

# Ballot Initiatives and Electoral Timing

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## Abstract

This paper examines the effects of electoral timing on the results of ballot initiative campaigns. Using data from 1965 to 2009, I investigate whether initiative campaign results systematically differ depending on whether the legislation appears during special, midterm, or presidential elections. I also consider the electoral context, particularly the effects of surging presidential candidates on ballot initiative results. The results suggest that initiatives on morality policy are sensitive to the electoral environment, particularly to “favorable surges” provided by popular presidential candidates. Preliminary evidence suggests that tax policy is unaffected by electoral timing.

## Introduction

The increasing use of the ballot initiative has led to heightened interest in both the popular media and among scholars. Some of the most contentious issues in American politics, once reserved for debate among elected representatives, are now being decided directly by the median voter. Yet the location of the median voter fluctuates from election to election based on a number of factors that influence turnout and shape the demographic makeup of voters in a given year. This suggests that votes on ballot initiatives may be influenced by the same factors that are known to influence electoral composition. In this paper, I contrast initiatives appearing on midterm and special election ballots with those held during presidential elections, deriving hypotheses from Campbell’s (1960) theory of electoral surge and decline. I examine whether electoral timing does systematically affect results.

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Recent scholarship has examined the effects of initiative campaigns on voter turnout (Smith, 2001; Grummel, Tolbert and Smith, 2001), and voter engagement (Nicholson, 2003; Donovan, Tolbert and Smith, 2009). Research suggests that salient initiatives during midterm ballots can increase turnout by up to 8% (Grummel, 2008). Looking at the relationship of candidates and ballot initiatives, scholars have also examined whether ballot initiatives might affect the fortunes of top-ticket candidates (Smith, DeSantis and Kassel, 2006), namely how gay marriage initiatives affected President Bush's reelection campaign in 2004. Recently, scholars have begun to examine influence in the opposite direction and examined how top-ticket candidates can influence the outcomes of initiatives. For example, Abrajano (2010) and Slade and Smith (2011) test anecdotal claims that the increased turnout among black and Latino voters led to the passage of same-sex marriage bans. Abrajano (2010) compares turnout between the 2004 and 2008 election and finds that Proposition 8 would have passed even if voters turned out at 2004 levels. Slade and Smith (2011) also rule out the conventional wisdom argument that a surge for Obama led to the passage of Amendment 2. They find that opinion of these surge voters is more nuanced and that many of the surge voters did not cast a vote on the initiative. Even though these studies both rule out the effects of the top-ticket candidate, and are often written in response to strong currents of journalistic musings, they might be on to something that is broader. Looking over several elections, this paper looks for broader patterns of electoral timing's effect on initiative outcomes.

If electoral timing can be shown to systematically and *predictably* affect outcomes, then initiative campaigns can be subject to manipulation. Activists and interested parties will learn to game the process and get favorable policies passed. While the opinions, or the makeup, of the electorate might be fleeting, the potential effects of the policy created can be long-lasting and far-reaching.

I consider two reasons for why timing might alter outcomes. The first explanation derives from work on the decline in voter turnout in midterm elections which leads to a different demographic makeup between midterm election and presidential election voters (Smith, 2001). The

second reason adapts and extends Campbell's(1960) surge and decline theory of voter turnout, which argues that popular presidential candidates provide coattails that aid candidates of the same party for lower offices on the ballot (Campbell, 1986), and posits that popular candidates might provide a "favorable surge" for some initiatives. To address these questions, I look at the effects of timing over two distinct issue areas: morality policy and tax policy.

## **Electoral Timing, Voter Turnout, and Initiative Outcomes**

The debate is ongoing among scholars about the relationship of turnout with electoral outcomes. Hansford and Gomez (2010) observe, "There are two undercurrents to much of the literature on voter turnout: a normative believe that high rates of voter participation are desirable and an empirical expectation that variation in voter turnout will have electoral consequences" (p.268). The latter proposition occurs if habitual or *core* voters differ from occasional or *peripheral* voters (Campbell, 1960). To Gomez and Hansford's first point, high rates of participation should provide a truer reflection of the electorate. Yet while the electorate might be able to "fix" a poor candidate choice by ousting that incumbent in their next election, the laws created by initiatives can be difficult to reverse.

