

Endorsements as Voting Cues: Heuristic and Systematic Processing in Initiative Elections¹

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This project explores how organizational endorsements influence voter attitudes during initiative elections. Building on the heuristic–systematic model (Chaiken, 1980; Chen & Chaiken, 1999), we propose that voters use organizational endorsements as heuristic cues to help them develop their attitudes toward initiatives. It is hypothesized that the influence of endorsements on initiative voting depends on the applicability, availability, and diagnosticity of the endorsement voting cue and on the degree to which the voter is motivated to fully evaluate the arguments behind the initiative. An experiment was conducted in which motivation (processing goal instructions), cue applicability (match between endorsing organization and initiative), and initiative (four different hypothetical ballot issues) were manipulated. Results showed support for our first two hypotheses, but not for the third.

Whether choosing a mate, a mayor, or a mower, people rely on firsthand and secondhand information, the impact of which depends on its valence, its source, and how people process it. These observations are the central tenets of the heuristic–systematic model (HSM) of persuasion (Chaiken, 1980; Chen & Chaiken, 1999), which maintains that individuals can develop attitudes via two different types of processing: heuristic and systematic. *Heuristic processing* involves the use of simple generalizations that individuals believe are predictive of an attitude (e.g., “Opinions held by the consensus are accurate”; Chen & Chaiken, 1999). These cognitive shortcuts are developed from prior

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experiences and become procedural knowledge used to evaluate messages (Smith, 1984). *Systematic processing*, by contrast, involves detailed analysis of argument quality and structure, and requires greater cognitive effort and attention.

Motivation to process systematically is often determined by the evaluator's desire for accuracy in his or her judgments. To the extent that an evaluator has a strong desire to reach an accurate conclusion, that individual is more likely to engage in systematic processing (Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, & Chen, 1996). Moreover, as individuals increase their level of systematic processing, the effects of heuristic cues are typically attenuated, although not necessarily removed (Maheswaran & Chaiken, 1991).

The HSM posits that the type of cognitive processing employed by an individual depends not only on motivation and ability to process systematically, but also on the availability, accessibility, and applicability of heuristic cues (Chaiken, 1980; Chen & Chaiken, 1999; Higgins, 1996). Potential heuristic cues are available when they are stored in memory, and they are accessible when they can be retrieved successfully from memory. Provided that the heuristic cue is both available and accessible, it will be utilized to the extent that it is applicable to the evaluation context at hand. Applicability can be determined by the frequency with which the heuristic has been used successfully in past judgments (Chen & Chaiken, 1999), by the extent to which the heuristic fits or matches the task (Higgins, 1996), and by the consciously perceived reliability of the heuristic to the domain in question (e.g., Darke et al., 1998). Moreover, applicability can be assessed at both conscious and unconscious levels (Bargh, 1997; Hardin & Rothman, 1997).

The HSM sometimes has provided the theoretical foundation for understanding citizens' evaluations of public policies (Mondak, 1993, 1994). In other research on political attitudes, heuristics have served as explanatory variables, even without explicit use of the HSM to derive hypotheses. In one collection of studies, affect toward political groups has been shown to influence how citizens form attitudes on policy issues (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). Some scholars contend that the use of heuristics allows voters without much information at their disposal nevertheless to make reasonable decisions (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998; Popkin, 1991). For example, Lupia (1994) found that voters largely ignorant of the content of ballot propositions, but who were aware of group endorsements, used that information to mimic the voting patterns of the most knowledgeable citizens.

As one would suspect from well-known research in social psychology showing that heuristics can lead to poor decisions (McGuire, 1969), the view that heuristics help citizens to arrive at accurate political judgments has provoked much debate. Even with available heuristics, low-information voters often make different choices than do high-information voters with similar demographic

characteristics (Bartels, 1996). Heuristics can undermine, rather than promote, the accuracy of decision making by citizens low in political sophistication (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Other critiques have noted the conceptual difficulties of defining what it means to make a reasoned and rational decision (Kuklinski, Quirk, Jerit, & Rich, 2001; Kuklinski, Quirk, Jerit, Schwieder, & Rich, 2000).

