

Taxing Decisions: Confusion, Preferences and Vote Choice in Direct Democracy

Mike Binder
Department of Political Science
University of California, San Diego
Social Sciences Building 349
9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0521
mbinder@ucsd.edu

Abstract

The traditional consensus among scholars of direct democracy is that voter confusion leads to a status quo bias and an increase in ‘no’ votes on ballot initiatives. If that is the case, direct democracy may fail to correctly convert voter preferences into public policy. I test both of these claims using survey evidence from the state of Washington during the November 2007 elections. The data are from The Washington Poll, which is a non-partisan, academic survey research project sponsored by the Washington Institute for the Study of Ethnicity & Race (WISER), a research center at the University of Washington in the School of Social Sciences. I find, first, that contrary to conventional wisdom, confusion does not lead to increases in ‘no’ votes on propositions. Second, by and large voters tend to correctly translate their preferences into votes. However, under certain circumstances confused voters do have more trouble voting their preferences.

Whether it includes punching the right chad, filling in the correct circle or pushing the proper space on the touch screen, voter's ability to vote their intent has been under tremendous scrutiny the past several years. No doubt, the act of voting has become increasingly more complex as simple one page ballots have become booklets and technology has led to ballot boxes being replaced with computer screens. But underlying the concern over physical misvotes and voter intent is whether or not the voters can accurately translate their preference into votes, regardless of voting method. This paper evaluates how well citizens can vote in line with their stated preferences on the basic tenet of government policies: taxes and spending. In addition to this analysis, I will assess what role confusion plays in voters' minds and how that may increase voting errors on Election Day.

First, I frame my argument using existing literature on voting accuracy and preferences for taxes and spending. Next, I address the role that confusion plays in the voting process. Following those sections I discuss the data collection and methodological tools employed to test my hypotheses. A presentation of the data and an interpretation of the results conclude.

Correct Voting

The ability to 'vote correctly' has been a concern to public officials and scholars alike for some time. Some of the best work assessing the success rates of voters has been accomplished by Bartels (1996) and Lau & Redlawsk (1997, 2006). Bartels (1996) used NES data to show statistically significant discrepancies between informed and uninformed voters of similar demographics, implying that the uninformed voters may be voting against their interests. However, the substantive differences were rather small and an optimistic reading of the data could lead to a more generous interpretation, suggesting the overall similarity between the vote choices of informed and uninformed voters.

Lau & Redlawsk's (1997, 2006) experimental work shows similar findings in that three quarters of their subjects did not change their votes when they became fully informed. Lau & Redlawsk's experimental work is a much improved measure of preferences or intent, as inferring from demographics can lead to questionable conclusions. Similarly, experimental work often faces external validity concerns. Do fictional candidates and brief biographies on a computer screen effectively emulate a real life election where voters have a real stake in the outcome and often have some experience with the candidates or the issues under consideration? Probably not, but the inferences drawn from their work are quite valuable. Combined with Bartels' study, Lau & Redlawsk's work suggests that a clear majority of voters seem to get it right when they enter the voting booth, but a disturbingly large minority of the electorate seem to be getting it wrong.

I aim to add to this literature by assessing how well citizens can translate their general ideological views on government size, specifically tax and spending policies, into votes on direct legislation. Unlike the complexities of candidate elections where multiple dimensions are involved voting choices, direct legislation allows for an unambiguous measure of preferences on a single dimension. While this may limit the extension of this research, by focusing on real life propositions and avoiding the difficulties associated with inferring preferences by demographic makeup, this paper can enhance the growing body work on correct voting. In addition to whether or not people are voting correctly, it is important to assess any differences among various subgroups, particularly informed vs. uninformed as this divide has been the subject of great debate (Bartels 1996, Converse 1964, 2000, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

Confusion

Aside from the role that information plays in the ability to vote correctly, confusion has been an oft studied topic in direct democracy. The role of confusion in vote choice is analogous,

though not identical, to the role that information plays. There have been decades of scholarship elucidating clear conceptual and operational definitions of political information (for a detailed review of political information and its effect on the electorate see Converse 2000 or Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Confusion, on the other hand, suffers from vague conceptual definitions, with various theorized results in the voting booth. Confusion is much like obscenity, in that it is difficult to describe, yet as Justice Stewart stated, “I know it when I see it” (Jacobellis v. Ohio 1964). Therefore, I have left it up to individual respondents to interpret whether or not they find any particular proposition confusing.