How might electoral timing and turnout influence initiative outcomes? My argument focuses on how the electoral composition varies in different elections. Jackson (2000) discusses the compositional differences of presidential and midterm election voters.

In contrast, with the presence of a presidential race, turnout "surges" in on-year elections. Presidential election years, associated with a marked rise in the stream of political information, locate citizens within a quite different campaign environment than do off years. Although information may remain somewhat scarce in a midterm, with political stimuli from the mass media and campaigns flooding the electorate, the saturation point is no doubt approached for many Americans by the end of a presidential race. Regardless of life circumstances and cognitive abilities,

it is difficult to miss the fact that candidates are vying for the Oval Office and that an important political event will take place. (p. 385)

Jackson (2000) argues that the one conclusion that consistently holds from research on voter turnout is that “young adults benefit markedly from the additional stimulus of an on-year [election]” (p. 387). Jackson measures the conditional effect of a presidential election with variables most commonly associated with turnout. He finds the largest effects of this interaction term when measuring age and residential mobility, showing that they are the only factors that are statistically different from midterm to presidential elections in terms of *relative* compositions. Younger voters, on average, are more mobile and less engaged than older voters, meaning a midterm election may lack the stimulation to motivate them to participate. If younger voters are less likely to pay the costs to participate in a midterm election on the micro-level, then this could have serious implications at the aggregate level. The added stimulus from presidential elections motivates the young and mobile to register and participate.

*Hypothesis 1: Conservative outcomes on ballot initiatives are more likely in midterm elections than in presidential elections.*

However, these effects might be moderated by salient ballot initiatives in midterm elections. While a high stimulus presidential election may take the majority of the voters’ and media’s attention, ballot initiatives receive more visibility in the low stimulus midterm elections. Smith (2001) argues that adding initiative contests to a ballot increases voters’ interest and motivates them to vote. He comes to two important conclusions: 1) turnout increases with the salience of initiatives on the ballot and 2) the effects of ballot measures during presidential elections do not have an effect on turnout. Smith finds that salient<sup>1</sup> ballot initiatives increase turnout by nearly 4 percentage points in midterm elections while having no effect on voter turnout in presidential elections. Nicholson (2003) uses *The California Poll* to analyze citizen awareness regarding ballot propositions over California elections since 1956. He discovers familiarity with ballot

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<sup>1</sup>Smith (2001) uses a ratio indicating the prominence of propositions relative to all other election and nonelection news reported.

propositions during midterm elections is 14 percentage points greater than during presidential elections. He also finds a 13 percent increase in awareness when initiatives concern morality policy and a near 18 percent increase when they pertain to civil rights and liberties.<sup>2</sup> Finally, Donovan et al. (2009) determine what kinds of citizens are engaged by ballot initiatives. In midterm elections, *peripheral voters* (infrequent voters who only turn out for high stimulus elections)<sup>3</sup> are more likely to recall information on initiatives and show interest in them. The presence of ballot initiatives on midterm ballots may increase turnout of peripheral voters, which might moderate differences in midterm and presidential voters.

Although increased familiarity and turnout may slightly alter the electoral composition of midterms, the differences may still be too small to impact the outcome of an initiative. While some peripheral voters may become engaged by a specific initiative, younger voters consistently vote in smaller numbers for midterm elections. Table 1 shows self-reported voter turnout by age cohort from the National Election Study (NES). Between the 1996 and 2002 elections, turnout among the youngest voters declined by nearly thirty percent, whereas the decline in voters age 55 and over is only ten percent. Both Jackson’s (2000) findings and Table 1 illustrate that younger voters are not a dependable voting bloc in midterms. And more importantly, this voting bloc may hold more liberal opinions on morality and tax policy (Erikson and Tedin, 2011; Hill and Leighley, 1992; Hill, Leighley and Hinton-Andersson, 1995).

