

Greenlining Institute

California Ballot Reform Panel Survey

Wave one results

Sample Size (N=1555)

Interview Dates: June 14 –July 1, 2011

Margin of error + - 3.1%

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Executive Summary

Purpose: This longitudinal survey was conducted to get a better sense of how Californians view the ballot initiative process. In wave one of our survey (conducted in June 2011) respondents were asked about their attitudes towards the ballot initiative process in California. Respondents will be re-interviewed in December of this year to learn more about what type of initiative reforms they would support.

Respondents: A representative sample (N=1555) of Californians with oversamples for Latinos and Blacks were asked to participate in this panel survey. 69% of respondents were registered to vote in California.

Methodology: This survey was funded by The Greenlining Institute and conducted online by Knowledge Networks in both English and Spanish from June 14- July 1, 2011. The survey has a sampling margin of error of +- 3.1%. Respondents who had neither Internet access nor a computer were provided materials to participate in this survey. 75% of respondents had internet access at home. Respondents will be surveyed again in December of 2011.

Key findings

Attitudes towards the ballot initiative system

- 1) Californians' attitudes towards the ballot initiative system vary based on the group that they perceive to have access to the system. Californians were more supportive of the ballot initiative system when it was framed as allowing people to have the ability to put issues on the ballot as opposed to corporations and labor unions having the ability to put issues on the ballot. This effect was found even after controlling for a respondent's age, gender, education status, race, party

identification, political ideology and whether or not they were registered to vote in California (see pages 4 and 5).

- 2) 68% of Californians agreed with the statement that the rights of various groups are sometimes attacked via the ballot initiative process (see page 6).
- 3) 41% of Californians felt that their rights have been attacked via the ballot initiative system (see page 7).

Attitudes towards reforming the ballot initiative system

- 1) 21% of Californians agreed with the statement that the ballot initiative system should be eliminated (see page 8).
- 2) 81% of Californians would favor having a system of review and revision of proposed ballot initiatives designed to avoid legal issues and drafting errors (see page 9).
- 3) Respondents who stated that they would prefer to have a system of review for proposed ballot initiatives were then given a list of potential government agencies or officials who might be designated to review and revise ballot initiatives (i.e., the state Supreme Court, a citizens commission, the state legislature, the attorney general, the governor, the secretary of state or another non listed agency). The top choice of Californians was a citizens commission (42%) followed by the state supreme court (28%; see page 9).
- 4) 56% of Californians think that the legislature should be more involved in the initiative process (see page 10).
- 5) A second experiment was conducted in order to determine if support for review of the ballot initiative system in California was related to attitudes toward the different interest groups that have access to the ballot initiative system. Results indicate that Californians' attitudes towards the need to review the ballot initiative system are related to their beliefs that certain groups have access to the system. Respondents were more likely to believe that the initiative system needs reform because corporations have the ability to put initiatives on the ballot than the fact that labor unions, nonprofit organizations or some people (control condition) have the ability to put initiatives on the ballot (see pages 10 and 11).

Voter information and the ballot initiative system

- 1) 58% of registered voters find recommendations from friends and family helpful when deciding how to vote on ballot initiatives (see page 11).
- 2) 68% of registered voters find the official California voter's guide helpful when deciding how to vote on ballot initiatives (see page 11).
- 3) When asked if one is required to vote on all propositions listed on the ballot, 69% of registered voters correctly stated that one does not have to vote on all propositions

listed on the ballot. White and Asian voters were more likely to give the correct answer than were blacks and Latinos (see pages 12 and 13).

- 4) 78% of registered voters stated that disclosure of ballot initiative funders in the California voters guide would be helpful in determining how to vote on a proposed initiative (see page 13).
- 5) 61% of registered voters stated that disclosure of ballot initiative funders on ballot propositions would be helpful to them (see page 13).

