

I Don't 'No':

Empirical Evidence of the Confused Voter in Initiative Elections

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Confused voters vote 'no' on initiatives. While this is apparently common knowledge, as evidenced by its regular assertions in the literature (Hyink 1969, Magleby 1984, Bowler and Donovan 1998, Higley and McAllister 2002, Goldsmith 2004) and routine anecdotal quotes by campaign consultants (Magleby and Patterson 1998), there is scant empirical evidence of this claim and relatively flimsy theoretical explanations for this supposed phenomena (Lowenstein 1982). Though a number theories suggest how and why voters become confused, the resulting 'no' votes that are assumed to occur have not been empirically verified.

This paper begins to assess these claims. These initial findings suggest that the current conventional wisdom may not be wholly correct. First, if confusion is conceptualized broadly, the conventional wisdom about confused voters being more likely to vote 'no' on initiatives appears to be incorrect. In comparison to other levels of information and policy preferences, broadly conceived confused voters seem to respond to the choices presented to them similar to everybody else. However, certain forms of confusion, under certain circumstances can have a meaningful impact on individual decision making. Therefore, the second, and perhaps more important finding of this analysis is that confusion needs to be looked at in all of its forms. Confusion is not simply one state of mind that results in consistent outcomes. The next section discusses current theories of confusion and voting. The second section describes how these concepts are measured, followed by a description of the research design and data collection techniques. The final sections discuss the results and suggest potential avenues for future research.

Theories about Confusion and Voting

One theory about how these confused voters cast ballots is that risk adverse voters unsure about the initiative simply vote 'no' to maintain the status quo (Hyink 1969, Lupia and Matsusaka 2004). This emanates from Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) 'prospect theory' of decision-making when people are faced with risk. Prospect theory claims that people undervalue outcomes that are probabilistic, in comparison to guaranteed outcomes. The resulting public policy consequences from ballot initiatives are uncertain, not only from a standpoint of individual interpretation of the potential law, but also the implementation of that ballot proposition is far from certain. Legislative and bureaucratic responses to direct democracy can limit the impact of initiatives (Gerber, Lupia, McCubbins & Kiewiet 2001, Gerber, Lupia and McCubbins 2004), but in a federal system, other levels of government can attempt dilute alter the results or outcomes of these elections as evidenced by the lawsuits in federal against Proposition 187, the "Save Our State" initiative in California in 1994 that aimed to deny illegal immigrants social services. Aside from simple uncertainty about the implementation, policy consequences are far from certain, as well. California's Proposition 140 instituting term limits has had numerous unintentional consequences, many of them negatively impacting the state (Kousser 2005).

Another belief is that voters become frustrated 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 the elites (Zaller 1992) leading to ambiguity about the elites' and their own true preferences. This ambiguity would then be translated into a 'no' vote.

Finally, another supposed outflow of confusion is simple 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. There has been some work that implicitly suggests that confusion can lead to abstention. Work done on "roll-off" or within ballot abstention that shows low information candidate races suffer from this phenomenon (Klein and Baum 2001, Darcy and Schneider 1989). Perea's (2002) work shows that longer ballots can increase abstention rates in Western European referenda elections and Walker (1966) shows how longer ballots can lead to abstention in the United States. 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 levels (Matusaka 1993), reduces the abstention rate in non-controversial ballot initiatives.

Measurement of Confusion

The difficulty in parsing out causes of vote choice can be challenging, and measuring confusion and its impact can be extremely difficult. One popular means of assessing the impact of awareness based vote choices relies on the amount of information and/or misinformation levels of voters. (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Kuklinski, Quirk, Jerit, Schwieder and Rich 2000, for participation effects see White, Binder, Ledet and Hofstetter nd). Unfortunately, information levels per se have difficulty transferring to measuring confusion. While information levels, both issue specific and general political

knowledge, are indispensable in any analysis of vote choice, other types of awareness, such as elite opinion (endorsements or cues), can directly influence public opinion and vote choice (Zaller 1992).

