

# AMERICAN FORUM: Voters call for clarity; IRS should listen

Story | **Comments**

Print | Font Size: |

Posted: Thursday, December 4, 2014 11:47 am

By Bill Schambra and Lisa Gilbert

Nonprofit political activity is at a crossroads. Nonprofits have come under criticism from some on the left for spending too much dark money to influence politics, while some on the right critique the IRS for subjecting certain groups applying for nonprofit status to increased scrutiny based on their names.

In the face of this hyper-partisanship, the conservative Hudson Institute's Bradley Center for Philanthropy & Civic Renewal and progressive Public Citizen are joining to discuss new ways to reform the IRS' treatment of nonprofit political activity and to hear from a vital voice that has so far been silent – that of the voter.

**Advertisement** A new bipartisan poll, released at an event co-hosted by the Hudson Institute and Public Citizen, shows that more than 8 out of 10 voters think it is important to have clear rules concerning political activities of nonprofit organizations. This is in stark contrast to the rules as they stand, which are so vague and difficult to administer that they've been partially blamed for last year's targeting scandal, in which in which some applications for nonprofit status were selected for more intensive review based on key words in their names.

The poll indicates that 80 percent of voters think that organizations taking advantage of unclear regulations is a problem, showing that they are rightly concerned with the consequences of the absence of clear rules. Among voters who had an opinion, a majority favored changing the way nonprofit activities are regulated to establish clearer and fairer rules for what counts as political activity. Voters also overwhelmingly favored disclosure of political spending by nonprofits.

This poll comes out at an important time for the future of nonprofits.

In November 2013, the IRS proposed a new definition of political activity that would have applied to 501(c)(4) social welfare organizations. The proposed rule was criticized for its potential to restrict activities that nonprofits had traditionally been allowed to engage in – such as host candidate forums and conduct voter registration campaigns. The IRS is currently revising those rules and will publish a new draft in early 2015. We hope that the new draft will protect those valuable nonprofit activities.

The poll was conducted by Lake Research Partners, a Democratic polling firm, and Chesapeake Beach Consulting, a Republican polling firm. The firms conducted a live telephone survey of 800 likely voters between July 26 and July 29. The numbers of Democrats, Republicans and Independents polled reflected the proportions of projected likely national 2014 voters from each of those parties.

The poll results show that nonprofit political activity isn't an issue that matters only to tax lawyers. The integrity of nonprofits must be protected so they can continue to fulfill their mission to serve the public. Naturally, groups as diverse as ours do not agree on everything that the new rules from the IRS should include. However, we think the IRS should listen to conversations like those taking place between our groups, as well as to the resounding agreement among disparate members of the public, to inform their decisions on what the next draft of their rules should contain.

The impact of these regulations on our election system (and public trust in it) will be substantial. Now that the public's voice is part of the conversation, we think these discussions will be even more valuable.

Bill Schambra is director of the Hudson Institute's Bradley Center for Philanthropy & Civic Renewal. Lisa Gilbert is director of Public Citizen's Congress Watch division.

Discuss | Print

Posted in **Opinion** on Thursday, December 4, 2014 11:47 am.

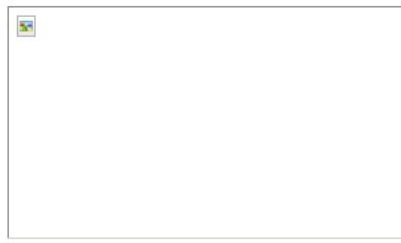
**Similar Stories**

**Most Read**

70° Overcast  
More weather.

Advanced Search  
GO  
Search the Archives

**Business Spotlight**  
Shell FCU is a member owned and operated cooperative serving Harris County. We offer a wide range of services at no-cost or at lower costs than traditional financial institutions, including more favorable rates on dividends and loans. 713-844-1100. www.ShellFCU.org



Job search by realmatch

Create a profile | Upload your resume

**yourHoustonjobs.com**

Get Started Now

- Olson votes to stop Obama immigration overreach
- Cornyn: Divided government presents opportunities
- SCOTT: Don't let a lawsuit take the shine off your holidays
- MOLLETTE: America's Cops and Eric Garner, tragic, but don't fight the police
- Ebola priority review bill heads to president's desk

- Three hospitalized following Sunday evening accident
- Conroe man confesses to vandalizing, stealing courthouse statue dedicated to foster children
- Man indicted by grand jury for murder in Kingwood shooting
- Conroe police search for missing 12-year-old girl last seen Sunday
- Reunited: Porter woman finds biological family through social media posting

Comments  
Facebook

## Welcome to the discussion.

Screen Name or Email

Password

[Forgot?](#)

Login

Or, use your linked account:



facebook



google



yahoo



[Need an account? Create one now.](#)

Watch this discussion

### HOUSTON NEWS

Home  
Storm Center  
Blogs  
Photos  
Calendar  
Celebrations  
Obituaries

Entertainment  
HS Gridiron  
Business  
Pets  
Health  
Weather  
101 Houston

### LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Atascocita Observer  
Bay Area Citizen  
Bellaire Examiner  
Cleveland Advocate  
Conroe Courier  
Cypress Creek Mirror  
Dayton News  
Deer Park Broadcaster  
East Montgomery Observer  
Eastex Advocate  
Fort Bend Sun  
Friendswood Journal  
Humble Observer

Kingwood Observer  
Lake Houston Observer  
Magnolia Potpourri  
Memorial Examiner  
Pasadena Citizen  
Pearland Journal  
River Oaks Examiner  
Spring Observer  
Sugar Land Sun  
The Rancher  
Tomball Potpourri  
West University Examiner  
Woodlands Villager

### MARKETPLACE

Classifieds  
Jobs  
Homes  
Autos  
Business Directory  
Celebrations  
Obituaries  
Legals

### SERVICES

Help  
Advertising Services  
Place a Classified ad  
Subscription Services  
RSS Feeds  
Contact Us  
Site index  
Careers at HCN

### MEMBERSHIP

Sign up  
Log in

Search

Search

[Terms of service](#) | [Privacy statement](#) | [FAQs](#)  
© Copyright 2014, Your Houston News, The Woodlands, TX.