Stemming from Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) work with prospect theory, the conventional wisdom is that confused voters have a status quo bias. Prospect theory claims that when people are faced with risk, they undervalue outcomes that are probabilistic, in comparison to guaranteed outcomes. More simply put, people prefer the devil they know to one that they do not, thus voting ‘no’ on propositions under conditions of uncertainty (Hyink 1969, Lupia and Matsusaka 2004).

Although there is only scant aggregate empirical evidence in support of this claim (see Christin, Hug and Sciarini 2002, and Bowler, Donovan and Hopp 1992), the status quo bias theory and ‘no’ votes by confused voters has become commonplace in scholarly writing (see Hyink 1969, Magleby 1984, Bowler and Donovan 1998, Higley and McAllister 2002, Goldsmith 2004) and routine in anecdotes told by campaign consultants (in Magleby and Patterson 1998). Yet, there has been some empirical evidence against this claim (Darcy and Laver 1990) and only flimsy theoretical explanations for this alleged phenomenon (as pointed out by Lowenstein 1982).

Individuals can be uncertain of the public policy consequences of ballot initiatives for many reasons. First, an individual's interpretation of the initiative may be unclear, either due to a lack of information or a confluence of competing information, leading to a heightened level of confusion. The initiative itself may even be deceiving on its face. In 2001, Washington voters passed a tax limiting measure that was overturned by the State Supreme Court in November of 2007, because the court claimed, "the text of the initiative misled voters about the substantive impact of the initiative on existing law" (Gilmore 2007).

Another potential cause of confusion is that legislative and bureaucratic implementation of the initiatives is not always straightforward (Gerber, Lupia, McCubbins and Kiewiet 2001, Gerber, Lupia and McCubbins 2004). In a federal system, other levels of government can attempt to dilute or alter the results, or change the outcomes of these elections. For example, the federal court overturned Proposition 187 in California which aimed to deny illegal immigrants social services. In addition to uncertainty about implementation, policy consequences are also far from certain. For example, California's Proposition 140 instituting term limits has had numerous unintentional consequences, many of them negatively impacting the state (Kousser 2005).

Another argument suggesting an increase in 'no' votes is that voters become frustrated when faced with competing initiatives (Ainsworth 1990, Bowler, Donovan and Happ 1992), and in order to avoid voting for the wrong initiative, the voter simply votes no on all competing initiatives. Additionally, as rational voters use trusted elites or organizations as shortcuts instead of gathering costly encyclopedic information (Lupia 1994, Lupia and McCubbins 1998), voters may become confused if they receive contradictory signals from elites (Zaller 1992) leading to ambiguity about the elites' and their own true preferences. This ambivalence may then be translated into a 'no' vote via risk aversion and prospect theory.

Another supposed consequence of confusion is abstention. Downs' (1957) discussion of the utility of voting predicts that if voters lack a clear candidate preference (or in this case policy preference) they will not vote. Walker (1966) has shown that longer ballots can lead to roll-off in the United States; Bowler and Donovan (1998) find similar results in Oregon and California specifically. Perea's (2002) work shows that longer ballots increase roll-off rates in Western European referenda elections, as well. Though there are no direct tests, it is posited in these cases that confusion works as the intervening variable in the causal chain. Additionally, the types of ballots available can influence abstention in initiative voting rates (McDonald 2003). Mueller (1969) suggests that media attention to elections, and by extension information and reduced confusion levels (Matusaka 1993), diminishes the abstention rate in non-controversial ballot initiatives. Similarly, it can be argued that low information candidate races can induce higher levels of confusion. Research on roll-off or within ballot abstention shows that low information candidate races suffer from this phenomenon (Klein and Baum 2001, Darcy and Schneider 1989).

