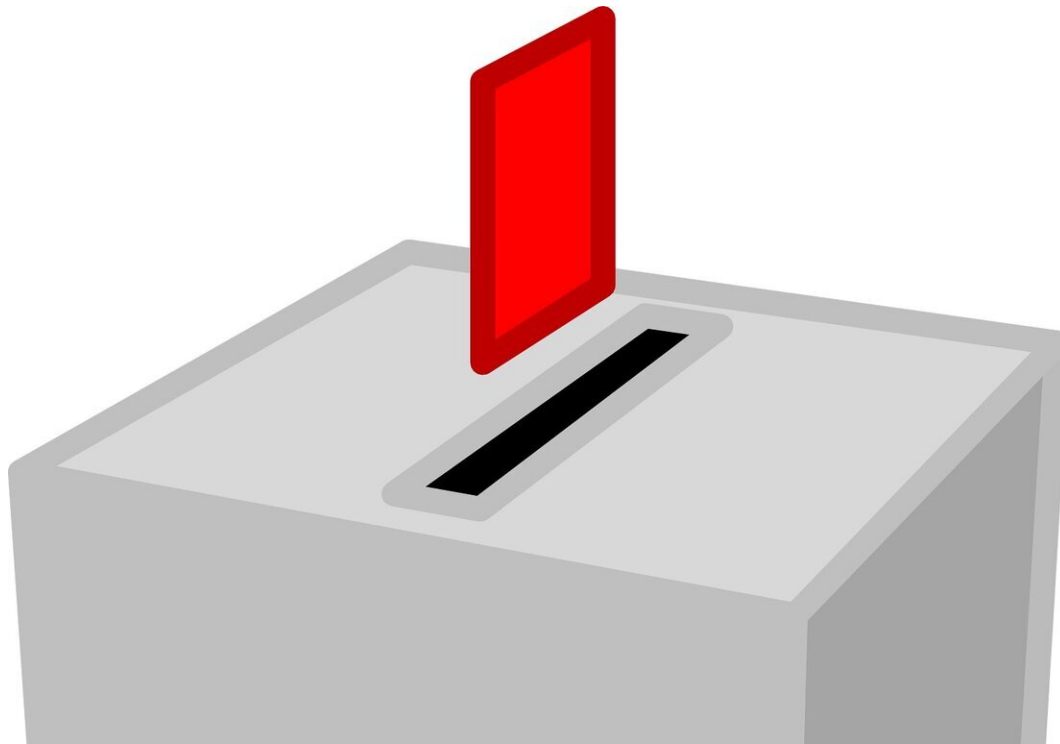


Can public financing for political campaigns affect voter participation?

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Policies that provide public financing for political campaigns have gained popularity in the United States. One example is the Democracy Vouchers program that was implemented in Seattle, Washington in 2017 to potentially reduce candidates' reliance on large donations. Research published in [Contemporary Economic Policy](#) studied the effects of this

program on voter registration and turnout.

In Seattle's Democracy Vouchers program, every registered voter in the city receives \$100 worth of publicly funded vouchers to donate to candidates for municipal office, and candidates who accept vouchers agree to limits on non-voucher contributions.

By analyzing data on [voter registration](#), voter turnout, and campaign donations from 2009 to 2021 in King County, where Seattle is located, Sarah Papich, a Ph.D. candidate in economics at the University of California Santa Barbara, estimated that the Democracy Vouchers program increased voter turnout by 4.9 percentage points. This finding suggests that public financing programs can increase political participation.

The analysis also revealed a shift in the composition of political contributions, with campaigns becoming more reliant on small contributions after the Democracy Vouchers program was implemented. For city council candidates, dollars from small contributions under \$100 increased by 156% whereas dollars from large contributions over \$250 decreased by 93%.

"Low voter turnout and the disproportionate influence of big donors are two significant problems in our democracy," said Papich. "These findings provide encouraging evidence that public financing for [political campaigns](#) can help address both problems."

More information: Sarah Papich, Do Democracy Vouchers Help Democracy?, *Contemporary Economic Policy* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/coep.12625](#)

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