Attitudes towards the ballot initiative system

An experiment was designed to understand if Californians liked the fact that certain interest groups have access to the ballot initiative system. Participants were randomly assigned to read the statement below with one of the following words in the bracket [people, elected officials, non-profit organizations, corporations, labor unions] inserted into the statement.

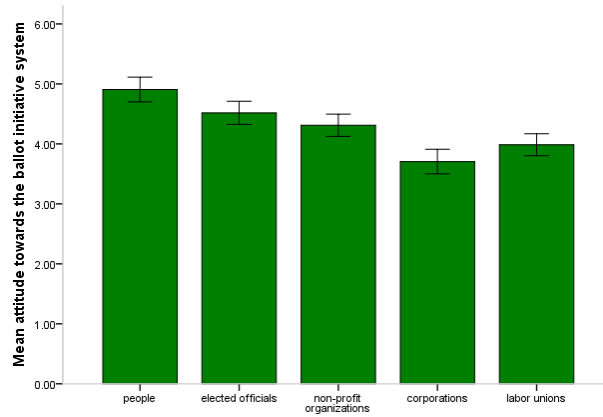
In California's ballot initiative process [] have the ability to bypass the legislature and have issues put on the ballot—for voter approval or rejection. Do you like, dislike or neither like nor dislike the fact that [] are allowed to put issues on the ballot for voter approval or rejection?

Results of the experiment:

As shown by the graph below, Californians differed in how they feel about the ballot initiative process based on who they feel has access to the system. We found this effect after controlling for a respondent's age, gender, education status, race, party identification, political ideology and whether or not a respondent was registered to vote. Respondents liked the fact that ordinary people have access to the system more than they liked the fact that corporations and labor unions have access to the ballot initiative system.

Respondents did not differ in their attitudes towards ordinary people, elected officials and nonprofit organizations having access to the ballot initiative system.

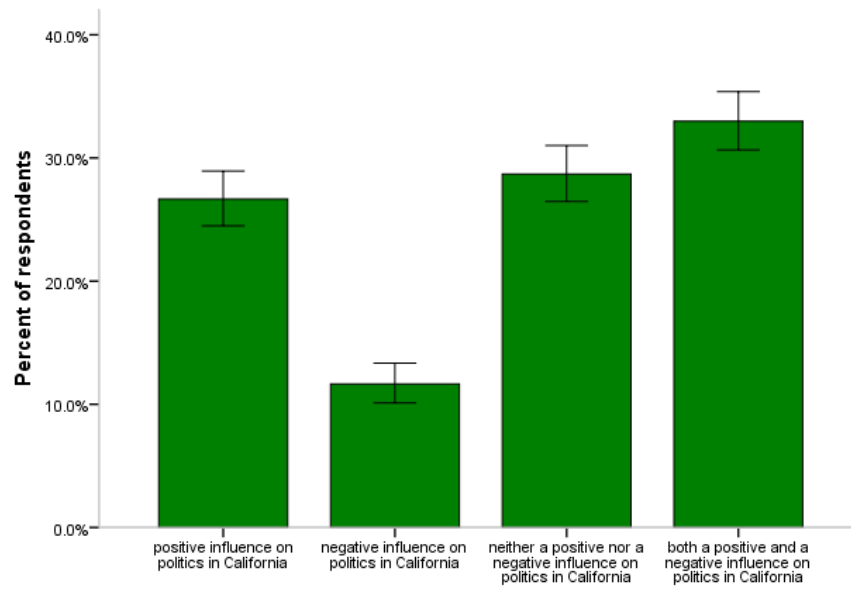
Attitude towards interest groups having access to the ballot initiative system