Since less than 2% of the sample directly stated that they would not (or did not) vote on the propositions, testing for abstention or roll-off is not a worthwhile endeavor. Similarly, there were no directly competing initiatives, so it is impossible to test that theory as well. However, general confusion, as identified by the respondent is testable at the individual level, which can help shed light on the true impact of confusion at the ballot box. Christin, Hug and Sciarini (2002) use voters' ability to recall the number, title and reasons they voted for or against initiatives and referendums in Switzerland through the 1980s and 1990s to test their claim that less informed voters have a status quo bias. Lack of information is not necessarily the same as confusion, though they argue the theoretical framework of status quo bias is similar. As Christin,

Hug and Sciarini argue, “uninformed voters have more information about the current solution to a particular problem than a new one” (2002 p.773). Unfortunately, in their work there is no evidence presented about voters’ awareness levels of the ‘current solution’. Though they find some weak support for their claims, their analysis and results cannot be extended to situations of confusion, it is merely measure of information and its impact on vote choice. Yes, clearly risk and uncertainty are prevalent in direct democracy, but does that lead to more ‘no’ votes? It is an empirical question which has not been satisfactorily answered to this point.

In order to clarify the aim of this paper, three main hypotheses are laid out to assess various claims about confusion and voter rationality made in the literature.

Hypothesis 1: Confused voters will be more likely to vote ‘no’ on ballot propositions than voters who are not confused.

Hypothesis 2: Voters who are not confused about ballot propositions are more likely to ‘vote correctly’ (i.e. in line with their preferences) than voters who are confused.

Hypothesis 3: The more educated the voter the more likely they are to ‘vote correctly’ on ballot propositions.

Data

The data for this analysis are from The Washington Poll, which is a non-partisan, academic survey research project sponsored by the Washington Institute for the Study of Ethnicity & Race (WISER), a research center at the University of Washington in the School of Social Sciences. This statewide random-digit-dial telephone survey (N = 601) was conducted from October 22 – 28, 2007 across the state of Washington, shortly before the November 6, 2007 general election. As shown in Table1, the survey correctly predicted the outcomes all six of the

statewide ballot measures, and the official returns were within the margin of error of the polling data on four of the six ballot measures (The Washington Poll).

(INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE)

The Propositions

Initiative 960, The Taxpayer Protection Act, was a controversial measure aimed at reaffirming Initiative 601 (passed in 1993) which required a 2/3 majority for legislative passage of tax increases. Tim Eyman, the sponsor I-960, is an anti-tax activist in Washington who has become popular for using direct democracy to advance his tax cutting causes. Over the past decade he has experienced mixed results with sponsored or cosponsored initiatives and referenda. Of the fourteen tax cutting and government shrinking propositions, nine have made it on the ballot and seven of those were passed by the voters, including Initiative 960 (Washington Secretary of State 2008). The courts have been less enthusiastic about these propositions and have declared three of the initiatives unconstitutional (McGann 2006).

Initiative 960 faced several tough battles before it even reached the ballot. Signature gathering was difficult and it suffered through court battles before it even reached the ballot as several unions sued on constitutional grounds, the case was dismissed in July of 2007 (Mercier 2007). There was a moderate of campaign spending on both sides of the issue. The Voters Want More Choices PAC, spearheaded by Tim Eyman and Mike and Jack Fagan, spent about \$2.3 million nearly doubling the \$1.3 million No On I 960 spent in opposition (Public Disclosure Commission 2008). This controversial initiative marked a clear divide among the political elite in Washington as popular Democrats came out against the initiative and prominent Republicans supported the cause (Wilson 2007). After a high profile battle, I-960 eventually passed with a bare majority of votes 51.24% to 48.26%.

The second ballot proposition is Engrossed House Joint Resolution 4204, a constitutional amendment on school district tax levies. This amendment would effectively ease the burdens of local school districts by allowing for tax levy increases to be enacted with a simple majority of votes (50% + 1) in a given election. Previously school levies above 1% could be enacted only “(1) if the number of voters who vote in the excess levy election exceeds 40% of the number who voted in the last general election in the district, then the excess levy is approved if at least 60% vote “yes.” (2) If the number of voters who vote in the excess levy election is 40% or less than the number who voted in the last general election in the district, then the levy is approved if the “yes” votes total at least 60% of 40% of the number of voters who voted in the preceding general election in the district” (Washington Secretary of State 2007). EHJR 4204 faced very little opposition compared to I 960. Supporters of Constitutional Amendment 4204 raised approximately \$3 million and faced no major organized opposition campaign, yet the measure barely passed by less than 20,000 votes 50.61% to 49.39% (Thomas 2007).