Table 1: NES Self-Reported Turnout

Age Cohort	1996	1998	2000	2002	Average Decline
17-24	49.0	15.6 (-33.4)	51.7	26.9 (-24.8)	29.1
25-34	63.2	40.3 (-22.9)	62.8	51.7 (-11.1)	17.0
35-44	74.3	47.4 (-26.9)	72.6	60.6 (-12.0)	19.5
45-54	79.4	64.3 (-15.1)	81.6	73.5 (-8.1)	11.6
55-64	81.6	72.9 (-9.0)	83.9	73.5 (-10.4)	9.7
65-74	83.6	77.6 (-6.0)	80.2	82.8 (+2.0)	2.0
>74	83.8	67.6 (-16.2)	80.1	74.5 (-5.6)	10.9

<sup>2</sup>Although he alludes to the fact that engagement should increase turnout, he does not test this proposition.

<sup>3</sup>Donovan et al. (2009) characterize peripheral voters as younger and with weak party attachments.

## Factoring in the Electoral Context - Surge and Decline Theory

The first hypothesis implicitly assumes that all elections are the same and occur in a vacuum. However, the particular presidential candidates and campaign environments can significantly affect what kinds of citizens turn out to vote. Campbell's (1960) foundational surge and decline theory of voter turnout proposes that there is a relatively small group of *core voters* who vote consistently over time. Highly salient elections, namely presidential elections, motivate less engaged and less partisan citizens, or *peripheral voters* to participate. Stated concisely, voters will "surge" in presidential elections and "decline" in subsequent elections. This has important repercussions for the outcomes of other races on the ballot.

This surging of presidential candidates can provide coattails for less known candidates on the ballot. James Campbell (1987) examines the fortunes of state legislators in presidential and midterm elections. He finds that the turnout surge, driven by partisans of the winning presidential candidate's party, benefits lesser known candidates of the same party. He observes that these same candidates often suffer in subsequent midterms when they are no longer bolstered by the momentum of a popular presidential candidate. Just as less known candidates can benefit from a popular candidate's momentum, so might certain initiative campaigns. However, this theory parts from the traditional surge and decline literature for two reasons. First, while initiatives can be clear in their policy consequences, they do not include simple partisan cues like candidates. Therefore, initiatives that benefit must be complimentary to a candidate's platform. Secondly, since initiatives only appear once on a ballot<sup>4</sup>, the "decline" mechanism does not really occur. For these two reasons, I choose to part from using the traditional surge and decline and coattails terminology and instead introduce the concept of "favorable surges". In contrast to Hypothesis 1, the favorable surges model does not predict a consistent liberal or conservative bias. Presidential candidates may prime voters to support initiatives that are consistent with their platform - the strength of these signals vary by the candidate and the type of issue on the ballot.

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<sup>4</sup>Only in Nevada must initiatives be approved in consecutive elections.

*Hypothesis 2: The outcomes of ballot initiatives on presidential ballots are likely to reflect the effects of a “surging” presidential candidate. Therefore, a) the most liberal outcomes of ballot initiatives are likely to coincide with Democratic surge elections and b) the most conservative outcomes are likely to coincide with Republican surge elections.*

A surge election is not simply an indicator of which party won the presidential contest for two particular reasons. First, presidential candidates have not always clearly divided on issues related to morality policy, thus failing to provide cues or direction to their supporters on morality policy. It is not until the 1980 presidential election between Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter that the candidates make the first clear and consistent divisions on salient morality policies. However, the candidates have consistently differed on issues regarding tax and spending policy, so a few pre-1980 elections will only be coded as surge elections when considering tax policy [e.g. 1968, 1972, 1976]. Finally, not all elections can be regarded as surging for one particular candidate. Some elections are so close that neither party clearly benefits from a surge. Table 2 lists the classification for each presidential election. In sum, a surge election requires for the parties to be clearly aligned on an issue and for their candidate to win convincingly.

