



Measuring Attitudes Toward Political Advertising Disclosures

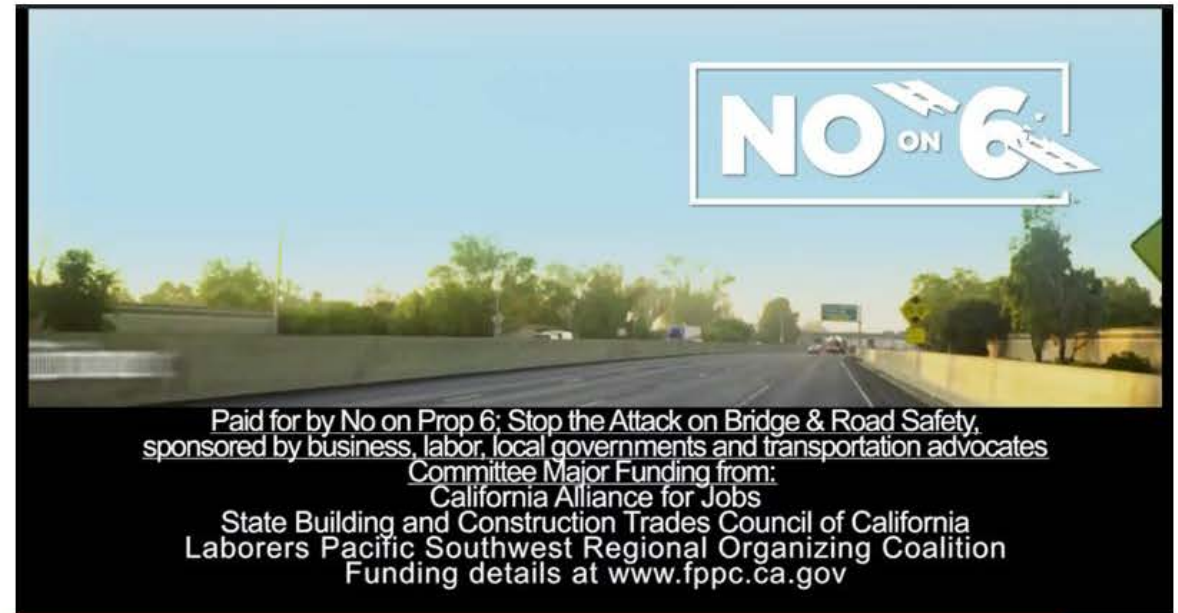
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Political Advertising Disclosures



Old Style



New Style

Problem

How do we improve the current campaign finance disclosure standards?

How would we compare different proposals?

- e.g. changes to format or font

Online Advertising

- The current era of online ad buys show an increasing divide between regulations and manipulation
- Ads are more targeted to voters than ever before, yet there is even less protection from manipulative intent
- In theory, this may create problems for an informed electorate
 - More targeting and limited awareness of who paid for ad

Previous research

- When polled, many believe campaign finance disclosures would aid decision making (Carpenter 2009)
- Individuals use disclosure cues to develop their opinions on low salient issues (Lesenyie 2020)
- Individuals attitudes toward the institution itself may moderate reactions to the information contained in the disclosure (Fowler et al. 2014)

Why disclosures?

1. Political disclosures are highly contentious institution. They intersect free speech rights and voters use of cues in the political environment
2. Supreme Court decisions have sided with speakers in part, and in part with the government's purpose in providing useful information to voters

(McConnell v FEC and Citizens United v FEC)

Samples

- Pilot study using UC Davis convenience sample (N=182)
 - This group was used to validate the instrument
 - Convergent and discriminant validity
- Full study using Prolific opt-in panel respondents (N=545)
 - Applying instrument to a California sample
 - Using the instrument to evaluate the new disclosure regulation in CA

INITIAL TRIAL

2017 UC Davis Sample



Scale Development

Attitudes toward disclosure is thought to have three dimensions

- Readability (6 Questions)
- Usefulness (6)
- Rights (2)
- Motive (2)