The clear split between those wanting to reduce government spending and those in favor of increasing the government’s ability to raise taxes makes these propositions an excellent test of voter competency. One measure (I 960) aims to reduce spending, while the other (CA 4204) attempts to reduce the hurdles school districts have in raising taxes. Taxes and spending are clearly not a new issue for voters, as the major political divide throughout American history has been economic (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). The constancy and importance of taxes as an issue should increase the likelihood of correct votes and reduce any levels of confusion amongst the electorate. Of course, general ideological views are never easily translated into policy when it comes to direct democracy (Gerber, Lupia, McCubbins and Kiewiet (2001). In these two cases the implications of a decision on these ballot measures are hidden behind intricate voting rules.

Yet, in a system of representative democracy a basic understanding of majority rule (or supermajority rule in the case of I 960) should not be too burdensome for the voter and even skeptics of citizen competency agree that most voters understand the basics of democracy (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

Dependent Variables

The two main dependent variables in this analysis are vote choice and correct votes on two ballot propositions. Vote choice is determined by self reported responses on a seven point scale ranging from certain to vote 'yes' to certain to vote 'no'. Those who were certain of their vote choice, had a preference but could change or were undecided but leaning in a direction were coded as voting in that direction, 'yes' votes were coded as one (1) and 'no' votes were coded as zero (0). Respondents who were completely undecided, did not vote on the proposition or refused to answer the question were removed from the analysis. The survey was in the field two weeks prior the election, however, all but two counties (King and Pierce – the most populous) in Washington vote by mail and a number of respondents had already sent in their mail ballots. Voters who had already voted by mail are simply categorized by their self reported 'yes' or 'no' votes.

Independent Variables

Parsing out an operationalization of a measure that is ill defined at a conceptual level (confusion) can be extremely difficult. Since both researchers and the general populace often have an 'I know it if I see it' feeling about confusion, the best way to measure confusion is to let the individual respondent to determine their own level of confusion about any particular proposition. Respondents were asked, "In talking to people about the election we find that due to ballot language or contradictory campaign advertisements a lot of people find ballot propositions confusing. How about you, do you find statewide ballot initiative 960, the one which we just

talked about, confusing?” Those who responded ‘yes’ were coded as one (1) and ‘no’ responses were coded as zero (0). Table 2 presents the level of confusion amongst the sample for the two propositions.

(INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE)

General levels of political awareness or information are often operationalized by creating scales (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996), or complex indices (Palfrey & Poole 1987). This dataset does not allow for a complex measure of information, but does provide a simple assessment of general information levels. The respondents were asked which party had the most seats in the US House of Representatives in Washington, DC and the Washington State Senate in Olympia. Correct responses (Democratic in both) were totaled and summed to create a three point index (high, medium and low), ‘don’t know’ and ‘Republican’ were treated as not correct responses. See Table 3 for a breakdown information levels amongst the sample.

(INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE)

Voter preferences for the two ballot propositions were measured by asking whether they supported the taxing and spending policies that were at the heart of each of the propositions. For Initiative 960, respondents were asked, “If you had a say in making up the state budget this year, when it comes to statewide spending would you like to see spending and taxes increased or decreased?” Respondents who indicated they wanted to see taxes and spending increased were coded as one (1). Those who volunteered ‘stay the same’ or ‘don’t know’ were coded as zero (0) and those who preferred taxes and spending to decrease were coded as negative one (-1). Even though Initiative 960 did not actually lower taxes and spending (it simply reaffirmed previous supermajority requirements for tax increases that were passed in 1993 by Initiative 601 and provided for advisory public votes on tax increases that were enacted by the legislature without

voter approval) the architects of the proposal and its opponents claim that it would reduce the state's ability to raise funds, hence lead to lower spending.

For preferences on Constitutional Amendment 4204, respondents were asked, "If you had a say in making up the state budget this year, when it comes to public education would you like to see spending and property taxes increased or decreased?" Similar to I 960, respondents who indicated they wanted to see property taxes and school spending increased were coded as one (1). Those who volunteered 'stay the same' or 'don't know' were coded as zero (0) and those who preferred property taxes and school spending to decrease were coded as negative one (-1). Again, CA 4204 did not directly impact any public spending on the school system, however, by reducing the requirements for passing increases in local property taxes this proposition reduces the burden of paying for increases in school spending. As such, it is reasonable to assume that higher property taxes for more school spending are more likely if CA 4204 were to pass.