Thus far, the HSM has not been applied to initiative campaigns, but it is likely that the same unconscious influences uncovered in nonpolitical domains will also occur in this context. An *initiative* is functionally equivalent to a bill before a legislature, with the difference being that an initiative must be approved by a majority of voters to take effect. Initiatives are close cousins of referenda. While referenda get to the ballot by being placed there by a legislature, initiatives bypass the legislature entirely and qualify for the ballot only if the designated number of citizen signatures has been submitted. A large number of American states, counties, and municipalities have used initiative elections to make major changes in public policy, such as repealing affirmative action, capping total taxes and spending, and legalizing physician-assisted suicide (Cronin, 1989; Ernst, 2001; Magleby, 1984).

When reaching decisions on ballot initiatives, voters can be expected to engage frequently in both heuristic and systematic processing. Initiatives are typically presented together with a voters' pamphlet that is mailed to all registered voters at the state's expense. This voting guide typically includes a series of pro and con arguments that may influence citizens who engage in systematic processing. Many voters report that these pamphlets are a preferred source of information during initiative elections (Bowler & Donovan, 1998). However, when voters have little interest in an initiative, they are unlikely to engage in systematic processing of the messages presented in the pamphlets. In this situation, voters may infer their attitudes on the basis of heuristic cues.

Ballot initiatives present an interesting area of study because the one heuristic most commonly used in elections—the party affiliations of competing candidates—is unavailable when voters make decisions on initiatives. Instead, the most salient cue may be the organizational endorsements for or against the initiative. In fact, the voters' pamphlets normally list the names of organizations that have formally expressed either support for or opposition to the initiative. By assessing the general match between their own attitudes and those expressed by the endorsing organizations, voters potentially could develop a preference independent of any systematic evaluation of the arguments for or against the initiative.

Hypotheses

In relation to initiative voting, we focus on the interaction of two elements of the HSM: the applicability of source cues to the task, and individuals' motivation

for accurate decisions. A key form of applicability during initiative elections is the issue relevance of the endorser. An endorsement carries more weight, we hypothesize, when it comes from an organization that participants associate with the initiative's issue domain. This greater influence as a result of issue match, however, should only be apparent when participants have low motivation to process information and hence utilize heuristics. High motivation is likely to cause participants to undertake a systematic evaluation of the pro and con arguments, rather than rely on the name of the endorsing organization. Our first-cue applicability hypothesis is formally stated as follows:

Hypothesis 1. Participants will express more support for an initiative when it is endorsed by an organization that focuses on initiative-relevant issues (high heuristic cue applicability) than when it is endorsed by an organization that focuses on initiative-irrelevant issues (low heuristic cue applicability), but only when the participants possess low motivation to process substantive arguments (likely heuristic processing).

Although the match between an endorsing organization and an initiative domain is a natural test of applicability, other factors might influence the perceived applicability of an endorsement. One such factor is people's familiarity with the endorsing organization. In recent years, some corporations and trade associations have established front groups to express positions that, were they explicitly advocated by the parent organization, would be widely discounted as purely self-interested behavior (Silverstein, 1998). For example, during the 2000 election cycle, the pharmaceutical industry created an organization called Citizens for Better Medicare for use in running ads opposing price controls for prescription drugs (Hosenball, 2000). Although these freshly created organizations can possess the surface appearance of a match with an initiative, they are fundamentally inapplicable to one's evaluation. As stated earlier, a crucial determinant of cue applicability is the frequency with which the heuristic cue has been used successfully in past judgments (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Given that these new organizations could not have been used in prior judgments, they should be deemed nonapplicable to initiative voting, and therefore should not influence attitudes, even when the voter processes the initiative heuristically. This suggests a second hypothesis regarding cue applicability:

Hypothesis 2. Participants with low motivation to process substantive arguments (likely heuristic processors) will express more support for an initiative when it is endorsed by an organization that focuses on initiative-relevant issues (high heuristic cue applicability) than when it is endorsed by an organization that focuses

on initiative-irrelevant issues (low heuristic cue applicability), but only when the endorsing organizations are real. When the endorsing organization is fictional or recently created, heuristic cue applicability should have no effect on initiative support.

