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Environmental Voting in the American States: A Tale of Two Initiatives

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Environmental ballot propositions are often considered bellwethers of the nation's willingness to take action on environmental issues and of the extent to which U.S. consumers and taxpayers are ready, willing, and able to pay for costly environmental reform. Statewide ballot questions present a golden opportunity to determine whether the environment's "bottom line" is truly to be judged by its impact on the electoral process (Dunlap 1987, 13). Collectively, initiatives and referendums provide the "purest form" of issue-voting in American politics (Zisk 1987, 161), consistently offering voters greater opportunities to address environmental issues in a succinct and direct way, largely shielded from dominant influences of electoral choice, such as partisanship and candidate appeal (Magleby 1984).

An inconsistent record of election-day victories and defeats over the years, however, has prompted scholars to interpret the environmental scorecard in very different ways. Some argue that the success of key environmental initiatives and referendums proves that Americans are willing to take a stand on environmental issues, especially when elected representatives fail to do so (Lake 1983; Dunlap 1987; Johnson 1990). Others insist that electoral losses are devastating to the political credibility of the environmental movement:

> Forget the hundreds of polls showing that 80 percent of Americans would walk over their grandmothers' graves to save a tree. No other lobby has been as routinely and overwhelmingly rejected at the polls during the past six years as has the environmental movement. When will Washington realize that the Green Emperor has no clothes? (Taylor 1992, B7)

Explaining the conditions under which environmental issues succeed (or fail) at the ballot box is an undeniably difficult task. Given the intuitive appeal of most environmental causes, some scholars have tended to view losses largely as a function of campaign finance, noting the wide margins by which environmental groups are typically outspent by their opponents (Gerlak and Natali 1993). To better understand how and when money matters, more research is necessary. This article explores the importance of issue-framing (i.e., how issues are symbolically presented) in initiative campaigns using survey data from two prominent and contrasting case studies—the first, a successful 1986 toxics initiative in California intended to protect drinking water supplies; the second, an un-

successful 1992 recycling initiative in Massachusetts. Magleby claims that "the side that defines the proposition usually wins the election" (1984, 168). Both cases demonstrate that, in the end, it may be the *content* of a campaign message—and not simply the media visibility that money affords—that is key to understanding public willingness to pay for protective environmental policies.

Theory and Methodology

When casting ballots for political candidates, most voters are unlikely to vote "green" (at least at the national level). Voting behavior for statewide referendums and initiatives, however, is more complex (Dunlap 1987; Guber 1999). Voters approach the mammoth task of evaluating complex legislation in the absence of economizing devices (i.e., short cuts or cues that help voters simplify their voting decisions) such as partisan identification or candidate evaluations (Zisk 1987). The dilemma faced by many voters is made even more difficult by the intimidating number of ballot questions offered on many state ballots and by the technical language used in wording the proposals (Magleby 1984). Informational vacuums can lead to risk-averse behavior and negative voting (Lau 1985), despite the social desirability of many environmental concerns. As a result, scholars caution that, compared with voting behavior for political candidates, voting behavior on ballot propositions is more likely to be unstable over the course of an electoral campaign and more susceptible to advertising and other political appeals, as voters strive to bring order to chaos (Magleby 1984).

Within this context, it is not surprising that campaign expenditures are considered a powerful predictor of the vote. Money, after all, enables an organized campaign to fund early polls, hire skilled campaign consultants, and bankroll advertising on radio and television. Zisk (1987) tracked direct legislation in four states between 1976 and 1980 and found that the high-spending side of a campaign won 80 percent of the time.

The effect of campaign finance is especially strong when lopsided spending occurs on the negative side of an issue (Lee 1978; Berg 1978; Lowenstein 1982; Magleby 1984; Banducci 1998). For instance, Lowenstein's (1982) data show that one-sided spending by groups opposed to an issue secured the defeat of that measure 90 percent of the time, even when the issue initially appeared to have strong public support in the polls. Magleby's (1984) analysis of California ballot questions between 1954 and 1982 shows a similar asymmetry (i.e., strong initial support followed by decreased support). Data on more than 50 ballot questions demonstrate that opposition campaigns that were able to outspend proponents by a 2:1 margin or greater defeated the measure 87 percent of the time, whereas proponents with a similar financial advantage won fewer than 50 percent of their campaigns.

Both conclusions are clearly bad news for environmentalists. Given the nature of environmental regulation, initiatives and referendums often challenge the vested interests of large corporations and other organized groups that have both the incentive and the financial ability to wage aggressive opposition campaigns. Moreover, even if environmental groups were able to launch a financially competitive campaign, precedent suggests that, as proponents, they would face a dollar-for-dollar disadvantage (Banducci 1998). With risk-averse voters suspicious of any change in the status quo, "it is harder to pass a proposition than to defeat one" (Magleby 1984, 147).