Aside from direct preferences on the issue, voters can have additional influences when it comes to deciding how to vote. Most notably party identification, a common determinant of vote choice in candidate elections, can serve as an influence in ballot propositions. Party identification is measured on a seven-point Likert scale with one (1) representing 'Strong Democrat', four (4) equaling 'Independent' and seven (7) representing 'Strong Republican.' Additionally, one's level of political interest can impact their awareness levels and affect whether or not they are confused or not. Political interest is a self reported measure coded such that higher values indicate and increased level of interest in "government and politics": extremely, very, moderately, slightly and not at all interested. Another potential influence on vote choice is whether or not people think direct democracy is generally good for the state. Arguably, individuals who believe direct democracy is bad for the state may be more likely to simply vote 'no' as a protest or statement about direct democracy. In order to control for this possibility, respondents who indicated they thought direct democracy was good for the state were coded one (1), those who were

unsure or did not know were coded zero (0) and those who thought direct democracy was bad for the state were coded negative one (-1).

Finally, three demographic variables are included in the analysis, age, education and income. Age is measured with an ordinal scale such that higher values designate an older category: Under 34, 35-49, 50-65, Over 65. Education is measured by the highest level completed by the respondent and is again coded such that higher values indicate more education: did not finish high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate and post-graduate education. Annual household income is also measured with a similar ordinal scale: Less than \$20,000, \$20,000 - \$39,999, \$40,000 - \$59,999, \$60,000 - \$79,999, \$80,000 - \$99,999, \$100,000 - \$150,000, Over \$150,000. Finally, males were coded as one (1) and females were coded as zero (0).

One way to assess the quality of a measure is its convergent validity, when measures that should be related actually are. Two measures that ought to be inversely related to confusion are education and interest levels. As an individual has higher levels education attained it is presumed that it becomes easier to understand the political world around them. Similarly for political interest, if an individual is interested in political affairs they should be less inclined to be confused about a particular initiative. Figures 1 and 2 show the expected inverse relationship. As interest levels increase, levels of confusion decrease. This finding is consistent across both propositions. Similarly for Figure 2, there is a downward trend in the amount of confusion for both propositions as levels of education. Finding the expected relationships between concepts that have a long history of being accurately operationalized significantly adds to the validity of the confusion measure.

(INSERT FIGURE 1 and FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE)

Hypothesis 1: Confused voters will be more likely to vote 'no' on ballot propositions than voters who are not confused.

In order to test H_1 , it is prudent to conduct both a bivariate and multivariate analysis. First the bivariate test. As evidenced in Table 4, there is virtually no difference between those

voters who are confused and those who are not. For I – 960, the results are nearly identical as both the confused and not confused voters were evenly split on their vote choice. CA – 4204 is quite similar as a mere three more percentage points separated the two groups, but it was those who were not confused that were more likely to vote ‘no’. Neither group for either proposition had statistically significant differences between ‘yes’ and ‘no’ votes.

(INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE)

The multivariate analysis of confusion and its impact on vote choice is very similar. Included in this test are a series of independent variables that often impact a voter’s decision making, as well as a series of demographic control variables. The dependent variable for the two models in Table 5 is vote choice on I – 960 and CA – 4204. The most glaring result from these models is the lack of influence confusion has. Conversely, preferences for tax and spending priorities are statistically significant in the expected direction. Those who preferred higher taxes and spending in the state’s budget were less likely to vote ‘yes’ on I – 960, whereas those who supported higher property taxes for increases in school spending were more likely to vote ‘yes’ on CA – 4204. The impact of partisanship is also in the expected direction as the more Republican respondents were, the more likely they were to support I – 960 and the less likely they were to support CA – 4204. The demographic controls did reach levels of significance except for the role the education plays in support for CA – 4204. This finding is logical; the more educated one tends to be, the more likely they are to understand the value of education and support the state’s role in providing that service.

(INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE)

Hypothesis 2: Voters who are not confused about ballot propositions are more likely to ‘vote correctly’ than voters who are confused.

Hypothesis 3: The more educated the voter the more likely they are to 'vote correctly' on ballot propositions.

