



Why Do Ballot Measure Outcomes Differ  
From Issue Polling Estimates?  
Survey Experiments on Status Quo Bias and  
Issue Preferences

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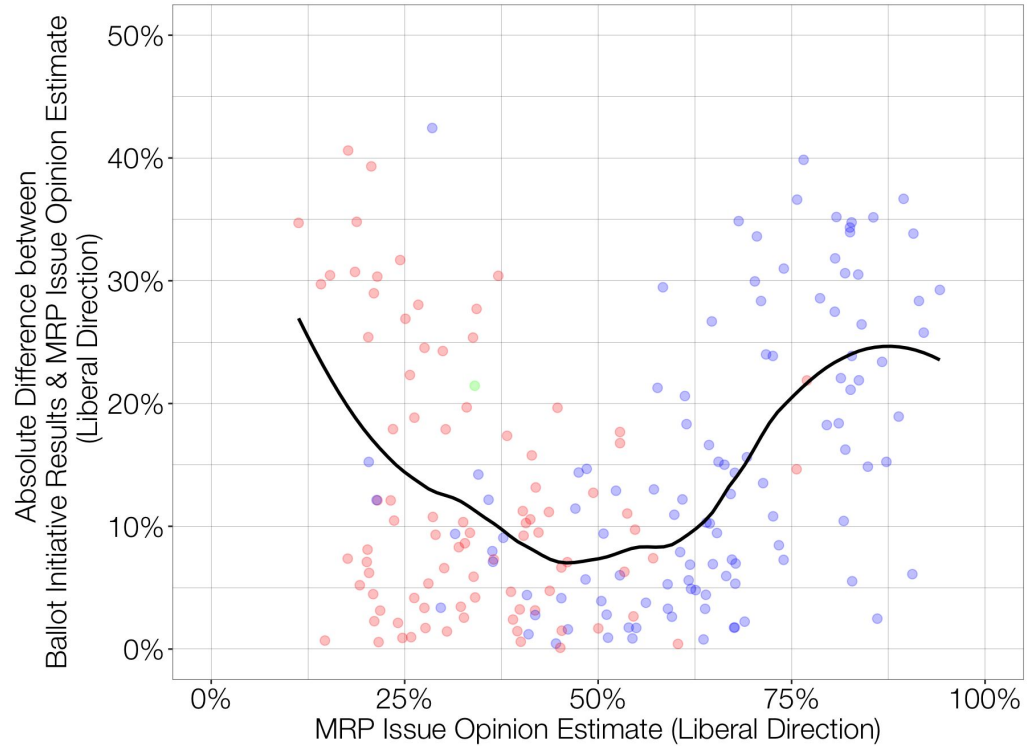


When Mass Opinion Goes to the Ballot Box:  
A National Assessment of State Level Issue  
Opinion and Ballot Initiative Results

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MRP Issue Opinion Estimates vs. Initiative Results (Absolute Diffs)



Dir. of Change in Status Quo ● Conservative ● Liberal ● Neither



- Due to the important and under-explored **status quo bias** in public opinion as well as initiative voting (Dyck & Pearson-Merkowitz 2018), we see bigger discrepancies when:
  - (1) opinion is lopsided in one direction and
  - (2) the initiative attempts to change policy in that direction

