

State Initiatives, Ballot Language, and the Media: Do They Overlap?



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Voters don't feel comfortable voting on what they don't know, so they won't vote when they lack information to make an informed decision (Wattenburg et al. 2000). What information are voters getting? I want learn more about how media, ballot language, and state initiatives intertwine

How We Are Measuring

Media: Newspapers

- Number of articles three months prior to the election & measure the word count of the articles.

State initiatives are seen throughout every state, some more than others, but every election brings them. However, not every election is equal. What role does media play in turnout during elections and does any amount of roll-off occurs during presidential or governor's elections? Does this roll-off or turnout have to do with media (or lack of) attention, or is there something more going on? I will also be studying the idea ballot language can have an impact on how citizens vote.

My Hypotheses:

- 1: The shorter the actual language of a state initiative appearing on the ballot is, the more likely it is to pass during the election.
- 3: The more media coverage there is of the initiative, the less roll-off there is from issue to issue.
- 3: The higher the readability of the initiative, the more likely it is to pass.

Data Collected So Far:

- List of each state's initiatives from 2011-2015
- Initiative Full Text
- Type of initiative
- Percent voted yes
- Word count
- List of important newspapers in each state
- Flesch-Kincaid Readability Score

Our Findings So Far:

Increased media coverage of an issue leads to less support.

Ballot measures receive higher levels of support when:

- Readability is at a lower than high school graduate level
- The measure has been placed on the ballot by the state legislature.
- The vote occurs in an odd-year election