Error bars: 95% CI

1

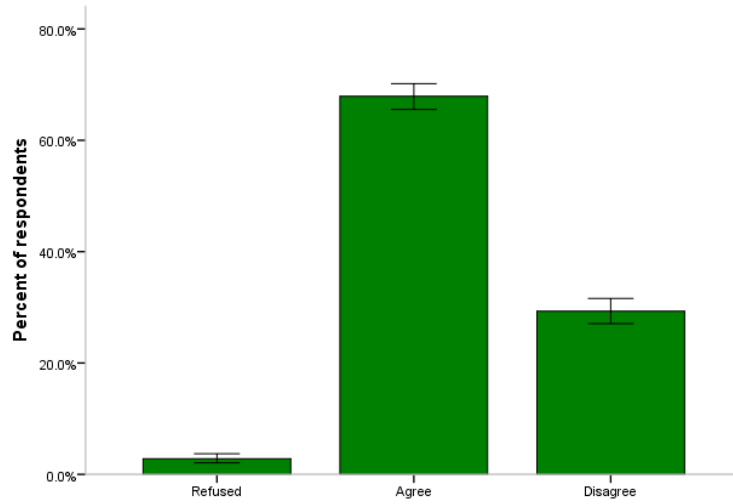
Is the ballot initiative process in California a...



Error bars: 95% CI

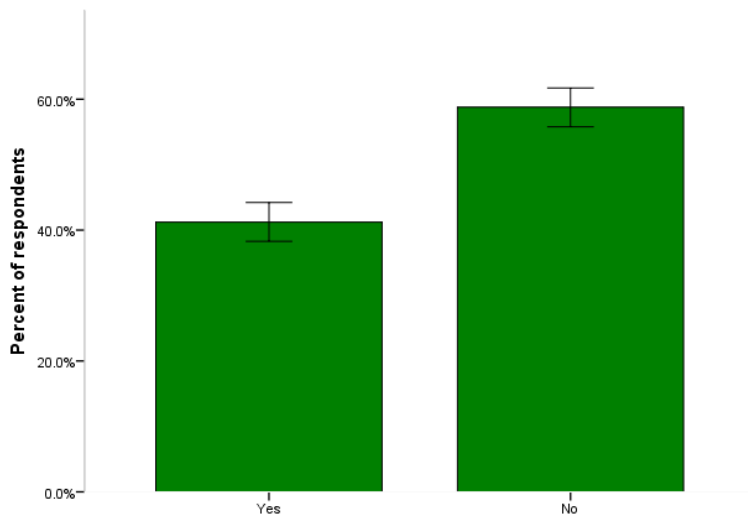
¹ Means plotted with 95% confidence interval bars.

Sometimes the rights of various groups of people are attacked through the use of the ballot initiative process.



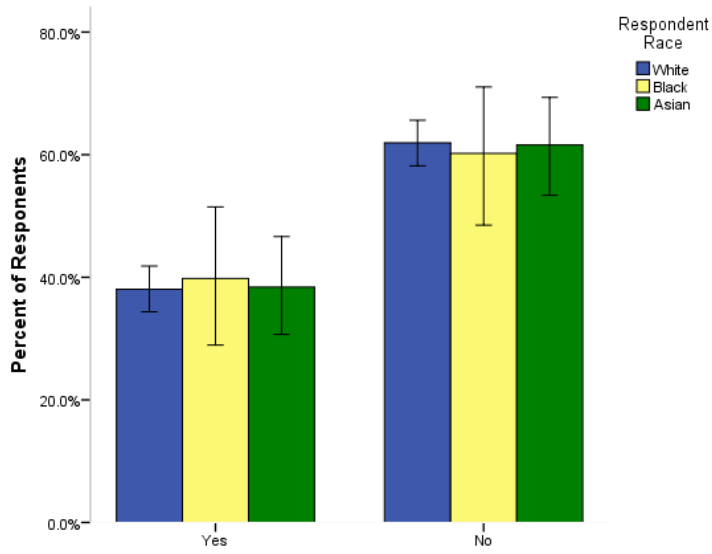
Error bars: 95% CI

Have you ever felt that your rights have been attacked via the ballot initiative process?