Examining campaign spending for 12 environmental measures that appeared on state ballots in 1992, Gerlak and Natali (1993) found that environmentalists were outspent by their opponents on all 9 measures that failed. Expenditure ratios ranged from 2:1 against a campaign to improve an Oregon nuclear power plant to 33:1 against a "right-to-know" initiative in Ohio that ultimately cost more than $5 million. The authors concluded that the financial disparity between

initiative proponents and opposing groups gave the opposition an advantage.

Nevertheless, despite the strength of published scholarship in this field, to conclude that campaign expenditures are the single most important factor in explaining the success or failure of ballot propositions may be premature for several reasons. First, most studies that attempt to explain patterns of electoral choice have relied on aggregate data: that is, the use of spending totals on both sides of a campaign (or even simple ratios) to predict vote margins. This approach sacrifices depth for breadth, often by ignoring a multitude of other less tangible factors that could be uncovered with greater satisfaction using case studies (Smith 1998).

Second, the use of aggregate data on campaign expenditures also tends to oversimplify the role that money plays in initiative campaigns. For example, it seems likely that, at the individual level, most voters do not select the high-spending side of an issue purposively; rather, they react in understandable ways to what a well-financed campaign provides by way of advertising and political argument. Essentially, this reaction relates to issue-framing, a concept long recognized as important in understanding public opinion and political choice (see, for example, Kahneman and Tversky 1984; Iyengar 1990; Kinder and Sanders 1996). As Citrin, Reingold, and Green (1990, 1126) note, "which general attitudes influence policy preferences partly depends on the particular symbols that become associated with a proposal—that is, on how the issue is symbolically framed." In short, what is most important is the ability of savvy political campaigns to define the terms of debate in ways favorable to their cause. Case studies that incorporate survey data are valuable because they allow researchers to explore in unique ways how various campaign messages are received by the public.

Third, although aggregate data are compelling in that they show the strength of the relationship between campaign spending and election results overall, deviant cases in which financial underdogs win are worth exploring. Zisk (1987, 105) argues that many initiatives fail at first because of the "broad range of the proposal itself" but that by narrowing the scope of the measure and keeping the campaign simple, low-key, and inexpensive, proponents can sometimes mold defeat into eventual victory. Because these "deviant" cases are likely to be small in number, a case-study approach is appropriate.

If a narrative discussion of a small number of cases is warranted, which cases should be chosen, and why? Even though more than 300 ballot propositions focusing on environmental issues have been offered to voters over the past 30 years,[1] high-quality survey research data are comparatively rare—a practical matter that necessarily narrows the range of possibilities. Ultimately, however, the two case studies offered here have important similarities and differences that help isolate and explore the theoretical issues at hand:

- Both the 1986 California toxics issue (Proposition 65) and the 1992 Massachusetts recycling debate (Question 3) involve citizen initiatives, an important control, given that various forms of direct legislation enjoy differing levels of success at the ballot box (Bone and Benedict 1975; Lowenstein 1982; Magleby 1984; 1994).
- Both case studies are drawn from states known to be liberal in their approach to politics and environmental policy. Moreover, in both instances, environmentalists were outspent by wide margins in high-profile races.
- Both the toxics case and the recycling case involve environmental issues with clear economic ties and consequences ripe for the development of strong opposition campaigns.

Magleby writes, "A successful ballot proposition campaign sets out to define the measure in such a way as to increase the chances

of victory on election day. By deciding which issues to raise and on which themes to focus, each side seeks to structure the debate" (1984, 168). As the following case studies attest, underfunded environmental groups structured their respective debates with different levels of success. Proposition 65 was approved by California voters on election day, whereas Massachusetts's Question 3 was not. Nevertheless, because of the similarities of these cases, competing explanations can be evaluated—and discounted.

Case Study #1: The 1986 California Toxics Initiative

In a state well known for its liberal support of environmental policies, continued concern about the safety of public drinking water supplies and ongoing frustration with legislative inaction encouraged environmental groups to offer a unique solution to California voters during the 1986 general election. Proposition 65—formally known as the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986—was designed to restrict the release of "significant amounts" of toxic substances into drinking water if those chemicals were known to cause cancer or birth defects. Moreover, the initiative required California companies to give "clear and reasonable" warning before knowingly exposing the public to harmful chemicals from a variety of sources, including alcoholic beverages, paint, dry cleaning fluids, and gasoline.