A final factor that may influence the perceived applicability of an endorsement cue is whether or not the evaluator possesses a strong attitude toward the endorsing organization. To the extent that the evaluator is generally ambivalent or indifferent toward an endorsing organization, that organization's endorsement should not influence attitudes toward the initiative. In contrast, when an individual possesses strong positive feelings toward an organization, an endorsement by that organization should be evaluatively diagnostic and applicable. Moreover, the influence of one's attitude toward the organization should be most pronounced when one possesses low motivation to process initiative information. This suggests the final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. Participants who possess favorable attitudes toward an organization that endorses an initiative will express more support for the initiative than will participants who possess neutral attitudes toward the organization. This effect should be most pronounced when the participant possesses low motivation to process substantive arguments (likely heuristic processing).

Method

To assess the influence of organizational endorsements on initiative attitudes, a two-stage experiment was conducted. During the first stage, participants reported their attitudes toward organizations that might endorse initiatives, and they completed personality and demographic measures. Three weeks later, during the second stage, participants viewed four separate hypothetical initiatives, read statements for and against each of the initiatives in a mockup of a voting guide, and reported their degree of support for each of the initiatives. Each statement for or against an initiative in the voters' pamphlet was credited to a specific organization. Because most initiatives in the United States occur in states that mail official pamphlets to all registered voters, our use of a parallel structure enhances the external validity of the experiments.

During the second stage of the experiment, we manipulated three variables. First, participant motivation was manipulated by varying the stated processing goal provided to the participants. Participants in the high motivation condition (likely systematic processors) were informed that they would have to explain the rationale behind their positions on the initiatives, whereas the participants in the low motivation condition (likely heuristic processors) were informed that they

would have to explain what they liked or disliked about the way the initiative was formatted on the page. The second manipulated variable was the match between the endorsing organization's field of expertise and the initiative domain. Third, the endorsements were from either real or fictional organizations.

Participants

A total of 95 female and 81 male students participated in both stages of the study. The average age of participants was 22 years. Using the tables provided by Cohen (1988), the sample of 156 participants had sufficient statistical power to detect even relatively small effect sizes (e.g., $r = .20$).

Stimuli and Pretest Manipulation Checks

Four hypothetical initiatives were created for the experiment. Multiple initiatives were used as experimental stimuli to reduce the potential for idiosyncratic reactions from the participants on a particular issue. The initiatives addressed the following topics: more stringent land-development controls in urban areas, increased gasoline taxes to finance road construction, free admission to state parks for senior citizens, and increased state assistance for working-family child-care. Each initiative was presented together with a statement for and against, and each of these statements was credited to a specific organization. The content of these statements was kept constant across all of the experimental conditions and is provided in the Appendix. To guard against order effects, the initiatives were presented in one of two orders, the second the reverse of the first.

Twelve organizations were used as initiative endorsers or opponents. For each initiative, the con statement was credited to a fictional organization with a non-descript name (Center for Civic Research, Governmental Studies Association, National Policy Analysis Group, and American Public Initiative Institute). The con organization for each initiative was kept constant across all experimental conditions, and each was designed to be neutral in both its appeal and its apparent relevance to the subject of the initiative. A two-item knowledge scale included in the pretest confirmed that participants had no recognition of these organizations.

Based on pretests, eight additional organizations (four real, four fictional) were selected as initiatives endorsers. The pretest was used to select organizations that participants perceived as fitting well with one of the proposed initiative topics. The pretest also made it possible to identify and select for this experiment those organizations toward which participants had neutral or favorable attitudes. Initiative campaigns rarely place in the voting guide an endorsement from an organization that most voters dislike.