Table 1 Survey Questions: Attitude toward Political Advertising Disclosures

Concept	Questions
Usefulness	<p>Political advertising disclosures reveal important information</p> <p>Political advertising disclosures provide voters with important information</p> <p>Political advertisements would be less informative without disclosures</p> <p>Disclosures are useful</p> <p>Political advertisement disclosures serve a purpose</p> <p>Political advertisement disclosures contain confusing information (R)</p>
Rights	<p>I think it should be illegal to require disclosure of campaign donors (R)</p> <p>Political advertising disclosures limit the free speech of political campaigners (R)</p>
Motive	<p>Disclosures in political ads are unethical (R)</p> <p>Political disclosures only trick voters (R)</p>
Readability	<p>Disclosures stand out from the background</p> <p>The size of disclosures is too small (R)</p> <p>In political ads, there is not enough time to read disclosures (R)</p> <p>Disclosures are easy to read</p> <p>There is not enough information in disclosures</p> <p>There is too much information in disclosures (R)</p>

(R) denotes reverse coding

Discriminant Validity

If *ATD* is a measure of attitudes, it should not measure individual traits like:

- Tolerance for Ambiguity
- Visual / Verbal Learning Types
- Skepticism toward political advertisements
- Need for Cognition

Finding

Tolerance for Ambiguity

$r^2 = .01$. $p = .20$ coef. = .11

Processing Style (Visual – Verbal Learning)

$r^2 = .01$. $p = .08$ coef. = $-.10$

- Disclosure attitudes are related to Visual learners, but not Verbal learners ($p = .24$)