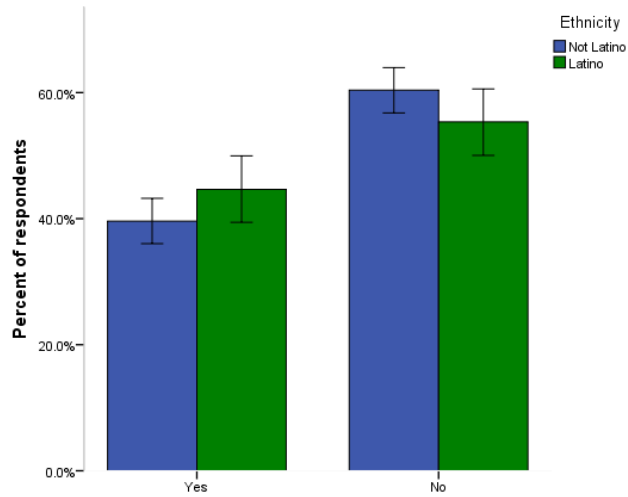
Error bars: 95% CI

Have you ever felt that your rights have been attacked via the ballot initiative process?



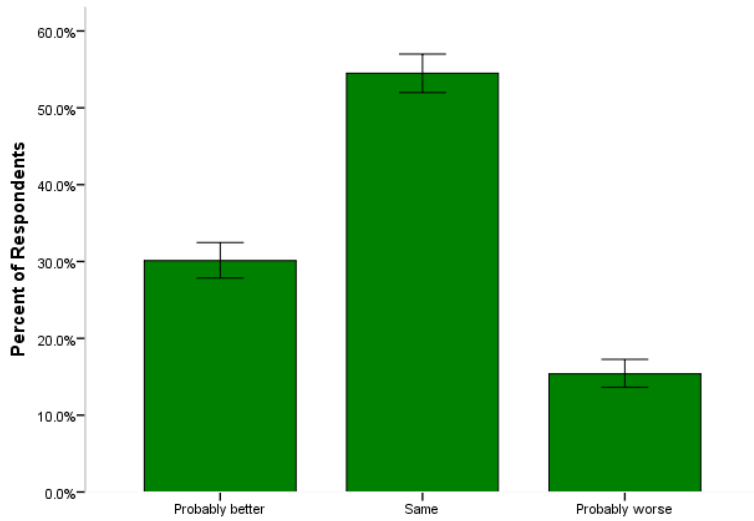
Error bars: 95% CI

Have you ever felt that your rights have been attacked via the ballot initiative process?



Error bars: 95% CI

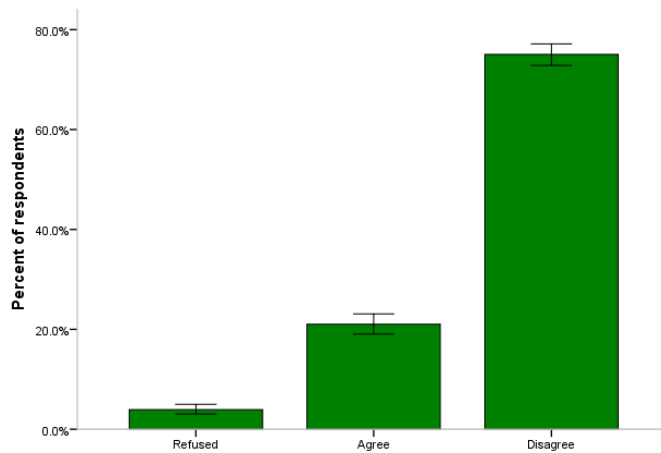
Overall, do you think legislative decisions made through the ballot initiative process by California voters are probably better or probably worse than legislative decisions made by the state legislature and the governor?



