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COMMENTING ON CANNABIS: TESTING NEWS FRAGMENTATION USING READER COMMENTS ON CALIFORNIA'S PROPOSITION 19

by

John D. Beecham

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COMMENTING ON CANNABIS: TESTING NEWS FRAGMENTATION USING READER COMMENTS ON CALIFORNIA'S PROPOSITION 19

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This content analysis studies reader comments on news articles pertaining to the issue of California's Proposition 19—the "Tax Cannabis Initiative" to legalize marijuana. It investigates whether these reader message boards are consistent with news fragmentation theory, by examining whether the distribution of "yes" and "no" opinion on alternative media sites' message boards is more homogenous than the distribution of opinions on mainstream news sites' message boards. This study also uses a thematic analysis to investigate whether the mainstream media, as represented by editorial board endorsements by daily California newspapers, influences themes used by reader comments on Proposition 19. Results show that message boards on Proposition 19 are not consistent with news fragmentation theory, and that the themes used in reader comments to support an opinion on Proposition 19 do not reflect the themes used by the mainstream media to support that same opinion.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my Grandma Kay, who provided me with encouragement and nourishment throughout the process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is an honor for me to acknowledge Joe Starita, Larry Walklin, and especially John Bender, and thank them for all their help with the development of this research. I would also like to thank my sister and my brother-in-law for their help in this process.

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CHAPTER ONE - PROBLEM

The news fragmentation theory proposes that, as diversification of media channels takes place, individuals will select media which reinforce their previously held positions and cover topics that are of individual interest (Sunstein, 2001). The inverse of this is that media outlets tailor their information to reach niche audiences, in a process of mutual reinforcement. As a result, members of society have fewer topics that everyone can talk about together, and the consensus-building role of the media is diminished. Moreover, since fragmentation often occurs along partisan lines (Himeboim, 2010), polarization occurs and it is harder for people of different viewpoints to come to terms on a social problem (McCombs, 1972). The internet may support news fragmentation by providing diverse, “segmented” avenues of information, however, in contrast to cable TV, the interconnectedness of the Internet (Baum & Groehling, 2008) also allows individuals to seamlessly move to a variety of positions on a particular issue, which may reduce fragmentation and consequent polarization. Furthermore, the internet, despite its diverse channels, may still reflect the agenda and framing of the mainstream media (Jae Kook, 2007).

Social critics such as David Brooks have taken up the issue of media fragmentation. Writing in the New York Times, Brooks says that companies in any given industry are dividing the market into narrow “lifestyle niches” (2007). Using the example of music, Brooks cites the diminishing presence of socially transcendent bands like the Rolling Stones, which draw on a variety of cultural traditions to appeal to a mass audience. Calling for “institutions that span social, class, and ethnic lines,” Brooks says we will need countervailing forces to check commercial segmentation and remind us of our common social traditions.

Internet-based news often contain a forum for readers to respond to the news that they are reading, and therefore an opportunity to test the news fragmentation theory. By asking whether reader comments reflect the opinion of the article, we can address several assumptions pertaining to news fragmentation theory. This thesis is a content analysis of these online comments, or message boards, of online news articles, and an analysis of the degree to which those comments agree with a controversial “yes or no” political position given in the article. It investigates, in a quantitative analysis, how that level of agreement varies between mainstream, or presumably less fragmented media, and the presumably more fragmented alternative media. It also investigates, in a qualitative analysis, the degree to which those comments across all forms of media reflect the primary framing of a political opinion by the mainstream media.

I decided to test this by recording the opinions of reader commenters on opinion journalism, from general interest daily newspapers to represent the mainstream, and from all other online news sites to represent the alternative media.

The literature suggests that we may find more debate, or “public reasoning”, (as measured by a greater balance of yes and no opinions) occuring on the mainstream sites than on alternative sites (Tanner, 2001). The popular literature also suggests online comments as a whole will show a tendency to disagree with the news article (Heffernan, 2008). Furthermore, the popular literature suggests that on a controversial issue pertaining to social change, supporters of social change will be more likely to use newer technology to promote their views, and so we may expect online comments to support the side of social change on a controversial issue (The Economist, 2010).

I chose the issue of legalization of marijuana, in the form of California’s Proposition 19, which offered the chance for online commenters to voice a simple “yes” or “no” opinion on a social problem. The problem of marijuana use and marijuana prohibition in American has been the source of discussion and debate since 1906, when Washington, DC became the first government in the US to regulate marijuana. The US Federal government currently prohibits marijuana use under the Controlled Substances Act of 1970, and in 2008, 873,000 people were arrested on marijuana charges in the US (Sullum, 2008). Opponents of prohibition claim that marijuana is no less harmful than tobacco and alcohol, and point out that although the US spends up to 44 billion dollars a year on enforcing drug prohibition, the level of drug use in the US has not declined

(Debussman, 2008). Supporters of prohibition say that drug use will rise if marijuana is legalized, that children will get the idea that drug use is acceptable, and that marijuana can be addictive to 9% of adults who use it (Roan, 2010). In the past four years, a new theme for opponents of drug prohibition has become the violence caused by drug cartels in Mexico, presumably an indirect result of American drug policy, which has resulted in 28,000 deaths since 2006 (The Economist, 2010). However, opponents of marijuana legalization claim that these cartels make most of their money from other, “hard” drugs, and not marijuana. In 1996 California legalized marijuana for medical purposes with Proposition 215, a ballot measure similar to Proposition 19, and 13 other states in the US currently allow marijuana use for medical purposes. In March, supporters of the “Tax Cannabis Initiative” in California gained enough signatures to put marijuana legalization to a vote, in the form of a ballot measure (Proposition 19), in the November 2010 election.

The worst case scenario according to fragmentation/polarization theory, would be that citizens get their information and arguments on a certain issue from a website that caters to a certain niche audience based on predisposed political preferences or worldviews, and therefore those citizens are less likely to see the issue from another point of view, and so the likelihood of changing one’s mind, compromising, or simply addressing opposition concerns on social problems will decline, and it will be difficult to forge a consensus that everyone can live with as a society. If a news site’s comments predominantly reflect only one of the two positions, then it may be the case that readers

of that site are less likely to see the issue from another point of view, and it may also be the case that that site tends to cater toward readers of that partisan position. In other words, the consensus-building function of the media is less prevalent on these fragmented sites.

CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

NEWS FRAGMENTATION

As a growing majority of people get their news from the Internet instead of print sources (Shaikh & Chaparo, 2004), scholars are becoming more concerned with the concept of News Fragmentation. According to News Fragmentation theory, as a multiplicity of news channels propagate into the media market, with the spread of the internet and cable television (Webster, 2005), these new outlets will directly reach certain niche segments of the population, marketing themselves to users of defined preferences, and as a result it will be more difficult for mainstream media to reach a broad enough audience to serve the agenda-setting function of a democratic press.

News Fragmentation studies have had largely to do with the agenda-setting function of different media outlets. As McCombs explains (1972), agenda setting refers to the media function of giving people common things to think and talk about. It has been suggested that, with their diversification and segmentation of target audiences, online news outlets threaten the agenda-setting function of the mainstream press, and that the mainstream press is diminishing in its consensus-building role.

Jae Kook (2007) adds to this theory the concept of "clustering." Clustering refers to the phenomenon that websites are more likely to link to other like-minded Websites. As Jae Kook points out there are two competing hypotheses having to do with news fragmentation. The first theory, in line with the concepts above, states that clustering will impede the agenda-setting function of the press and make it more difficult for society to reach democratic policy solutions. (Havick, 2000) The second hypothesis states that new media, in their "redundancy," already reflect the agenda of mainstream media (McCombs, 2005), and so clustering will not result in the decline of a common agenda in which citizens can find grounds for reasoned debate.

Jae Kook's study of comparisons and traditional and new media agenda-setting in the 2004 election concluded that new media (in the form of partisan blogs) tend to follow the same agenda as the mainstream press, as well as their liberal or conservative counterparts. Due to the nature of hyperlinks, the author speculates, it may be easier for blogs and alternative media to respond to mainstream stories than cable news, and moreover, most new media sites lack the resources to generate their own stories, and so instead they mainly react to mainstream stories. While these findings cast doubt on the fragmentation thesis, another study on the perceived "newsworthiness" of wire stories showed that conservative and liberal websites tend to practice partisan filtering, or "polarization" of political stories to a greater degree than the Websites of mainstream news wires (Baum & Groeling, 2008). The authors of this study examined stories from the AP and Reuter's "top politics news" section, and then compared this perceived

newsworthiness to that of partisan blogs such as Thedailykos.com, by recording how many of those stories labeled “top news” by the mainstream wires ended up being prominently published in various blogs.

This study departs from previous news fragmentation theory in that it is not concerned with news fragmentation’s influence on agenda-setting as measured by story position or prominence (i.e. newsworthiness), but rather with news fragmentation’s influence on the distribution of opinion on message boards that are part of online news articles.

Aside from agenda-setting theory, news fragmentation theory is closely related to the public sphere theory. Public sphere theory states that democratic societies solve their problems by public reasoning and engaging in critical dialogue in so-called “public spaces” (Habermas, 1989). A public space ideally is completely separate from an economic or a government space; it is a network of communications links that is deeply tied to everyday life of people in society. One example of a public space could be a bowling alley; it is a place where people get together outside of the context of economic or government interactions and have the chance to communicate with each other, free to talk about public issues and engage in a civil, respectful exchange of ideas (Putnam, 2000). When communication in public spaces hits upon public affairs, that interaction is an example of the public sphere in action, serving its role in facilitating critical public reasoning on public problems. The public sphere is kind of platform, characterized by 1)

open access, 2) freedom of ideas, 3) standards, or conventions of dialogue, and 4) information or arguments, ideally based on "reason."

Scholars such as Putnam are concerned with the declining prevalence of public spaces and the level of participation of citizens in the public sphere in this electronic age, when a broad range of information and high-quality entertainment, tailored to narrow preferences, can be delivered to a person's home without any human interaction.

While much has been made of the hazards of segmentation, fragmentation, and diversification of media channels, some studies suggest that these hazards are exaggerated, due to smaller media and new media tendencies to reflect, or even directly link to, mainstream news sites. A recent study of 6,298 news services across the world, in 20 languages, found that new media outlets across the world tend to use hyperlinks mainly to link to more established mainstream news outlets in "core" countries that tend to dominate the agenda-setting of international news (Himelboim). This may indicate that the inter-relatedness of Internet news sites may compensate for the segmentation of those sites. In the words of Himelboim, "News media use new technology to replicate old practices." Furthermore, fragmentation and polarization may be tempered by the tendency of alternative media outlets to not only link to mainstream outlets, but also to reflect the agendas of the mainstream press, as pointed out by Jae Kook.