The four real organizations selected included the Sierra Club for the land-development initiative, the American Automobile Association (AAA) for the

Table 1

Counterbalanced Pairings of Initiatives and Endorsing Organizations

Type of organization	Initiative subject			
	Environment	Children	Seniors	Transportation
Real, high match	Sierra Club	United Way	AARP	AAA
Real, low match	United Way	Sierra Club	AAA	AARP
Fictional, high match	Coalition for the Environment	Children's Alliance	United Seniors Association	Citizens for Better Transportation
Fictional, low match	Children's Alliance	Coalition for the Environment	Citizens for Better Transportation	United Seniors Association

Note. The AARP and AAA were shown in the questionnaire with their full names followed by the acronym; that is, "American Association for Retired Persons (AARP)" and "American Automobile Association (AAA)."

gasoline tax initiative, the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) for the free admission to parks for senior citizens initiative, and the United Way for the working-family childcare initiative. The four fictional organizations included the Coalition for the Environment (land-development initiative), Citizens for Better Transportation (the gasoline tax initiative), United Seniors Association (the free admission to parks for senior citizens initiative), and Children's Alliance (the working-family childcare initiative).³ With counterbalancing across the initiatives, there were four possible initiative–organization combinations (Table 1).

Pretest data were used as a check of the proposed manipulation of match between organizations and ballot initiatives. In every case, the intended

³After creating a list of four fictional organizations for this experiment, an exhaustive search revealed that two relatively obscure organizations in other areas of the country possess names that are similar in part or whole to the Children's Alliance (CA) and the United Seniors Association (USA)—two of the "fictional" organizations used herein. Using the same familiarity scale described earlier in the Method section, very few study participants had a familiarity score at or above the scale midpoint (3.5% for CA; 1.3% for USA), and most had the minimum possible score (67.5% for CA; 82.5% for USA). Given that so few of the participants claimed to have heard of these obscure organizations, they were treated as functionally fictional for the purposes of the study. In practice, this is analogous to political practice, in which newly formed organizations often have innocuous and vaguely familiar-sounding names, such as those used herein.

distinctions were salient to participants, and all of the contrasts between low- and high-match pairings were statistically significant ($p < .001$).

To support the motivation manipulation, the formatting style of the initiatives also was varied. Each of the four initiatives was presented in a slightly different format (different fonts, different use of boldface and italics, initiative pro and con arguments placed side by side vs. one above the other). These formats were counterbalanced by both order and initiative.

Procedure

After providing demographic and attitudinal data in the first stage of the experiment, participants returned 3 weeks later and were then told that they were going to read about a series of ballot initiatives to be proposed in their state. After reading each initiative, along with corresponding pro/con arguments, participants indicated their degree of support for the initiative.

The questionnaire instructions were systematically altered to create the motivation manipulation. Participants assigned to the high-motivation condition (likely systematic processors) were instructed to "Read each initiative carefully and answer the questions that follow each one." In addition, the high-motivation participants were told that they would be asked to "explain why you took the position that you did on each initiative. Think carefully about your responses, so that you will be able to explain your choices." In contrast, participants assigned to the low-motivation condition (likely heuristic processors) were instructed to "Answer the questions that follow each initiative" and were told that they would be asked to "comment on the formatting used for each initiative. Each has a distinctive presentation style, and you will be asked to explain what you liked or disliked about each style."

Measures

Attitudes toward the endorsing organizations were measured during the first stage of the experiment. Liking was measured using four 7-point semantic differential items. These items measured liking for the organization (*strongly dislike/strongly like*), feelings for the organization (*strongly negative/strongly positive*), agreement with the organization's policies (*strongly disagree/strongly agree*), and similarity of one's own views with the views of the organization (*very different/very similar*). The midpoint of each scale was labeled *neutral*. These four items had high inter-item reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .97$) and were averaged into a single organizational liking scale.

Two measures used as covariates in the analyses were also collected during the first stage of the experiment. Neither of these variables was the focus of the present study, but both have been found to predict how likely individuals

are to engage in systematic processing. First, to account for variations in participants' general motivation to systematically process information (Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996; Maheswaran & Chaiken, 1991), participants completed Cacioppo, Petty, and Kao's (1984) 18-item Need for Cognition scale ($\alpha = .87$). Second, participants completed a domain-specific measure of political expertise (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Fiske, Lau, & Smith, 1990), which consisted of five factual questions about U.S. politics and government. The number of correct answers was used to indicate a participant's level of political expertise.