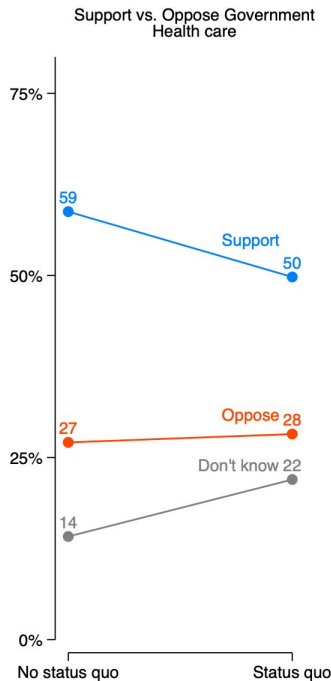
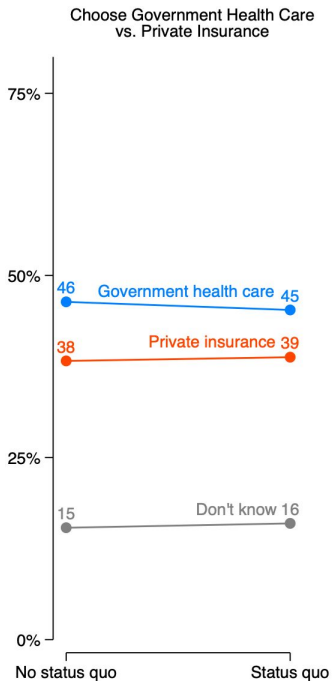
How much of the difference between issue polling and ballot initiative outcomes is due to **status quo bias**\*?

\*(As told by two sets of survey experiment pilots from **2020** and **2022**)

- ❑ May 2020 survey experiments (N=3k) conducted by Data for Progress that measured public opinion on 2 issues:
  - ❑ Government run health-care programs
  - ❑ Paid family leave
- ❑ 4 versions of questions about each issue
  - ❑ Likert vs. binary choice
  - ❑ Status quo vs. non-status quo framed public policies

	No status quo framing	Status quo framing
<b>Support or oppose reform</b>	Would you support or oppose a government-run healthcare system that provided all Americans with health insurance?	Would you support or oppose <b>changing from the current system to a</b> government-run healthcare system that provided all Americans with health insurance?
<b>Choose between reform and alternative</b>	Which of the following approaches to healthcare in the United States would you prefer:  A government run Medicare program that covers all Americans  A system based mostly on private health insurance	Which of the following approaches to healthcare in the United States would you prefer?  <b>Replacing the current healthcare system with a new system in which</b> the government run Medicare program covers all Americans  <b>Maintaining the current system</b> based mostly on private health insurance