CONTENT ANALYSES

Some content analyses of online media have shown that the rise of digital media has actually had a salubrious effect on the public sphere. For example, when the Chilean mainstream newspaper “La Tercera” formed an electronic discussion board on its Website dedicated to the issue of Augusto Pinochet’s 1998 extradition from Britain to Spain, thousands of Chilean citizens had the opportunity to voice their opinions on a controversial matter that had been generally avoided in the public sphere, in the interest of the nation’s “reconciliation” process. In her content analysis of the reader comments, Tanner (1998) found that the message boards of La Tercera’s Web site exhibited all four qualities of the public sphere as described by Habermas. Commenters routinely responded to each other and created an atmosphere of mutual respect, and enjoyed the freedom and the platform for an open debate that was unprecedented in Chile’s history. “Long live technology!” said one commenter. The researcher found that 64 percent of comments were anti-Pinochet and 26 percent were pro-Pinochet. In addition to analyzing the comments based on Habermas’s four qualities of the public sphere, Tanner added a fifth quality of those message boards: the ability to help shape collective memories.

Aside from illustrating the importance of electronic forms of the public sphere, Tanner’s study provides one of the first political content analyses of reader comments on online news papers. Content analyses of electronic bulletin boards and message boards are relatively common in the field of public health, to see how patients of a certain program with a certain disease reacts to a treatment program (Cousineau, 2006), but it seems that this method of content analysis isn’t as common in politics and press research.

However, we do have some useful precedent with content analyses of reader comments on the Al Jazeera Web site, the BBC's forum on the bird flu scare, and the Chinese newspaper Dayoo.com.

Rowe and Hawkes' (2008) study of reader comments in reaction to the bird flu scare provides another example of a content analysis of a mainstream news site's reader responses on a particular issue. The study's purpose was to help predict future public reactions to social hazards such as disease outbreaks or meat recalls. The researchers took special efforts to rationalize the validity of their samples, allowing that a sample of online reader comments on an issue is not necessarily a good indicator of national public opinion, and that a representative national sample would be preferable for their purposes. This is indeed a limitation when analyzing reader comments for "public opinion"; however, the study points out that reader comments are a uniquely valuable source of data on public opinion because they are more immediate than surveys that ask a participant to comment on his or her attitudes after the fact (and outside of the context of a lively, current debate). Rowe and Hawkes conclude that further research would benefit from a control group of comments elicited from surveys, to test the results against a representative sample of a population.

Abdul-Mageed (2008) tackles the concept of citizen journalism in his content analysis of Al Jazeera reader comments. Research showed that reader comments on the Arabic news outlet's website were evenly distributed throughout the site, which focused its editorial content during the study mainly on military and political violence. Mageed

concluded that the layout of the site and the editorial choices of the site influenced reader comment.

In fact some researchers believe that the reader comments section of online newspapers are more authentic units of analysis than survey responses because they represent speech from a real live debate, and are not solicited for research purposes (Tanner). This study is different in that it is not concerned with agenda setting. Instead it addresses the problem of news fragmentation's effect on consensus-building; that is, the media's role in fostering debate on a common issue.

Ideally we would expect the mainstream message boards to reflect a broader range of themes, so that we can come to a broader societal consensus. One would expect more debate and public reasoning on the mainstream message boards. While on the new, presumably fragmented media, you would find a narrower range of themes and opinions. If people never leave these narrow confines of new media sites, they will engage in less public reasoning with people who hold different views, since those different people are ensconced in their own narrower public spheres. So if the segmentation of the public sphere is a reality in new media news sites, there will be less debate going on there. Will there be a greater level of consensus in alternative or mainstream media? And of those commenters on a particular side, will they see the debate in the same terms as the mainstream media? Or will they, like Jae Kook concluded, use new media to reflect traditional attitudes?

CHAPTER 3 - HYPOTHESIS, RESEARCH QUESTION, AND METHODOLOGY

As I thought about news fragmentation, and read about the Proposition 19 debate, I began to wonder if those people using the internet to advance their views are less likely to consider the potential pitfalls of their political position (whether for against Prop 19). From my preliminary research it seemed like there was some sort of phenomenon at work with the blogs and Internet media reflecting a more polarized version of the debate than the circumspect mainstream media. While I considered measuring news fragmentation by counting the number, and prominence, of Prop 19 articles appearing on a given site, I wanted to test the potential effects of fragmentation using some of the new, interactive features available on websites. Since the reader comments section may serve as a forum for internet readers to gain information, and consider arguments, on an issue, and since these message boards can be clearly analyzed for a “yes” or “no” opinion (as opposed to other interactive media such as Twitter), I decided to analyze these reader comments. I was interested in whether an average internet news reader would more likely be exposed to a one-sided debate if he or she read reader comments on an alternative (and presumably “fragmented”) media site.

And although the “one-sidedness” of debate was the object of my main, quantitative investigation, I was still interested in performing a thematic, qualitative

analysis of some of the comments, and this became my secondary object of investigation. Specifically I wished to use a variation of Jae Kook and Himelboim's agenda setting analysis. If agenda setting addresses the question, "what is the biggest problem with our society?", then I wished to apply this to a single issue. So for the example of Proposition 19, the media's agenda can be understood as the answer to the question "what is the biggest problem with Proposition 19?" The most prevalent themes used in the Prop 19 debate give us some idea of how the media and commenters understand the debate. I wished to investigate whether the message board comments seem to use the same themes of debate as the mainstream media.

And finally, since the November 2 election provided a sort of natural experiment, I was curious to see if message board comments are a natural reflection of public opinion (as Rowe & Hawkes speculated in their bird flu study). Although public opinion may not be accurately reflected by the voting results, we can at least have a control group of "California voters" by which to compare the distribution of message board opinions. And this is how I arrived at my research questions.

Research Questions:

RQ1: Are reader comments on mainstream media sites and alternative media sites consistent with the news fragmentation theory?

Hypothesis (H1): That the distribution of comments on message boards from alternative media op/eds will be more likely to reflect the opinion of the article than comments from mainstream op/ed message boards.

RQ2: Does the mainstream media the agenda-setting of online message boards on the issue of Proposition 19?

RQ3: Are reader comments on online opinion articles regarding Proposition 19 an accurate reflection of public opinion?

Methodology

To test this hypothesis, I analyzed the content of message boards (also known as reader comments sections) of articles which take a stand on a controversial issue. The issue I chose to follow is Proposition 19, a ballot initiative that was voted on in California on 2 November 2010. The initiative proposed the legalization of marijuana in California.

Data sources

I selected opinion articles from two kinds of sources. I restricted the study to opinion articles in order to exclude articles on the news and political process that accompanies this debate. Recognizing that issue debate occurs within the message

boards of these "news" articles as well, I excluded this potential forum of debate. Data sources included: 1. Op-ed pieces from the Websites of California daily newspapers. 2. Opinions articles in non-mainstream, primarily Web-based, media, or "alternative media."

Study size

There are 80 English-language California general interest daily newspapers (www.mondonewspapers.com). I set out to select 50 opinion articles (Op/eds) from these newspapers (For the complete list, see Appendix A). Twenty-five of them were to be against Proposition 19, and 25 were to be for Proposition 19. In order to keep the sizes of the subgroups comparable, I chose the same sample size for the alternative media group. This leads to a total of 100 articles selected for content analysis of their reader comments--a "comments analysis." A unit of analysis constituted a comment from any of the 100 articles selected. In order to limit the potential number of units of analysis, I analyzed only the first 100 comments on message boards that contain more than 100 comments. The reasoning behind this is that the first 100 comments on an article is probably a reasonable approximation of the overall percentage of total comments pro or con, and gives an approximate sample of that sites total comments[1]. So the maximum possible n value for this study is 10,000.

[1]The reasoning behind this is that if message boards with, for example, 500 comments, were not censored, then that source might constitute up to a third of the data in any given category.

Article selection

1. Op/eds from the 80 newspapers were searched online, starting with the highest circulation newspaper (the LA Times). If the newspaper was not available online or had not yet published an Op/Ed on Proposition 19 at the time of sampling, then the next highest circulation newspaper was searched for an Op/Ed. If available, the following data was abstracted. Position, number of comments, number of comments pro, con, and other. I also recorded the circulation of the newspaper. (For a complete list of sources used, see Appendix C).

2. From the 80 daily California newspapers, I made a purposive sample of 25 opinion-editorial pieces in support of Proposition 19 and 25 op/eds in opposition. To select articles, starting on September 1, 2010, I went down the list of papers in descending order of circulation, starting with the Los Angeles Times, gathering available pro- and con-Propostion 19 articles from the newspaper Websites, checking once a week for new articles, until 25 pro- and 25 con-Proposition 19 mainstream articles were selected. Articles with no reader comments were excluded. After I had selected an article, I would analyze the comments. If an article was selected on the day it was published, then I would wait one week to analyze the comments, so that a sufficient amount of time for debate could take place and comments to accrue. For the purpose of the study, I assumed that there were almost no comments posted to an article after it was

a week old, and so once an article had been published on the Web for a week, I stopped checking it for more comments. Articles with no comments were excluded.

3. For the non-mainstream, or alternative sources (see below for operational definitions), I made a convenience sample of 25 articles in favor of Proposition 19 and 25 articles against Proposition 19 starting on September 1, 2010, and ending November 1. Selection of the articles was in one week increments, with a limit of ten per week, to allow for later-arriving opinion articles in the election season. In order to identify articles with a wide readership, Twitter search, Facebook searches, and Google blogs and news searches for "Proposition 19 OR Prop 19" were used. Posts with no comments were excluded.

Data elements: Quantitative Analysis (RQ1)

1. Data source

* For newspapers, I recorded the name of the newspaper, circulation of the newspaper, city, and publisher, and Web address. For non-newspapers, I recorded the name of the source and web address.

2. Article

* For each article, the date, position, and number of comments was recorded.

3. Comments

* Each comment, or post, was coded as pro Prop-19, con-Prop 19, or unknown. Only comments on the Website of the original article were considered. For every 10th article

considered, all comments were given to another referee to code independently. In addition, if a comment could not be clearly coded, an independent referee was consulted. This determination was made by the author and in cases where uncertainty still existed, a second referee was consulted. For comments where consensus is not achieved, the comment was classified as “unknown”. (For a complete list of comment distribution, see Appendix B).

* In addition, some comments were selected by the author to illustrate the tenor, and content of the debate from the different sources. This will be qualitatively described in the research.

Data elements: Qualitative Analysis (RQ2)

* For the qualitative analysis of RQ2, from the top five highest circulation mainstream newspaper editorial board opinions, top three themes (rationales) were coded.

* Since the top five highest circulation newspapers argued against Prop 19, a convenience sample of 288 anti-prop 19 comments were selected from 20 different articles from all four article categories.

*Each comment was coded as using one of 11 primary themes. When a primary theme could not be identified it was classified as unknown.

* In addition, a some comments were selected by the author to illustrate the tenor, and content of the debate from the different sources.

Data elements: RQ3

*****For RQ3 I simply used the coded comments gathered from my sample for RQ1, omitting the unknown category, and compared the distribution of opinion with the final voting results from the November, 2010 general election.

Operational Definitions

"Mainstream" refers to content originating from the print edition of general-interest daily newspapers. For this I referred to the list of California daily newspapers from www.mondonewspapers.com, excluding any newspapers classified as special-interest (ex. business), ethnic (ex. Spanish-language papers), or college newspapers.

"Alternative/non mainstream", refers to articles originating from anywhere except a source defined as "mainstream" (see above). This includes Spanish-language newspapers, college newspapers, single-issue sites such as "Stop19.com," and personal blogs. The phrases "Internet News," "new media," "online newspapers," etc, may be used to describe these articles.