Finding

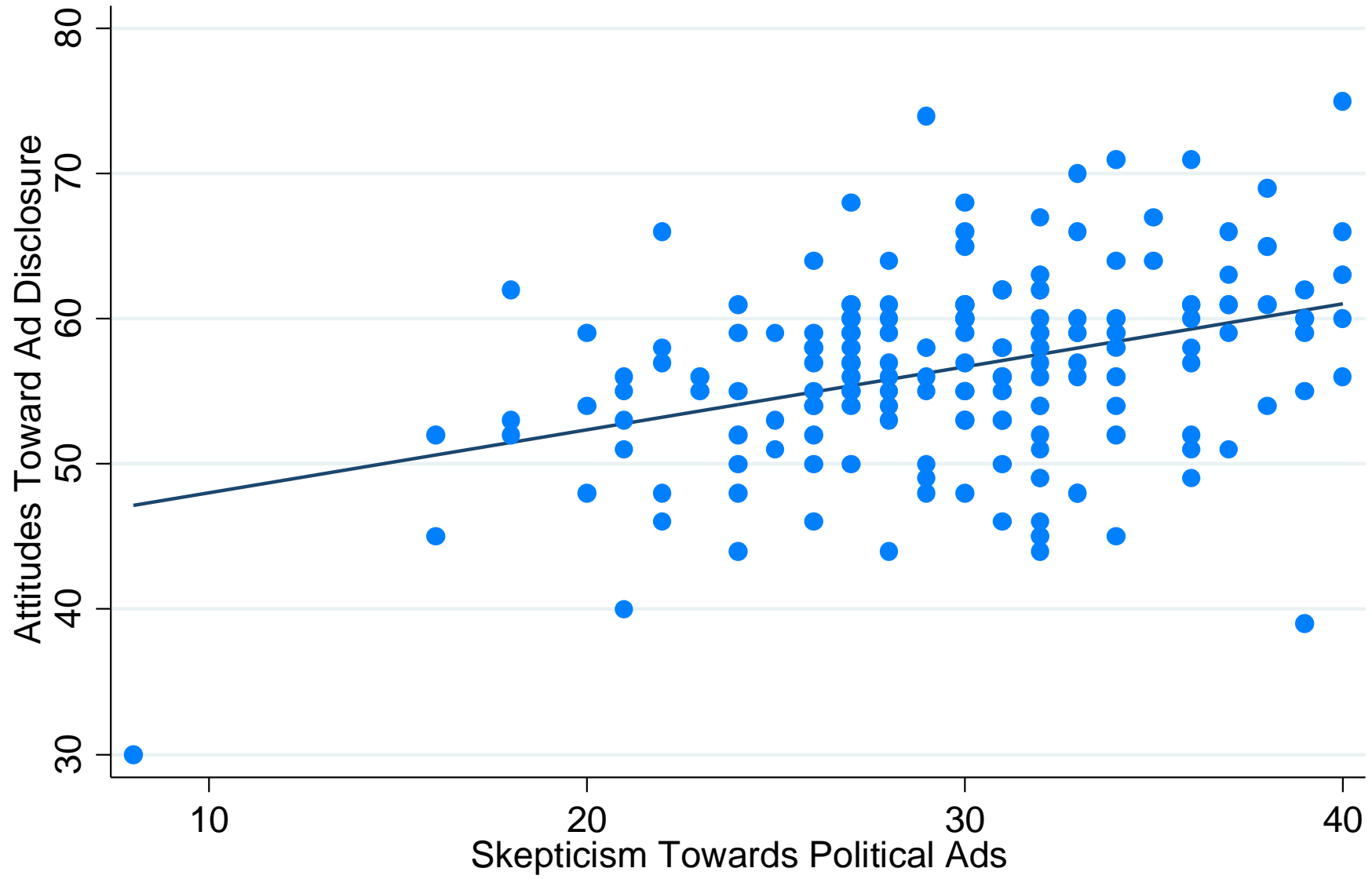
Need for Cognition

$r^2 = .01$. $p = .72$ $\text{coef.} = -.04$

Skepticism towards Advertisements

$r^2 = .12$. $p < .01$ $\text{coef.} = .43$

Disclosure attitudes are significantly related to Skepticism toward political advertisements



CALIFORNIA TRIAL

2018 Prolific Sample



Method

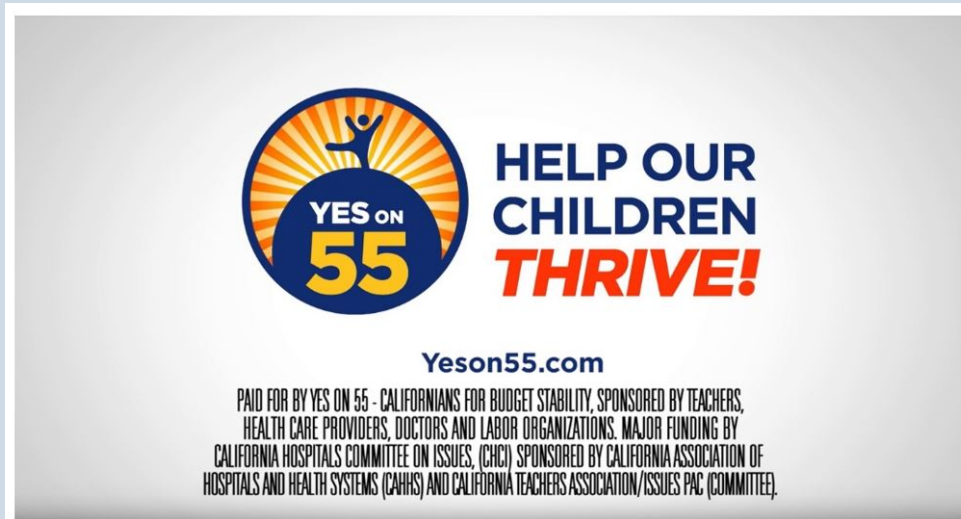
- Experiment showing two forms of old disclosure against the same new disclosure image.

Treatment was still image taken from tv advertisement

- Sample N=545 Californians



Old Format



Old Format



New Format



New Format

Dependent Variable

Inform

The new format helped to better inform me than the old format

- (Strongly agree, somewhat agree, Not sure, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree)

Expectations

- Individuals rating higher on *ATD* scale will evaluate new disclosure reform more favorably
- Caveat
 - Those scoring low on the Rights portion should rate new disclosure less favorably (e.g. disclosures conflict w/ free speech)
 - Readability critics should rate more favorably

Finding

Individuals rating higher on *ATD* scale will evaluate new disclosure reform more favorably (Confirmed)

- This result **did not vary** with respect to readability
- **Unexpected result:** Those who found disclosures less useful, rated the reform positively

Predicting Support for the 2018 Reform with Attitudes toward Disclosure

	coefficient	Std. Err.	Sig.
Usefulness	.07	.01	p=.01
Speech Rights	-.18	.00	p=.03
Readability	.01	.01	Not sig
Skepticism toward political ads	.01	.00	p= .03

Thank you!

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