The use of shortcuts (endorsement or cues) for voting has a long history, and its usage by direct democracy voters is even more prevalent because of rational ignorance due to the high costs of gathering the limited amounts of information typically available to the voter (Downs 1957, Bowler and Donovan 1998, p. 32, see Kriesi 2002 for comparative empirical evidence). Therefore it is practical, even expected, that an analysis of voter understanding of these cues be used for assessing confusion levels. Lupia (1994) showed that voters can use cues to overcome informational problems, but what happens when the cues are the problem? What if the cues are not interpreting correctly or they are overwhelmed with contradictory information? How do the voters respond to that level of confusion?

At the base level, two types of confusion exist. One form, taken from Alvarez, Brehm & Wilson (2003), *uncertainty*, is simply a lack of information that prevents individuals from properly acting on their true preferences. A second form of confusion is *ambivalence*, which is a situation where individuals have underlying conflicting preferences that are not ameliorated with increased information (Alvarez and Brehm 1995, 1997). Though they do not analyze vote choice, they examine this concept and its effect within the framework of public opinion survey responses involving two hot button issues, abortion (1995) and racial policies (1997). Both concepts (uncertainty and ambivalence) transfer directly to theories about initiative voting.

When looking at cues and confusion, there are four types of confusion that stem from these two underlying conditions (uncertainty and ambivalence). First, voters may be ambivalent, actually holding contradictory beliefs about the same issue (they may have competing values that leave them torn on a policy issue, for example they may believe that life begins at conception, but also support a woman's right to control her own body). In this circumstance additional information will not reduce their confusion. According to Lupia and McCubbins' (1998) work about cues and endorsements, this can be observed in two separate ways. Voters that have received *contradictory consensus cues* (the elites agree on an issue position, but the individual's relationship with those elites makes their signal contradictory) from elites that are urging them to vote in similar directions are faced with a confusing choice. In analogous circumstances, when the cues voters receive clash, but the elites furnishing them are of equal trustworthiness, voters become similarly confused by the *competing cues* they receive (one elite cue pushes the voter in one direction, and a different elite cue pulls the voter in a different direction). Either the elite's consensus policy position creates confusion or contradictory elite messages induce the confusion.

The other underlying condition of confusion, uncertainty, stems from a lack of information that prevents voters from obtaining or understanding their true preferences. In this case, additional information would help the voters make up their minds. In the framework of cues analysis, two forms of this type of confusion exist. First, a voter perceives that the elite is urging them to both support and oppose an issue stance, the voters are receiving *bad cues*. Finally, those without any inkling on how to vote because they are *absent cues* are also confused.

Data

The California Special Election of 2005 presents the exceptional opportunity to assess the impacts of confusion on vote choice. I designed and conducted an exit poll to overcome the obstacles of comparing the four types of confused voters to each other and the rest of the voting population. Instead of simply asking voters if they were confused, which would likely yield biased results, as respondents would be inclined to give the socially desirable response, this research uses responses about elite support for, or opposition to, propositions as a direct measure for confusion.

This unique data set based on an exit poll in the city of San Diego during the 2005 California Special Election (N = 244) presents an opportunity to assess the claim that voter confusion leads to a 'no' vote on direct legislation.¹ The exit poll was conducted by student volunteers in a political behavior course at San Diego State University and an introductory American politics course at the University of California, San Diego. The students received extra credit in their classes for conducting approximately 3 hours of interviewing at a given polling station. A total of 244 respondents from 10 separate precincts were interviewed over the course of the day. The precincts were chosen using a random cluster sampling method. Four precincts were randomly selected from a list of precincts from the most recent election in San Diego (July 26, 2005 San Diego Special Election). The additional six precincts were located at the polling stations of the four originally selected precincts.

¹ One potential limitation of using an exit poll for analysis is that absentee voters are not part of the sample and they can differ in voting patterns for direct legislation (Dubin and Kalsow 1996). The only way this would affect the results of this test is if absentee voters responded differently to confusion, not if their confusion levels were systematically higher or lower. There is no evidence or theory that would suggest this to be the case.

