

NEWS

Page 1 of 6

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Poll: Americans Opposed to “Outside Money” In Elections

MEADVILLE, PA – Oct. 14, 2010 – A survey of 1,000 Americans nationwide suggests a wide majority believe it is unacceptable for groups to spend heavily on political advertising in districts where they are not located, a phenomenon dubbed “outside money.”

Two-thirds of those polled say they oppose this practice, while 26 percent support it (Table 1).

Recent published reports in The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and other major media outlets have noted that television spending by outside groups has more than doubled from what was spent at the same time in the 2006 midterm elections.

An analysis published earlier this week in Politico.com reported that, “Never in modern political history has there been so much secret money gushing into an American election. By Election Day, independent groups will have aired more than \$200 million worth of campaign ads using cash that can’t be traced back to its original source.”

“While it might be true that outside groups have the legal right to flood these races with ads, many Americans are concerned that it distorts the democratic process,” said Daniel M. Shea, director of the Center for Political Participation at Allegheny College, which developed and commissioned a poll, “Nastiness, Name-calling & Negativity: The Allegheny College Survey of Civility and Compromise in American Politics,” in spring 2010.

Shea expressed concern with the volume of money being spent by outside pressure groups in local races. In Pennsylvania’s 3rd Congressional District, where Allegheny is located, numerous outside groups have hammered the airwaves with ads for and against both the Democratic and Republican candidates.

“On one level, outside money is not entirely new. We’ve seen this before. But the amount of money that is being spent by national groups is unprecedented. As the head of an organization designed to promote grassroots campaigning, I worry that outside money will lead all citizens, but especially young citizens, to question the value of their own engagement,” said Shea

Much of Allegheny’s spring poll centered on issues related to the tone of politics, and its results have been widely circulated in the news media. But the poll also queried about the

outside money issue. “We knew it would be a big issue this fall, and, sure enough, it is one of the most important issues of this campaign season,” said Shea.

Group spending has become the focus of attention since a January U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. The High Court lifted restrictions on corporate spending in elections. Corporations, including nonprofit ones like labor unions, are no longer restricted when it comes to financing radio and television commercials that focus on voters and identify a political candidate.

The New York Times reported that in the weeks leading to this November’s hotly contested House and Senate races, many nonprofit advocacy organizations have begun to be more aggressive, explicitly asking voters to cast their ballots for or against candidates. “The vast majority of these political commercials are billed as ‘issue advocacy,’ said Shea, “but they are more easily recognized as attack ads.”

According to Shea, this latest twist on campaign financing laws speaks to the incivility permeating politics today. An overwhelming majority of Americans polled last spring said they perceived an increasing rancor and hostility in politics. A second survey, conducted two weeks ago by the CPP, indicates that the majority of Americans believe civility has gotten worse, in large part due to the nature of campaigning.

“It’s no wonder,” Shea noted, “that four times as many Americans see the tone of campaigning as much more negative this year, than those who see the election as more positive. The floodgates are open, and we’re a torrent of nastiness and negativity.”

Self-described independents expressed the most opposition to outside election spending, at about 72 percent. Self-described Democrats and Republicans both oppose the practice, at about 65 percent, respectively.

Self-described conservatives, liberals and moderates oppose outside spending by about 65 percent (Table 2), while a full 75 percent of Americans aged 50 and older oppose it, too (Table 3). About 63 percent of Americans who earn more than \$100,000 and 69 percent of those making less than \$25,000 oppose outside spending (Table 4).

