University of Missouri – St. Louis
The Graduate School
Announcement

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

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The Role of Money and Endorsements in Same-Sex Marriage Ballot Initiatives

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Place: 344a SSB

Abstract
This research examines how well certain theories of direct democracy explain outcomes of ballot measures on gay marriage bans. Most theories of direct democracy focus on the types of issues that are quite dissimilar from gay marriage bans. Therefore, these theories will likely not do a good job of explaining the results of these elections. In particular I examine the role of campaign spending and elite endorsements in campaigns for gay marriage ban ballot initiatives. In candidate elections, voters commonly use heuristics such as party labels and past performance to help them decide. In most ballot initiative contests voters rely on the information provided by campaigns in lieu of these heuristics, since these are removed in ballot initiative contests. Greater campaign expenditures allow each side to get out more information regarding the proposition, which could be vital in swaying the minds of less informed voters. Elite endorsements can provide voters with partisan signals that may aid in their decision-making. Campaign expenditures and elite endorsements have been found to be important factors in determining which side wins in some ballot initiative elections. However, social issues such as gay marriage are quite different from the areas normally covered by ballot initiatives. As a moral issue, gay marriage has low information needs. Voters do not need to conduct a lot of research to be able to decide their opinion on gay marriage. Therefore, the effect of heuristics such as campaign expenditures and elite endorsements may be lower than it normally is in ballot initiative campaigns. My findings support these hypotheses. I find that campaign expenditures are not significantly correlated with the vote outcomes of same-sex marriage bans. Survey experiments also found that being primed with President Obama’s view on same-sex marriage did not affect most respondents’ opinion on marriage equality.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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