Table 2: Classifications of Presidential Elections

Type of Election	Election Year	Margin of Victory
Republican Surge	1972	23.2 - Nixon(60.7); McGovern(37.5)
	1980	9.8 - Reagan (50.8); Carter (41.0)
	1984	18.2 - Reagan (58.8); Mondale (40.6)
	1988	8.4 - Bush (53.4); Dukakis (45.7)
Democratic Surge	1996	8.5 - Clinton (49.2); Dole (40.7)
	2008	7.2 - Obama (52.9); McCain (45.7)
No Favorable Surges	1968	0.7 - Nixon (43.4); Humphrey (42.7)
	1976	2.1 - Carter (50.1); Ford (48.0)
	1992	4.5 - Clinton (43.0); Bush (37.5)
	2000	-0.5 - Bush (47.9); Gore (48.4)
	2004	2.4 - Bush (50.7); Kerry (48.3)

## Morality Policy and Tax Policy Initiatives

Some of the most common and politicized ballot initiatives occur in two policy arenas: morality policy and tax policy. The politics surrounding each of these initiative types is unique, therefore I examine each separately. Table 3 displays the some basic information on the initiatives.

Table 3: Distribution of Conservative Votes by Initiative Type (since 1965)

Type	<i>N</i>	Mean Conservative Vote	S.D.	Min.	Max.	% Conservative Proposals
Morality	169	53.5	12.4	26.8	83.9	60.4
Tax	145	51.7	15.9	11.8	87.7	65.3

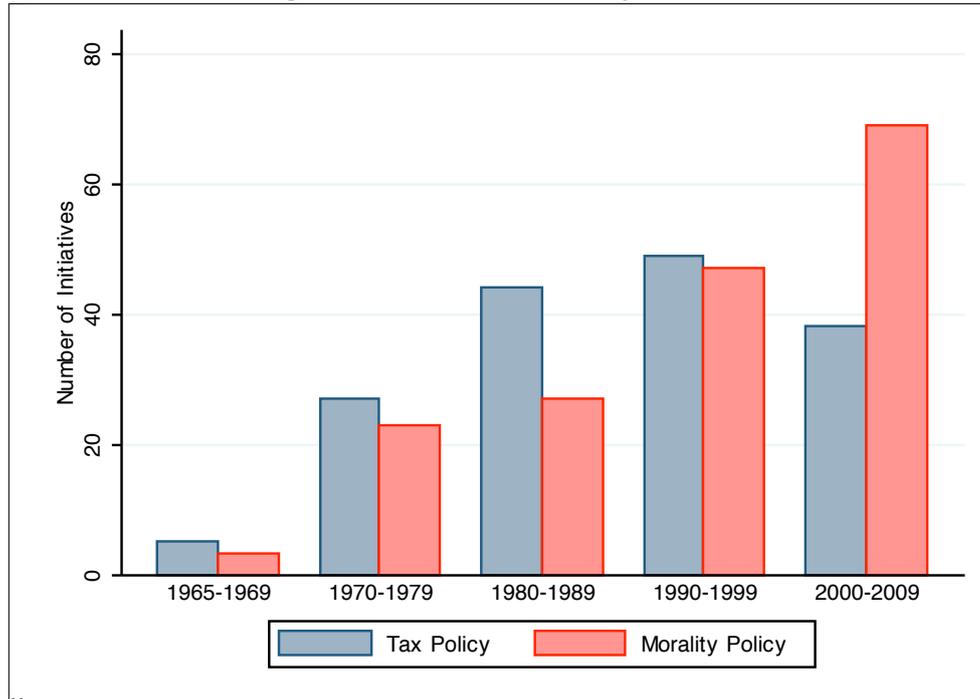
The increase in the use of ballot initiatives (Figure 1) is becoming especially prevalent in addressing morality policy (Matsusaka, 2007; Lupia et al., 2010). Morality policies are those policies that “generate fundamental conflict between significant groups of citizens over core values” (Mooney 2000, 173). Mooney (2000) lists morality policies as policies regarding abortion, capital punishment, gambling<sup>5</sup>, gay rights, pornography, and sex education. Mooney argues that for a policy to exhibit the characteristics of a morality policy that there must be “at least a significant minority of citizens [who have] a fundamental, first-principled conflict with values embodied in [the policy]” (p.174). This “first-principled conflict” leads to three important characteristics: the policy is technically simple, has a potential for high public salience, and can lead to an unusually high level of citizen participation. Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics for the initiatives.