Perhaps most significant, in permitting citizen lawsuits to be filed against offending companies, Proposition 65 promised a dramatic "change in the rules about who is responsible for setting safe chemical exposure levels" (Lovett 1994, 26). Rather than relying on a massive state and federal bureaucracy to study scientific evidence and determine safe levels of exposure—a process that is often excruciatingly slow—Proposition 65 offered an "innovative legal approach" that effectively turned the regulatory tables by putting the burden of proof on businesses to show scientifically that the chemicals they use are safe (Russell 1989, Z12).[2]

This shift in the burden of proof solidified fierce opposition to the initiative from the oil industry, utility companies, the California Chamber of Commerce, the Farm Bureau Federation, and the California Manufacturers Association as well as the incumbent California governor, George Deukmejian. In outspending environmental proponents by a 3:1 margin, "No-on-65" campaign groups accumulated a war chest of nearly $5 million. The groups even ran a full-page ad in the *Wall Street Journal* urging companies nationwide to help them "prevent the second biggest business disaster in California history," which (in their opinion) ranked behind only the stock market crash of 1929 (Epstein 1986, 6).

In presenting their case before California voters, opposition groups argued that prohibiting "significant amounts" of toxic discharges (defined as "any detectable amount") would essentially ban the use of many chemicals useful to agriculture and industry, given the sophistication and sensitivity of current scientific techniques (Locke 1986). The "No-on-65" campaign also argued that the initiative was blatantly unfair and "full of exemptions," granting immunity to government agencies but creating still more bureaucratic red tape for private-sector businesses (Locke 1986, 8). In short, opponents argued that Proposition 65 would harm the California economy, drive away jobs, and not result "in one single glass of cleaner water" (Skelton 1986, 3).

Understanding Public Attitudes toward Proposition 65

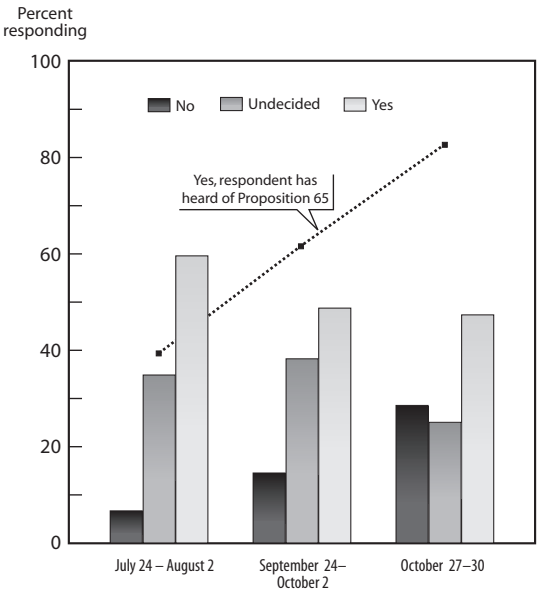
Between July 24 and October 30, 1986, the Field Institute (a nonpartisan public policy research organization that collects public opinion data on a variety of social and political topics within California) conducted a series of polls measuring public attitudes toward the upcoming state election, its candidates, and its ballot propositions.[3] Respondents in all three surveys were asked whether

they had "seen or heard anything about an initiative, Proposition 65, that will be on the November statewide election ballot having to do with toxic substance[s] and drinking water." Voters who were aware of the measure were then asked how they might vote based on the information they had already received. All participants were then read a brief neutral description of the initiative and asked one final time how they would vote if the election were being held that day.[4]

Taken together, data results from these three surveys demonstrate strong public support for Proposition 65. During the summer prior to the election, for example, 88 percent of those responding supported the initiative after hearing a brief description of its goals. By the beginning of October, well into the fall campaign and just a month prior to election day, overall support remained high at 79 percent. Among likely voters who were already familiar with Proposition 65, however, opposition to the initiative increased substantially, from just 7 percent during the summer months to nearly 30 percent by the end of October (see Figure 1). For these voters, the campaign arguments levied against the initiative by business and industry clearly had a detrimental impact on the measure's support.

As Table 1 suggests, however, strong support overall was clearly sustained, in no small part by the positive initial reaction of uninformed voters who had not previously heard of the policy. Even controlling for a variety of social, political, and demographic factors (including partisan identification and political ideology), it is clear that voters who were not familiar with Proposition 65 (and who therefore had no knowledge of negative advertising) were much more likely to favor the measure ($p < .001$). The proposition's goals of prohibiting "the discharge of toxic substances into drinking water" and requiring "warnings of toxic chemicals exposure" likely were appealing to these voters.[5] Equally appealing wording on the ballot on election day also meant that voters heading to the polls with little or no knowledge of the initiative were likely to support it. As opponents feared, this strong "gut reaction" contributed to an impressive victory for environmentalists. The toxics initiative attracted 63 percent of the popular vote and passed by a margin of nearly 2:1.

Figure 1: Voters' Responses to Polls on the 1986 California Toxics Initiative



Source: Field Institute (see note 3).

Note: Voter familiarity with Proposition 65 increased as the campaign moved forward and information about the initiative became widely available. At the same time, however, opposition increased. The more voters knew about Propostion 65, the more they disliked it.

Why Did Proposition 65 Succeed?