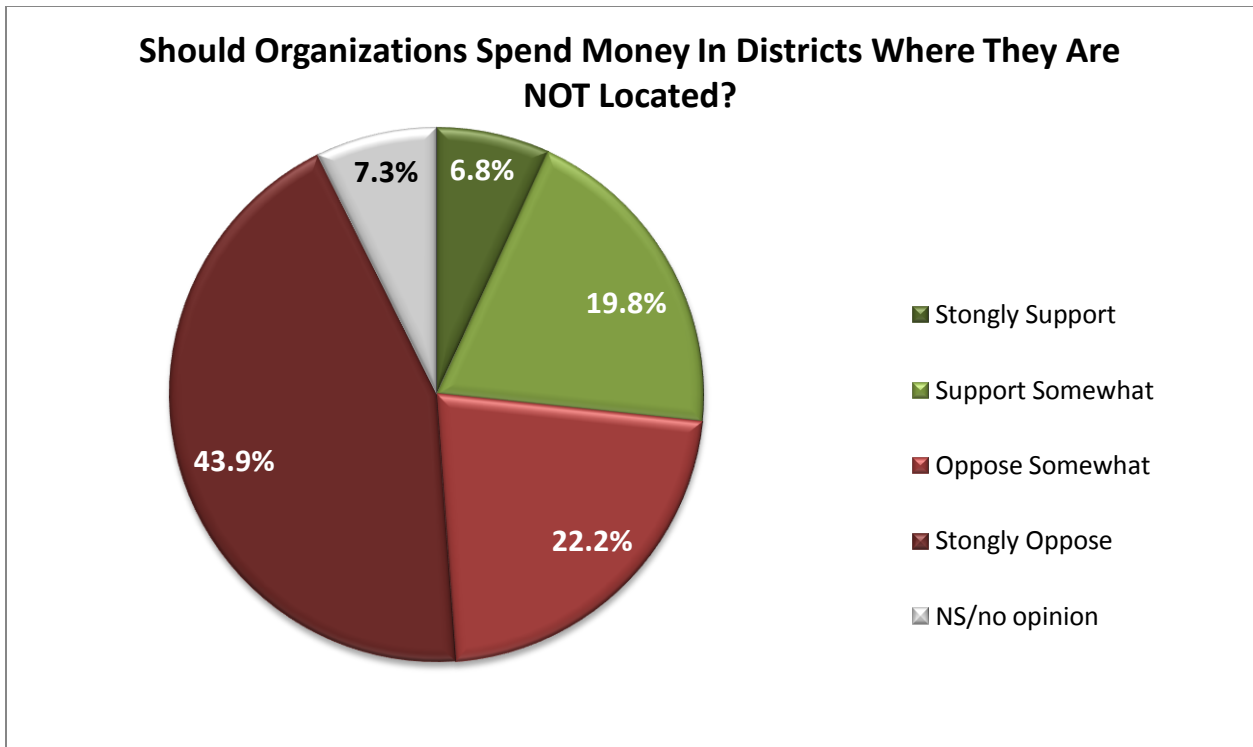


Table 1. Should organizations spend money in districts where they are not located?