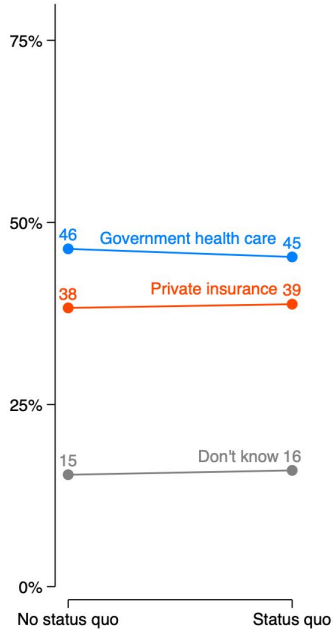
## HEALTH CARE



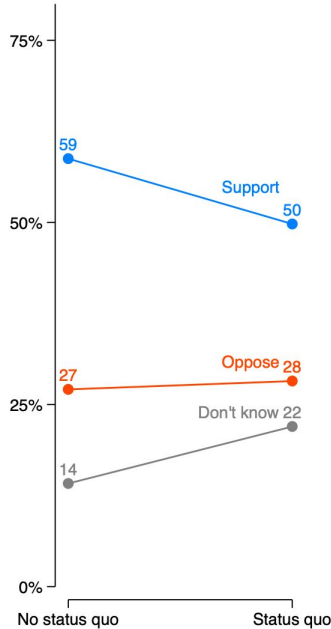


## HEALTH CARE

Choose Government Health Care vs. Private Insurance

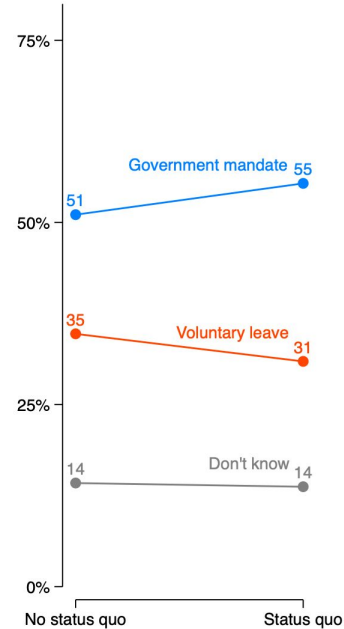


Support vs. Oppose Government Health care

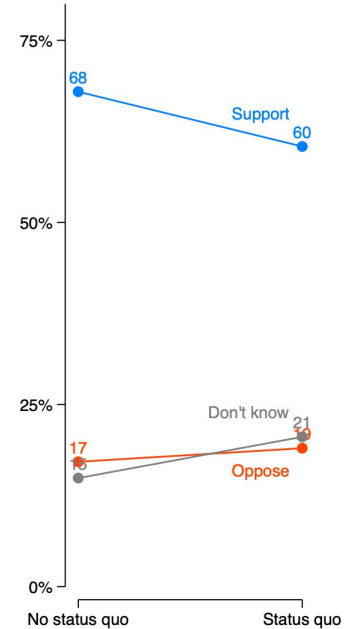


## FAMILY LEAVE

Choose Government Mandated Leave vs. Voluntary Leave



Support vs. Oppose Government Mandated Leave



- ❑ May 2022 survey experiments conducted by Data for Progress designed to test status quo bias on policies in our referenda database (designed to mirror initiative voting experience\*, N= $\sim$ 6k, w/ item variable missingness)
  - ❑ Medicaid expansion
  - ❑ Parental consent for abortion
  - ❑ Background checks for gun purchases
  - ❑ Marijuana legalization
- ❑ Three conditions
  - ❑ Baseline standard issue question wording
  - ❑ Status quo primed issue question wording
  - ❑ Ballot initiative language question wording

**[4]** Below is a proposition that could appear on a referendum in your state in the next year.

- Expand the Medicaid health insurance program to include adults with an income below 133% of the federal poverty level
- Prohibit additional barriers to receiving Medicaid
- Have your state government work closely with the federal government to expand Medicaid

State government entities are estimated to have one-time costs of approximately \$6.4 million and an unknown annual net fiscal impact by 2026 ranging from increased costs of at least \$200 million to savings of \$1 billion.

Do you support or oppose this proposal? (N=1,461)

		D	R
Support	69%	85%	52%
Oppose	31	15	48

**[5]** Do you support or oppose expanding the Medicaid health insurance program in your state to include adults with an income below 133% of the federal poverty level?

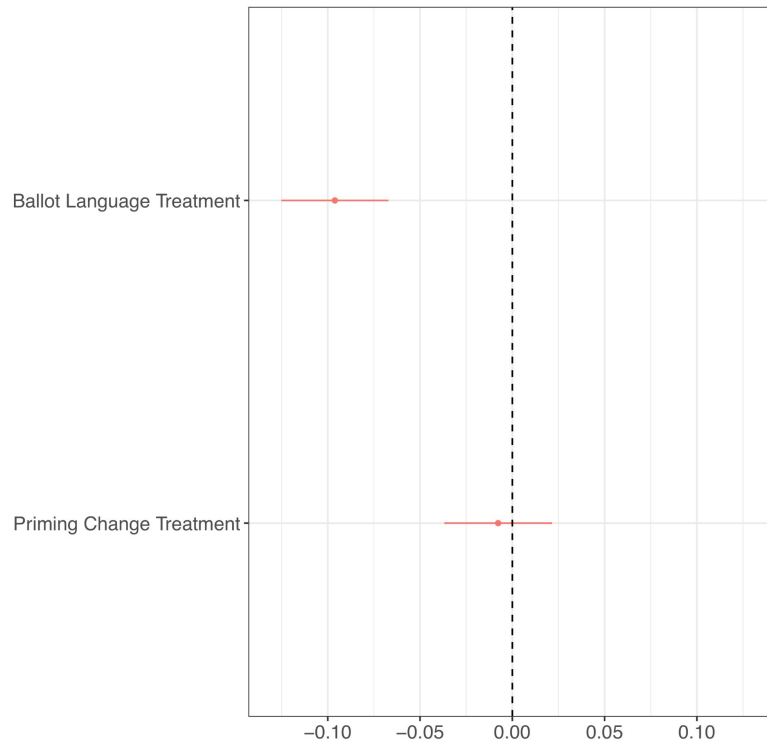
		D	I	R
Support	79%	91%	82%	66%
Oppose	21	9	18	34

**[6]** There is a new proposal in your state to **change** current law about who is eligible for the Medicaid health insurance program. This proposal would expand Medicaid to include adults with an income below 133% of the federal poverty level.

