

# NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER

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**EMBARGOED UNTIL SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15 AT 9:00 A.M.**

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## **AS ELECTION NEARS ASSOCIATED PRESS-NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER POLL REVEALS STRONG DISTRUST IN GOVERNMENT**

***Americans of both parties support limiting the size of campaign donations,  
but argue on government's role making America a better place***

***Americans' trust of online media remains low,  
while confidence in small and local businesses is up***

Philadelphia, PA (September 14, 2012) – On the eve of the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S. Constitution, and as the nation prepares for a presidential election, a new poll released today by The Associated Press and the National Constitution Center indicates that Americans continue to lack confidence in the federal government and Congress. In addition, the government's marks on ensuring that all Americans feel safe, secure, and free are down over last year's results; moreover, only 40% say the government is doing a good job of promoting the well-being of all Americans, not just special interests.

The new poll, conducted in August 2012, is the fifth in an annual series that tracks public opinion on constitutional issues.

The federal government and the U.S. Congress continue to rank among the institutions with the lowest levels of trust among Americans, earning only 13% and 11% confidence, respectively, with 23% of Americans expressing no confidence at all in Congress.

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However, of the 18 different institutions in this year's poll – including the Supreme Court, local and state governments, public schools and organized religion – online news media and independent or citizen media replaced Congress as the least trusted of all, garnering only 10% confidence from Americans. The U.S. military once again earned the deepest public trust, holding the confidence of 57% of Americans.

In other noteworthy findings, recent high-profile Supreme Court rulings on health care, immigration, and other highly politicized issues have done little to change the public's opinion of the court. Ranking fourth among the 18 institutions, the court earned a 24% confidence rating – the same as in 2011.

One of the largest ratings boosts went to small and local businesses – a focus of much of the presidential campaign rhetoric this year – which received a confidence level of 49% (up from 40% in 2011).

Where the government does receive high marks is on its handling of responsibilities as spelled out in the Preamble of the Constitution. With a 69% “excellent” or “good” rating, Americans give the government its best marks on making sure that our nation is safe from foreign and domestic threats. Additionally, 52% say the government is doing a good job making sure that Americans are free to pursue happiness now and in the future.

On making America a better place, 49% give the government a positive review – the highest percentage recorded for this task in the history of the AP-NCC poll. However, the percentage increase rests entirely among Democrats, 66% of whom believe the government is making the country better (an increase from 56% last year). Among independents, 40% say so, as do only 32% of Republicans.

A majority of respondents continue to say that the Constitution remains relevant today (69%) rather than an outdated document that needs to be modernized (28%). However, among Democrats, those referring to the Constitution as an enduring document dipped from 67% to 58%, and among Republicans, it fell from 92% to 80%.

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Among independents, on the other hand, those who believe the document to be “enduring” increased from 63% to 75%.

“Even as partisan debates heat up during this pivotal election season, and as trust in government wanes, it is comforting to see that Americans are still looking to the Constitution for guidance during uncertain times,” said National Constitution Center President and CEO David Eisner. “I think our Founding Fathers would be pleased to know that, 225 years after the signing of the Constitution, Americans are still committed to our core constitutional values.”

The poll also shed light on some of the central political issues of the day:

### On campaign finance

Regardless of partisan views, Americans broadly support limits on the amount of money that individuals and corporations should be able to contribute to election campaigns:

- On individual donations to campaigns, 70% of Democrats, 68% of independents, and 62% of Republicans support limitations.
- On corporate donations to outside organizations, 85% of Democrats believe there should be limits, as do 81% of Republicans and 78% of independents.
- Americans from the highest income households were most likely to support limits on either type of donation. In fact, 75% of those with household incomes above \$100,000 backed limits on individual contributions and 90% approved of limits on corporate contributions.

### On voting rights

Amid controversy over state laws requiring voters to show government IDs in order to cast ballots – a practice that opponents contend places an undue burden on minorities and the poor – the poll shows an increase in the share of Americans who believe voting rights for racial minorities require legal protection. The 2012 poll finds that 47% view the laws as necessary, up from 41% in 2011.

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### On the health care mandate

Regardless of whether the individual health care mandate is said to impose a “fine” or a “tax,” most Americans believe the government should not have the power to impose any fee if Americans choose not to purchase health insurance. When asked about a “fine,” 74% oppose it, and 73% do so when asked about a “tax.”

### On same-sex benefits

For the first time, the poll showed that more than six in 10 Americans believe same-sex couples should be entitled to the same government benefits as married couples of the opposite sex. Backing is particularly strong among younger Americans, with 81% of those under age 35 voicing support for equal benefits.

### On gun control

There has been no change in views on gun laws despite a string of high-profile gun violence incidents this summer. About half, 49%, say laws limiting gun ownership infringe on the public’s right to bear arms under the Second Amendment, while 43% say such laws do not infringe on that right.

Complete poll results are available at <http://surveys.ap.org>.

The poll involved telephone interviews with 1,006 adults nationwide. The survey was conducted from August 16-20, 2012 by GfK Roper Public Affairs & Corporate Communications, and had a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

### About the National Constitution Center

The National Constitution Center is the first and only nonprofit, nonpartisan institution devoted to the most powerful vision of human freedom ever expressed: the U.S. Constitution. Located on Independence Mall in Historic Philadelphia, the birthplace of American freedom, the Center illuminates constitutional ideals and inspires active citizenship through a state-of-the-art museum experience, including hundreds of

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interactive exhibits, films and rare artifacts; must-see feature exhibitions; the internationally acclaimed, 360-degree theatrical production *Freedom Rising*; and the iconic *Signers' Hall*, where visitors can sign the Constitution alongside 42 life-size, bronze statues of the Founding Fathers. As America's forum for constitutional dialogue, the Center engages diverse, distinguished leaders of government, public policy, journalism and scholarship in timely public discussions and debates. The Center also houses the Annenberg Center for Education and Outreach, the national hub for constitutional education, which offers cutting-edge civic learning resources both onsite and online. Freedom is calling. Answer it at the National Constitution Center. For more information, call 215.409.6700 or visit [www.constitutioncenter.org](http://www.constitutioncenter.org).

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