

**CHRISTOPHER S. ELMENDORF**

Professor of Law  
UC Davis School of Law  
Office: (530) 752-5756  
Cell: (415) 385-5781  
E-mail: cselmendorf@ucdavis.edu

**DOUGLAS M. SPENCER**

Jurisprudence and Social Policy Ph.D. Program  
UC Berkeley School of Law  
Office: (510) 529-5709  
Cell: (415) 335-9698  
E-mail: dspencer@berkeley.edu

**Are Ballot Titles Biased?  
Partisanship and Ideology in California's Supervision of Direct Democracy**

Thank you for choosing to participate in this exciting study of ballot initiatives. We are relying on you to help us identify whether the language used to describe ballot initiatives is biased in a way that may affect how people vote on it. You will be asked to read 3 ballot initiatives, all of which are included in this pamphlet. After you read each measure, you will be asked to answer six questions about the language on an online survey. We anticipate that this exercise will take you approximately 30 minutes to complete. The online survey will not permit you to save part of your answers and then return later to complete the session. Please begin only when you have enough time to complete the task in one sitting.

To get started, please follow these steps:

1. Send an e-mail to [REDACTED] with the subject "Ballot initiative study" and the following information:
  - a. Your name
  - b. Your university
  - c. The name of the professor in whose class you heard about this project.
2. Within 24 hours you will receive an e-mail (same subject line) with a link to the online survey.
3. Before you click on the link to launch the online survey, read the instructions that begin on the next page of this pamphlet and follow the directions.

If you have any questions, or encounter any problems during the session, please do not hesitate to contact either of the study's Principal Investigators on their cell phones: Professor Chris Elmendorf at [REDACTED] or Doug Spencer at [REDACTED].

Thank you again very much for your participation. Your work has very important implications for the future of direct democracy and we hope that you find satisfaction in being part of this study.

# Instructions

“Ballot initiatives” are citizen-proposed reforms that become law if approved by a majority of voters. They are described on the ballot with a title and a short written summary of their principal provisions and effects. In this study, we are collecting information about whether such titles and descriptions are perceived to be biased.

You will be asked to evaluate 3 ballot initiatives. For each ballot initiative, you will first carefully read a neutral, 1-2 page description of the measure and its likely effects, prepared by a disinterested expert (and included in this pamphlet). You will then read a short title and summary of the measure on the online survey. The short title and summary may or may not be the actual title and summary that appeared on the ballot, and it may or may not have been prepared by a neutral and disinterested person. We want to know whether you think the title/summary accurately and fairly describe the measure, or whether you think the title/summary is biased in some way.

The online survey will ask you to detect the presence or absence of the following types of bias:

**Prejudicial language.** Does the title/summary use colorful or symbolic language, creating a risk that some voters who know little about the measure will end up voting for or against it because of their emotional response to the colorful or symbolic language?

**Argumentative.** Does the title/summary make an argument for or against the proposed measure?

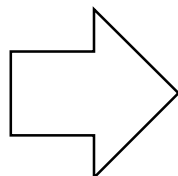
**Selective information.** Does the title and summary selectively exclude or include information about the measure in a way that may cause some voters who know little about the measure to vote differently than they would have voted if they had carefully read the long description prepared by the neutral expert?

**Other (please describe).** Is the title/summary otherwise biased for or against adoption of the proposed measure?

This exercise requires careful reading of both the long description and the title/summary. It will probably take you about 10 minutes (maybe more, maybe less) to read the materials and answer the questions for each of the three ballot measures. We encourage you to underline, highlight, and take notes on the disinterested expert’s summary as you read it, and to refer back to your notes and underlining as you answer the online survey questions.

Some of the descriptions are less than one page and easy to understand. Others are longer or more complicated, and will require careful reading and re-reading before you fully understand them. Again, please read carefully. To be able to assess bias or its absence in the title/summary, you must first develop a firm understanding of the substance of the proposed reforms.

When you are ready to begin, turn the page. You will see a description for a ballot measure. Please follow the directions.



**RESPONDENTS ARE GIVEN A BOOKLET OF THREE  
RANDOMLY ASSIGNED MEASURES TO READ**

**THE ONLINE INTERFACE FOLLOWS.  
(BOOKLETS ARE IN A DIFFERENT FILE)**

**(Individual screen shots are separated by '#####')**

## **Informed Consent Form**

Thank you for your participation in this study of bias in the language of ballot initiatives. You have been provided with information about three ballot measures, and you will answer a set of questions about each measure. We will also ask you some questions about your background at the end.

### **Costs and Benefits**

There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the survey, which we anticipate will take approximately 40 minutes to complete.

If you are taking this survey in connection with a course, you may receive extra credit for your participation (if your professor has so informed you).

If you are taking this survey in the Berkeley Xlab, you will receive \$10 for your participation.

We also hope that you find satisfaction by participating in a social science research study and that you learn something about the data-collection process, as well as about issues at the intersection of law and politics.

### **Confidentiality**

You will not be individually identified and your responses will be used for statistical purposes only.

### **Participation**

Your response to this survey, or any individual question on the survey, is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate without penalty. You may skip any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without penalty and without loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### **Contact**

If you have questions about the study or procedures, you may contact: Professor Chris Elmendorf, U.C. Davis School of Law, 530.752.5756, email: [cselemendorf@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cselemendorf@ucdavis.edu).