The California Special Election on November 8, 2005 was called by Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger after a failed attempt to push his reform agenda through a Democratic controlled legislature in Sacramento. There were eight propositions on the statewide ballot, four of which were part of the Schwarzenegger reform package: Propositions 74, 75, 76 & 77.² This research will measure confusion about two propositions in the 2005 California Special Election. First, Proposition 74 was an initiative proposing the alteration of teacher hiring and firing in the public schools. The key policy proposal was increasing the number of years teachers needed to work before being granted tenure from two years to five years. Second, Proposition 75 was an initiative proposed to restrict public employee labor unions' ability to use member dues for political contributions.

These two propositions were chosen because there were popular elite supporters and opponents on each initiative, providing clear cues for the electorate, a necessary condition for successful shortcut voting (Lupia 1994, Lupia and McCubbins 1998). The electorate had access to an abundance of information and cues for these propositions, as evidenced by the staggering amount of money during the campaign. Supporters of Proposition 74 spent \$57.2 million, while opponents spent \$16.8 million. The story is even more overwhelming for Propositions 75 where supporters spent a total of \$50.9 million, and opponents' expenditures totaled \$55.9 million. These two propositions accounted for over \$188 million in spending during this special election campaign.³

A series of questions proposed in the survey assessed voter awareness of elite support and opposition for the initiatives and the respondent's preferences for those

² Summaries and full text of all eight initiatives are available at <http://www.voterguide.ss.ca.gov/>

³ All campaign figures were obtained from the California Secretary of State's webpage Cal-Access <http://dbsearch.ss.ca.gov/>, accessed April 15, 2006.

elites.⁴ Contradictory responses or an absence of the awareness of cues regarding the two propositions of interest enable me to assess the impact of the various types of confusion on vote choice. Several assumptions are made for the operationalization and classification of these concepts. First, being aware of the elite support or opposition of the proposition and believing that each elite either represents ‘people like you’ or ‘special interests’ is treated equally. For example, if the voter believes that Arnold Schwarzenegger and Labor Unions both represent ‘people like you’, and Schwarzenegger supports Proposition 74 and the unions oppose it, the influences of each of the elites is treated as equivalent. Even though in actuality, people may weight the endorsements of some elites more than others, due to limitations in the data, it is not possible to directly account for this possibility. Second, these categorizations of confusion are not mutually exclusive, so voters can be ‘confused’ because of bad cues, contradictory consensus cues and/or competing cues.

For both Proposition 74 and Proposition 75, confusion is operationalized to account for the four types of confusion discussed above: contradictory consensus cues and competing cues (ambivalence), as well as, bad cues and absent cues (uncertainty). The next section details the operationalization of the four forms of confusion. Later sections discuss the effect that confusion has on the likelihood of voting for each ballot initiative and the individual effects that confusion have on vote choice.

⁴ The complete questionnaire used for the survey is available in the Appendix. Which of the propositions do you believe was supported by Arnold Schwarzenegger? Which of the propositions do you believe was supported by unions? Which of the propositions do you believe was opposed by unions? Which of the propositions was opposed by teachers? Who do you believe Arnold Schwarzenegger represents: ‘people like you’ or ‘special interests’? Who do you believe labor unions represent: ‘people like you’ or ‘special interests’? Who do you believe teachers represent: ‘people like you’ or ‘special interests’?

Operationalizations

The first set of ambivalent voters comes from those who believed the unions and Arnold Schwarzenegger supported Proposition 74 and 75.⁵ If the voter believes that both the unions and Arnold Schwarzenegger support the initiative, but believe one represents ‘people like you’ and the other represents ‘special interests,’ the voter is beset with conflicting information (*contradictory consensus cues*) and is categorized as confused. Based on work done on cues (Lupia and McCubbins 1998), not only can positive endorsements from trusted groups encourage votes, but endorsements for groups that have a negative evaluation (i.e., the auto insurance industry in Lupia 1994) can lead voters to cast their ballots in the opposite direction. Based on similar logic, voters who believe that both the unions and the teachers opposed each proposition, but have contradictory elite preferences believing that one group represents ‘people like you’ and the other ‘special interests’ are also confused, or at least conflicted and ambivalent. However, if the respondent believes that both the unions and Arnold (or the teachers) uniformly represent ‘special interests’ or ‘people like you,’ the voter cannot be classified as confused under my definition. Even though the voter holds incorrect information about elite support for the initiative, the beliefs are reinforcing and do not present conflict or confusion for the voter.