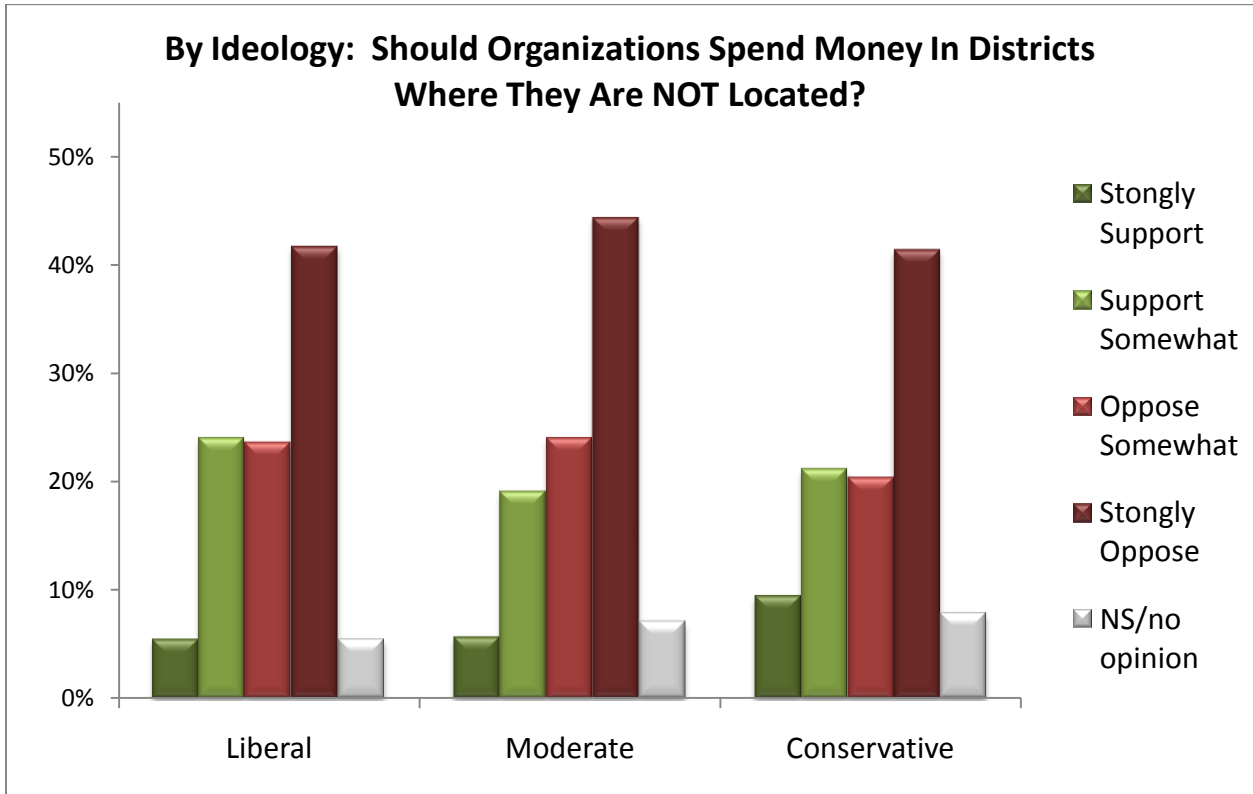


Table 2. Should organizations spend money in districts where they are not located? (by ideology).