Between 1965 and 2009, 163 initiatives have appeared on statewide ballots regarding tax policy. Table 3 shows that 65.3% of the propositions are conservative in nature. California’s Proposition 13 in 1978 embodies the goals of many of these conservative initiatives. The amendment limited annual property tax increases to 2% and imposed the requirement of a two-thirds majority in both houses of the legislature for new tax increases (Sears and Citrin,

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<sup>5</sup>See Appendix for brief note on gaming

Figure 1: Ballot Initiatives by Decade



1982). Numerous advocates across the nation followed California and tax crusader Howard Jarvis' lead and proposed initiatives limiting property taxes, requiring supermajorities or voter approval to raise taxes, and even eliminating the state income tax (Smith, 1998).

However, there still remain many initiatives that raise taxes. Of these, roughly 20% are intended to levy or increase sin taxes, mainly tobacco taxes. Still, the remaining 80% give voters the option to raise the sales tax, tax rates, gas taxes, property taxes and taxes on specific industries.<sup>6</sup> In most cases, the initiatives that raise revenue clearly designate where the money will be invested, with education funding being the primary beneficiary.

Understanding popular preferences on tax policy is more difficult. Although less salient, tax policy is more likely to have direct consequences for the voter. As Dyck (2010) argues, "Given that the average ballot initiative requires a graduate-level education to comprehend, how can voters possibly behave rationally under such conditions? The problem is exacerbated by the fact that initiatives are policy issues and do not contain explicit partisan cues on the ballot"

<sup>6</sup>These taxes mainly target energy industries.

(p.612). However, research has shown that voters use information shortcuts to make choices as if they are well-informed (Lupia, 1994). In general, the least informed voters are better characterized as “careful” rather than “irresponsible” when it comes to voting on initiatives (Dyck, 2010).

In general, citizens want cutbacks in government spending and taxes while similar majorities also want more services from the government (Sears and Citrin, 1982). It is more difficult to parse out which voters in particular have the strongest preferences. Lowery and Sigelman (1981) investigate eight different explanations for the tax revolt of the late 1970s and find each explanation to be flawed. And even though the long-held conventional wisdom argued that older voters are generally less supportive of raising taxes, recent studies have discredited this perspective. Looking at property taxes used to support education, Plutzer and Berkman (2005) challenge the notion that older voters are the least supportive of raising revenue to fund education. It is not age effects, but cohort differences that account for this divergence, meaning subsequent generations have not shifted in their preferences on education spending. Voters have numerous considerations that motivate them when tax policy: self-interest, political ideology, and even symbolic understandings of tax policy all factor in. Unlike morality policies, which are normally easy issues, voters might also consider the way in which the revenue is raised and where the revenue will be directed. Finally, voters may be more concerned with state and local conditions, leaving their choice unaffected by a national candidate.

In considering the differences in morality and tax policy, it is important to define the surge elections by how the candidates differ on those two indexes. Not only must a candidate win convincingly, they must also represent a platform that clearly diverges from the other candidate on the relevant issues.