"Anti Proposition 19/Against Proposition 19/con-Propostion 19/unfavorable" refers to the political alignment of an article or individual comment. The researcher and independent coder asked him/herself, "Based on the content of the post, if the author of this comment were to enter a voting booth just after making the post, would he or she most likely vote in favor or against Proposition 19?" If the answer is "against," then the comment is classified as "con."

"**For Proposition 19/pro-Proposition 19/favorable,"** refers to the political alignment of an article or individual comment. When an article or comment is thus classified, it means that the researcher (and independent coder) asked him/herself the same question as the previous paragraph, and the answer was "in favor," Since articles selected for comments analysis were strictly opinion articles,

"**Unknown.**" A comment is classified as unknown when the same question as applies to the previous two classification is used, and no clear conclusion can be drawn one way or another. (Since only articles which take a clear position on a political issue were used in this study, no articles were defined as "unknown").

Comments section is also known as "message board," the bottom of most online news articles there is an interactive section where readers can post their

Comments, or "posts," are short messages written by Website users on a news article message board or comments section. Though I sometimes make statements about "commenters," it should be understood that I am strictly limiting my study to comments--that is, any conclusions on "commenters" or the people who comment, comes from inference based on the comments alone. I did not record commenter names, locations, or any other personal data such as icon used, and my independent coder and I approached each comment as if it were from a different user. Sometimes it would be the case when a commenter--say, "Denver Dan," would post four clearly anti-Prop 19 comments in a discussion, and on the fifth comment would post just a hyperlink, such as "www.thetruthon19.org." In this case the comment was coded as a question mark (?).

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Ninety-one eligible articles were identified for analysis. From the mainstream media, I selected 25 articles that were against Proposition 19 and 20 articles that were in favor in Proposition 19. From the alternative media I selected 25 articles that were in favor of Proposition 19, and 21 articles that were against Proposition 19. Although the methodology called for 25 articles, I was unable to identify 25 opinion articles in the mainstream pro category and the alternative con category. Rather than more intensified searching, and in order to avoid ascertainment bias, I decided to suspend searching on November 1. (For a list of the articles and their sources, see Appendix A, table 4.1.)

Table 4.1 Total Comments sampled, by Op/Ed political alignment and media form. Chi-square p <0.0001.

Source	Pro-19 Op/Ed	Con-19 Op/Ed	Total
Mainstream	622 (15.6%)	1462 (36.7%)	2084 (52.3%)
Alternative	1623 (40.7%)	279 (7%)	1902 (47.7%)
Total	2245 (56.4%)	1741 (44.6%)	3986 (100%)

A total of 3,986 comments were analyzed. Comments were evenly split between the mainstream and alternative media and articles in favor and in opposition to Proposition 19. However, a majority of comments (77 percent) were found in either the mainstream "con" or alternative "pro" articles. Of the 3,968 comments found in eligible articles, 2,768 were analyzed. The remaining 1,218 comments were those found on articles with more than 100 comments. (Such as Salon.com's pro-19 editorial, which had 492). As per the methodology, only the first 100 comments of an article were analyzed. Those articles that contained more than 100 comments will be called "censored articles", since up to 75 percent of their comments were omitted from analysis.

Table 4.2 Total Comments analyzed, after omission of "censored" comments. Chi-square p <0.0001.

Source	Pro-19	Con-19	Total
Mainstream	613	1109	1722
Alternative	758	288	1046
Total	1371	1397	2768

Each comment analyzed was coded for its political opinion (alignment) regarding Proposition 19. The categories were “pro-19”, “con-19”, and “unknown”. Of the comments that were analyzed, 492 did not state a specific position for or against Proposition 19. One thousand seven hundred and fifty-seven were in support of Proposition 19, and 519 were in opposition to Proposition 19.

Table 4.3 Total comments by opinion.

Political Alignment	n	%
Pro-19	1757	63.5
Con-19	519	18.8
Unknown	492	17.8
Total	2768	100

How did the comment opinions break down according to article form and the opinion advanced by the article? The distribution of pro and con comments were similar regardless of article source or position, and the unknown comments were evenly divided between mainstream and alternative articles as well as pro-19 and con-19 articles. Of the 1,757 comments in favor of Proposition 19, 756 were found in mainstream articles that were against Proposition 19, making it the most represented category of comments that indicate an opinion in the debate. Of the 519 Cons-19 comments, only 76 were found on

alternative articles that were against Proposition 19, making it the smallest category among those comments that indicate an opinion.

Table 4.4 Commenter opinion, by article alignment and article form.

Commenter Opinion	**Article Form**	**Pro-19 Articles**	**Con-19 Articles**	**Total/Chi Square**
Unknown	Mainstream	115	152	
	Alternative	181	44	
				492
Pro-19				
	Mainstream	379	756	
	Alternative	454	168	$p < 0.0001$
				1757
Con-19				
	Mainstream	119	201	
	Alternative	123	76	$p < 0.0001$
				519

How did the commenter opinion break down according to the different types of media and the article positions? In Mainstream articles against Proposition 19, 68 percent of comments were pro-Proposition 19. Only 18 percent of comments reflected the same opinion as the article.

Table 4.5 Percent Comments Pro/Con/Uncertain, by Article Form and Position

	Pro-Prop 19	**Con-Prop 19**
Mainstream	62/19/19	68/18/14
Alternative	60/16/24	58/26/16

The Distribution of comment opinion was relatively uniform across all four categories of op/ed. The maximum distribution of pro-19 comments was 68%, in the mainstream media against Proposition 19, and the minimum distribution of pro-19 comments was 58%, found in the alternative media articles against Proposition 19.

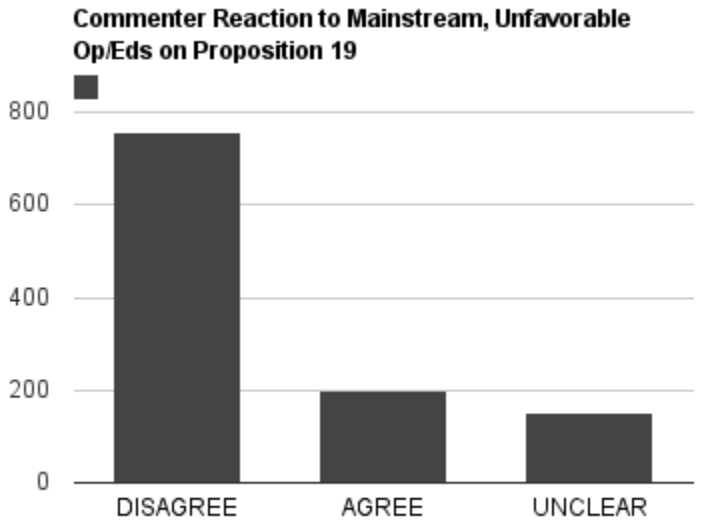
Table 4.6: Commenter opinion REGARDING PROPOSITION 19, on Mainstream, Con-Prop 19 articles. (Top five highest commented-on articles)

PUBLI-CATION	COMMENTS ANALYZED	COMMENTS PRO-19	COMMENTS CON-19	COMMENTS UNKNOWN
Los Angeles	100 (out of	77	10	13

Times	270)			
Sand Diego Union-Tribune	100 (out of 207)	61	11	28
Ukiah Daily Journal	100 (out of 155)	63	27	10
Santa Cruz Sentinel	100 (out of 128)	73	10	17
Sacramento Bee	100 (out of 126)	66	16	18
Total All 25 Articles	1109	756	201	152

Since authors of these articles were against Proposition 19, those comments that were for Proposition 19 can be classified as disagreeing with the article. In other words, disagreement of commenters toward the article author was high in this category.

Figure 4.1: Commenter Reaction to Mainstream, Anti-Prop 19 articles.



In mainstream articles that favored Proposition 19, a majority of commenters voiced support for Proposition 19, with 62 percent of comments indicating support, and this case, agreement with the article. The most commented-on article in this category came from the San-Diego Union Tribune. That article also had one of the most balanced debates of all 91 articles, with 54 comments against and 38 for Proposition 19.

Table 4.7: Commenter opinion REGARDING PROPOSITION 19, on Mainstream, Pro-Prop 19 articles. (Top five highest commented-on articles)

PUBLI-CATION	COMMENTS ANALYZED	COMMENTS PRO-19	COMMENTS CON-19	COMMENTS UNCLEAR
San Diego Union-Tribune	100 (out of 115)	54	38	8

Modesto Bee	99	69	21	9
Los Angeles Times	80	59	9	11
Record Searchlight	65	36	9	20
San Francisco Chronicle	64	40	14	10
Total All 20 Articles	613	379	119	115

In alternative-media articles against Proposition 19, commenters were again most likely to support Proposition 19, with 58 percent writing in favor of legalizing marijuana. The Foundry, which is the blog of the traditionally conservative think tank The Heritage Institute, led all articles in this category with 40 comments on its opinion article's message board. But despite its conservative reputation, commenters on that site voiced support for legalizing marijuana at a rate of 36 to 1 (with three unknowns).

Table 4.8: Commenter opinion REGARDING PROPOSITION 19, on Alternative, Con-Prop 19 articles. (Top five highest commented-on articles)

PUBLI-CATION	COMMENTS ANALYZED	COMMENTS PRO-19	COMMENTS CON-19	COMMENTS UNCLEAR
The Foundry	40	36	1	3

Daily Titan	40	21	10	10
Red State	39	14	10	15
Brand X	24	18	5	1
The Hive	24	18	5	1
Total All 21 Articles	288	168	76	44

In the group of 25 alternative news articles in favor of legalization, 60 percent of all those articles' comments also favored legalization; just a two percent increase from the "mainstream, pro" article group. The article selected from Townhall, a conservative blog, contained 552 comments, making it the most commented on article of the entire selection of 91. Of the 100 comments analyzed from that article, a majority were against Proposition 19.

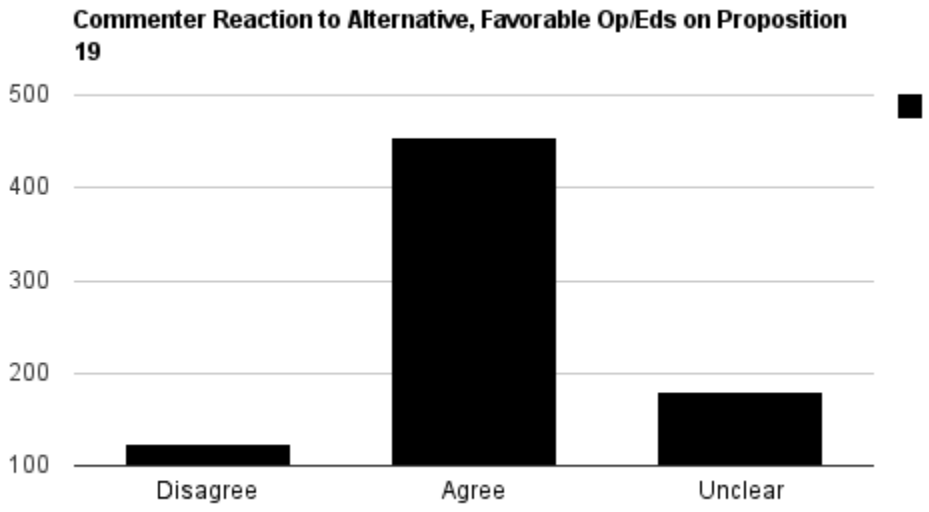
Table 4.9: Commenter opinion REGARDING PROPOSITION 19, on Alternative, Pro-Prop 19 articles. (Top five highest commented-on articles)

PUBLI-CATION	COMMENTS ANALYZED	COMMENTS PRO-19	COMMENTS CON-19	COMMENTS UNCLEAR
Townhall	100 (out of 552)	34	37	29
Salon	100 (out of 492)	66	4	30
The Hill	100 (out of 145)	97	1	2

Cannabis Culture	100	51	26	23
Politico	51	30	15	6
Total All 25 Articles	758	454	123	81

Among those commenters who posted on pro-19 articles in the alternative media, 60 percent agreed with the article's opinion, while 16 percent disagreed.