Error bars: 95% CI

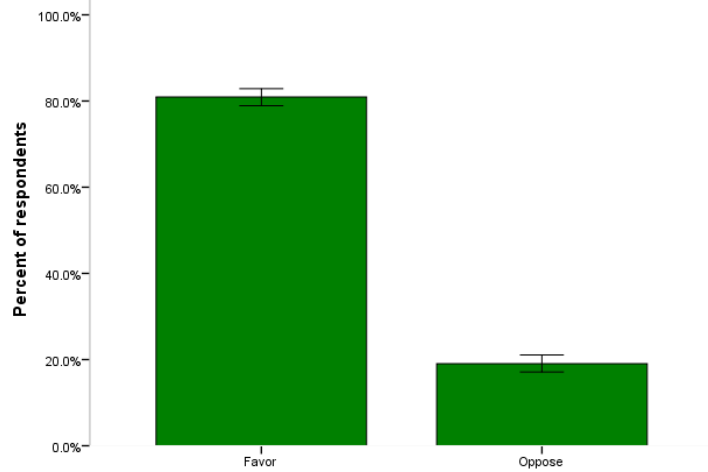
Attitudes towards the ballot initiative review process

The ballot initiative process in California should be eliminated



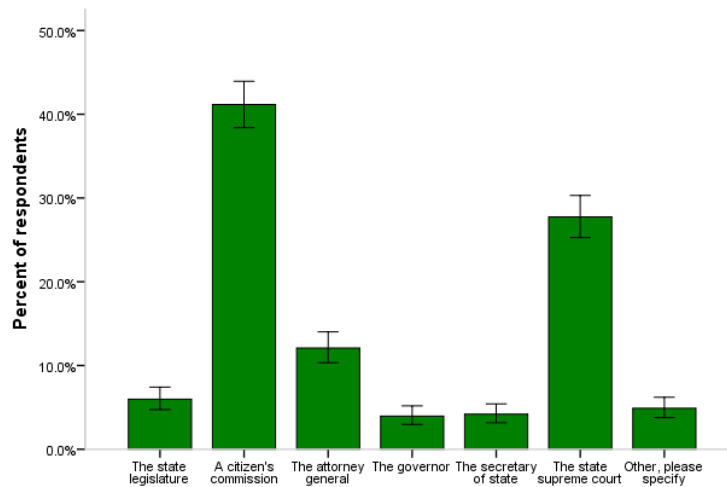
Error bars: 95% CI

Would you favor or oppose having a system of review and revision of proposed ballot initiatives to try to avoid legal issues and drafting errors?²



Error bars: 95% CI

Who would you trust to review and revise propositions to try and avoid legal issues and drafting errors?³

