

The American Public's Opinion of Big Tobacco

Majority of adults surveyed want non-profits to reject Big Tobacco money

Most adults (59%) believe that **non-profits should reject donations from tobacco companies**, according to a 2020 Truth Initiative survey of nearly 1,600 voters ages 18 and older.

Tobacco companies use strategic donations and alliances with organizations to help protect business interests and improve their image among existing and prospective customers. These contributions can also be a PR strategy to increase visibility among young people as they attempt to overhaul their reputation and recruit a new generation of tobacco users.

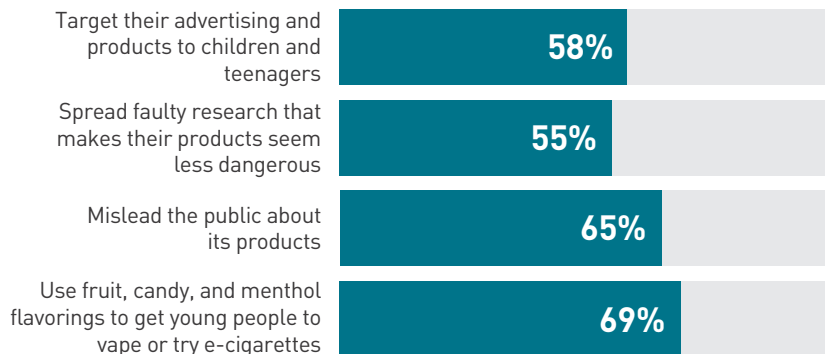
Agreement about rejecting money from Big Tobacco crossed all genders, ages, and political affiliations, including **nearly half of current (47%) and more than half of former smokers (54%)**.

Most adult respondents also distrust the tobacco industry and believe it deceives the public about its products. Only about 1 in 4 respondents believe the tobacco industry tells the truth about the addictiveness and health effects of its products.

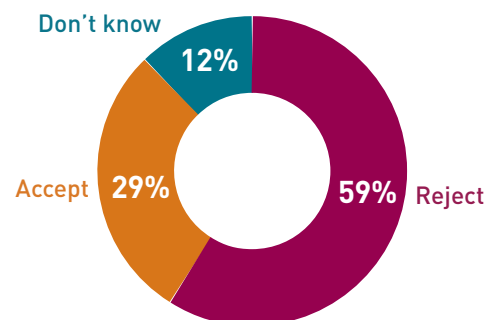
Agreement about rejecting money from Big Tobacco crossed all genders, ages, and political affiliations, including current (47%) and former smokers (54%).

Distrust of Tobacco Companies

Voters believe that Big Tobacco:



Should nonprofit community organizations and schools accept or reject money from tobacco companies?



Adults have plenty of reasons to mistrust the tobacco industry and its charitable giving. Tobacco companies continue to play the “long game” on public opinion and find innovative ways to maintain and expand their interests:

- In March 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Philip Morris International, the makers of Marlboro, **donated 50 ventilators to Greece** in what was called a “shameful publicity stunt.” Greece continues to hold the **highest smoking rate in the European Union**.
- In December 2020, **John Middleton** — makers of *Black & Mild* cigars and a subsidiary of Altria, one of the world’s largest makers of tobacco products — donated \$1 million to black-owned businesses in response to heightened awareness of systemic racism. The company selected a business in Cleveland as one of the recipients “because we have a number of our adult tobacco consumers in Cleveland.”
- Vaping companies are following Big Tobacco’s playbook. JUUL donated \$7.5 million to Meharry Medical College, a historically Black college, to fund a public health center.

For more info on industry tactics to target youth and public opinion about those efforts, read our full reports on how young people are **Seeing Through Big Tobacco’s Spin** and **How Big Tobacco is trying to sell a do-gooder image and what Americans think about it**.

Methodology: In partnership with Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, Truth Initiative conducted a national survey of registered voters between the ages of 18 and older about their views of the tobacco industry and tobacco use from October 17-28, 2020. A total of 1,583 voters — including 400 African American voters and 400 voters ages 18-24 — were surveyed by cell, landline, and text-to-online. The margin of error was +/- 3.1% (4.9% in the 18-24 sample).



Tobacco companies continue to play the “long game” on public opinion and find innovative ways to maintain and expand their interests