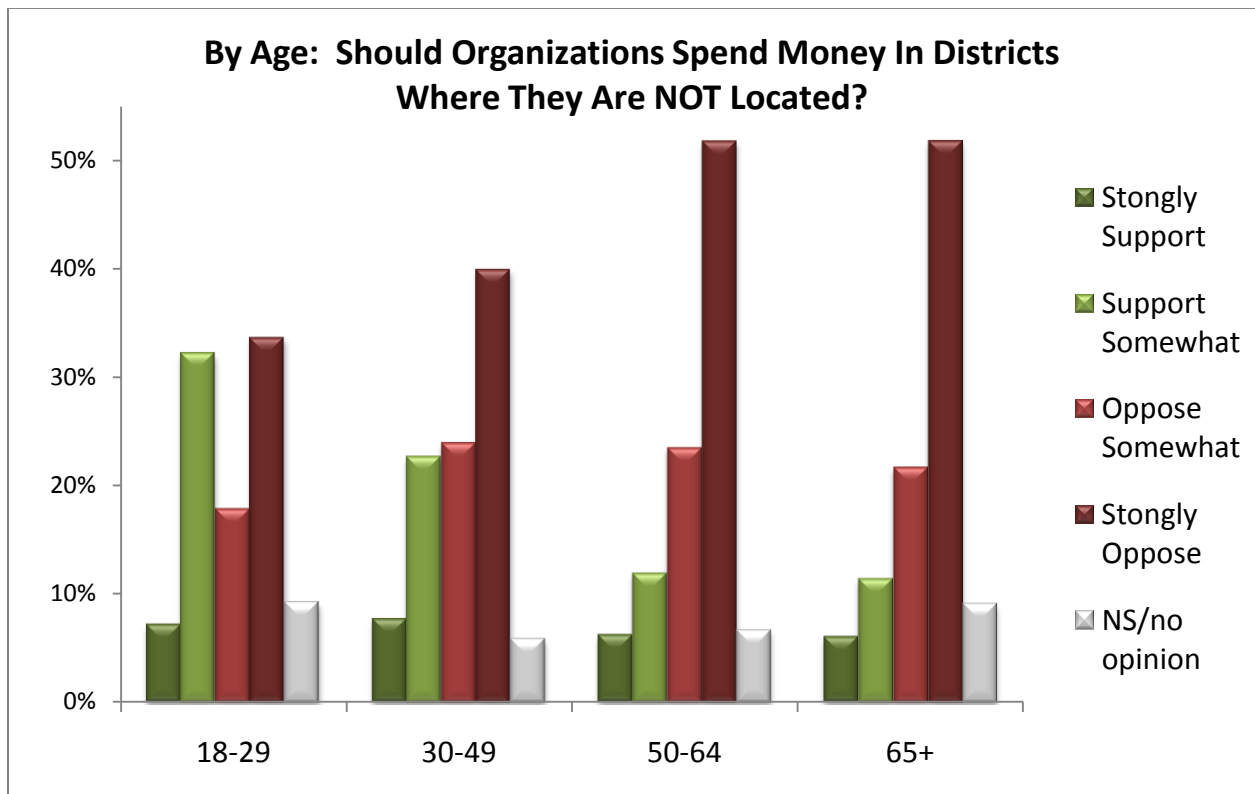


Table 3. Should organizations spend money in districts where they are not located? (by age).