The importance of the success of Proposition 65, as a strict environmental policy put before California voters, cannot be overestimated. It was, after all, the first fiercely contested environmental ballot measure to succeed in California since the 1972 Coastal Act (Epstein 1986). Moreover, its emphasis on pollution prevention (rather than cleanup) was both innovative and resourceful—considering how long it typically takes the federal government to determine safe levels of exposure, set standards, and impose limitations. As a bonafide electoral success, however,

Table 1: Factors Affecting Willingness to Vote for the 1986 California Toxics Initiative (i.e., Proposition 65)

Independent Variables	Ordered Probit Slope Coefficient	Standard Error
Age	–0.006	0.00
Education	–0.092	0.07
Income	–0.019	0.04
Partisan identification	–0.003	0.04
Political ideology	0.104*	0.05
Race	0.281	0.27
Gender	–0.198	0.14
Prior knowledge of Proposition 65	–0.623**	0.15
Intercept #1	1.613	0.36
Intercept #2	0.528	0.07
Log-likelihood = –284.615		

$N = 447$ (out of 1,023 surveys administered). *$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

Source: Field Institute (see note 3).

Notes: The dependent variable on which the analysis in this table is based was operationalized by the following question: "Proposition 65 would prohibit the discharge of toxic chemicals into drinking water and require warnings of toxic chemicals exposure. If you were voting today on Proposition 65, would you vote yes or no?" Answers are coded as follows: Vote no (1); Undecided (2); Vote yes (3). A positive coefficient indicates greater likelihood of voting for Proposition 65. Some questions were asked of only a limited subset of respondents, decreasing the sample size. A listwise deletion of missing values is used throughout; that is, respondents who answered "don't know" or who had no answer to the question were dropped from the analysis.

Definitions of Variables Used in Table 1

Age: "May I ask your age, please?" Coded in years.

Education: "What is the highest grade or year of school that you have finished and gotten credit for?" Answers are coded as follows: 8th grade or less (1); Some high school (2); Graduated high school (3); Trade/vocational school (4); 1–2 years of college (5); 3–4 years of college (6); Graduated college (7); 5–6 years of college (8); Master's degree (9); Post-master's (10).

Income: "Now, we don't want your exact income, but just roughly could you tell me if your annual household income before taxes is …" Answers are coded as follows: Under $10,000 (1); $10,000–$19,999 (2); $20,000–$29,999 (3); $30,000–$39,999 (4); $40,000–$49,999 (5); $50,000–$59,999 (6); $60,000–$69,999 (7); $70,000 or more (8).

Partisan identification: "Generally speaking, in politics do you consider yourself a conservative, liberal, middle-of-the-road, or don't you think of yourself in these terms?" If liberal/conservative: "Do you consider yourself a strong or not very strong liberal/conservative?" If middle-of-the-road: "Do you think of yourself as closer to conservatives or closer to liberals?" Answers to this series of questions are coded as follows: Strong conservative (1); Not a strong conservative (2); Moderate, closer to conservative (3); Moderate (4); Moderate, closer to liberal (5); Not a strong liberal (6); Strong liberal (7).

Political ideology: "Generally speaking, do you usually consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" If Democrat/Republican: "Would you call yourself a strong or not very strong Republican/Democrat?" If Independent, no preference, other, or don't know: "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or the Democratic party?" Answers to this series of questions are coded as follows: Strong Republican (1); Not very strong Republican (2); Independent, closer to Republican (3); Independent (4); Independent, closer to Democrat (5); Not very strong Democrat (6); Strong Democrat (7).

Race: "For classification purposes, we'd like to know what your racial background is. Are you white, black, Asian, or are you a member of some other race?" Coded as White (0); Other (1).

Gender: Coded as Female (0); Male (1).

Prior knowledge of Proposition 65: "Have you seen or heard anything about an initiative, Proposition 65, that will be on the November statewide election ballot having to do with toxic substances and exposure restrictions?" Answers are coded as follows: Have not heard (0); Have heard (1).

Proposition 65 would undoubtedly be considered a "deviant" case by Zisk (1987) and others who stress the importance of campaign spending in determining initiative outcomes, particularly given high and disproportionate spending on the negative side of the issue. On these grounds, the success of Proposition 65 warrants attention as well as explanation.

Despite a well-funded campaign against the proposal, the message opponents sent to California voters was ill-advised. Emphasizing that the proposal would exempt government agencies from accountability while putting onerous restrictions on businesses may have convinced some that the toxics initiative was either inadequate or unfair, but it was the source of that message that ultimately failed to ring true: "The oil and chemical companies went on TV to attack the measure as too weak. Their slogan was, 'Too many exemptions,' as if *they* were the environmentalists" (Nicholl 1989, 17 [emphasis added]). As Lupia and McCubbins (1998) contend, credibility is ultimately key to understanding the dynamics of political persuasion.