Figure 4.2: Commenter reaction to Alternative, Pro-Proposition 19 articles.



QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

For my qualitative analysis, I examined the comments that were unfavorable to Proposition 19. Since the top five highest circulation newspapers argued against Prop 19, a convenience sample of 288 anti-prop 19 comments were selected from 20 different articles from all four article categories. This way I could address the question of whether message board commenters tend to use the same themes as the mainstream media in identifying what the biggest problem is with Proposition 19. Since I wanted to use the editorial board decisions of newspapers as my indicator of mainstream predominant themes, and only three editorial boards endorsed Proposition 19, I didn't have a consistent indicator of the editorial boards' rationales (themes) for passing Prop 19, and so I omitted pro-Prop 19 comments for this question. Furthermore, since it appears that people who use interactive features of news sites and are also unfavorable Proposition 19 are in a minority, it may be interesting to study the points of view of this minority.

From the chart of articles with the most comments that were unfavorable to Proposition 19, I took those comments from the top five articles with the most comments unfavorable to Proposition 19, and analyzed them. Specifically, I was curious to see if they were using arguments along the lines of "Legalization is inevitable but this is not the right bill." That is, the theme of "poorly written bill." Since this was the theme of most of the op/eds in the mainstream that were against Proposition 19, I wondered if the

commenters would echo these themes or if they would instead generate their own themes using the interactive features of the website.

I read each unfavorable comment until the commenters' first argument could be identified, and made a code for that argument. Since most comments used more than one argument, the first argument presented was used to classify the comment into a thematic category.

THEMES

Of the 297 comments I analyzed out of my purposive sample, 55 of them fell into the category of general anti-drug sentiment. A comment was categorized under this theme when the first argument that arose in the comment was some sort of insult or generalization about drug-users, or a personal attack on those people who favor legalization.

Number of comments: 55

Theme: Personal attacks on drug users or advocates of legalization.

> *The druggy democrats need it. That's how they cope with the screw ups they've done to this state. BTW: insulin takes the sugar out of the blood stream, candy, puts it in. -My Marijuana Meds*

> *Yeah...I've tried pot. In fact we used to party with the crap...you can't read so much as a newspaper article without help, you laugh at about anything, tunnel vision is common and a drive through the parking lot of your local Safeway feels like you're driving the entire California coast on a moped. Add to that you're dumber than a brick and that pretty much sums up that ****. -Chico E-R*

> *Get ready to start speaking chinese. There are reasons the Chinese economy is thriving, one of them being, they don't have a bunch of pot heads. Should be ashamed what our country has become. -from Modesto Bee Pro-Prop 19 Op/Ed. CON - Debra is one of the dumbest broads I have seen in a long time. Shinning example of a liberal left wing loony. What's next? Meth? Bank robbery? -From SF Chronicle Pro-Prop 19 Op/Ed.*

Sometimes these comments referred to other themes, such as danger to motorists, but were classified under theme No. 1 because the commenter appears to have some clear bias or personal dislike toward marijuana users, on which is point of view is apparently based (as opposed to the rational arguments used by commenters in the other categories). For example:

> *See...if we can keep less of you loser potheads whom are so stoned out of your minds you couldn't spell your own name given three tries off the streets we're all better off. -Chico E-R*

After personal attacks on drug-users, the most common theme was the threat of social harm and moral decay posed by marijuana use. This category includes commenters who argued that prohibition has failed because drug laws aren’t strict enough. It also included those who used the “slippery slope” argument that legalizing one more vice may lead to legalization of other social taboos such as prostitution or methamphetamine, or else a gradual melt-down of morals and “public virtue.” One commenter revealed some insight into this theme when he/she said that as a social conservative, he values public virtue, and that this measure has no regard for public virtue. This category also includes commenters who argue that it is immoral for society to profit from tax dollars from the vice of drug use, since it may encourage such behavior.

Number of comments: 38

Theme: Social Harm

> *I see this as the slippery slope, still slipping down the hill into the bottom of the ravine. I don't see any benifit for the people when it comes to marijuana use. Anything can be justified; That does not mean that marijuana is morally justified. Whatever happened to morality? Oh, yeah, just a lot of baloney. Just where are we headed? No use arguing, Pat J. They have their "opinions", and we have ours and never will the "twain" shall meet.*
>
> *I went to Bali, Indonesia and there were no illegal drugs. Why? Because the laws are so amazingly strict everybody is terrified to use drugs. So, stop saying law enforcement can't ever stop illegal drugs. Sure they can, you just have to increase the penalties to the point where people actually have fear, like in Indonesia. -SD UNION TRIBUNE*

The next most common theme was that of effects on health caused by marijuana use. This theme refers to comments that point out marijuana's addictive potential, as well as comments that include links to health studies showing a variety of adverse health effects from marijuana use. Many commenters under this theme pointed out the correlation between marijuana use and schizophrenia. One important note regarding this theme, is that refers to health effects on individuals, and not on society at large. Comments that suggested that legalized marijuana would increase the burden on public health programs were classified as theme No. 2.

Number of comments: 34

Theme: Adverse health effects.

> *Prop 19 does not give a d*mn teaching about its dangers of dependency and health issues. It does not allow for treatment of those with pot dependencies. MARIJUANA is being marketed as a WONDER drug that the youth will think is SAFE and a medicine. That is what is the BIG problem.*

Pot use causes impotence through endothelial cell damage; it also causes obesity, laziness, and stupidity. People who are stoned are not getting work done. I recall one of my suite- mates in Foothill dropping out after pot became a staple in his life. -Berkeley Blog

The next most common theme was the potential conflict with California's current medical marijuana law, known most commonly as Proposition 215 (the name of the 1996 ballot measure which is now state law). Commenters who used theme speculated that passage of Proposition 19 would nullify many provisions in current California law, such as the stipulation that those people under 21 can use marijuana if they have a doctor's prescription. Also included in this theme is the argument that medical marijuana patients will not be able to grow their own cannabis, and also that the new law would destroy the economy of northern California.

Number of commenters: 30

Theme: Current Medical Marijuana law is superior to Proposition 19.

Medical Marijuana is the change we have all been waiting for. The 'change' is already here; enjoy it. Grow it. Smoke it. make a hearty living from it. Prop 19 seeks to hand production of marijuana over too Big Business. Thats real bad news. Current laws keep Big Business locked out....that means real families csn have agood fighting chance in the medical marijuana marketplace. –SacBee

nowhere does prop. 19 exempt MMJ patients with regard to CULTIVATION. section 8 says that the city will have control over how much people are allowed to cultivate. that means the city would decide how much MMJ patients could grow (right now that amount is UNLIMITED). -Cannabis Culture

I gotta say your right on every one of those reasons. There is just one though that should be up there and that is if prop 19 is passed, citizens up north, our main crop growers, will be out of business and we will be turning northern california into a bunch of ghost towns. -Stop19.com

Next came the theme that the perceived benefits of Proposition 19 are really illusory--that is, that no tax revenue will come in, that the drug cartels will not go away, and that the number of people in prison will not be reduced. This theme could be classified as those people who directly respond to the main themes used by the measure's advocates. These commenters don't necessarily provide their own arguments as to why legalization is a bad idea, but merely argue that legalization will not have the anticipated benefits trumpeted by the opposition. The main arguments here are that 1) the price of marijuana will plummet once it is legal for everyone to grow their own, and so no tax dollars will be raised, 2) the drug cartels won't go out of business since most of their money is made on harder drugs and since they will enjoy a black market in the rest of the country anyway, and 3) people arrested for possession of marijuana almost never go to prison under current state law, contrary to what many legalization advocates claim.

Number: 25

Theme: Proposition 19 won't lead to those benefits expected by proponents.

> *If it is legalized, then the price would drop to almost nothing, and the cartels would lose this part of their drug business. The government would not be able to tax if much, since people would grow their own. Is there a flaw in this analysis? - Catholic Daily*

> *The problem is that this whole idea is predicated on the idea that legalization will magically make the illegal drug trade in weed go away. Who came up with that loony idea? Are the drug gangs who make tons of money suddenly going to just shrug their shoulders and walk away? Why would they do that? They make a boatload of money tax free. –Townhall*

This is true BABB. People with an agenda want to file thru court records and point out that "X" number of people are in jail because of simple pot possession, when in fact, other crimes they have committed have been plea bargained down to the least serious offense. –Townhall

Number of comments: 21

Theme: Legalization sets a bad example for children

Many commenters worried that legalization will be bad for children in general, since it will take the perceived stigma away from another "vice." This theme of protecting children was the sixth most common. Most of the time, comments under this theme reflected a concern for the well-being of children in general, and not one's own children. So in a way this is quite similar to theme No. 2, social harm. However some commenters expressed the more immediate concern of vulnerability of their own children to drugs. Both social and personal fears related to "the youth" are included in this theme.

We Americans value the youth, who are our nation's future. As reported by the National Institutes of Health, marijuana impairs memory, perception, ability to study and learn, judgment, coordination, causing car crashes, etc. Marijuana can be addictive, producing withdrawal symptoms such as insomnia, loss of appetite, restlessness, shaky hands, and of course a hunger for more marijuana. This is not what parents typically want for their offspring. –Politico

I certainly don't think smoking pot is a good example for your children/grands, and hard to believe it would be any more healthy than cigarettes, which we all know are bad for you. - A News Cafe
Raised Our Children To say NO TO DRUGS and These SORRY POLITICIANS Are TRYING TO LEGALIZE IT!!!!!!!!!!!!!! -Modesto Bee

*Alcohol is legal, as soon as kids gain a little independence from their parents what do they head for first? The easily obtained legal f***up. Why? Well why not? It's legal and therefore endorsed by society. That's the message legality has sent. -From Santa Barbara Daily Sound Pro Prop 19 Op/Ed.*

The theme of conflict with existing federal law was one of the most common themes cited by mainstream editorials, but among commenters it wasn't as common. Among the 20 comments analyzed that used this theme as their primary argument, most of them accepted at face value the argument that federal law trumps state law, arguing that passage of Proposition 19 is "impossible." Some commenters expressed fear that federal agents would harass Californians as a result of the bill's passage. Other commenters simply lamented what they saw as the weakening of ties that bind the union.