Additionally, those who believed Schwarzenegger supported the propositions and the unions opposed them are considered confused if they have similar elite preferences (*competing cues*). Likewise, those who believed Schwarzenegger supported the

⁵ If respondents did not believe that either supported the initiative, the same logic does not hold. Lack of support and opposition are fundamentally different. Simply not knowing who supports what is classified as being “absent [of] cues”.

propositions and the teachers opposed them are confused if they also have similar elite preferences.

The group of uncertain voters that have *bad cues* are operationalized as having answered ‘yes’ to both questions about union support and opposition to Proposition 74 and 75.⁶ Therefore, whether or not you think that unions represent ‘people like you’ or ‘special interests,’ believing that the unions are both supporting and opposing the same proposition is *prima facie* confusion. This is grouped under uncertainty because additional information would presumably clear up this discrepancy.

Finally, uncertain voters without any information about the shortcuts available to them are confused (*absent cues*). These voters did not know if Schwarzenegger or the unions supported the initiatives or if the unions or the teachers opposed them. Clearly it is possible these individuals could have other cues available to them such as other elites or newspaper endorsements, however, lacking this basic information about the most visible elite cues implies these voters actually are absent of cues.

Confusion and Abstention in the Special Election

Before addressing vote choice, it is worthwhile to assess the claim that confusion leads to abstention. It is important to first realize that this was a special election called for the sole purpose of voting on Governor Schwarzenegger’s reform initiatives. Therefore it would be expected that ballot drop-off (total ballots cast minus valid votes cast for a particular initiative or office) due to confusion would be limited as confused voters would likely abstain, instead of voting at all. The precincts that were polled did have a Mayoral election to decide, and it is possible that this local race had an impact on turnout inside

⁶ The questions were: “Which of the propositions do you believe was *supported* by unions?” and, “which of the propositions do you believe was *opposed* by unions?”

the city limits (55.21% of registered voters) compared to the rest of the county (52.77% of registered voters). Nonetheless, this increase in turnout is minimal and ballot drop-off for Proposition 74 was less than one percentage point inside the city (.87%) and only slightly higher for Proposition 75 (1.07%).⁷ Therefore, it is more likely that because of the nature of this election, ballot drop-off was suppressed and voters simply chose to not show up at the polls.

Due to the nature of the data, an exit poll, abstention due to confusion cannot be measured. For ballot drop-off, the evidence presented here suggests that confusion had a minor contribution to increased levels of non-voting for both Proposition 74 and Proposition 75 (Table 1). Voters that are not confused have lower abstention rates, however, the percentage differences between the two groups of confused and not confused is not statistically significant. Though this data could not confirm that confusion contributes to abstention rates, the claim is far from invalidated and needs to be investigated with more appropriate data.

Table 1 Abstention Rates, by Presence or Absence of Confusion

	Proposition 74 (Teacher Tenure) Abstention	Proposition 75 (Union Dues) Abstention
Confused Voters	7.22%	8.49%
Not Confused Voters	4.08%	3.62%

Note: For Proposition 74 and 75 N = 244
 The differences in the percentage of “confused” and “not confused” voters are not statistically significant for either Proposition in a two-tailed comparison at a 95% confidence level.

⁷ Turnout numbers were obtained from the website of the San Diego County Registrar of Voters <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/voters/Eng/Epast.html>, accessed April 15, 2006.

Bivariate Analysis

Conventional wisdom claims that confusion will lead to an increase in the incidence of ‘no’ votes in initiative elections. As shown in Table 2, “confusion” as a general category (any voter who is classified as confused in any of the four groups: contradictory consensus cues, competing cues, bad cues and absent cues) did not lead to a significantly greater occurrence of ‘no’ votes for either proposition. For Proposition 74, confused voters were almost 9% less likely to vote ‘no’ than those individuals who were not confused. Confused voters in Proposition 75 were nearly identical in their proportion of ‘no’ votes to their non-confused counterparts. This finding is contrary to expectations and conventional wisdom. In order to more fully understand the concept of confusion and its influence on vote choice, it is important to separate out the different types of confusion (contradictory consensus cues, competing cues, bad cues and absent cues) and analyze their individual impacts.