The next set of tests involves assessing the impact of confusion and education on one's ability to vote correctly. The implication about confusion is that it may lead to more voting errors, situations where a voter casts a ballot in conflict with their preferences, whereas education is posited to have a positive relationship with correct voting. Testing if somebody actually votes 'correctly' is difficult; however, these measures provide some traction on the issue. The three point measure of tax and spending preferences can be combined with vote choice to determine a correct vote. For I – 960, if a voter prefers lower taxes and spending an affirmative vote is considered 'correct'. Likewise, if a voter desired higher taxes and spending, a 'no' vote is considered 'correct'. It can be argued that people who did not want a change in policy should have voted 'no' to maintain the status quo. It can be similarly argued that by voting 'yes' and increasing the requirements to raise taxes would also lead to a maintenance of the status quo. Without a clear expectation of what a correct vote is in this circumstance, those who indicated that they wanted spending to stay the same or did not know are removed from the analysis. The same logic applies to CA – 4204, those in favor of increasing school spending and property taxes who voted 'yes' and those in favor of decreased spending who voted 'no' are considered to have voted correctly, while 'stay the same' and 'do not know' have been removed from this analysis. The majority of the sample did manage to 'get it right' as over 60% of people got it right on I – 960 and upwards of 76% voted in line with their stated preferences for CA – 4204.

Though confusion does not appear to lead to more 'no' votes, it does seem to lead to more incorrect votes. Table 6 shows the differences between confused and not confused voters' records for correct voting. For both propositions, confusion leads to a statistically significant

decrease in the proportion of voters who are able to vote correctly. Additionally, Table 6 breaks down the differences between correct and incorrect votes. Whether or not the voters are confused, those making incorrect votes are more likely to vote ‘no’ than their correct voting counterparts. It appears that if voters are getting it wrong, they are more likely to make errors in the ‘no’ direction. This could explain the supposed status quo bias for confused voters. Without this specificity of individual level analysis it may appear that confusion is leading to the ‘no’ votes, when in fact confusion is not the key variable. Figure 3 also shows the expected relationship between education and correct voting. Moving from the lowest level of education to the highest, the likelihood of voting correctly increases by nearly 30% for each proposition.

(INSERT TABLE 6 AND FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE)

The multivariate models using correct votes as the dependent variable show mixed results. Confusion is negatively related to correct voting both propositions, but falls just short of statistical significance for CA – 4204. Education is statistically significant for both propositions, as the more education obtained leads to a greater likelihood of correct voting. Political interest is positively related and statistically significant to correct voting for CA – 4204, but not statistically significant for I – 960. Political information presents an intriguing finding in that it is positively related to I – 960 but negatively related to CA – 4204.

(INSERT TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE)

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that a fair number of voters are confused about ballot propositions. However, the data cannot support H_1 , suggesting that confusion may not in fact lead to more ‘no’ votes on propositions. Though it is always inadvisable to draw dramatic conclusions from null findings, especially when only two propositions were tested, both

propositions are quite consistent and the validity of the confusion measure adds weight to these results. The status quo bias described in the literature is just simply not evident with this dataset.

Even though confusion does not lead to more 'no' votes, this data supports H_2 that confusion leads to more incorrect votes. Though this sounds rather commonsensical, this is the first systematic effort to test this hypothesis. As confused voters are getting it wrong more than their unconfused counterpart, there ought to be concern about how that impacts campaigning. A campaign that finds itself on the losing end of public opinion often believes it has incentive to confuse the electorate in an effort gain votes; unfortunately it appears as though success can be found using this tactic.

The data also support H_3 , as education leads to an increase in correct votes. This reinforces previous work that suggests those with higher education levels are better prepared to translate their preferences into actual votes (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Lau and Redlawsk 2006). Again, the limitations of a survey conducted in only one state that analyzes vote choice on only two propositions cannot be over stated. Nonetheless, these results are quite convincing. Confusion is fairly prevalent across the electorate, does not lead to more 'no' votes, but does lead to more incorrect votes. Finally, even though education can be an effective antidote against incorrect votes, up to 20% of the most educated among us still cast ballots that contradict their preferences. Fortunately, the impact these incorrect votes have on policy outcomes is limited by the disproportionate amount of 'no' votes in the overall amount of incorrect votes. Therefore it is extremely unlikely a ballot proposition will pass without a majority of supporters of a particular policy within the electorate.