Number of comments: 20

Theme: Proposition 19 conflicts with Federal law.

> *PROPOSAL Prop 19 will cause chaos because it conflicts with the Federal Laws. It is also a socially irresponsible proposition. Repeal ALL MEDICAL MARIJUANA LAWS. - from the Ukiah Daily Journal*
>
> *Consider what happens when states have no inclination to participate in enforcement of other federal laws - like immigration laws, for instance...To me, at least, it represents not so much an assertion of a state's prerogatives as another weakening of the Union. -from Red State*
>
> *I still don't understand how CA can "legalize" marijuana when it's illegal under federal law. A state law can expand on a federal law, or legislate issues that aren't covered by federal law, but it is unconstitutional for a state law to oppose a federal law. Whether or not I think it's a good idea (I'm still fairly undecided), it just doesn't make any sense! -from the Redding Record*

Just as common as the federal conflict theme, was the theme that Proposition 19 will lead to more dangerous roads and society in general. While this theme refers almost entirely to arguments specific to the perceived danger toward motorists resulting from "stoned drivers," it also refers to some comments that express a general fear of increased

violent crime and other unnamed accidents or hazards that might endanger citizens. A major point of contention on the message boards and in the mainstream media articles was the difficulty in testing whether or not a driver has been using marijuana, which may make it difficult to enforce DUI laws. While increased danger in the workplace was another worry, I grouped these comments in with "Workplace Issues."

Number of comments: 20

Theme: Danger for motorists, public safety.

> *I just have one question: How much is too much? We have ways of measuring the alcohol in a person's system, but nothing put in place for pot. I really don't have a problem with pot personally, I just don't think I can support something that has no safeguards in place for potential problems that could arise (aka driving under the influence [of pot]). -From The Modesto Bee*
>
> *No deaths due to overdose, many deaths due to driving, flying or operating machinery while stoned. Please tell the truth. -From the Sacramento Bee*
>
> *Will Highway Patrol, Sheriff and Police Officers on patrol have a new device available to detect if a driver is under the influence of Mary Wanna? God help us non users/abusers and our loved ones if pot is legalized. -From the San Diego Tribune*

Next came the theme of greed and sinister profit motives of those who intend to benefit from Proposition 19. Many of the comments referring to this theme also used the theme that current medical marijuana laws are superior to Proposition 19, but there were sufficient comments that used "corporate greed" or the specter of "monopoly" on marijuana, that it warranted its own category. This theme may be unique in that it appears to be made independent of one's own attitude toward marijuana use. However, if one

carefully analyzes the entirety of these comments, it sometimes becomes apparent that they are written by supporters of Proposition 215.

Number of comments: 16

Theme: Corporate Greed

> *Im for the legalization of it but in the right way. This bill is on the ballot for one and only one reason- to make Richard Lee a billionaire. To get maijuana legal without all the BS that surrounds this bill it needs to take place at the federal level. California is to broke to deal with all the after effects of this bill. And again all for what? So you can walk around with an ounce. You are already allowed to do that. -Brand X*
>
> *I have followed the money trail and it ends with Rich Lee and the marijuana dispensaries. The math is very simple. The proposition is designed from the very start to bankrupt the Emerald Triangle counties as well as growers all over the state, and shift all of the profits to a new medical marijuana dispensary monopoly... -From Ukiah Daily Journal*
>
> *You are naïve. Read the front page article in The New York Times 10/5/10 about newspapers' new advertising cash cow: medical marijuana ads. No wonder the media has been so pro-drug all these years. -From Politico*

Protecting the standards of the "work place" in California was the second least common theme. Comments using this theme frequently worry that employers will have no way to fire intoxicated workers, or else that the law will conflict with federal drug-free workplace regulations. Some commenters pointed out that potential employers and industries may avoid California when looking to establish a new factory or location, as the quality of workers may decline with increased marijuana use. Other comments mentioned that workers intoxicated on marijuana may be a hazard to the safety of other workers.

Number of comments: 15

Theme: Prop 19 bad for Workplace.

> *Marijuana is not exactly "harmless". One of my co-workers smokes on his lunchbreak and is pretty much unproductive for the rest of the afternoon. Staring at the ceiling is not working. The workplace problems will only intensify if marijuana is legalized in CA., and employers DO have the right to not hire smokers (of anything). Insurance companies do not care to insure anyone with impairment issues. -From the Redding Record-Searchlight*
>
> *The dumbing down process is still hard at work, not the stoners, just the process. I suppose someone stoned working on a high rise will be just as proficient as a un stoned welder, get real! Dopes. -From the Redding Record-Searchlight*
>
> *Prop 215 passed, and we now have pot shops dispensing to potheads on very thin evidence of valid medical need. If Prop 19 passes, stoners are going to be messing up their work, enticing more employers to leave California. They will also be on the road in waves, all believing that they can manage their addiction and that they are not high. Welcome to hell. -From the LA Times*

The final theme that appeared was that Proposition is “not the right bill.” Comments using this theme usually indicated that the author supports legalization, but that for some reason Proposition 19 is not the best avenue to legalization. Comments using this theme are often similar to those using the “threat to medical marijuana” theme, but as opposed to those comments, comments under this theme agree that something more needs to be done to end marijuana prohibition. Most commenters who use this theme cite the unnecessary harshness of the “new” penalties it will create (such as making it a crime to use marijuana in the presence of a minor), or else they lament the increased “government control” that will come from taxation of cannabis.

Number of comments: 12

Theme: Legalization inevitable, but bill is flawed

What about all the prisoners that are locked up because of supposed marijuana crimes. At the very least these people should be freed if it goes legal why isn't this written into prop 19??????????????????? -Stop19.com

Excellent editorial. The editorial writers have actually read the initiative, and seen what a disaster it is. I have read the initiative as well - and it's clear to me that most people who talk about it have not read it. (I guess that would take too much work.) Please go and actually read the initiative. It's easy to find online, and it's only 10 pages long. The initiative is so badly written, and so legally flawed, that it would be a disaster for California. -From the LA Times

The $50 tax is ridiculous, period. It is WAY TOO HIGH. But worse than that, a tax should be on THC content, not plant material weight. Whoever though such a tax was good excise tax policy is an idiot. As a producing state, in the future should legality spread to other states CA could become a provider, just like wine, except that tax will make our product non competitive. A gallon of wine in CA is excise taxed at 0.20 per GALLON. That makes our wine competitive across the US. -From Cannabis Culture

Finally there were those comments that either did not refer to any of the themes above, or else didn't give a reason for their opposition to Proposition 19. Also, if a comment gave a clear opinion against Prop 19 but instead of a rationale, provided a link, then it was classified as unclear, since this study focuses on the comments and not any linked material from those comments.

Number: 11

Theme: Unclear (?)

VOTE NO ON 19 !!! Mr. Barr, You are a PINHEAD. -From A News Cafe
Saunders misses the mark because she does not consider why many Re-Legalization advocates are actually against this. Educate yourself by going here: http://www.newagecitizen.com/NoOnProp19.htm -SF Chronicle

To a non-pot smoker, how does passing of Prop 19 benefit you?

1. If you are a non-pot smoker, you won't go to jail. So passing Prop 19 will do nothing for you.
2. If the pot cartels are killing each other, as a non-pot smoker, that does NOT really affect you. So passing Prop 19 will do nothing for you. -From the LA Times

ANALYSIS OF USE OF THEMES:

Differences in distribution of themes across forms of media:

Mainstream newspaper articles versus Alternative media articles.

Although comments from mainstream newspaper articles outnumbered comments from alternative media articles in the purposive sample by a ratio of 170 to 127, we can still draw some preliminary conclusions based on some considerable differences in the prevalence of certain themes across the form of media.

Table 4.10: Distribution of themes used by anti-Proposition 19 reader comments, sorted by article form.

	Mainstream	Alternative	Total
Dislike Drug Users	34	21	55
Social Harm	16	22	38
Health Effects	21	13	34
Threats to Medical Marijuana	11	19	30
Refutation of Pro-19 Premises	8	17	25
Bad for Children	12	9	11
Federal Conflict	15	5	20
Public/Motorist Safety	19	1	20
Greed/Profits	9	7	16

Workplace Complications	13	2	15
Poorly Written Bill	5	7	12
Unknown	7	4	11
Total	170	127	297

Comments using the theme of danger for motorists, workplace dissolution, and federal conflict were far more prevalent in the mainstream message boards than in alternative message boards. Out of my convenience sample, mainstream comments of these themes outnumbered their alternative counterparts 19 to 1, 13 to 2, and 15 to 5, respectively.

In the alternative message boards, the themes of Proposition 215's superiority, as well as the refutation of anticipated benefits, were both considerably more common than in the mainstream message boards.

Pro-Proposition versus Anti-Proposition 19 Articles.

Again, although comments from Pro-Proposition 19 articles outnumbered comments from Anti-Proposition 19 articles in the purposive sample by a ratio of 177 to 120, we can draw some preliminary conclusions based on some noticeable differences in the prevalence of certain themes based on the stance of the article, or, that is-whether the comment agrees or disagrees with the article.

Table 4.11: Distribution of themes used by anti-Proposition 19 reader comments, sorted by article position.

	Pro-Prop 19	Anti-Prop 19	Total
Dislike Drug Users	24	31	55
Social Harm	27	11	38
Health Effects	27	7	34
Threats to Medical Marijuana	16	14	30
Refutation of Pro-19 Premises	18	7	25
Bad for Children	15	6	21
Federal Conflict	11	9	20
Public/Motorist Safety	13	7	20
Greed/Profits	4	12	16
Workplace Complications	12	3	15
Poorly Written Bill	4	8	12
Unknown	6	5	11
Total	177	120	297

When an op/ed article was in favor of Proposition 19, anti-Proposition 19 comments were far more likely to use the themes of "social harm," "unhealthiness of marijuana use," "refuting anticipated benefits," "bad example for children," and "bad for workplace" than when an op/ed article opposed Proposition 19. In other words, anti-Prop 19 comments were more likely to use these arguments when they disagreed with the article than when they agreed with the article.

When an op/ed article was against Proposition 19, and anti-Prop 19 commenters agreed with the article, they were more likely to use the themes of "dislike of marijuana-users," "greed," and "flawed bill."

Do themes of anti-Prop 19 comments use the same themes as mainstream anti-Prop 19 editorial board endorsements?

The most prevalent theme used by editorial boards to argue against Proposition 19, was that it would invite "legal chaos" (in the words of the San Francisco Chronicle) due to its proposed framework of local government control and taxation (instead of a unified state-level framework). The top five highest circulation daily newspapers in California all used this theme as their first argument against the bill. The Los Angeles Times warned that "In Los Angeles County alone it could mean 88 different sets of regulations." The San Jose Mercury news argued that "Hundreds of local marijuana ordinances would also confuse the inevitable federal challenges." However, the theme of "bad bill" cropped up sparingly in the purposive sample, and not once did one of the comments in the purposive sample mention the problem of local versus state control.