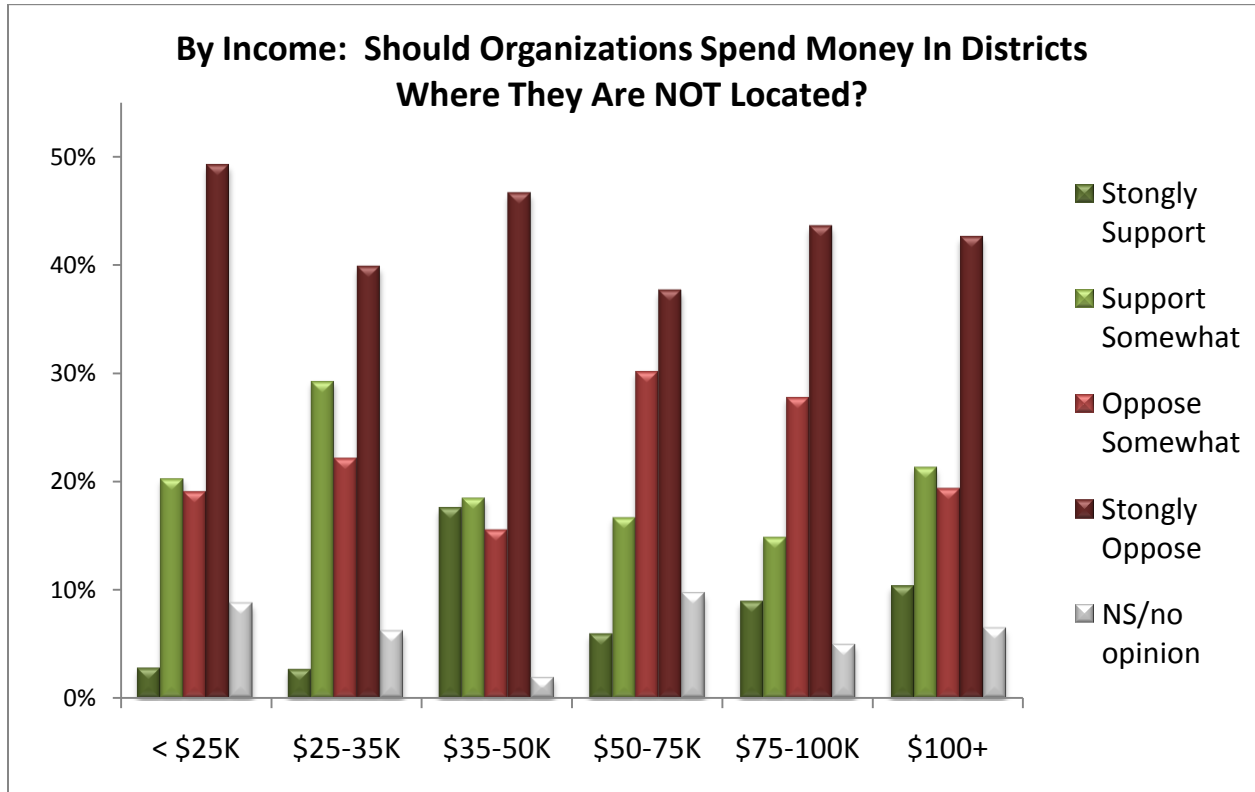


Table 4. Should organizations spend money in districts where they are not located? (by income).

Survey Methodology

The survey instrument and report were compiled by Daniel M. Shea, Director of the Center for Political Participation (CPP) and professor of political science at Allegheny College, along with four student fellows at the CPP: Maya Brod, Katie Janocsko, Matt Lacombe and Richard Shafranek.

Zogby International was commissioned by Allegheny College to conduct telephone interviews of 1,000 adults nationwide. The survey was conducted from March 24–29, 2010.

The sample included 1,000 interviews with approximately 45 questions asked. Samples are randomly drawn from telephone CDs of a national listed sample. Zogby International surveys employ sampling strategies in which selection probabilities are proportional to population size within area codes and exchanges. Up to six calls are made to reach a sampled phone number. Cooperation rates are calculated using one of AAPOR's approved methodologies¹ and are comparable to other professional public-opinion surveys conducted using similar sampling strategies.²

Weighting by region, party, age, education, race, religion and gender was used to adjust for non-response. The overall margin of error is +/- 3.2 percentage points. Margins of error are higher within sub-groups.

The majority of telephone lists for polls and surveys are produced by the IT department at Zogby International. Vendor-supplied lists are used for regions with complicated specifications, e.g., some congressional districts. Customer-supplied lists are used for special projects like customer satisfaction surveys and organization membership surveys.

Telephone lists generated in Zogby's IT department are called from a nationally published set of phone CDs of listed households, ordered by telephone number. Residential (or business) addresses are selected and then coded by region, where applicable. An appropriate replicate* is generated from this parent list, applying the replicate algorithm repeatedly with a very large parent list, e.g., all of the U.S.

Acquired lists are tested for duplicates, coded for region, tested for regional coverage and ordered by telephone as needed.

The resulting list is loaded into a CATI** application and the randomize function within the CATI software is run to further assure a good mix for the telephone list.

Interviews were conducted at Zogby International by professional interviewers trained on a

¹ See COOP4 (p.38) in *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates of Surveys*. The American Association for Public Opinion Research, (2000).

² *Cooperation Tracking Study: April 2003 Update*, Jane M. Sheppard and Shelly Haas. The Council for Marketing & Opinion Research (CMOR). Cincinnati, Ohio (2003).

CATI system. A policy requiring one supervisor to no more than 12 interviewers was used. The sample management module of the CATI system gives all prospective respondent households in the source telephone list the same chance of joining the sample. Regional quotas are employed to ensure adequate coverage nationwide.

Reported frequencies and crosstabs are weighted using the appropriate demographic profile to provide a sample that best represents the targeted population from which the sample is drawn. The proportions comprising the demographic profile are compiled from historical exit poll data, census data and from Zogby International survey data.

* Replicate—A sub-list with the same cover characteristics as its parent list. Replicates are generated from the parent list by selecting every n^{th} record from the parent list, where “n” is the size of the replicate/total records in the parent list.

** CATI—Computer-Aided Telephone Interview. This is a software application that displays survey questions to the interviewer at a LAN workstation, stores survey responses keyed in by an interviewer on a server and manages list disposition.

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*The April 2010 report, “Nastiness, Name-calling & Negativity,”
is available at www.allegheny.edu/civility.*