Do you support or oppose this proposed **change** to who is eligible for Medicaid? (N=1,464)

		D	I	R
Support	78%	90%	70%	68%
Oppose	22	10	30	32

Medicaid Expansion





[10] Below is a proposition that could appear on a referendum in your state in the next year.

- Change your state's Constitution to require minors to wait to have an abortion until 48 hours after the doctor notifies the minor's parent or legal guardian.
- Allow the doctor not to notify the minor's parent if it is a medical emergency or the parent has waived their right to be notified.
- Permit courts to waive parental notification based on evidence of a minor's maturity or best interests.
- Require doctors to report any abortions performed on minors.
- Authorize damages against physicians for violating notification requirements.
- Requires minor's consent to abortion, with exceptions.

		D	I	R
Support	55%	47%	54%	66%
Oppose	45	53	46	34

Do you support or oppose this proposal? (N=1,510)

[11] Do you support or oppose requiring that minors wait to have an abortion until 48 hours after a doctor notifies their parents or legal guardian (except in cases of medical emergency)? (N=1,454)

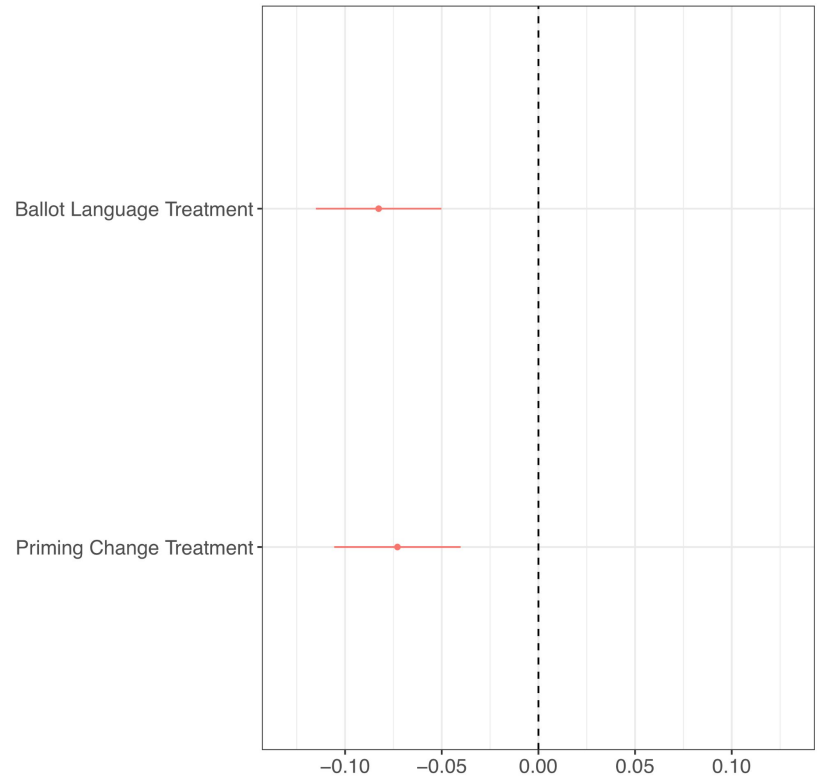
		D	I	R
Support	64%	49%	65%	79%
Oppose	36	51	35	21

[12] There is a new proposal in your state to **change** current law about whether minors can have an abortion. This proposal would require that minors wait to have an abortion until 48 hours after a doctor notifies their parents or legal guardian (except in cases of medical emergency).

		D	R
Support	57%	48%	66%
Oppose	43	52	34

Do you support or oppose this proposed **change** to the requirements for minors to obtain an abortion? (N=1,452)

Parental Consent for Abortion





[7] Below is a proposition that could appear on a referendum in your state in the next year.