Since my purposive sample took only those articles with the highest number of anti-Proposition 19 comments, I also examined the primary themes in the five anti-Proposition 19 mainstream articles that I used for the purposive sample, and only one of them, from the Chico Enterprise-Record, used a theme other than "badly written bill" for

its primary argument (the Enterprise-Record used “bad for workplace” as its primary theme--a theme that was reflected by three of the 26 comments on that article).

COMMENTS DISTRIBUTION VS VOTER RESULTS (FOR RQ3):

After omitting the “unknown” category of message board comments, it could be calculated that 77 percent of reader comments were in favor of Proposition 19 (that is, of all those comments that indicated an opinion, 77 percent were pro-Prop 19). However, only 46 percent of the voting public gave their support to Proposition 19.

Table 4.12. Should California pass Proposition 19 to legalize marijuana? Distribution of opinion percentage points.

	YES	NO
California Voters (Nov 2, 2010)	46	54
Message Board Comments	77	23

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

The news fragmentation theory holds that the new media environment will have a tendency to hamper democratic debate by providing a diverse set of specialized media outlets. People are presumably less likely to discuss common social problems and understand each other in a fragmented society, much less agreeing on methods to solve them (Jae Kook). In theory, new fragmentation results in many niche news audiences that don't communicate with each other.

In this study I analyzed 2,767 reader comments that were posted on message boards of mainstream and alternative news articles giving an opinion on the 2010 California vote on Proposition 19 to legalize cannabis. I was interested in this data as a way to measure the effect of News Fragmentation on message boards pertaining to a controversial political issue. While the data sample used was not a representative sample of any given population, it is still a timely indication of public opinion of those people using internet news in two different forms (Rowe & Hawkes), and furthermore, provides information on the nature of public debate on the Internet that a survey could not (Tanner).

Many prominent alternative media sites published opinion pieces that contained lively message boards on Proposition 19, from the politically liberal Huffington Post (pro-19), to the politically conservative blog of the Heritage Foundation, *The Foundry*

(anti-19). The Google, Facebook, and Twitter searches also resulted in a colorful selection of smaller alternative media. Conceivably, any voter who was interested in learning about the measure would have come across these sites on any given day using these two popular web platforms. Anyone who wanted to read a variety of opinion or engage in debate on the internet could have come across these sites with just a few keystrokes and mouse clicks. The even split between mainstream and alternative may shed some light on agenda-setting theory, as it suggests that the issue was just as hotly debated in both forms of media.

There were many pro-Proposition 19 articles that appeared in the alternative press that weren't selected for analysis; as explained in the methodology I stopped gathering articles for analysis after I reached 25. Likewise there were many anti-Proposition 19 articles in the mainstream news that were excluded from the comments analysis. Almost every daily newspaper in California decided to oppose Proposition 19, and many of the anti-Proposition 19 articles selected can be attributed to newspaper editorial boards. But because some of the highest circulation newspapers waited until near the election day to publish their staff editorials, there are also columns and editorials by prominent public figures such as police chiefs and senators. In other words, there was a wealth of articles in two of the four categories, and moreover, the two categories were divided by their stance on Proposition 19. The mainstream news appeared more likely to publish anti-Prop 19 articles, whereas the alternative media were more likely to publish pro-Prop 19 articles. So it would seem there is some news fragmentation at work here, assuming that the

average reader of internet news, should he or she log on to mainstream media sites, would be more likely to come across anti-Prop 19 articles. If the average reader uses an alternative media site, he or she is more likely to come across a pro-Proposition 19 article. (However, I was not analyzing the actual articles, but rather the message boards that correspond to those articles.)

It was the opposite for the other two types of articles I gathered for analysis. In the alternative media, there were only 21 articles against Prop 19 that qualified for analysis. There might have been more, but many articles against Proposition 19 had no comments section, or else there were no comments posted to their message boards. In the mainstream media, there were only 20 articles in favor of Proposition 19 were identified for analysis. Most of these articles came from the largest circulation California newspapers.

RQ1: Are message boards consistent with the news fragmentation theory?

The results indicate that message boards on mainstream and alternative media sites are not consistent with news fragmentation theory. If news fragmentation were at work, one would expect that the "fragmented environment" (Baum & Groeling) of alternative media would result in more homogeneity of opinion on the message boards of those sites. Particularly, one would expect message board (reader comment) opinion on alternative media sites to reflect the opinion of the article more so than message boards on mainstream sites. Conversely, one would expect to see a greater balance of opinion

on the mainstream media sites, in accordance with their “consensus-building” role (McCombs).

However, the results do not support the hypothesis that the distribution of reader comments on alternative media sites are more likely to reflect the opinion of (agree with) the article. Comments in favor of Proposition 19 considerably outnumbered those comments against Proposition 19 in both articles in favor of the Proposition and in articles against the Proposition. Comments in favor of Proposition 19 also considerably outnumbered those comments against Proposition 19 in both mainstream and alternative media message boards.

This suggests that the tendency of commenters to reject what they have read (Heffernan) is not exhibited in this particular sample. This may be explained by another tendency of commenters; that of proponents of social change movements to use new forms of media, including social media, to advance their views (The Economist, 2010).

RQ2: Does the mainstream media influence the agenda of mainstream and alternative media message boards ?

The results of the qualitative analysis indicate that the mainstream media, as represented by daily newspaper editorial board endorsements, does not influence the themes used by message board comments. “What is the biggest problem with Proposition 19?” If we are to use the main themes of the editorial board endorsements as an indication as to how the mainstream media answers this agenda-setting question, then we

can conclude that the “poorly written bill”, conflict with federal authorities, and workplace complications are the main problems with Proposition 19. Since the top five daily news paper editorial boards agreed on their anti-Prop 19 stance, anti-19 reader comments were used to test whether the message boards use the same themes to address what the main problem is with Proposition 19. According to the thematic analysis of 297 message board comments, the three top problems, in order of prominence, are the undesirability of drug-users, social decay, and the health effects of marijuana. So it appears that the mainstream media do not influence the agenda of mainstream and alternative message boards.

Perhaps this is a reflection of the nature of web comments and their unedited condition. Those comments categorized under the theme of “dislike (undesirability) of drug users” were all comments that made no use of reason, but rather used name-calling and insults, and which would probably not be published as a “letter to the editor”. It would be interesting to do a future study to see how mainstream editorial board decisions seem to influence the use of themes by writers of letters to the editor. But as far as message boards go, those reader comments that take the same anti-legalization stance as the mainstream editorial boards tend to use much different themes to support their opinions.

RQ3: Are reader comments on online opinion articles regarding Proposition 19 an accurate reflection of public opinion?

Contrary to what Rowe & Hawkes speculated in their Bird Flu comments analysis, the reader comments of online opinion articles, at least on the issue of Proposition 19, are not an accurate reflection of public opinion. This may be due to the phenomenon mentioned above (The Economist) that proponents of social change are more likely to use new forms of technology to disseminate their messages. For example, The Economist (2010) found that Republicans in congress in 2010 were five times more likely to use Twitter than Democrats, due presumably to the fact that Republicans were the opposition party and lacked control over other mainstream information channels available to the presiding party (such as televised presidential addresses). It might be an interesting study to see how message board opinion distribution reflects actual public opinion on a variety of issues, such as health care reform, to see if one side of the debate appears to be using this form of technology more than the other. While this finding also casts doubt on the validity of message board comments as a representative sample of the population, the reader comments section can still give us valid insight into that population of people who use internet message boards.

POINTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Another finding from previous research that appears to be supported by the data is commenter tendency to use message boards to “shape collective memories” (Tanner), as evinced by the number personal stories shared in the comments. Although this was not a

focus of this study's methodology, it may deserve further research, as both Tanner's data and this study's data have to do with somewhat taboo, or controversial topics on a very subjective level that is typically not debated in the public sphere. In this way, a degree of anonymity provided by the message boards may be helpful in contributing to consensus-building. During the course of the public polling in the Proposition 19 debate, pollster Nate Silver, hearkening to the "Bradley Effect," coined the term "Broadus Effect" (named after rapper, celebrity cannabis user, and Proposition 19 supporter Snoop Dogg, a.k.a. Calvin Broadus) to provide a possible explanation as to why three automated telephone polls on Proposition 19 all reported greater support for the measure than live polls done by a human caller. Silver speculates that social desirability bias may result in people reporting that they favor traditional political arrangements when in reality they favor a more culturally-sensitive or taboo alternative (Silver, 2010).

If the Broadus effect is a reality, then the automated nature of online message boards may give voters a welcome opportunity to voice anonymous support, along with reasoned arguments, for controversial viewpoints. Especially on a matter such as cannabis legalization, where voicing support based on personal experience entails admitting to criminalized behavior, anonymous debate may be a powerful tool for social change. Even opponents of marijuana legalization gave accounts of their personal (usually past) relationship with the drug, which indicates that freedom to share controversial experiences can also benefit the opponents of controversial measures. For example:

> *Yeah...I've tried pot. In fact we used to party with the crap. I'm highly familiar with it and just may give you some insight. It doesn't make you see your late Uncle George in the lawn clippings but it does make your reaction time worth ****, you can't read so much as a newspaper article without help, you laugh at about anything, tunnel vision is common and a drive through the parking lot of your local Safeway feels like you're driving the entire California coast on a moped. Add to that you're dumber than a brick and that pretty much sums up that ****. –From Chico E-R*

A theme mentioned in some of the prior literature of reader comments analyses is the responsiveness of commenters in regards to the content of the article commented on. That is, it seems that a high percentage of commenters don't even address the points of the article in a thoughtful way, but rather spout their own preconceived opinions without any reference whatsoever to the articles. The category of "refutation of opposition's arguments" sheds some light on this.

LIMITATIONS

A key limitation I ran into early on when asking if a reader agrees or disagrees with an article, is that its difficult to claim that a commenter agrees with the author, because many commenters don't actually refer to the arguments made in the article, or to the author him/herself. And sometimes the commenters disagreed with the arguments of the author but nonetheless agreed with the proposition, and so I counted that as agreeing with the article, as it would seem that the article author and reader share the same overall attitude toward the question at hand. So, instead of classifying a comment as "agreeing

with article," I classified it as "favorable to Proposition 19." So if the opinion of the author and the commenter correspond on Proposition 19, then I assumed it was reasonable to count that as the reader agreeing with the article.

It was also a curious finding to see that many people who disagreed with Proposition 19 voiced vehement support for cannabis use and identified themselves as cannabis users. So, perhaps this is a special case where a reader's general worldview is actually quite similar to the author's but on this specific measure they are at odds. If the same author, with the same narrative and worldview, were to write on another topic it is likely that it would indeed reinforce the beliefs of the otherwise libertarian/cannabis-using reader.

Ad-hominem attacks also presented a problem while surveying the comments lists (for example, on Townhall.com.) In some posts, the same commenter would sometimes post several comments in a row—up to ten in a row in one case—however I counted each comment as an individual unit of data. Furthermore there were some cases of satirical comments, and particularly one satirical comment that appeared again and again on different message boards. This satirical comment derided Proposition 19 and linked to an apparently anti-Prop 19 website, but upon following the link, it became clear that the website was a "reefer madness" style satire of anti-marijuana activists. However, I chose to count the comment at face value, as if I were a casual reader of a message board who didn't investigate every link provided on the boards.