Moreover, an appealing ballot title probably meant that many undecided or uninformed voters cast ballots in favor of Proposition 65. Broad environmental goals were described in a manner that very likely encouraged support based on social desirability alone. Voter intentions were strengthened further by ballot wording implying that big business—rather than consumers themselves—bore the responsibility (and potential cost). Although well-financed opponents tried to label the toxics initiative a "simplistic response to a complex issue," California voters ultimately preferred to view the proposal as a clear-cut health and quality-of-life issue rather than an intricate political debate over policy (Allswang 1991, 156; Nicholl 1989). Such rhetoric may ultimately weaken the sophistication and potential of issue-voting on environmental concerns, but it is a strategy that is fundamentally compatible with the informational vacuum faced by many voters on election day (Magleby 1984).

Case Study #2: The 1992 Massachusetts Recycling Initiative

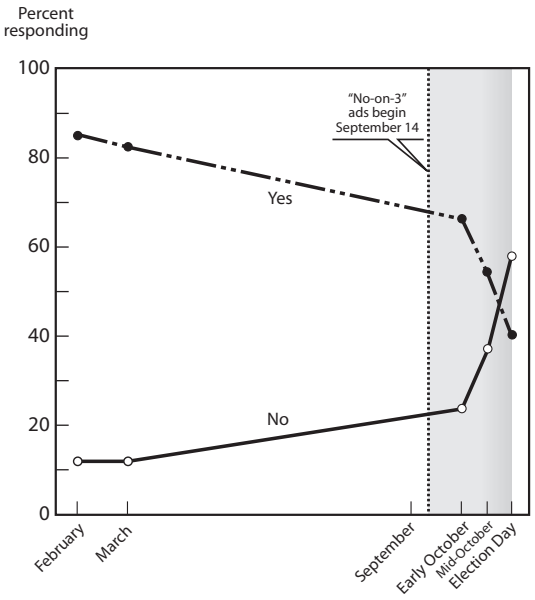
Just six years after a major victory in California, environmentalists faced the possibility of major defeat in Massachusetts. By putting Question 3 on the November 1992 ballot, sponsors hoped that a new policy regulating the recycled content of all product packaging would "close the loop" in the state's burgeoning recycling program by creating local markets for the old newspapers, milk bottles, and plastics collected curbside by town recycling programs (Allen 1992). The state was continuing to recover that year from an economic slump that had produced declining revenues and serious job losses, but even the Republican governor, William Weld, believed that the measure would "be good for the state's economy as well as its environment" (Dumanoski 1992b, 13).

Strong opposition to the initiative, however, came from several well-financed groups, including packaging companies, the plastics industry, the American Paper Institute, and the Grocery Manufacturers Association, who together formed a vocal "No-on-3" coalition. Over the course of a $6.5 million advertising campaign that outspent environmental sponsors by 13:1, opponents argued that consumers were the ones most likely to bear the burden of mandated repackaging, costing families up to $230 per year in higher product prices (Allen 1992; Leaversuch 1992). Enforcement of the initiative, they contended, would require a costly new state bureaucracy, burying grocery stores in bureaucratic red tape (Dumanoski 1992b) but having little impact on the state's solid waste problems, given that over 80 percent of Massachusetts packaging originated outside the state (Allen 1992; Dumanoski 1992a, 1992b).

The Voters Respond

Initial reaction to Question 3 was overwhelmingly favorable (see Figure 2). In accordance

Figure 2: Trends in Support for the 1992 Massachusetts Recycling Initiative



Source: Marttila & Kiley, Inc. (see note 6). Election day data are actual vote totals.

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because some respondents answered "not sure" or did not answer.

with Magleby's theory, however, support weakened considerably over the course of the election campaign, particularly after negative advertising began to appear in the mass media in September 1992. In a series of polls conducted by the Boston firm of Marttila & Kiley, Inc., 88 percent of respondents said they were likely to support Question 3 in February of that year, whereas just 55 percent agreed by mid-October. In the interim, well-financed opponents successfully recast the recycling issue as a packaging ban, stirring up voter concern about jobs and the economy as well as disapproval of government waste, inefficiency, and bureaucracy. By election day, Question 3 failed badly at the polls, winning just 41 percent of the popular vote.

Understanding Public Attitudes toward Question 3

Why such a seemingly drastic reversal of opinion? Perhaps the best explanation can be found in the February 1992 poll conducted by Marttila & Kiley.[6] In interviewing 402 likely Massachusetts voters, this benchmark survey asked respondents how they might vote for the recycling initiative under three different conditions. Respondents were asked for their "initial reaction" to a proposal that "would require nearly all packaging used in the state to be recyclable or made of recycled materials" (question 11, page 2 of questionnaire). Later in the survey, respondents were read a more detailed description of the initiative and asked which way they would be inclined to vote "if the election on this proposal were being held tomorrow" (question 18, page 2 of questionnaire). Immediately following, respondents were asked to react to two batteries of questions assessing the various reasons why the proposal should be supported or rejected.[7] A final measure of voter intention was asked following discussion of these positive and negative attributes.