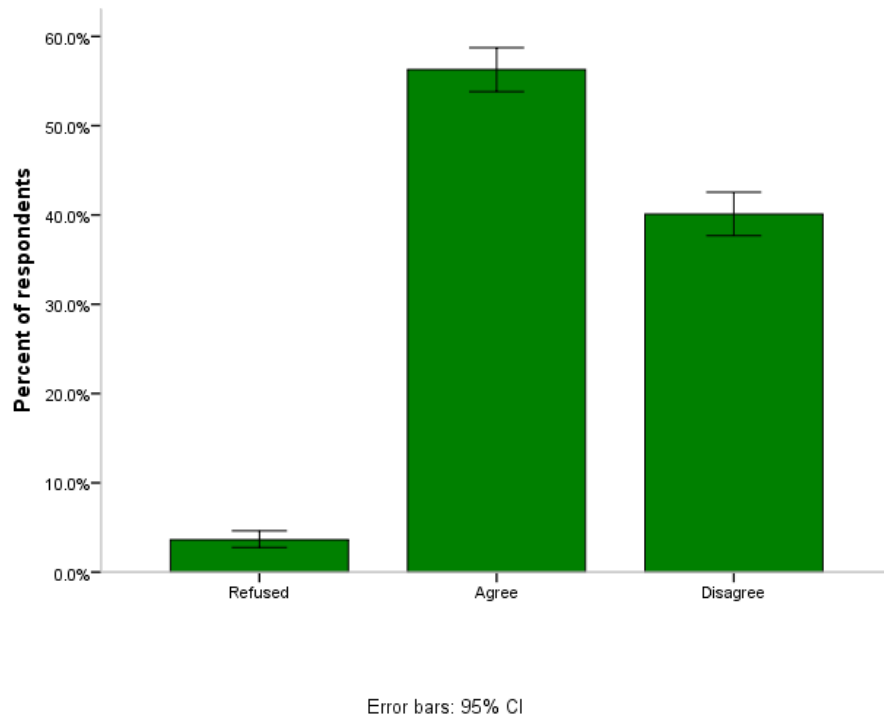


Error bars: 95% CI

² Results did not differ between registered voters and the general population

³ Results did not differ among registered voters and the general population

The legislature should be more involved in the ballot initiative process in California⁴



We conducted a second experiment to understand if Californians differed in their support for reforming the ballot initiative system based on the various groups that have access to the system. Participants were randomly assigned to read the statement below with one of the following words in the bracket [corporations/ labor unions/some people/ elected officials/ non-profit organizations] inserted into the statement.

The ballot initiative process in California needs to be reformed because right now it is too easy for[] to put initiatives on the ballot.

Results of experiment two:

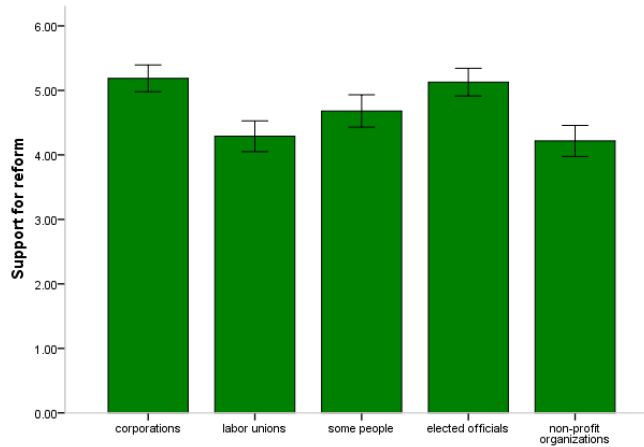
Californians differed in their attitudes towards reforming the ballot initiative system depending on whom they believed has access to the system. This effect was found after controlling for a respondents age, education status, gender, race, party identification, political ideology and whether or not a respondent was registered to vote.

Respondents were more likely to believe that the initiative system needs reform because corporations have the ability to put initiative on the ballot than the fact that labor unions,

⁴ Only registered voters were used in this analysis.

nonprofit organizations or some people have the ability to put initiatives on the ballot. Respondents did not differ in their support for reforming the ballot initiative system based on the fact that corporations and elected officials have access to the system

Support for reforming the Ballot initiative system based on who has access to the system



Voter information

The following list contains sources of information people often use in making decisions as to how to vote on ballot initiatives. Please indicate how helpful each source of information is to you.

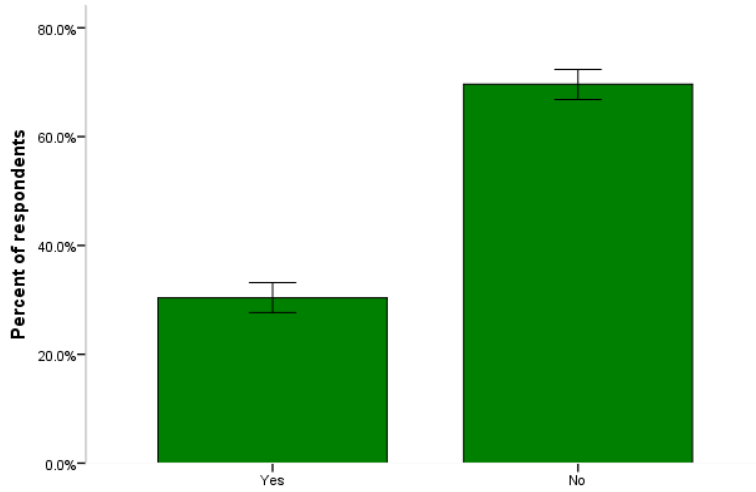
	Unhelpful	Neutral	Helpful
Recommendations from friends and family	170 <i>15.8%</i>	271 25.1%	628 <i>58.2%</i>
The official California voters guide	88 <i>8.1%</i>	244 22.7%	737 <i>68.3%</i>
Recommendations from politicians and political parties	366 33.9%	286 26.5%	418 38.7%
Campaign Advertisements	441 40.9%	241 22.3%	386 35.8%
Recommendations from non-partisan organizations	167 <i>15.5%</i>	275 25.5%	622 <i>57.6%</i>