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Table 1
Comparison of Yes Votes for Washington Poll and Official Election Returns*

	WA Poll	Returns	Prediction	Within Margin of Error
I – 960	51%	51%	Correct	Yes
CA – 4204	65%	51%	Correct	No
R – 67	61%	57%	Correct	Yes
CA – 8206	78%	68%	Correct	No
Prop – 1 RTID	48%	44%	Correct	Yes
I – 25 (King Co)	55%	57%	Correct	Yes

* Data are taken from The Washington Poll’s release on November 7, 2007, “Did the Washington Poll get it right?”

Table 2
Confusion Totals for Initiative 960 and Constitutional Amendment 4204

	Confused	Not Confused
I – 960	53.88%	46.12%
CA – 4204	31.72%	68.28%

Table 3
Political Information Levels

Information Level	Correct Responses	Percentage of Sample
High	Two	58.50%
Medium	One	29.17%
Low	Zero	12.33%

Table 4
Confused Versus Not Confused Vote Choice on I – 960 and CA – 4204

I – 960	Confused	Not Confused
Yes	49.77%	50.75%
No	50.23%	49.25%

CA – 4204	Confused	Not Confused
Yes	65.25%	62.12%
No	34.75%	37.88%

Differences between ‘no’ votes not statistically significant
 N = 420 for I – 960, N = 471 for CA – 4204

Table 5
Effect of Confusion and Selected Predictors on “Yes” Votes for I – 960 and CA – 4204

	I - 960	CA - 4204
Confusion	-0.098 (0.24)	0.148 (0.29)
State Spending	-0.425 (0.16)**	
School Spending		1.039 (0.15)**
Support for Direct Democracy	0.439 (0.19)*	-0.197 (0.22)
Partisanship	0.122 (0.07)*	-0.128 (0.06)*
Education	0.022 (0.12)	0.287 (0.13)*
Income	0.035 (0.07)	-0.022 (0.08)
Age	0.001 (0.01)	-0.010 (0.01)
Gender	-0.236 (0.25)	-0.086 (0.26)
Constant	-0.986 (0.80)	0.640 (0.84)
Observations	323	366
Pseudo R2	.06	.21

Logit coefficients in cell, Standard errors in parentheses

Dependent variable = 1 if respondent voted “Yes” on the proposition

* significant at 5% level; ** significant at 1% level

Table 6
Correct Votes for I – 960 and CA – 4204

	I – 960		CA – 4204	
	Confused	Not Confused	Confused	Not Confused
Percent of Correct Votes*	53.14%	68.15%	71.07%	79.55%
Correct “No” Votes **	26.88%	25.23%	30.23%	31.78%
Incorrect “No” Votes**	76.83%	86.00%	42.86%	43.64%

Note: Correct votes were determined by similarity between vote choice and stated issue preference.

* Differences for Confused and Not Confused % of Correct Votes are statistically significant at the 5% level for both propositions.

** Differences between the amount of “No” votes between correct and incorrect votes are statistically significant at the 5% level for both propositions.

Table 7
Effect of Confusion and Selected Predictors on “Correct” Votes for I – 960 and CA – 4204

	I - 960	CA - 4204
Confusion	-0.466 (0.239)*	-0.388 (0.261)
Information	0.430 (0.178)**	-0.404 (0.198)*
Education	0.260 (0.115)*	0.313 (0.121)**
Interest	0.125 (0.138)	0.368 (0.151)**
Constant	-1.365 (0.672)*	-0.521 (0.669)
Observations	331	389
Pseudo R2	.06	.04