Table 2 “No” Votes in Proposition 74 and 75

	Proposition 74 (Teacher Tenure)	Proposition 75 (Union Dues)
Confused Voters (N)	58.89% (97)	60.82% (106)
Not Confused Voters (N)	67.38% (134)	60.15% (124)
Difference between Confused and Not Confused	-8.47%	.67%

Notes: The differences in the percentage of ‘no’ votes between “confused” and “not confused” voters are not statistically significant for either Proposition in a two-tailed comparison at a 95% confidence level.

Multivariate Analysis

To fully understand the impact (or lack thereof) of confusion during ballot initiative elections, a series of logistic regressions use vote choice for Proposition 74 and Proposition 75 as the dependent variables (see Table 3). The first set of models for the propositions use a dummy variable for ‘confused’, where the respondent is coded as “1” if they were classified as confused for any of the categories, all others, i.e. ‘not confused’ are coded as zero and are the reference group.

The second set of models for the propositions incorporate the four types of confusion discussed above. Based on the aforementioned classifications of ‘confused,’ a dummy variable was created for each of the different operationalizations of confusion (contradictory consensus cues, competing cues, bad cues and absent cues) and coded ‘1’ and ‘0’ otherwise. These variables were entered into the logit regression along with a number of control variables.

Levels of political information have long been associated with impacts in voting behavior (Bartels 1996, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Neuman 1986, Palfrey and Poole 1987, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). For this research, voters are asked a series of questions about the government in Washington, DC. The correct responses are then tallied to form a six-item information index. The scores ranged from 0 – 6, with a mean of 5.12 and standard deviation of 1.19.

Preferences for policy positions are the most natural explanations for vote choice in initiative elections. The key component of Proposition 74 was increasing the time it would take public school teachers to be eligible for tenure from two years to five years. Therefore, there are two policy choices, first a ‘no’ vote would maintain the status quo at

two years. Second, a 'yes' vote would increase the time to five years. Therefore, to control for preferences in Proposition 74, respondents were asked, "How many years should California teachers have to work before they are granted tenure?" Theoretically, voters should prefer legislation closer to them in the policy space; respondents were grouped into one dummy variable for those responding 4 years or more (expected to support the proposition) and a second category for those answering 3 years or less (expected to oppose the proposition), the reference group were those who either did not know or refused to answer.

For Proposition 75, the key component of that initiative was limiting the political contributions of unions. To assess the voters' policy preferences, the respondents were asked, "Do you favor passing legislation limiting the ability of labor unions to donate money to political candidates and parties?" A dummy variable for 'yes' and 'no' responses was included in the regression, the reference group were those who either did not know or refused to answer.

Ideology was measured on a seven-point self placement scale from very liberal (1) to very conservative (7). Partisanship was measured by asking what party the respondent was registered with, independents, non-partisans, minor party members and those that refused to answer are the reference group. I scaled income into groups based on annual household totals and coded them "1" through "5": under \$25,000, \$25,000 to \$45,000, \$45,001 to \$75,000, \$75,001 to \$150,000 and over \$150,000. I categorized Education by the highest level completed by the respondent and coded it "1" through "5": did not finish high school, finished high school, some college, four year college degree

and more than four years of college. Age was coded “1” through “6” and grouped as follows: under 25, 26 to 35, 36 to 45, 46 to 55, 56 to 65 and over 65.

The results of the logit models in Table 3 are presented such that positive coefficients indicate voters are more likely to vote ‘yes’ on the proposition while negative coefficients represent a less likely ‘yes’ vote, or more understandably, a more likely ‘no’ vote. Those who did not vote, refused to answer or simply forgot their selection are coded as missing and removed the equations.

For Proposition 74 the variable of interest, confusion, is pointed in the expected negative direction suggesting that confusion contributes to more ‘no’ votes. However, its marginal impact is negligible. For the other independent variables, the results were in line with the expectations. The two policy preference dummy variables (high tenure and low tenure) are in the expected direction and statistically significant. Also, information levels, while not statistically significant, it is in the expected direction. The other control variables perform as expected, as the more conservative a voter becomes on the ideological spectrum the more likely they are to vote ‘yes’ on Proposition 74. Similarly, Democrats are significantly less likely to support this proposition, which makes sense due to Arnold Schwarzenegger’s support for this initiative and organized labor’s opposition to it.