Table 4: Classifications of Presidential Elections

Type of Election	Election Year	Morality Surge	Tax Surge
Republican Surge	1972	None	Conservative
	1980	Conservative	Conservative
	1984	Conservative	Conservative
	1988	Conservative	Conservative
Democratic Surge	1996	Liberal	Liberal
	2008	Liberal	Liberal
No Favorable Surges	1968	None	None
	1976	None	None
	1992	None	None
	2000	None	None
	2004	None	None

## Data

The Initiative and Referendum Institute at the University of Southern California collects data on referendums and ballot initiatives. The *Initiatives Historical Database* (1904-2009) lists all statewide initiatives since the first one appeared on a ballot in Oregon in 1904 and includes a total of 2,314 initiatives. Following practices by Matsusaka (2007), I extract and dichotomize the morality policy issues (N=254) as conservative (1) or liberal (0). Most of the legislation, especially on morality policy, has a clear conservative or liberal goal. For initiatives with unclear goals, I use publicity pamphlets provided by initiative proponents and opponents along with newspaper articles to appropriately code the initiative as conservative or liberal.

My primary interest is in whether the timing of initiatives affects voting on ballot initiatives. The dependent variables is coded as the percent conservative vote. To determine the extent that the timing of a ballot initiative affects voting, I control for a number of factors. I use state control variables that I expect will be important contextual factors in the results of initiatives. I also include indicators to capture the electoral context. To control for general national trends, I use a national measure of policy mood developed by Stimson (1991). I expect that due to differences in the composition of voters in midterm electorate, namely that voters are older and more socially conservative (Jackson, 2000; Smith, 2001; Nicholson, 2003; Donovan, Tol-

bert and Smith, 2009), that outcomes on morality policy are more likely to be conservative in midterm elections. I also consider the effects of a presidential candidate on a race, particularly if they are ‘surging’ (Campbell, 1960). My expectation is that a surging candidate “lifts all boats” and provides strong coattails for initiative campaigns. For example, Barack Obama’s popularity in 2008 might help liberal initiatives get passed and impede conservative initiatives from passing.

Although the use of initiatives dates back to 1904, I only consider data from 1965 to 2008. This time frame is selected for a number of reasons. First, 1965 marks the passing of the Voting Rights Act. This period is often seen as a time of realignment for partisan dispositions (Carmines and Stimson, 1989). Secondly, literature regarding the culture wars only dates back to the early 1990s, where most authors cite the origins as the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, when new cleavages were formed regarding civil rights, the Vietnam War, feminism, and abortion (Hetherington, 2009).

## **Research Design**

My primary interest is in whether the timing of initiatives affects voting on ballot initiatives. The dependent variable is coded as the percent conservative vote. To determine the extent that the timing of a ballot initiative affects voting, I control for a number of factors. In addition to a brief description of the control variables in the following section, Table in the appendix provides a brief description of each independent variable and the source for the data. The model uses many state-level control variables that are often correlated with opinions on morality policies and tax policies.

The electoral context in which citizens consider ballot initiatives is important. I create a dummy variable denoting whether the election is a Midterm (1) or not (0). I expect to see a positive relationship between Midterm elections and conservative outcomes. I expect to see the same relationship for Special elections. I code all elections that do not fall in November or in

an off-year<sup>7</sup> as special elections (1). It is likely that conservative outcomes are even more likely in this event due to likelihood that only core voters will participate in these elections.

Gubernatorial elections can increase interest and turnout in elections. A dummy variable is added to denote when a gubernatorial election is occurring. Most of the states in the sample hold their gubernatorial elections in the same years as midterm elections. Of the twenty-one states that have considered morality policy during this time frame, only five<sup>8</sup> states have gubernatorial elections during presidential election years. Gubernatorial elections are likely to increase the attention paid to midterm elections since they are often the most salient elections on the ballot, thus increasing turnout and likely attracting more peripheral voters.