The primary dependent measure was collected during the second stage of the experiment. Immediately after reading each initiative, participants were instructed to indicate their degree of support or opposition for each initiative. Support was measured on 7-point semantic differential item (*strongly oppose/strongly support*), with the midpoint labeled as *neutral*. To identify those individuals with weak, nonexistent, or strongly ambivalent attitudes, participants were then asked whether they would choose to vote on each initiative if it were to appear on their ballot during an election. Those cases in which a participant declined to vote on an initiative were dropped from the main analyses.

Results

Analytic Design and Data Reduction

An ANCOVA was conducted to test each hypothesis. The dependent variable in this ANCOVA was expressed support for the initiative. Independent variables were participants' processing motivation (low vs. high), heuristic cue applicability (whether or not the endorsing organization matches the initiative subject), participants' prior attitude toward the endorser, endorsing organization familiarity (real or fictional endorsing organization), and subject of the initiative. Since initiative was a within-participants factor, each participant provided four observations, one for each initiative. As could be expected, given the substantive differences among the initiatives used in this experiment, participants expressed significantly different levels of support for the four initiatives, $F(1, 293) = 16.21, p < .0001$ ($\eta_p^2 = .15$). However, initiative topic did not interact with any of the other independent variables ($p > .20$) and was not of theoretical interest. There also were no higher order interactions among the independent variables.

The covariates employed were need for cognition and political expertise. Slope homogeneity tests show that neither potential covariate interacted with any of the independent variables, which meant that it was appropriate to use them as covariates. However, neither need for cognition nor political knowledge significantly influenced support in the final ANCOVA, so they are not discussed further.

Hypothesis 1

Participants were expected to express more support for an initiative when it was endorsed by an organization that focuses on initiative-relevant issues (high match applicability) than when it was endorsed by an organization that focuses on initiative-irrelevant issues (low match applicability). Moreover, this effect was predicted to occur only when participants possessed low motivation to process the initiative information. This suggests a two-way interaction between motivation and heuristic cue applicability. Since this hypothesis is best tested using responses to endorsements from organizations about which participants have pre-existing beliefs, only real organizations were used to test this hypothesis. Using responses to real endorsing organizations, this interaction was found, supporting Hypothesis 1, $F(1, 293) = 10.47, p < .001$ ($\eta_p^2 = .04$).

To provide greater insight into the nature of this interaction, we conducted supplementary simple effects tests. These reveal that participants expressed more support for initiatives endorsed by organizations with high match-based applicability than organizations with low match-based applicability when the participants possessed low motivation to process ($M_{\text{high match}} = 4.21, M_{\text{low match}} = 3.28; p < .01$). No significant difference between high and low match-based applicability was observed for participants who possessed high motivation ($M_{\text{high match}} = 3.43, M_{\text{low match}} = 3.94; p > .10$). These same means appear in Figure 1. This graph shows both the predicted positive impact of match on attitude toward initiatives in the low processing motivation condition and a nonsignificant reverse effect in the high processing motivation condition.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 proposed that the effect of match on low processing-motivation participants observed in the test of Hypothesis 1 should not occur when the endorsing organizations are fictional or recently created. This suggests a two-way interaction between match-based applicability and the real or fictional nature of the endorsing organization. Using the responses of just those participants in the low processing-motivation condition, this interaction was found, supporting Hypothesis 2, $F(1, 305) = 6.38, p < .01$ ($\eta_p^2 = .02$). We again conducted supplementary simple effects tests to discern the nature of this interaction. These tests reveal that participants expressed more support for initiatives endorsed by organizations with high match-based applicability than by organizations with low match-based applicability when the organizations were real ($M_{\text{high match}} = 4.21, M_{\text{low match}} = 3.28; p < .01$). However, no significant difference between high and low match-based applicability was observed when the organizations were fictional or recently created ($M_{\text{high match}} = 3.98, M_{\text{low match}} = 4.26; p > .10$).