In order to more intuitively understand the lack of impact confusion has on vote choice, Clarify,⁸ is used to produce estimates of the effect of changing a median type respondent from “not confused” to “confused.” The values of the regression were set to

⁸ “Clarify is a program that uses Monte Carlo simulation to convert the raw output of statistical procedures into results that are of direct interest to researchers, without changing statistical assumptions or requiring new statistical models” (Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2001, p. 4).

Table 3 Explaining Proposition Vote Choice Using Combined Confusion Measure

	Proposition 74	Proposition 75
Confused	-.10 (.43)	-.04 (.39)
Information	.08 (.18)	.16 (.16)
Tenure 4+ years	1.29* (.60)	
Tenure 3 or less years	-1.53* (.69)	
Limit Union Contributions		.85 (.62)
Do not Limit Union Contributions		-1.21 (.67)
Democrat	-1.08* (.53)	-1.00* (.48)
Republican	-.04 (.64)	.30 (.58)
Ideology	.76* (.20)	.47* (.16)
Income	-.27 (.20)	-.06 (.17)
Education	.62* (.25)	.25 (.21)
Age	.02 (.15)	.20 (.14)
Gender	.12 (.44)	.32 (.41)
Pseudo R ²	.43	.34

Notes: For Proposition 74 N = 231, for Proposition 75 N = 230

Table entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

* indicates that an estimated effect is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level in a two-tailed test.

their medians, except the “ideology” variable was set to “4” (a moderate), and the “information” value set to “1”, a very low level of information. This allows for the most likely circumstance of confusion affecting vote choice. The hypothetical respondent is a 36-45 year old male with a four year college degree making between \$45,000 and \$75,000. This ‘respondent’ has no partisan affiliation, considers himself a moderate and does not have a stated policy preference for teacher tenure. This situation presents median type respondent who is likely influenced by confusion. However, as shown in Table 4, there is a less than 2% increase in the likelihood for this person voting ‘no’ when that person becomes confused.

Table 4 First Differences Changing from “not confused” to “confused” for Proposition 74 and 75

	Proposition 74 Probability of Voting “No”	Proposition 75 Probability of Voting “No”
Confused	63.03%	49.18%
Not Confused	61.40%	49.02%
Effect of Being Confused (Difference in Probabilities)	1.63%	.16%

Note: The values are set to responses that would most likely be affected by the introduction of confusion for both Proposition 74 and Proposition 75.

For Proposition 75, the results are strikingly similar. Confusion seems to have no effect on vote choice. In the logit regression, confusion has nearly no effect. Both policy preference variables are in the expected direction, as are the ideological and partisan indicators. Demographic attributes are not statistically significant and do not have much influence in the regression. Again, in order show the lack of importance that confusion plays in vote choice, Clarify is used to show changes when a hypothetical respondent changes from ‘not confused’ to ‘confused’ (see Table 4). This hypothetical respondent is a 26 – 34 year old woman with ‘some college’ making under \$25,000. She is a strongly

conservative Democrat with a limited amount of political information (“3”), who does not have a stated policy preference for limiting the political contributions of unions. This is the archetype respondent for having confusion alter her vote. With these particular characteristics she has 51% chance of voting ‘yes’ on this proposition. However, even stacking the deck with this hypothetical respondent, making her confused does not alter her ultimate choice as her likelihood of voting ‘no’ only increases only .16%.

The variable of interest, confusion, and the other control variables acted nearly identically in Proposition 74 as they did in Proposition 75. Also, the first differences results show no real effects changing the hypothetical respondent from “not confused” to “confused.” This consistency across propositions indicates that this operationalization of confusion clearly does not lead to more ‘no’ votes in initiative elections. Since the two models (Proposition 74 and Proposition 75) are so similar, these results are very strong.

