “The Varmint Hunter” Romney.

White House press secretary **Jay Carney** says Gingrich [is lying](#) about his pledge to get gas to \$2.50 per gallon.

In a new book, former senator **Arlen Specter** (D-Pa.) says Obama [ditched him](#) after he switched parties in 2010.

The California Republican Party has endorsed **Elizabeth Emken** to face Sen. **Dianne Feinstein** (D-Calif.). Feinstein is considered safe.

Video has surfaced of Rep. **Cliff Stearns** (R-Fla.) questioning Obama’s [birth certificate](#). “I’ve seen a copy of it on television. But you know the governor of Hawaii couldn’t get what he felt was an original of the birth certificate. He tried to do it and gave up on it,” Stearns says in the video, which is reportedly from late February. Stearns’s problems just keep growing; his primary opponent recently accused Stearns of trying to buy him out of the race.

Speaking of which: A poll indicates about half of likely GOP primary voters in Alabama and Mississippi incorrectly think Obama [is a Muslim](#).

Former senator **George Allen** (R-Va.) gets his [own super PAC](#).

New Mexico state Auditor and U.S. Senate candidate **Hector Balderas** (D) had a [strong showing](#) at the state’s pre-primary convention, taking 45 percent of the vote against the establishment favorite in the Democratic primary, Rep. **Martin Heinrich** (D).

Washington state Attorney General **Rob McKenna** (R) raises [\\$250,000 in one weekend](#) for his gubernatorial campaign.

Democrats [recruit](#) Nassau County District Attorney **Kathleen Rice** against Rep. **Pete King** (R-N.Y.).

The New Hampshire state House moves forward with a [status-quo redistricting map](#).

Must-reads:

[“2012 GOP primary shaping up to be cheapest race in years”](#) — Dan Eggen, Washington Post

[“Afghan killings bring the war to presidential campaign debate”](#) — Dan Balz, Washington Post

[“Polling in Deep South Has Posed Challenges”](#) — Nate Silver, New York Times

[Read more from PostPolitics](#)

[Fact Checker: Is Obama’s health-care law in the red?](#)

[How unpopular is Congress? Very unpopular.](#)

[She the People: ‘Doonesbury’ portrays ultrasound as rape](#)

© The Washington Post Company