If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions on this form, or your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, you may contact the University of California IRB Administration at The CTSC Building, University of California, 2921 Stockton Blvd, Ste. 1400, Rm 1429, Sacramento, CA. Their phone number is 916.703.9151.

I have read and understood the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

- I agree.
- No thanks.

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Please select the 4-digit code of the FIRST ballot measure in your pamphlet (the code printed at the top and bottom of the page(s) containing the description of the measure).

A250 

Next, you will see a proposed title and summary of the FIRST ballot measure in your pamphlet. The title and summary may or may not be the actual title and summary that appeared on the ballot, and it may or may not have been prepared by a neutral and disinterested person. We want to know whether you think the title and summary accurately and fairly describe the measure, or whether you think the title and summary are biased in some way.

#####

### TITLE & SUMMARY

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IMPOSES NEW TWO-THIRDS VOTER APPROVAL REQUIREMENT FOR LOCAL PUBLIC ELECTRICITY PROVIDERS. INITIATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT. Requires two-thirds voter approval before local governments provide electricity service to new customers or establish a community choice electricity program using public funds or bonds.

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1. Does the ballot title/summary above use prejudicial (colorful or symbolic) language, creating a risk that some voters who know little about the measure will end up voting for or against it because of their emotional response to the colorful/symbolic language?

- Yes  
 No

#####

### TITLE & SUMMARY (Same as above)

2. Does the ballot title/summary above make an argument -- either in favor or against -- the proposed measure?

- Yes  
 No

#####

TITLE & SUMMARY  
(Same as above)

3. Relative to the long description of the measure in your pamphlet, does the ballot title/summary above selectively include or exclude information about the measure in a way that may cause some voters who know little about the measure to vote differently than they would have voted if they had read the long description prepared by the neutral expert?

- Yes
- No

#####

TITLE & SUMMARY  
(Same as above)

4. Is the ballot title/summary above otherwise biased for or against the proposed measure?

- Yes
- No

#####

5. Based on the long description of the measure you read in the pamphlet, how would you vote on this measure?

- |          | Definitely<br>vote NO | Probably vote<br>NO   | Probably vote<br>YES  | Definitely vote<br>YES |
|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| I would: | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |

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STOP!

Before you continue, read the description of the SECOND measure in your pamphlet. When you are finished reading, please click "Next."

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THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE ABOUT YOU AND YOUR BELIEFS, RATHER THAN THE BALLOT MEASURES YOU JUST READ.

**Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...**

Strong Democrat	Not very strong Democrat	Lean Democrat	Independent	Lean Republican	Not very strong Republican	Strong Republican
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**People have different ideas about government. These ideas don't refer to Democrats or Republicans in particular, but just to government in general. We want to see how you feel about these ideas.**

A. How much of the time do you think you can trust government to do what is right?

- Just about always
- Most of the time
- Only some of the time

B. Would you say government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all people?

- A few big interests
- For the benefit of all

C. Do you think that people in government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?

- Waste a lot of money
- Waste some of it
- Don't waste very much of it

D. Would you say that laws enacted through the ballot-initiative process pretty much benefit a few big interests looking out for themselves or that they benefit all people? (In states with the ballot initiative, measures proposed by individual citizens or groups are put on the ballot if the proponents gather signatures from a certain number of registered voters, and these measures become law if approved by a majority vote at the next election).

- A few big interests
- For the benefit of all

#####

FINALLY, WE WOULD ALSO LIKE YOUR OPINIONS ABOUT THE FOLLOWING (you are almost done):

E. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

- Most people can be trusted
- Can't be too careful

F. Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?

- Try to be helpful
- Just look out for themselves
- Depends

G. Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance or would they try to be fair?

- Would take advantage of you
- Would try to be fair
- Depends

H. How often do you lend money to your friends?

- More than once a week
- About once a week
- About once a month
- Once a year or less

I. How often do you lend personal possessions to your friends (e.g., CDs, clothes, bicycle, etc.)?

- More than once a week
- About once a week
- About once a month
- Once a year or less

J. How often do you intentionally leave the front door to your house/apartment unlocked when nobody is home?

- More than once a week
- About once a week
- About once a month
- Once a year or less



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FINALLY, PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF. These are the final 4 questions.

What University do you attend?

- UC Berkeley
- Brigham Young University
- UC Davis
- Utah Valley University

Did you take this survey in the Berkeley Xlab?

- Yes
- No

Please note your educational status:

- Undergraduate student
- Law student
- Non-law graduate student

When it comes to politics, do you usually think of yourself as...

- |                       |                       |                       |                          |                       |                       |                        |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Extremely liberal     | Liberal               | Slightly liberal      | Moderate, Middle of Road | Slightly conservative | Conservative          | Extremely conservative |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |

Please identify the range that best reflects your score on the "Critical Reading" (SAT) or "Reading" (ACT) section of your college entrance exam:

- |                       | <u>SAT</u>                              | <u>ACT</u> |
|-----------------------|---|------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | 700-800                                 | 31-36      |
| <input type="radio"/> | 650-699                                 | 28-30      |
| <input type="radio"/> | 600-649                                 | 25-27      |
| <input type="radio"/> | 550-599                                 | 21-24      |
| <input type="radio"/> | Below 550                               | Below 21   |
| <input type="radio"/> | I don't know or don't remember my score |            |