Require background checks before the sale or transfer of firearms between individuals not licensed as firearms dealers, with failure to do so punishable by law, and with exceptions for family members, hunting, self-defense, lawful competitions, military veterans, law enforcement officials, and shooting range activity.

Do you support or oppose this proposal? (N=1,470)

		D	R
Support	79%	91%	71%
Oppose	21	9	29

[8] Do you support or oppose requiring background checks at private gun sales and gun shows before a buyer is allowed to purchase a gun? (N=1,440)

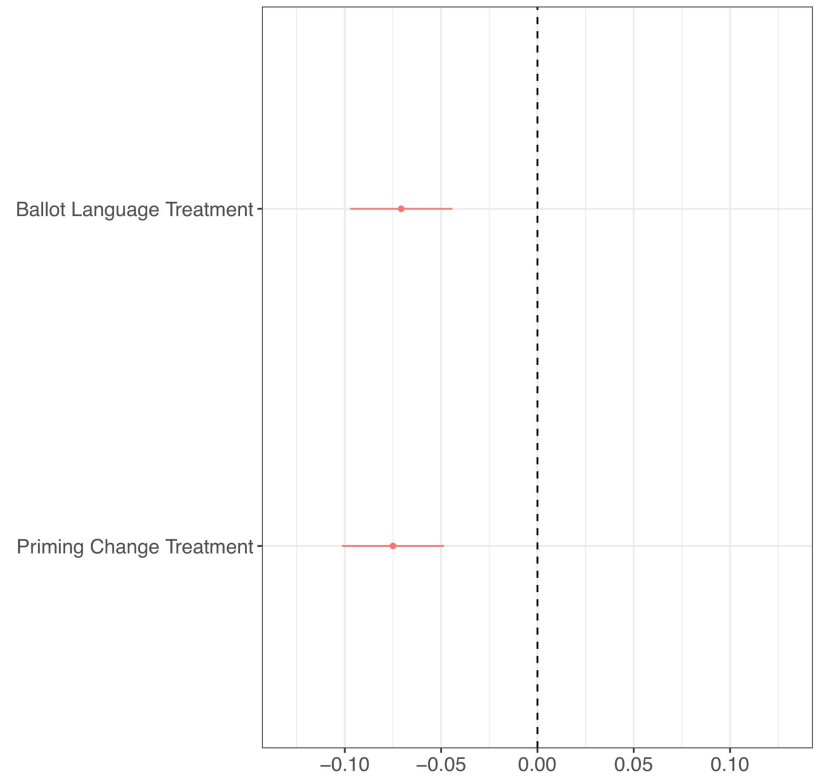
		D	I	R
Support	85%	92%	84%	79%
Oppose	15	8	16	21

[9] There is a new proposal in your state to **change** current law about how people purchase guns. This proposal would require gun buyers to pass a background check at private gun sales and gun shows before being allowed to purchase a gun.

		D	I	R
Support	80%	87%	76%	73%
Oppose	20	13	24	27

Do you support or oppose this proposed **change** to the requirements for gun purchases? (N=1,481)

Background Checks for Guns



Marijuana Legalization

[14] Do you support or oppose legalizing the use of marijuana for adults over the age of 21 as well as the growing and selling of marijuana, subject to state regulation? (N=1,093)

		D	R
Oppose	36%	24%	52%
Support	64	76	48

[15] There is a new proposal in your state to **change** current law about marijuana. The proposal would legalize the use of marijuana for adults over the age of 21 and the growing and selling of marijuana, subject to state regulation. Do you support or oppose this proposed **change** to the laws regulating marijuana? (N=1,161)

		D	I	R
Oppose	31%	19%	27%	44%
Support	69	81	73	56

[13] Below is a proposition that could appear on a referendum in your state in the next year.