Finally, another limitation of my study is that I don't know how the commenters came across the Website (link from another blog, Google search, etc.). In the inquiry of news fragmentation or polarization, it would have been interesting to know how the commenters arrived at these Websites (did they arrive from another alternative news site that was devoted solely to the issue of cannabis legalization?) It's probably likely that many commenters didn't first arrive at these sites via a Google search of "Proposition 19," but this is how I selected them. I may have missed some articles with lively comments sections, but I am confident that my Google and Twitter searches netted me almost all of the articles on Proposition 19 with online comments.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

An interesting study would be to change the distinction of "mainstream versus alternative," and use a purely geographical spectrum. Since all of the mainstream articles selected for comments analysis came from a news outlet serving a specific locality, it would be interesting to use the same articles and then compare them with other mainstream articles that served a national audience, such as The New York Times and Wall Street Journal, and even international news sites of mainstream TV channels such as CNN international, which published an editorial by drug activist Evan Wood on Proposition 19 which garnered over 1,300 comments from all over the world (That article was not analyzed because it appeared after selection had been completed). There may be

some relationships based on the likelihood of a comment's political alignment versus the size of the audience which that news article selected for analysis is aiming toward.

I think the usefulness of content analyses of Internet news message boards is going to sharply increase very soon. "Comments analysis" may become a more commons phrase in the literature. With the advent of Facebook for Websites, which lets newspapers embed a single sign-on login for their users, one can use Facebook to log in instead of one's old newspaper password. This could increase the popularity of reader comments because anyone with a Facebook account will be able to post on a politics article that they read online, letting everybody know whether they agree or disagree. So there may be many more easily arranged studies based solely on Facebook comments that are in response to political news articles.

With the advent of Facebook's social plug-in available to news sites, as well as increasing concern regarding the anonymity of "Journalism 2.0," one must wonder if commenters will feel more responsible for their opinions in the future, which would presumably include their real first and last name. Most sites haven't adopted this Facebook application, but many have, and it's this author's opinion that more sites should, as it would open up the discussion to millions of people who are already on Facebook, and would require that those who participate attach their first and last name to the posts. Although decreasing level of anonymity may result in less free exchange of ideas on certain controversial topics such as legalization of marijuana, in the long run it

will require citizens on both sides of the debate to be more accountable for their arguments.

APPENDIX A – LIST OF NEWSPAPER SAMPLED

Table A.1: California daily newspapers, by circulation, from mondonewspapers.com.

Los Angeles Times	Los Angeles	616606	Tribune Publishing
San Jose Mercury News	San Jose	516701	MediaNews Group, Inc.
San Diego Union-Tribune	San Diego	249630	Platinum Equity
San Francisco Chronicle	San Francisco	241330	Hearst Corporation
Orange County Register	Santa Ana	236770	Freedom Communications, Inc.
Sacramento Bee	Sacramento	217545	The McClatchy Company
San Francisco Examiner	San Francisco	200000	Clarity Media Group
Fresno Bee	Fresno	126398	The McClatchy Company
Riverside Press-Enterprise	Riverside	122691	A. H. Belo Corporation
Los Angeles Daily News	Los Angeles	95938	MediaNews Group, Inc.
Torrance Daily Breeze	Torrance	80000	
Long Beach Press-Telegram	Long Beach	73148	MediaNews Group, Inc.
Ventura County Star	Ventura	70730	E.W. Scripps Company
North County Times	Escondido	70000	Lee Enterprises, Inc.
Santa Rosa Press Democrat	Santa Rosa	68022	The New York Times Company
Contra Costa Times	Walnut Creek	67464	MediaNews Group, Inc.
Modesto Bee	Modesto	65605	The McClatchy Company
Inland Valley Daily Bulletin	Ontario	54547	MediaNews Group, Inc
Oakland Tribune	Oakland	52459	MediaNews Group, Inc.
San Bernardino County Sun	San Bernardino	51954	MediaNews Group, Inc
Bakersfield Californian	Bakersfield	51000	Virginia Moorhouse
Palm Springs Desert Sun	Palm Springs	46856	Gannett Company, Inc
Stockton Record	Stockton	42488	Dow Jones Local Media Group
San Luis Obispo Tribune	San Luis Obispo	39627	The McClatchy Company
Marin Independent Journal	Novato	36205	MediaNews Group, Inc.
Tri-Valley Herald	Pleasanton	35436	MediaNews Group, Inc.
San Gabriel Valley Tribune	West Covina	33387	MediaNews Group, Inc.
Hayward Daily Review	Hayward	32574	MediaNews Group, Inc.
Record Searchlight	Redding	29000	E.W. Scripps Company

Victorville Daily Press Victorville 28565 Freedom Communications, Inc.
Chico Enterprise Record Chico 28500 MediaNews Group, Inc.
Fremont Argus Fremont 27631 MediaNews Group, Inc.
Santa Barbara News-Press Santa Barbara 27044 Ampersand Publishing, LLC
Pasadena Star News Pasadena 27041 MediaNews Group, Inc.
Monterey County Herald Monterey 26226 MediaNews Group, Inc.
Santa Cruz Sentinel Santa Cruz 25000 MediaNews Group, Inc.
San Mateo County Times San Mateo 24915 MediaNews Group, Inc
Costa Mesa Daily Pilot Costa Mesa 24600 Tribune Publishing
Antelope Valley Press Palmdale 21237 William C. Markham
Glendale News-Press Glendale 20000 Tribune Publishing
Eureka Times Standard Eureka 19800 MediaNews Group, Inc.
Visalia Times-Delta Visalia 19310 Gannett Company, Inc.
Santa Monica Daily Press Santa Monica 19000 Ross Furukawa
Palo Alto Daily News Palo Alto 18500 MediaNews Group, Inc.
Marysville Appeal-Democrat Marysville 18306 Freedom Communications, Inc
Santa Maria Times Santa Maria 18245 Lee Enterprises, Inc.
Salinas Californian Salinas 18000 Gannett Company, Inc.
Fairfield Daily Republic Fairfield 18000 McNaughton Newspapers
Vallejo Times Herald Vallejo 17744 MediaNews Group, Inc.
Vacaville Reporter Vacaville 17582 MediaNews Group, Inc.
Lodi News Sentinel Lodi 16553
Grass Valley Daily Union Grass Valley 15900 Swift Communications, Inc.
San Mateo Daily Journal San Mateo 14800
Merced Sun-Star Merced 14219 The McClatchy Company
Napa Valley Register Napa 14130 Lee Enterprises, Inc
Placerville Mountain Democrat Placerville 13200 McNaughton Newspapers
Whittier Daily News Whittier 13076 MediaNews Group, Inc.
Santa Clarita Valley Signal Santa Clarita 12500 Morris Communications
Hanford Sentinel Hanford 12400 Lee Enterprises, Inc.

APPENDIX B – TOTAL COMMENTS SAMPLED

QUANTITATIVE DATA: COMMENTS SAMPLED: TABLES 4.6-4.9; N=3,968

Table B.1: Mainstream, anti-Prop 19 articles

PUBLICATION	TOTAL COMMENTS	COMMENTS PRO	COMMENTS CON	COMMENTS UNCLEAR
Los Angeles Times	270	77	10	13
Sand Diego Union-Tribune	207	61	11	28
San Francisco Chronicle	54	36	7	11
Sacramento Bee	126	66	16	18
Fresno Bee	25	14	9	3
Los Angeles Daily News	46	38	7	1
Torrance Daily Breeze	14	11	3	0
Modesto Bee	25	23	1	0
Inland Valley Daily Bulletin	8	5	2	1
San Bernardino	77	57	11	9

County Sun				
Palm Springs Desert Sun	15	13	2	0
Stockton Record	3	3	0	0
Marin Independent Journal	3	4	0	0
San Gabriel Valley Tribune	69	48	11	10
Record Searchlight	51	35	8	8
Chico Enterprise Record	70	36	27	10
Santa Cruz Sentinel	128	73	10	17
Visalia Times-Delta	15	8	8	0
Grass Valley Daily Union	16	8	4	4
Santa Clarita Valley Signal	21	14	3	3
Santa Barbara	14	8	4	2

Daily Sound				
Ukiah Daily Journal	155	63	27	10
Lompoc Record	14	11	1	2

Table B.2: Alternative, anti-Prop 19 Articles

PUBLICATION	TOTAL COMMENTS	COMMENTS FOR	COMMENTS AGAINST	COMMENTS UNCLEAR
The Foundry (Heritage Foundation)	40	36	1	3
Brand X	24	18	5	1
Fox & Hounds Daily	17	16	1	0
Red State	39	14	10	15
Christwire	14	13	1	0
My Marijuana Meds	13	9	3	1
Science Becoming Religions (Personal Blog)	8	7	1	0
Rampage	6	6	0	0

Online (Student Paper)				
Opposing Views	8	6	0	2
Catholic Daily	13	4	12	0
La Prensa	6	4	2	0
The Cannabis News	3	3	0	0
Just Say No to 19	3	1	1	1
Thinking Outside the Blog	4	1	2	1
Probable Cause	1	1	2	0
Stop19.com	11	0	11	0
The Canny Bus	3	0	0	3
Daily Titan (Student Paper)	40	28	6	6
The Hive (Modesto Bee-Sponsored Blog)	24	16	5	3
CABPRO Report	1	1	0	0

The California Patriot	1	0	1	0

Table B.3: Mainstream, pro-Prop 19 articles

PUBLICATION	TOTAL COMMENTS	COMMENTS FOR	COMMENTS AGAINST	COMMENTS UNCLEAR
Los Angeles Times	80	59	9	11
San Jose Mercury News	15	12	3	1
San Diego Union-Tribune	115	54	38	8
San Francisco Chronicle	64	40	14	10
Orange County Register	10	60	0	4
Sacramento Bee	9	8	0	1
Ventura County Star	2	1	0	1
North County Times	4	4	0	0
Modesto Bee	99	69	21	9
Palm Springs	2	0	0	

Desert Sun				
Record Searchlight	65	36	9	20
Victorville Daily Press	2	1	0	1
Pasadena Star News	7	3	2	2
Vacaville Reporter	30	15	8	7
Santa Barbara Daily Sound	14	8	4	2
San Gabriel Valley Tribune	19	12	4	3
Morgan Hill	14	8	2	4
Salinas Californian	8	4	2	2
Vallejo Times Herald	83	43	18	22

Table B.4: Alternative, pro-Prop 19 articles

PUBLICATION	TOTAL COMMENTS	COMMENTS PRO	COMMENTS AGAINST	COMMENTS UNCLEAR
The Hill	145	97	1	2

Salon	492	66	4	30
Cannabis Culture	100	51	26	23
Townhall.com	552	34	37	29
Huffington Post	42	33	3	16
Politico	51	30	15	6
AlterNet	33	25	2	6
The Berkeley Blog	37	22	12	3
A News Cafe	19	15	7	10
Celeb Stoner	14	13	1	0
World News Vine	27	11	1	15
San Jose Buyer's Collective	11	8	2	1
Firedog Lake	23	7	3	12
Daily Kos	14	7	0	7
Independent Political Report	12	7	0	5
Santa Barbara Noozhawk	8	6	2	0

Bud’s Blog	4	4	0	2
Dig Magazine	4	3	1	0
Free Market Mojo	4	3	0	1
Sandiego.com	3	3	0	0
Technorati.com	9	2	1	6
Drug War Rant	9	2	0	6
Latino Politics Blog	4	2	3	0
Winds of Change	3	2	1	0
Real Clear Politics	3	1	1	1

APPENDIX C – MESSAGE BOARD/READER COMMENTS SOURCES

Table C.1: List of [Mainstream, anti-Prop 19] Comment sources.