Confusion – The Four Different Types

If confusion is looked at in its entirety, there is little support for the conventional wisdom that confusion leads to more ‘no’ votes in initiative elections. Breaking apart confusion into its various categorizations presents some interesting relationships, and suggest that the conventional wisdom may hold in certain circumstances. For both Proposition 74 and 75, a logit regression was run separating out the four different types of confusion. The results are presented in Table 5. The dependent variable, vote choice in the respective propositions, and various controls remain unchanged for each proposition. The four types of confusion, contradictory consensus cues, competing cues, bad cues and absent cues are dichotomous variables coded “1” if the respondent is classified in that manner or “0” otherwise.

Table 5 Explaining Proposition Vote Choice Using Categories Confusion Measure

	Proposition 74	Proposition 75
Contradictory Consensus Cues	-.37 (.58)	.14 (.54)
Competing Cues	1.12 (.62)	-.06 (.54)
Bad Cues	.06 (.80)	-.71 (.75)
Absent Cues	-1.55 (.82)	.78 (.66)
Information	.05 (.20)	.19 (.18)
Tenure 4+ years	1.53 (.64)	
Tenure 3 or less years	-1.77 (.73)	
Limit Union Contributions		.93 (.63)
Do not Limit Union Contributions		-1.08 (.68)
Democrat	-1.27 (.56)	-1.10 (.49)
Republican	-.07 (.66)	.24 (.58)
Ideology	.83 (.21)	.48 (.16)
Income	-.49 (.23)	-.05 (.18)
Education	.64 (.26)	.28 (.22)
Age	.08 (.16)	.21 (.14)
Gender	.36 (.46)	.29 (.42)
Pseudo R ²	.45	.35

Notes: For Proposition 74 N = 231, for Proposition 75 N = 230

Table entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

* Estimated effect is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level in a two-tailed test.

The results from these regressions indicate that different types of confusion may influence voters in different ways on different issues. For example, in the regression for Proposition 74, the competing cues variable is positively related to vote choice (statistically significant at the .10 level), indicating that as individuals have ‘competing cues’ they are more likely to vote ‘yes’, whereas in the Proposition 75 regression this variable has very little influence. Also, in the Proposition 74 regression, ‘absent cues’ falls in line with expectations about confused voters, as it is negatively related to vote choice (significant at the .10 level). While the other independent variables in each model react nearly identically to the regression equations using only a single category of confusion, disparity across confusion variables suggests that there is more to confusion than meets the eye.

For Proposition 75 when confusion is looked at in its various forms, none of the individual operationalizations approach statistical significance. In fact, those that are ‘absent cues’, the only version of confusion that added some credence to the conventional wisdom for Proposition 74, are more likely to vote ‘yes’. Similar to the analysis of Proposition 74, the control variables act nearly identically in the expanded model of Proposition 75.

While very few of the variables are statistically significant, the control variables are generally in the expected direction. Ideology is significant, as the more conservative the respondent the more likely they are to support both propositions. Democrats are less supportive of both 74 and 75. Not surprisingly, for Proposition 74 those who favor shorter amounts of time before a teacher can become tenured (1-3 years) are less likely to vote ‘yes’ and those who think teachers should have to work longer (4 or more years) are

significantly more likely to vote ‘yes’. Also those favoring limiting the ability of unions to donate money to political campaigns were more likely to support Proposition 75 and those who did not support that policy were less likely to vote ‘yes’.

Perhaps the most surprising results of these two expanded models are the confused voters. Of the eight categories of confusion in the two models, only four were in the expected negative direction and only two of the eight are statistically significant, one of which was in the positive direction. At least for these two propositions, and these four operationalizations of confusion, voters were no more likely to vote ‘no’ and in fact in certain circumstances they were more likely to vote ‘yes’.

In order to get a sense of scale of these logit coefficients, Clarify is used to estimate the effects of changing a median respondent from “not confused” to “confused” for both competing cues and absent cues for the Proposition 74 model (See Table 6). For the first difference test for the ‘competing cues’ variable, all of the independent variables were set to their medians. This resulted in a hypothetical respondent that was a 36 – 45 year old male, with a 4 year college degree making \$45,000 - \$75,000. He considers himself slightly liberal, but has no partisan affiliation, nor does he have a stated policy preference for the initiative. He is not confused under any of the four different operationalizations and has a high level of political information about the government in Washington, DC. These characteristics resulted in a 73.03% likelihood of voting “no” on the initiative. Changing the ‘competing cues’ variable to “1” (i.e. making this respondent confused) actually *decreases* the likelihood that he would vote “no” on Proposition by 23%. Being confused in this circumstance would change a fairly certain “no” vote to a likely “yes” vote.