Table 2 shows that there was a dramatic shift in opinion across these three measures because of framing effects (i.e., how the questions pertaining to the issue were posed) that were purposely designed to test the strength and stability of attitudes toward Question 3. Eighty-eight percent of respondents were initially favorable to the proposal, and nearly all continued to support the measure after it had been explained to them in greater detail.

Table 2: Responses to the Poll on the 1992 Massachusetts Recycling Initiative (i.e., Question 3)

	Responses (by percent)			
	Yes	"Leaning" Yes	"Leaning" No	No
Voter intention #1 (n = 388)	87.9	—	—	12.1
Voter intention #2 (n = 391)	87.2	5.6	1.0	6.1
Voter intention #3 (n = 377)	52.8	29.4	7.2	10.6

N = 402 (overall sample size).

Source: Marttila & Kiley, Inc. (see note 6).

Notes: n's are the effective sample sizes for each question. A listwise deletion of missing values is used throughout.

Definitions of Voter Intentions Measured in Table 2

Voter intention #1: "Please tell me whether your initial reaction would be to vote in favor of … or vote against … a proposal that would require nearly all packaging used in the state to be recyclable or made of recycled materials."

Voter intention #2: "Let me describe this proposal in a little more detail. Packaging accounts for roughly one-third of the total volume of trash disposal in Massachusetts each year. In order to sharply reduce the amount of trash, this proposal would require that by July 1, 1996, packaging will have to meet one of five standards, by being smaller in size, reusable, recycled, or made of recycled or recyclable materials. Manufacturers and businesses can use any one of the five standards to meet the new packaging requirements. If the election on this proposal were being held tomorrow, would you be inclined to vote yes or no on this proposal?" If not sure: "I know you could change your mind, but which way are you leaning based on this information?"

Voter intention #3: [Question posed after asking respondents to react to a lengthy list of positive and negative reasons for supporting/rejecting the proposal]. "Now that you have heard some of the practical concerns and reservations about the recycling initiative, I want to see how you feel now. If the election were held tomorrow, would you probably vote yes on this proposal, are you leaning toward voting yes, are you leaning toward voting no, or would you probably vote no on this proposal?"

However, only 53 percent of voters felt that they would "probably vote yes" after being exposed to political arguments by both environmentalists and their critics during the course of the campaign. Comparing responses to the second and third items, just 3 percent of voters were more likely to support Question 3 by the end of the survey, whereas 38 percent (nearly 2 in 5) felt that their support had weakened.

To explain this downward shift and compare voter intentions immediately before and after respondents were experimentally exposed to various political frames, a new variable was created by calculating the difference in voter intentions between the second and third survey conditions. The scale ranges from –3 to +3; 0 indicates no change in voter intention. The presence of a negative sign means that a respondent's support for Question 3 weakened; a positive sign indicates that voter intention strengthened.

Although political ideology had a strong impact on initial vote choice, it appears to have had little independent effect on changing voters' minds either way during the course of the survey (see Table 3), even though respondents' criticisms of the initiative were closely related to traditional ideological beliefs (i.e., taxation, bureaucracy, regulation, etc.). Second, data also indicate that respondents who voluntarily recycled or who participated in town recycling programs were not more likely to support Question 3, despite the expectation that prior recycling behavior would have helped to invest Massachusetts voters in the outcome of Question 3 and its efforts to create local markets for recycled materials.

Most important, it is clear that positive and negative frames had an asymmetrical effect: positive evaluations played little or no role in strengthening voter intentions toward Question 3, but reservations about the proposal were a major factor in eroding public support. For example, a shift in response from "minor reservations" to "strong reservations" leads to a statistically and substantively significant shift in voter intention, holding other factors constant. When asked which particular concern they considered to be "most serious," respondents whose support declined commonly mentioned "loss of jobs" (29 percent) and "cost to consumers" (20 percent). It is those concerns that were actively exploited by opponents throughout the initiative campaign.

Table 3: Factors Affecting Willingness to Vote for the 1992 Massachusetts Recycling Initiative (i.e., Question 3)

Independent Variables	Ordered Probit Slope Coefficient	Standard Error
Age	0.013	0.03
Education	0.023	0.06
Income	0.059	0.06
Partisan identification	0.076	0.12
Political ideology	0.125*	0.06
Gender	0.286	0.16
Household recycles	0.185	0.18
Additive scale of positive evaluations	0.029	0.02
Additive scale of negative evaluations	–0.060**	0.01
Intercept #1	–0.603	0.80
Intercept #2	0.049	0.02
Intercept #3	0.074	0.03
Intercept #4	1.076	0.11
Intercept #5	1.674	0.16
Log-likelihood = –243.193		

$N = 254$ (out of 402 surveys administered). $*p < .05$. $**p < .001$.