Logit coefficients in cell, Standard errors in parentheses

Dependent variable = 1 if respondent voted “Yes” on the proposition

* significant at 5% level; ** significant at 1% level

Figure 1
Confusion by Political Interest

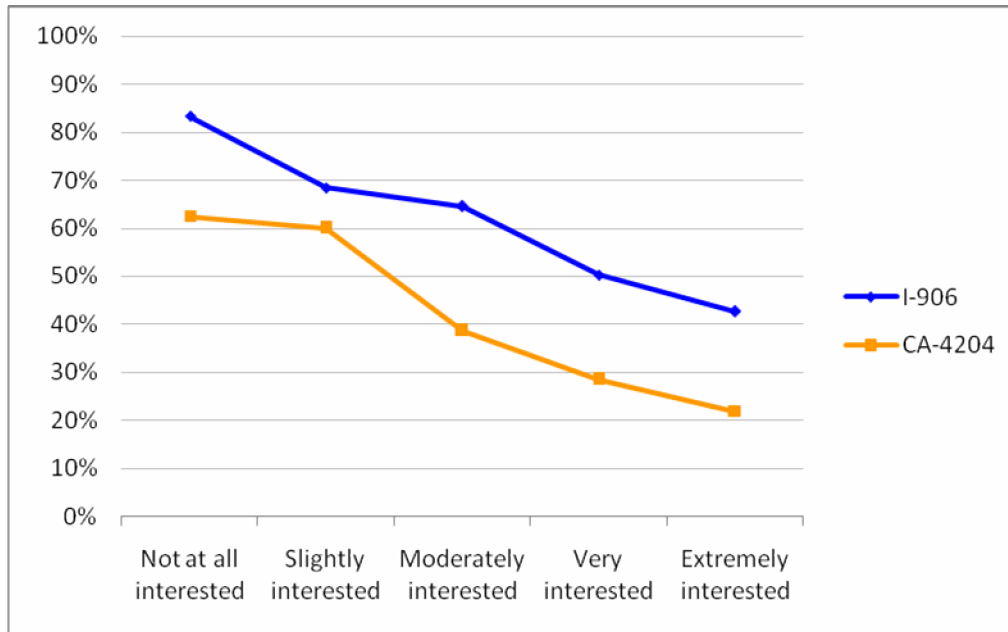


Figure 2
Confusion by Education Levels

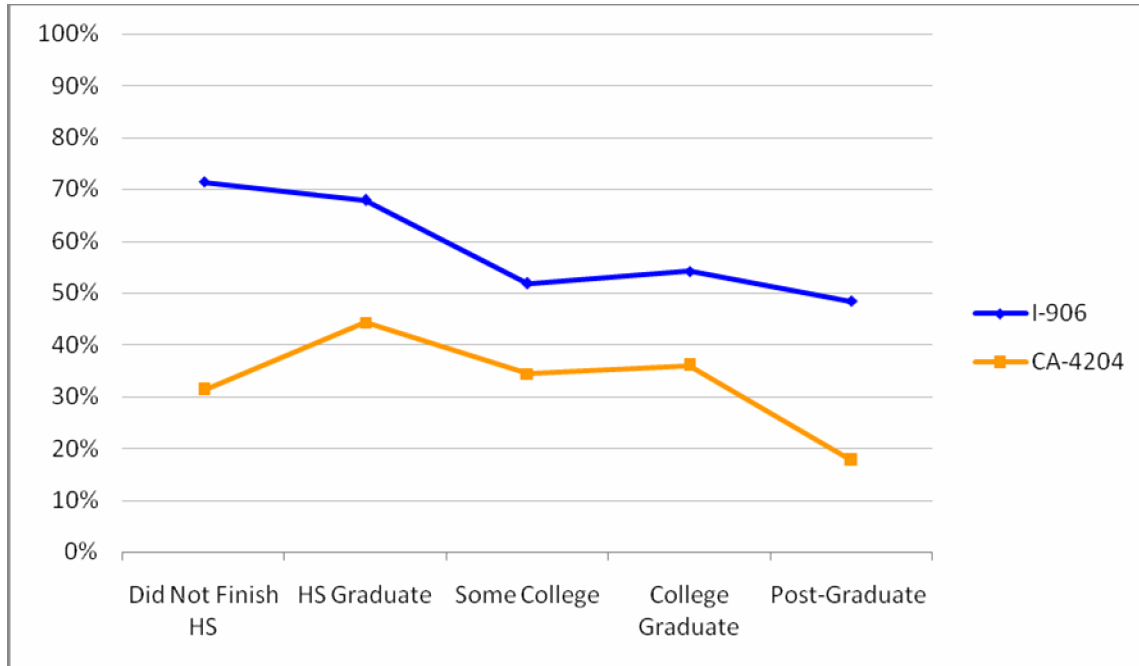


Figure 3
Correct Votes by Education Levels