*Sample only includes registered voters (N=1078)⁶

⁶ Percentages in italics are different from each other at the 95% confidence interval. Neutral respondents were not compared to other groups

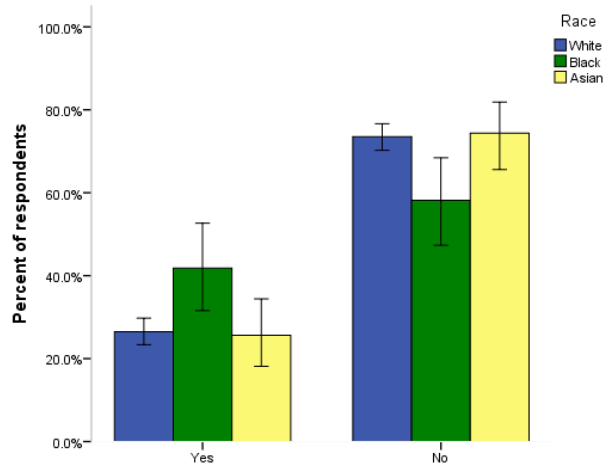


When voting are you required to vote on all propositions listed on the ballot?⁷



Error bars: 95% CI

When voting are you required to vote on all propositions listed on the ballot?⁸

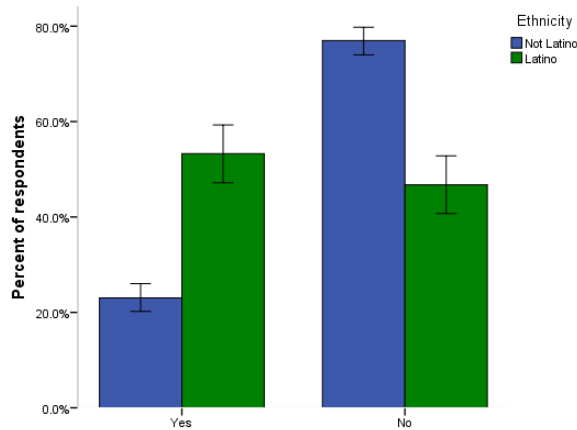


Error bars: 95% CI

⁷ Only registered voters were used in this analysis.

⁸ Only registered voters were used in this analysis.

When voting are you required to vote on all propositions listed on the ballot?⁹



Error bars: 95% CI

Attitudes towards disclosure

There are many different ways information about ballot initiative funders could be made available to voters. Please indicate how helpful each method would be to you.

	Unhelpful	Neutral	Helpful
In television advertisements	248	263	549
	<i>23.0%</i>	24.3%	<i>50.9%</i>
In the official state voter information guide	41	184	842
	<i>3.8%</i>	17.1%	<i>78.1%</i>
On ballot initiative petitions	129	275	660
	<i>11.9%</i>	25.5%	<i>61.2%</i>
At polling places	292	281	490
	<i>27.1%</i>	26.1%	<i>45.5%</i>

*Only registered voters were included in this analysis (N=1068)¹⁰

⁹ Only registered voters were used in this analysis.

¹⁰ Percentages in italics are different from each other at the 95% confidence interval. Neutral respondents were not compared to other groups