Table 6 First Differences “No” votes

	Proposition 74 Competing Cues “No” Votes	Proposition 74 Absent Cues “No” Votes	Proposition 75 Bad Cues “No” Votes	Proposition 75 Absent Cues “No” Votes
Confused	49.65%	57.32%	50.44%	42.52%
Not Confused	73.03%	23.95%	34.49%	59.34%
Effect of Being Confused (Difference in Probabilities)	-23.38%	33.38%	15.95%	-16.82%

Just the opposite is true for the ‘absent cues’ variable. The same median type respondent with two political preference changes, he considers himself a moderate ideologically and prefers teachers to have to work for at least four years before being eligible for tenure, is only 24% likely to vote “no” on Proposition 74. However, if this respondent becomes confused by being ‘absent cues’, the likelihood of a “no” vote increases substantially to 57.32%. These two examples clearly highlight the differences between the various types of confusion. Each of these categorizations, ‘competing cues’ and ‘absent cues,’ can make significant impacts on vote choice, however, if they are lumped together under the umbrella of broad confusion category, the impacts cancel each other out and it appears as if there is no effect.

For Proposition 75 the results are comparable, if not as dramatic. The ‘absent cues’ type of confusion has the opposite effect in this equation. A median type respondent who is a 46 – 55 year old female with a four year college degree who makes \$25,000 - \$45,000 who has a high level of political information, is not confused and considers herself a moderate Democrat has almost a 60% likelihood of voting on this initiative. However, by making her confused by being ‘absent cues’ reduces the likelihood that she would vote “no” to less than 43%.

Conversely, a median type respondent male, aged 36 – 45 with a 4 year college degree making between \$75,000 - \$150,000 with a high level of political information who considers himself a slightly liberal Republican that believes in limiting political contributions by unions has only a 34% chance of voting “no”. However, by confusing the hypothetical respondent with ‘bad cues’ this respondent’s likelihood of voting “no” increases to more than 50%. Clearly, this is a circumstance where conventional wisdom is correct and confusion could lead to a “no” vote, when all other indicators would point to a “yes” vote.

Discussion

There are at least three potential answers to why this data is so conspicuously different than the conventional wisdom. First, this may not be the correct operationalization of confusion. However, the category of ‘absent cues’, a prima facie state of confusion, still responds quite differently from one initiative to the next. Even though four separate operationalizations were presented, the possibility exists that people that are classified as confused in this research are not actually confused. Even though the three major elite groups backing and opposing these initiatives (Governor Schwarzenegger, labor unions and teachers) were used in the operationalization, it is possible (although not likely) that other less visible cues were being used in a systematic way. Second, the cues may be created unequally. If voters faced with contradictory cues greatly discount one side of the equation, they may not actually be confused and that could contribute to these findings. Finally, and most likely, it is possible that the conventional wisdom of confused voters voting ‘no’ needs to be reevaluated in light of

these finding. Nonetheless, these results warrant a further examination of both the concept and empirical evidence surrounding confusion in direct democracy.

These examples illustrate that different types of confusion do not affect individuals in the same manner across categorizations and policy questions. However, different types of confusion can have enough of an impact to alter the vote choices of individuals. Assuming that the results are not simply an artifact of the data and have at least a modicum of external validity, this analysis presents two very striking results. First, if confusion is conceptualized broadly, the conventional wisdom about confused voters being more likely to vote 'no' on initiatives appears to be incorrect. In comparison to other levels of information and policy preferences, broadly conceived confused voters seem to respond to the choices presented to them similar to everybody else. However, certain forms of confusion, under certain circumstances can have a meaningful impact on individual decision making. Therefore, the second, and perhaps more important finding of this analysis is that confusion needs to be looked at in all of its forms. Confusion is not simply one state of mind that results in consistent outcomes.

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