I use dummy variables to test the surge and decline hypothesis. The reference category denotes elections that cannot clearly be classified as “surge” elections. Elections prior to 1980 are included in this category since neither party’s candidates had taken opposing positions on many moral policies. The elections of 1992, 2000, and 2004 are also included in this category. The elections of 1980, 1984, and 1988 can be classified as both Republican and morally conservative surges. The elections of 1996 and 2008 are classified as Democratic surge elections. Table 2 and Table 4 summarize the elections.

In both models I control for national mood of the country. As Erikson et al. (2002) note, “*Mood* is our best effort at measuring the public’s movement regarding support for government programs or movement on the liberal-conservative continuum” (p.193). This is an important variable to add in the analysis because overall mood might better explain shifts in preferences than elections with surging candidates.

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<sup>7</sup>Although two states hold gubernatorial elections during odd-years (NJ and VA), neither are in the dataset making it likely that only state and local matters will be decided in any Special election.

<sup>8</sup>Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Utah and Washington.

## Methodology

A variance-components model is used to control for clustering within the states. This is preferable to using traditional OLS analysis because although aggregate state-level indicators do account for some of the variation, they also treat each observation as independent. That is, each observation, although a function of the state-level covariates, is not interpreted by the OLS estimator as residing in the same context.

This intuition is supported for two reasons. First, there is an unequal probability of a state having an initiative. A state's political culture and norms along with procedural rules and costs affect the number of initiatives that appear on a given state's ballot. In this case, I transition from treating the observations as if they come out of a simple random sample of initiatives. Second, the initiatives are often clustered on the same ballot in the same election. In this way, an initiative result that occurs on a statewide ballot in a certain year might add no more information to the estimate if it also shares that ballot with another initiative since both initiatives occur in identical contexts at both the national level and the statewide level.

The intraclass correlation,  $\rho$ , measures within cluster homogeneity. The true between cluster variance is unknown, and is estimated via ANOVA. The ICC value ranges from 0 (complete heterogeneity) to 1 (complete homogeneity). The ICC value indicates the percentage of variance that can be explained by the cluster. The null hypothesis for the ICC model is that there is no random intercept in the model. The likelihood-ratio test for tax policy rejects the null hypothesis, suggesting the model should be run with parameters that control for clustering. The likelihood ratio test for morality policy suggests that the initiatives are not clustered within the state. I report robust standard errors for both models.

## Results and Discussion

Table 5 displays the results from the variance-component model. The variables related to electoral timing are placed at the top of the table and the omitted category entails presidential elections with no clear favorable surge. The analysis shows that Midterm elections do not systematically affect initiative results for either policies. This suggests that either a) the composition of voters does not change enough to systematically alter results, b) that the increased awareness and turnout associated with initiative campaigns counters any systematic bias or c) other factors such as gubernatorial campaigns or other hotly contested campaigns might mobilize voters and mitigate any effects.

The surge and decline hypothesis (Hypothesis 2) produces noteworthy results. The results are significant, substantive, and in the expected direction for liberal and conservative surge elections for morality policy. A Republican surge election creates a favorable surge for conservative initiative causes by 8 percentage points, on average. Meanwhile, a surging Democratic candidate is expected to create a favorable surge for liberal causes and change outcomes by roughly 4.5 percent. Considering 48 initiatives were decided by less than 10 points, these findings have substantive consequences.

Meanwhile, the model poorly predicts outcomes on tax policy. There are a number of reasons for why this model is misspecified for tax policy. This may also be a case where statistical analyses cannot capture the nuance in the policy. While most morality policies are easy issues and salient to most voters, this is not the case with tax policy. The dependent variable is based off of a simple indicator of whether the initiative increased or decreased taxes. However, nearly 20% of the increased taxes were on tobacco or alcohol. It is likely that votes on sin taxes tap into different attitudes than other votes. For one, nonsmoker and teetotalers will not view a sin tax as one that personally affects them. Secondly, most of the tax-raising initiatives are clear about where the revenue will be directed, meaning self-interest might override normal ideology for many voters. Finally, the model does not account for temporal economic factors.