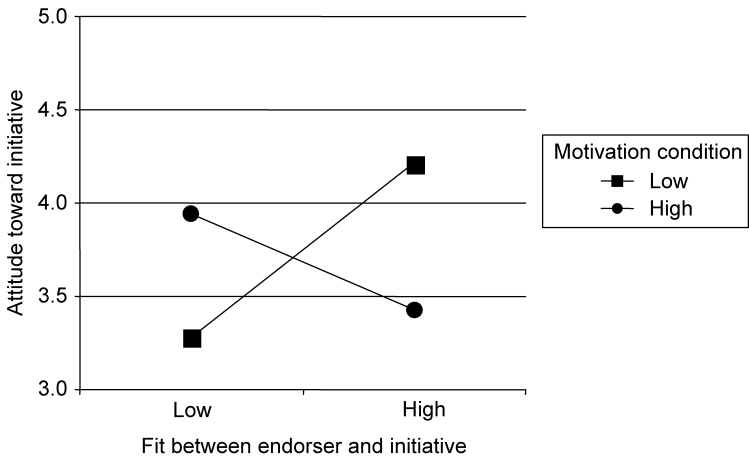


Figure 1. Interaction of processing condition and endorser–initiative fit on attitude toward initiative.

Hypothesis 3

To test Hypothesis 3, participants were divided into neutral attitude and positive attitude groups on the basis of their initial evaluations of each endorsing organization. Participants who expressed uniformly neutral attitudes toward the endorser on the multi-item organizational attitude scale (an organizational liking score of exactly 4.0) were classified as having a neutral attitude, whereas those who had a liking score greater than 4.0 were classified as having a positive attitude.⁴

It was hypothesized that participants who possess favorable attitudes toward an endorser will express more support for the initiative than individuals who possess a neutral attitude toward the endorser when they possess low motivation to process initiative information, but not when they possess high motivation to process initiative information. This hypothesis suggests an interaction of motivation and organizational liking on initiative support. A significant interaction between motivation and organizational liking was observed, $F(1, 293) = 4.49$, $p < .04$ ($\eta_p^2 = .02$), but simple effects tests reveal that this interaction was driven by some unexpected findings. Specifically, a directionally positive (but nonsignificant) effect of organizational liking was found for low motivation to

⁴A small number of participants expressed negative attitudes toward one or more of the organizations endorsing initiatives. Given that this experiment focuses on the factors that influence the positive impact of endorsements, these observations—7.4% of the total sample—were dropped from all subsequent analyses.

process individuals ($M_{\text{positive org. attitude}} = 3.91$, $M_{\text{neutral org attitude}} = 3.58$; $p > .10$), and a significant negative effect of organizational liking was found for high motivation to process individuals ($M_{\text{positive org. attitude}} = 3.38$, $M_{\text{neutral org attitude}} = 4.00$; $p < .05$). Given the observed pattern of means, there was not unambiguous support for Hypothesis 3. The observed negative effect of organization liking under high motivation to process was unexpected and suggests that a boomerang effect could have been at work. This unexpected finding is discussed further in the Discussion.

Discussion

This study demonstrated the applicability of the heuristic–systematic model of persuasion (Chaiken, 1980; Chen & Chaiken, 1999) to the domain of initiative elections. We derived three hypotheses from the HSM in relation to the influence of the endorsing organizations that appear in official voters' guides during initiative elections, and the experiment found support for two of the three hypotheses.

First, we found that participants expressed more support for an initiative when its endorser was issue relevant than when it was issue irrelevant, though, as predicted, we found that this effect was present only when participants had low motivation to process information. This finding is also consistent with the more general claims of the HSM, which posits that the level of heuristic cue applicability matters when participants' processing motivation is low. The results suggest that participants are more likely to be swayed by an endorser when they are both unmotivated to process systematically pro and con arguments in the voters' guide and the initiative endorser appears issue relevant (e.g., an endorsement by the Sierra Club on an environmental ballot issue).

Second, this study tested a hypothesis regarding endorsements by fictional organizations. The results indicate that the effects found regarding the interaction between cue applicability and level of motivation were not present for these non-existent organizations. Study participants, having no familiarity with these organizations, were not influenced by them, regardless of participants' processing motivation or the perceived match between the endorser's names and the initiatives' issue domains.