Source: Marttila & Kiley, Inc. (see note 6).

Notes: The dependent variable on which the analysis in this table is based measures change in vote intention on Question 3 after considering both positive and negative aspects of the proposal. It is a scale that ranges from –3 to +3, where 0 indicates no change in voting intention between the second and third survey conditions (see Definitions of Voter Intentions Measured in Table 2). A positive coefficient indicates greater likelihood of voting for Question 3. A listwise deletion of missing values is used throughout.

Why Did Question 3 Fail?

Early polls suggest that support for the initiative was high but "soft." As Magleby (1984) argues, because most voters are exposed to a campaign knowing little, if anything, about the propositions they are likely to face on the

Definitions of Variables Used in Table 3

Age: "In which category does your age fall?" Answers are coded as follows: Under 25 years (1); 25–29 (2); 30–34 (3); 35–39 (4); 40–44 (5); 45–49 (6); 50–54 (7); 55–59 (8); 60–64 (9); 65 and over (10).

Education: "What was the last grade of school you completed?" Answers are coded as follows: Grade school or less (1); Some high school (2); High school grad (3); Vocational/technical (4); Some college/two-year college (5); Four-year college graduate (6); Post-graduate work (7).

Income: "For tabulation purposes only, please tell me which of the following income categories includes your total family income in 1991 before taxes—just stop me when I read the correct category." Answers are coded as follows: Less than $20,000 (1); $20,000–$29,999 (2); $30,000–$39,999 (3); $40,000–$49,999 (4); $50,000–$74,999 (5); $75,000 or over (6).

Partisan identification: "Regardless of which party you like better these days, are you currently registered to vote in Massachusetts as a Democrat, Republican, or an Independent?" Answers are coded as follows: Republican (1); Independent (2); Democrat (3).

Political ideology: "When it comes to most political issues, do you think of yourself as a liberal, a conservative, or a moderate?" If moderate: "Do you think of yourself as closer to being liberal or being conservative?" Answers are coded as follows: Conservative (1); Moderate-conservative (2); Moderate (3); Moderate-liberal (4); Liberal (5).

Household recycles: "Other than returning bottles and cans for deposit, do you or does your household participate in a recycling program in your community; do you voluntarily recycle certain items even though it is not part of a community program; or isn't your household involved in recycling yet?" Answers are coded as follows: Participate in community recycling program *or* voluntarily recycle without program (1); Not involved in recycling (0).

Additive scale of positive evaluations: Respondents were asked to react to a battery of nine statements, indicating how important each reason was for voting in favor of the proposal. Their answers were coded as follows: Not very important (1); Somewhat important (2); Very important (3); Extremely important (4). Answers to each of these questions were summed, resulting in a scale ranging in value from 9 to 36. Reasons included, among others, "jump-starting the economy by creating new recycling jobs," "reducing our reliance on landfills," and "saving money in trash disposal costs."

Additive scale of negative evaluations: Respondents were asked to react to eight statements, indicating to what extent each reason gave them reservations about the proposal. Their answers were coded as follows: No reservations (1); Minor reservations (2); Fairly strong reservations (3); Very strong reservations (4). Answers to each of these questions were summed, resulting in a scale ranging in value from 8 to 32. Reservations included, among others, "creating a whole new government bureaucracy to enforce new, complicated packaging standards"; "fewer choices for consumers in the supermarket"; "banning plastic packaging used to keep fresh foods fresh and sanitized"; and "job losses in plastics and packaging industries."

electoral ballot, it is not uncommon to find widespread opinion change over time as voters gather more information about the issues. Especially for initiatives, that pattern is one of strong early support followed by defeat, especially when there is high spending on the negative side of a proposition. The failure of the Massachusetts recycling initiative seems to provide evidence for these theories. Still, the asymmetry of the positive and negative frames used within the survey itself questions whether campaign spending was indeed the root cause for the initiative's failure or simply an enabling factor that allowed opponents to publicize their complaints to a primed audience.

Controlling the terms of debate can be key to understanding eventual success or failure (Magleby 1984, 168). In the case of Question 3, by reframing the issue as a packaging ban, rather than a pro-recycling policy, opponents were able to successfully shift public attention away from environmental concern about potential economic costs that would presumably be borne by Massachusetts consumers and their families (Leaversuch 1992). Moreover, the political context in which this shift occurred allowed opponents to simplify the issue and link public attitudes toward Question 3 to other factors, such as political ideology and long-standing beliefs about bureaucratic waste and inefficiency. Ultimately, its failure was not solely the result of lopsided campaign spending and negative advertising, although certainly those resources helped to inform Massachusetts voters of alternative positions. Instead, the "No-on-3" campaign succeeded because its content and tone resonated with anxious voters.

