



Highlights of GAO-03-453, a report to Congressional Committees

# CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

## Early Experiences of Two States That Offer Full Public Funding for Political Candidates

### Why GAO Did This Study

In 2000 and 2002, Maine and Arizona held the nation's first elections under voluntary programs that offered full state funding for political candidates who ran for legislative and certain statewide offices. The goals of these programs, passed as ballot initiatives by citizens in these states, included increasing electoral competition and curbing increases in the cost of campaigns.

Congress has considered legislation for public financing of congressional elections nearly every session since 1956, although no law has been enacted. In the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (P.L. 107-155 (2002)), Congress mandated that GAO study the results of the unique public financing programs in Maine and Arizona.

For the 2000 and 2002 elections in Maine and Arizona, this report provides:

- Statistics on the number of candidates who chose to campaign with public funds and the number who were elected.
- Observations, based on limited data, regarding the extent to which the goals of the public funding programs were met.

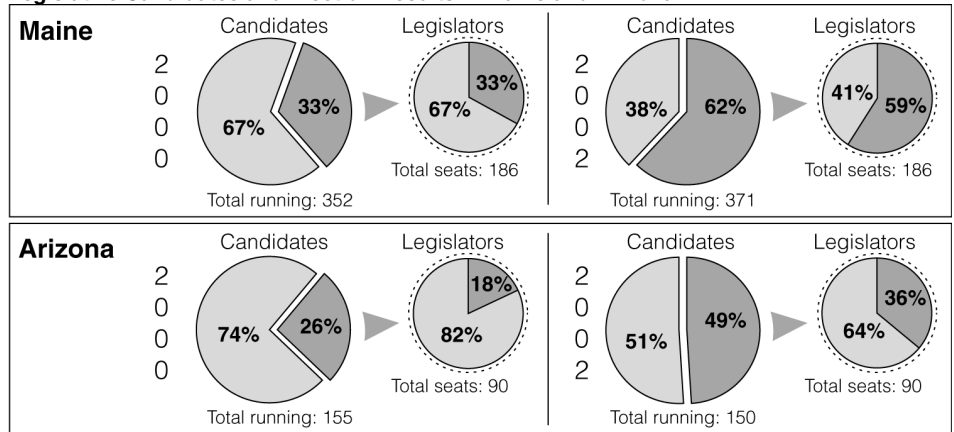
[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-453](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-453).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Norman Rabkin at (202) 512-8777 or rabkinn@gao.gov.

### What GAO Found

In both Maine and Arizona, the number of legislative candidates who chose to use public financing for their campaigns increased greatly from 2000 to 2002. In perspective, 59 percent of Maine's and 36 percent of Arizona's current legislators successfully ran as publicly financed candidates in the 2002 election. Also, in Arizona's 2002 election, publicly financed candidates won seven of the nine available seats in races for statewide offices, including Governor.

**Legislative Candidates and Election Results in Maine and Arizona**



Legend:  
 Traditionally financed  
 Publicly financed

Source: GAO analysis of state data.

In comparing the 2000 and 2002 elections to those in 1996 and 1998, GAO's findings regarding changes in electoral competition were inconclusive. Various measures—contested races (more than one candidate per race), incumbent reelection rates, and incumbent victory margins—reflect mixed results. Also, these results may have been affected by term limits, redistricting, and other factors. Average legislative candidate spending decreased in Maine but increased in Arizona in 2000 and 2002, compared to previous years. Further, particularly in 2002, both states experienced increases in independent expenditures—a type of campaign spending whereby political action committees or other groups expressly support or oppose a candidate. The extent of spending for public policy messages without explicit election advocacy is not known.

In sum, with only two elections from which to observe legislative races and only one election from which to observe most statewide races, it is too early to draw causal linkages to changes, if any, that resulted from the public financing programs in the two states.