An unexpected finding also appeared in this experiment. When participants had a high motivation to process the arguments printed in the voters' guides, it appears that endorsements from liked organizations caused less favorable attitudes toward the corresponding initiatives, and endorsements from organizations with clear relevance to the issue domain had a negative effect on attitudes toward initiatives. Though only the former of these boomerang effects was statistically significant, this pattern has precedence in research on implicit cognition. *Implicit cognition* is argued to occur when prior exposure to a stimulus influences an individual's attitudes and behavior without the individual's awareness (Greenwald &

Banaji, 1995). One form of implicit cognition that could apply to the influence of endorsements on initiative support is assimilation (Martin, 1986; Martin, Seta, & Crelia, 1990), which occurs when one's attitude toward a contextual factor generalizes to closely associated stimuli. Applied to the domain at hand, assimilation could occur if a voter's positive feelings toward an organization unconsciously transfer to the initiative the organization endorses.

However, prior research has found that this assimilation process is mitigated or even reversed if the source of assimilation is recognized and processed explicitly (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Martin, 1986; Martin et al., 1990; Pratto & Bargh, 1991; Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Skowronski, Carlston, & Isham, 1993). When evaluators explicitly recognize the potential influence of their positive feelings toward a contextual element, they may consciously attempt to partial out its influence to eliminate any potentially inconsistent or irrational attitudes. In certain situations, this editing can be overapplied, causing the evaluator to have a more negative attitude toward the target stimulus than if the positive contextual prime had never been present (Lombardi, Higgins, & Bargh, 1987; Martin, 1986; Martin et al., 1990). Given that the boomerang effect occurred precisely when participants more actively processed the initiative arguments, it is possible that it was produced by a similar conscious attempt to partial out the influence of the organization.

Thus, future research on this subject could include measures to detect whether study participants are engaging in explicit or implicit message processing. If participants process messages explicitly, there is a greater chance that they could engage in conscious correction that could remove or even reverse the presumed impact of heuristic cues, such as initiative endorsements. Though the implicit–explicit distinction parallels, in some ways, the heuristic–systematic framework of the HSM, these concepts have distinct theoretical and operational definitions, and future research should consider developing tests that take both into account.

Though the sample presented herein was not a representative sample of likely voters, and the initiatives and endorsements examined were hypothetical, this experiment's findings have practical implications for those who conduct initiative campaigns and other activities intended to garner public support for policies and programs. Endorsements from real, salient, and issue-relevant organizations can promote favorable views of one's initiative, but the benefit of such endorsements is less clear when people are scrutinizing the initiative's content. Under those conditions, it appears that endorsements do not substitute—or even necessarily complement—more substantive information about the pros and cons of an initiative. Moreover, it appears that constructing new organizations to generate dubious endorsements has limited value, even if the new organization has an appealing and issue-relevant name. Taken together, these findings underscore the limited impact of endorsements for initiatives, particularly when an initiative

campaign seeks out numerous, disparate endorsements or inventing new organizations to create endorsements (Silverstein, 1998).

This should only reassure democratic theorists to the extent that citizens are, in fact, motivated to process initiative content carefully. Given the skepticism that many observers have about the scope and depth of citizen deliberation in initiative elections (Broder, 2000; Gastil, 2000), it may well be the case that issue-relevant endorsements from familiar organizations play a key role in an initiative's success. By contrast, were the bulk of citizens to process information more carefully, it is possible that trumpeting such endorsements could even backfire, as citizens make a concerted effort to second-guess their own heuristic biases.

In conclusion, the findings of this experiment strengthen our understanding of how voters make voting decisions on ballot initiatives. Among actual voters, there is surely variation in who is likely to make heuristic-based decisions: Those without much information on the substantive content of an initiative are most likely to rely upon cues provided by like-minded groups or individuals (Lupia, 1994). With margins of victory often in the realm of a few percentage points or less, endorsements that affect only part of the population can, nonetheless, tip the balance. Moreover, because voters' pamphlets are the most frequently mentioned source of information that people report (Bowler & Donovan, 1998), endorsements appearing there are likely to be especially influential. Thus, it is important to continue studying how the applicability, availability, and diagnosticity of endorsements influence how voters make choices in low-information elections.