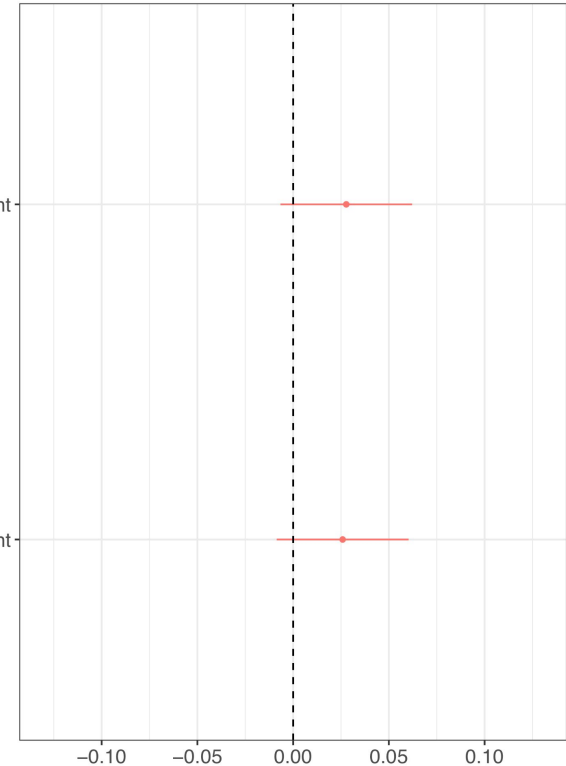
		D	I	R
Oppose	32%	20%	32%	43%
Support	68	80	68	57

- Allow the possession and use of marijuana under state law by persons who are at least 21 years of age
- Allow the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, testing, and sale of marijuana and marijuana products, subject to state regulation, taxation and local ordinances

Do you support or oppose this proposal?  
(N=1,205)

Ballot Language Treatment

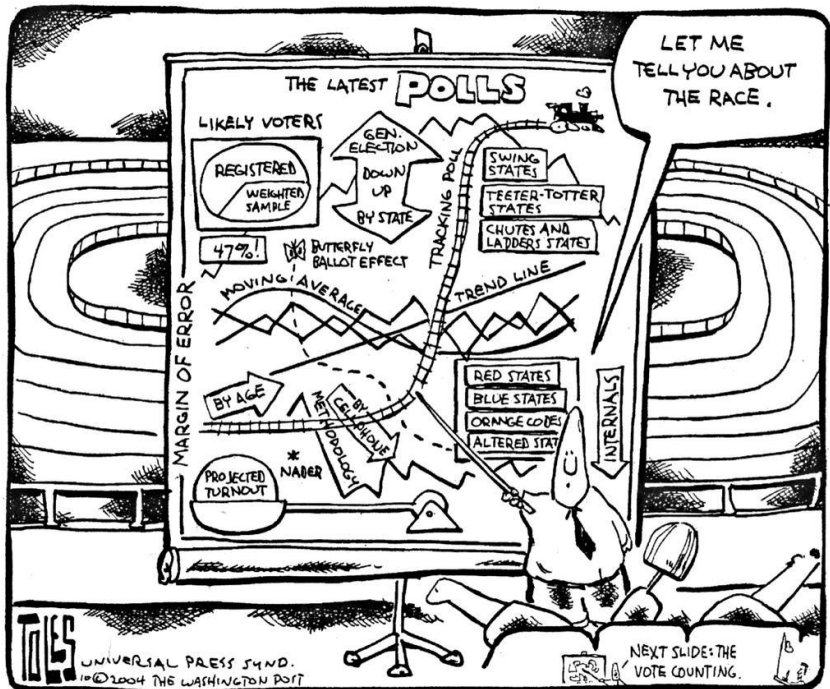
Priming Change Treatment



- Status quo bias likely explains **some but not all** of the difference between ballot initiative outcomes & issue opinion toplines
  - And not always in the predicted direction
- Other explanations are harder to test in a “designed” setting but the gap seems to be caused by more than just this (in our formulation testing this)
  - Will look at differences in states that have these policies on the books vs. not, other pre-reg’d subgroup analysis
    - Low political info voters move more, etc

Questions? Thank you!





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# Appendix

Effect of Status Quo Treatment on Support