Discussion

Studies of electoral behavior on statewide ballot propositions have long shown that in the absence of typical cues and informational shortcuts, voters are more dependent on political campaigns to simplify choice and shape

electoral decisions (Magleby 1984). In fact, nowhere is this influence more clearly seen than in environmental issues, where political opponents frequently use powerful rhetoric to persuade environmentally concerned voters that the marginal benefit of regulation fails to exceed its cost. In recent years, however, some scholars have tended to view losses at the ballot box largely as a function of campaign expenditures. In that context, the wide margins by which environmental groups are typically outspent by their opponents may seem explanation enough. The two cases presented here instead reassert the importance of issue-framing in understanding the dynamics of electoral choice.

By linking the debate over product packaging to preexisting fears about state unemployment and bureaucratic red tape, political opponents to Massachusetts's Question 3 were able to redirect voters' attention away from the environmental benefits of the proposal toward a bitter acknowledgement of its cost in a way that ultimately undermined support for the proposal. An ability to outspend environmentalists allowed business and industry groups to dominate the airwaves during the fall of 1992, and the effectiveness of their attacks can be seen clearly in a poll conducted months before. In this sense, money becomes a proxy for other factors that deserve equal attention.

Although money is instrumental (of course) in funding early polling, securing qualified campaign staff, and paying for media advertising, it cannot always compensate for a poorly constructed message: sometimes it is the content of the message that matters most. By choosing to emphasize the complexity of Proposition 65 in a multimillion dollar advertising campaign, opponents asked Californians to view a potentially "easy" issue regarding public health and safety as a "hard" policy debate, which overwhelmed voters were loathe to do (Carmines and Stimson 1980). It was a tactical mistake that allowed environmentalists to win an unlikely victory as financial underdogs. A pro-environmental campaign in Massachusetts six years later failed after making many of the same strategic errors. Election results in these two cases seem to underscore the importance of simple, lucid proposals that sympathize with the substantial informational demands put on voters.

In the final analysis, too, available evidence suggests that voting "green" on ballot propositions may be more likely, as Zisk (1987) notes, in simple, inexpensive, and low-key campaigns that avoid uniting political enemies. As survey data from the California and Massachusetts elections demonstrate, initial voter intentions on environmental issues remain overwhelmingly positive. Given that salience increases the likelihood of political opposition, as well as the probability that voters will have been exposed to potent negative advertising, environmentalists unable to win the money "war" might fare better in the long run by promoting quiet, incremental reform rather than broad, sweeping changes in environmental law.

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Notes

1. This estimate is based on the author's own extensive analysis of environmental ballot propositions between 1964 and 1994 (Guber 1996).
2. This change in the incentive structure has undoubtedly been successful. In the years since Proposition 65's implementation, the federal government has de-

termined safe levels of exposure, set standards, and imposed limitations for more than 250 specific chemical substances, compared with 20 or so under the old regulatory system (Lovell 1994).

3. Field poll data files are archived at the University of California and at the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut. All three California polls (archived by the Roper Center as USCA 86-04, USCA 86-05, and USCA 86-06) were administered by the Field Institute. Adult residents of California were selected by random-digit dialing. The first poll (administered July 24–August 4, 1986) had a sample size of 1,028; the second poll (September 24–October 2) had a sample size of 1,023; and the last poll (October 29–30) had a sample size of 701. Field Institute, 550 Kearney Street, Suite 900, San Francisco, CA 94108-2527. See http://www.field.com/fieldpoll/.
4. The wording of this description in the first survey (for the poll administered July 24–August 4) was as follows: "Well, as you know, Proposition 65 would restrict the amount of toxic substances that could be discharged into drinking water supplies. It would also require that individuals be informed of businesses that use toxic chemicals and that these chemicals be identified. If you were voting today on Proposition 65 would you vote yes or no?" In the second survey, slightly different wording was used. This measure was not used in the final survey.
5. Respondents in the second poll (administered September 24–October 2, 1986) were asked open-ended questions about the reasons for their vote choice. Although sample sizes for these questions are too small to support intensive statistical analysis, coded answers suggest that initiative supporters were most concerned with the safety of their drinking water, whereas opponents were most likely to feel that additional efforts aimed at regulating toxics were simply "unnecessary."
6. Designed for the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group, the environmental sponsors of Question 3, the Marttila & Kiley, Inc. survey (#MK-92110) was administered by telephone February 11–13, 1992. A sample of 402 Massachusetts voters was generated using a random probability method that included unlisted phone numbers. The sample was stratified according to county, and gender quotas were observed. The data used here were provided to the author courtesy of Marttila Communications Group, Inc. (1 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108) and the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (29 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111). See http://www.masspirg.org.
7. Reasons to support Question 3 included increasing the state recycling rate, creating new recycling industries, and reducing reliance on landfills. Reservations about the proposal included creation of a costly new state bureaucracy, packaging bans on plastics that keep foods fresh and sanitary, higher product prices, and competitive disadvantage for Massachusetts companies.

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