While the national mood measure does capture a general disposition of the electorate towards more or less government action, other variables such as unemployment or consumer sentiment might improve the model fit and possibly illuminate some patterns. Regardless, it is premature to make any strong conclusions about the relationship of tax policy initiatives with electoral timing.

## **Conclusion**

The results suggest that timing matters, but only under certain circumstances and with regards to certain policies. There is no empirical support for the claim that the composition of voters in midterm elections leads to more conservative outcomes. From this model, I cannot infer whether the null finding is due to increased initiative awareness during midterms (Smith, 2001), the nature of morality policy initiatives (Nicholson, 2003), or the increased mobilization potential of initiative campaigns during midterms (Donovan et al., 2009); it is likely that all of these factors are in some combination affecting the outcomes of initiatives.

Meanwhile, for morality policy, the coattail effects of popular presidential candidates can be quite strong, especially when the candidate and parties align clearly on morality policy. Popular candidates can provide a favorable surge for some ballot initiative campaigns. As sponsors of initiatives consider successful strategies, they should not consider whether an initiative appears on a midterm or presidential ballot, but instead consider the strengths of their preferred candidate. Considering that it is difficult to predict a surge election many months in advance, this strategy may prove to be quite elusive.

My analysis suggests that timing may matter in some circumstances, however it does not matter in a way in which activists can systematically take advantage of the electoral system. With regards to the findings on favorable surges, initiative campaigns commence petitioning process long before a popular presidential candidate emerges. This is encouraging news for those with a normative concern that differences in turnout could have consequences on initiative

results. Future research should go further in attempting to understand when electoral timing matters most and what mechanisms are most important.

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Table 5: Variance-Components Results

	Morality Policy	Tax Policy
(Intercept)	92.06** (14.09)	47.20 (32.17)
Midterm Election	-1.35 (3.52)	-0.83 (2.60)
Liberal Surge	-4.68* (2.43)	-3.57 (7.54)
Republican Surge	8.17* (4.02)	3.59 (4.97)
Special Election	-3.23 (3.09)	6.90 (5.05)
Governor Election	4.15 (3.18)	4.40 (2.92)
National Mood	-0.59** (0.24)	-0.19 (0.35)
State Ideology	-0.06 (0.20)	-0.30 (0.30)
Education	-0.31 (0.19)	-0.19 (0.39)
% Black	0.54** (0.23)	-0.11 (0.33)
% Hispanic	-0.03 (0.07)	0.40* (0.17)
% Fundamentalist	-0.02 (0.01)	–
% Catholic	0.01 (0.01)	–
GDPpc (logged)	–	2.26 (2.86)
<i>N</i>	169	145
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.17	0.09

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.10$ \*\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.05$

Table 6: Full Model - Variables and Sources

Variable	Measurement	Source
D.V. - % Conservative Vote	% of Votes favoring a conservative outcome. 'Yes' to Conservative Legislation or 'No' to Liberal Legislation	National Council of State Legislators
Electoral Timing	Midterm Election (1), Special Election (1), & Gubernatorial (1)	
Surge Election	See Table 2	Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections
National Mood	Measure of public support for national programs on a liberal-conservative continuum (0=Most Conservative; 100 = Most Liberal)	Stimson (1999)
State Ideology	Scaled from -10 (most conservative) to +10 (most liberal) based on aggregated opinion polls	Erikson et al. 1993
Education	% of state population with bachelor's degree	U.S. Census Bureau
Fundamentalist Population	Rates of evangelical congregation adherents per 1000 population + Latter Day saints congregants	Religious Congregations and Membership Study (2000) by the Association of Religious Data Archives
Catholic Population	Rates of Catholic congregation adherents per 1000 population	Association of Religion Data Archives
Racial Minority Population	% of African Americans and % of Hispanics Living in the state	U.S. Census Bureau
State GDPpc (logged)	Personal Income Per Capita by State	Bureau of Economic Analysis