

Voter opinion not affected much by charges of political corruption

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Republican claims of political corruption in North Carolina's Democratic Party have made little impact on public opinion among potential voters in the state, according to new polling data analyzed by North Carolina State University researchers. The findings show that highlighting actual corruption is not necessarily an effective electoral strategy.

"The North Carolina Republican party has tried to brand state Democrats as corrupt, but we don't know whether voters respond to this strategy," says Dr. Michael Cobb, an associate professor of political science at NC State. "We wanted to determine whether Republican corruption claims are actually influencing the opinions and likely voting behavior of potential voters in the state." Cobb designed this representative survey of adults in North Carolina, which ended earlier this week.

"North Carolina should be a good case-study," says Dr. Andy Taylor, professor of political science at NC State. "If the corruption strategy can work, it should work under the current conditions in North Carolina." In recent years, the state has seen multiple scandals involving high-profile Democrats – including then-Speaker of the House Jim Black and former Gov. Mike Easley. Over the same timeframe, there have been no comparable Republican scandals.

However, the poll finds that the recent scandals do not affect people's opinion on which party is best suited to reduce political corruption.

Specifically, the poll finds that 53 percent of respondents could name at least one political scandal over the past several years, and most respondents named a Democrat as being at the heart of the scandal. But the majority of respondents – 58 percent – say there is no difference between the parties when it comes to handling corruption. And 22 percent think Democrats would do a better job of limiting corruption, versus 20 percent who favor Republicans.

Furthermore, the poll found that the corruption issue had no effect on how favorably people viewed the Democratic party overall. “People who identified Democrats as being involved in scandals were no more likely to have an unfavorable opinion of the party than those who didn’t identify Democrats in a scandal,” Cobb says. “The polling data show that the strategy of highlighting corruption has a marginal effect, at best. The most frequently cited Democrat associated with scandal was John Edwards, which has nothing to do with this election. This highlights the questionable nature of this strategy.”

The survey of 663 North Carolina adults was conducted earlier this month over the Internet by Knowledge Networks on behalf of researchers in NC State’s School of Public and International Affairs. The sample was drawn from a panel of respondents Knowledge Networks recruited via random sampling of landline telephone households with listed and unlisted numbers. The company provides Web access to panel recruits who don’t already have it. With a probability basis and coverage of people who otherwise couldn’t access the Internet, the Knowledge Networks online surveys are nationally representative. Results of this survey are weighted, or adjusted, to reflect the adult population by demographic factors such as age, sex, region, race and education. No more than one time in 20 should chance variations in the sample cause results to vary more than plus or minus 3.6 percentage points from the answers that would have been obtained if all adults in North Carolina were surveyed.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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