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Appendix

Wording of the Four Initiatives

This appendix lists the wording of the four initiatives used in this study, along with the arguments given for and against each initiative. The endorsing organizations listed are given just as examples. In the experiment, they were manipulated, as described in the Method section. To guard against order effects, the initiatives were presented in one of two orders: the order shown here, and the reverse order.

Initiative 1. The State of Washington should institute stronger controls on land development to protect the quality of life in urban areas.

Statement for: The natural beauty that has marked our region for centuries is slowly disappearing, replaced by high rises, parking lots, and strip malls. To combat these problems, Initiative 1 would strengthen the state's regulations on land development. It would allow denser development in core urban areas while tightening regulations in the surrounding areas. Changes in zoning laws would make sprawl more difficult by requiring construction projects to seek out sites near existing developments before turning to low-density areas.—The Sierra Club

Statement against: Initiative 1 would create far more problems than it would solve. By making new development in Washington's urban areas more difficult, it would raise the prices of existing housing and make it even harder for families to find an affordable place to live in or near cities. Moreover, the initiative represents an unfair set of restrictions on urban land development. By limiting what people can do with their own land, it amounts to an unfair seizing of their property. We need to find solutions to the region's problems that don't raise the cost of living or override rights to private property.—Center for Civic Research

Initiative 2. The State of Washington should raise taxes on gasoline to fund the construction and maintenance of roads.

Statement for: Traffic problems in our state have reached the breaking point. Our roads and highways are constantly jammed up, causing untold stress and wasted time to commuters. And yet there is not enough money in the state budget to address the problem. Initiative 2 therefore proposes to raise taxes on gasoline by 10¢ per gallon in order to fund the construction and maintenance of roads. Asking those who use the roads to pay for them is the fairest way to collect the necessary funds. This new revenue source would be sufficient to pay for long-overdue road projects in all parts of the state.—American Automobile Association (AAA)

Statement against: We agree that traffic congestion has become a major problem in our state, but we disagree with the proposed solution. Gasoline taxes are

regressive, taking a greater share of income from our poorest citizens than from our wealthiest ones. Moreover, we believe that funding for new roads could be found within the existing state budget. Taxes on Washington citizens are already too high, and Initiative 2 would only make that problem worse. By eliminating waste in other programs, we could find additional funding for transportation projects. —Governmental Studies Association

Initiative 3. The State of Washington should provide senior citizens with free admission to all Washington state parks.

Statement for: Many of our state's senior citizens live on a fixed income, making it difficult for them to afford the parking and other fees associated with enjoying our state's parks. And yet this was the generation that, through decades of paying taxes, allowed the establishment of those parks in the first place. Initiative 3 would give senior citizens free admission to all state parks.—American Association for Retired Persons (AARP)

Statement against: We support the goal of making our state parks affordable to all. Initiative 3, however, would single out one group of citizens and reward only them. Moreover, senior citizens already receive many government-sponsored benefits, including Social Security and Medicare. Instead of granting benefits only to senior citizens, we should lower admission fees to state parks for all people in Washington.—National Policy Analysis Group

Initiative 4. The State of Washington should make funds available to ensure that poor working families receive affordable childcare.

Statement for: More and more working parents are having difficulties finding affordable childcare. To address this problem, Initiative 4 would give all families with a gross income of \$20,000 or less a \$500 credit per year for childcare expenses. A state agency would send the payment to whatever childcare provider the family designates. It is the children who ultimately lose when a parent must accept low-quality childcare or even leave a child unattended in order to work long enough hours to make ends meet. Initiative 4 would renew the state's commitment to its children most at risk.—The United Way

Statement against: Initiative 4 is a well-intended but ultimately misguided proposal. It is the parents' responsibility—not the government's—to care for children. There are all kinds of ways for parents to provide adequate childcare, such as finding a friend, neighbor, or family member to help. Initiative 4 would simply create a new and unnecessary form of welfare for which only the poor qualify. Just as with other welfare programs, the recipients would end up dependent on government, rather than relying on their own abilities and their communities, churches, and extended family.—American Public Initiative Institute