Publication	Hyperlink
Los Angeles Times	http://discussions.latimes.com/20/lanews/la-ed-prop19-20100924/10
Santa Cruz Sentinel	http://www.topix.net/forum/source/santa-cruz-sentinel/TSMU05V21NCKCK0NE
Sacramento Bee	http://www.sacbee.com/2010/09/19/3038161/endorsements-2010-prop-19-deserves.html
Ukiah Daily Journal	http://www.ukiahdailyjournal.com/ci_16251457
San Diego Union-Tribune	http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/oct/18/vote-no-ganja-madness/
San Bernardino County Sun	http://www.sbsun.com/editorial/ci_16174958
San Gabriel Valley Tribune	http://www.sgvtribune.com/ci_16187455?IADID=Search-www.sgvtribune.com-www.sgvtribune.com
Los Angeles Daily News	http://www.topix.net/forum/source/los-angeles-daily-news/TT4KJOMBEE9BVIH3T
Chico Enterprise Record	http://www.chicoer.com/editorials/ci_16325850
San Francisco Chronicle	http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/09/16/ED3R1FE16O.DTL
Record Searchlight	http://www.redding.com/news/2010/oct/07/legalize-pot-maybe-but-not-via-prop-19/
Ventura County Star	http://www.vcstar.com/news/2010/sep/11/prop-19-risky-skips-key-details/
Modesto Bee	http://www.modbee.com/2010/09/26/1355681/just-say-no-to-legalizing-pot.html

Grass Valley Daily Union	http://www.theunion.com/article/20101001/NEWS/100939985&parentprofile=search
Fresno Bee	http://www.fresnobee.com/2010/09/20/2086251/editorial-vote-no-on-prop-19-the.html#storylink=misearch
Santa Clarita Valley Signal	http://www.the-signal.com/section/32/article/34397/
Palm Springs Desert Sun	http://www.mydesert.com/article/20100829/OPINION01/8290341/1004/opinion/Legalizing+pot++A+dopey+idea
Lompoc Record	http://www.lompocrecord.com/news/opinion/editorial/article_01f52392-cc55-11df-badb-001cc4c03286.html
Torrance Daily Breeze	http://www.dailybreeze.com/ci_16330637
San Jose Mercury News	http://forums.mercurynews.com/topic/mercury-news-editorial-no-on-proposition-19-legalizing-marijuanas-inevitable-but-is-wrong-way?source=article
Santa Barbara Daily Sound	http://www.thedailysound.com/results/100510ROT
Visalia Times-Delta	http://www.visaliatimesdelta.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=201010180314
Inland Valley Daily Bulletin	http://www.dailybulletin.com/editorial/ci_16174940
Marin Independent Journal	http://www.topix.net/forum/source/marin-independent-journal/TBCD03V1CO6TK39RA
Stockton Record	http://www.recordnet.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20101014/A_OPINION01/10140313

Table C.2: List of [Mainstream, pro-Prop 19] Comment sources.

Publication	Hyperlink
San Diego Union-Tribune	https://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/oct/03/prop-19-legalization-will-improve-public-safety/
Modesto Bee	http://www.modbee.com/2010/10/18/1389002/prop-19-would-send-the-marijuana.html
San Francisco Chronicle	http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/09/19/INUU1FDOLV.DTL

Los Angeles Times	http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/opinionla/la-oew-dershowitz-20100728,0,527914.story
Record Searchlight	http://www.redding.com/news/2010/sep/12/proposition-19-is-no-threat-to-workplace-safety/
Record Searchlight #2	http://www.redding.com/news/2010/oct/17/doug-bennett-cut-through-misinformation-prop-19/
Vacaville Reporter	http://www.thereporter.com/opinion/ci_16421640
Santa Barbara Daily Sound	http://www.thedailysound.com/results/100510ROT
San Gabriel Valley Tribune	http://www.sgvtribune.com/opinions/ci_16235799
San Jose Mercury News	http://www.mercurynews.com/ci_16034783
Pasadena Star News	http://www.pasadenastarnews.com/ci_16111324
San Jose Mercury News #2	http://forums.mercurynews.com/topic/opinion-critics-of-prop-19-on-marijuana-rely-on-fear-not-facts?source=article
OC Register (2nd Pro article)	http://www.ocregister.com/opinion/marijuana-270653-prop-prohibition.html
Sacramento Bee	http://www.sacbee.com/2010/09/19/3038170/its-time-to-dump-failed-marijuana.html
Orange County Register	http://www.ocregister.com/opinion/marijuana-268444-use-prop.html
Morgan Hill	http://www.morganhilltimes.com/opinion/268868-editorial-reasons-to-support-proposition-19-are-numerous-vote-yes
North County Times	http://www.nctimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/article_09b1a7d3-85d2-5d5d-9bec-8d780a82928d.html?mode=comments
Ventura County Star	http://www.vcstar.com/news/2010/aug/07/medias-coverage-of-report-spurs-reefer-madness/
Victorville Daily Press	http://www.vvdailypress.com/opinion/office-22389-drug-budget.html
Palm Springs Desert Sun	http://www.mydesert.com/article/20101022/COLUMNS26/10210389/Proposition-19-is-better-than-failing-drug-war-

Table C.3: List of [Alternative, anti-Prop 19] Comment sources.

The Hive	http://thehive.modbee.com/node/21644
Catholic Daily	http://calcatholic.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?id=affc9e77-d80e-47e6-a29a-524729ed972a
Stop19.com	http://stop19.com/ten-reasons-to-vote-no/
Daily Titan	http://www.dailytitan.com/2010/10/13/marijuana-package-mexican-drug-runners-dispensaries-and-medicinal-cards/
Red State	http://www.redstate.com/neil_stevens/2010/06/30/california-proposition-19-the-next-stand-for-federalism/

Brand X	http://www.thisisbrandx.com/2010/10/cover-story-no-on-19.html
My marijuana meds	http://www.mymarijuanameds.com/why-does-california-even-need-proposition-19-when-they-already-have-medical-marijuana-legal-there.php
La Prensa	http://laprensa-sandiego.org/editorial-and-commentary/commentary/proposition-19-is-flawed-and-takes-california-in-the-wrong-direction/
Probable Cause	http://www.rhdefense.com/blog/marijuana-law/stems-or-bud-proposition-19-again/
Thinking Outside the Blog	http://thinkingoutsidetheblog.blogspot.com/2010/10/too-stoned-to-see-through-marijuana.html
The Foundry - Heritage Foundation Blog (Right Wing)	http://blog.heritage.org/2010/10/08/scam-to-legalize-marijuana-going-up-in-smoke/
Fox & Hounds Daily	http://foxandhoundsdaily.com/blog/gary-toebben/7949-stuck-weed-no-prop-19
Christwire	http://christwire.org/2010/08/drug-deals-push-yes-to-proposition-19-to-legalize-dangerous-weeds-like-magic-mint/
Science Becoming Religion	http://www2.ljworld.com/weblogs/science-becoming-religion/2010/oct/23/californias-wacky-marijua/
Just Say no to 19	http://www.justsaynoto19.com/prop-19-facts-a-dealers-perspective/
CABPRO Report	http://cabproreport.typepad.com/weblog/2010/10/vote-no-on-proposition-19.html
The California Patriot	http://www.californiapatriot.org/magazine/2010/09/counter-point-proposition-19-does-more-harm-than-good/
Opposing views	http://www.opposingviews.com/i/marijuana-news-why-obama-is-right-on-calif-prop-19
Rampage online (student paper)	http://www.fresnocitycollegerampage.com/why-prop-19-1.1668458
The Canny Bus	http://thecannybus.org/the-devil-is-in-the-details/
The Cannibus News	http://www.cannabisnews.org/united-states-cannabis-news/proposition-19-has-too-many-flaws/

Table C.4: List of [Alternative, pro-Prop 19] Comment sources.

Townhall.com	http://townhall.com/columnists/DebraJSaunders/2010/09/19/end_prohibition;_yes_on_proposition_19
Cannabis Culture	http://www.cannabisculture.com/v2/content/2010/06/05/Why-You-Should-Vote-YES-California-Control-Tax-Cannabis-Initiative?page=1

Politico	http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1010/43544.html
The Berkeley Blog	http://blogs.berkeley.edu/2010/09/24/yes-on-california-proposition-19-legalize-marijuana/
A News Cafe	http://anewscafe.com/2010/10/13/prop-19-the-okie-from-muskogee-got-it-wrong/
Salon	http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2010/10/14/wars/index.html
Huffington Post	http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tim-lynch/pot-shots-at-prop-19-fall_b_769946.html
Firedog Lake	http://elections.firedoglake.com/2010/06/28/yes-on-prop-19-marijuana-legalization-gets-its-number-in-california/
Latino Politics Blog	http://latinopoliticsblog.com/2010/10/20/yes-on-prop-19-a-yes-vote-is-clear-particularly-for-groups-being-marginalized-by-current-policy/
Alter Net	http://www.alternet.org/story/148406/
San Jose Buyer's collective	http://sjcbc.org/2010/09/11/an-open-letter-on-prop-19/
Santa Barbara Noozhawk	http://www.noozhawk.com/opinions/article/100310_randy_alcorn_proposition_19/
The Hill	http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/lawmaker-news/116577-proposition-19-is-the-right-direction
Celeb Stoner	http://www.celebstoner.com/201008304765/blogs/tommy-chong/tommy-chong-for-prop-19.html
World News Vine	http://worldnewsvine.com/2010/10/vote-yes-on-being-less-hypocritical-proposition-19/
Dig Magazine	http://media.www.digmagonline.com/media/storage/paper1159/news/2010/10/04/Opinion/Puff-Puff.prop.19-3940631-page3.shtml
technorati.com	http://technorati.com/politics/article/californias-proposition-19-not-such-a/
Winds of Change	http://www.windsofchange.net/archives/proposition_19_smoke_two_joints_in_the_morning.html
Real Clear Politics	http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2010/09/19/end_prohibition_yes_on_proposition_19_107215-comments.html
Daily Kos	http://www.dailykos.com/story/2010/7/31/131640/803
Independent Political Report	http://www.independentpoliticalreport.com/2010/08/darryl-perry-californias-proposition-19-yes-we-cannabis/
Bud's blog	http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2010/10/20/18661813.php?show_comments=1#comments
Free Market Mojo	http://freemarketmojo.com/?p=13782
Sandiego.com	http://www.sandiego.com/opinion/arthur-salm-prop-19-and-ganja-madness
Drug War Rant	http://www.drugwarrant.com/2010/10/prop-19-continues-to-gather-steam-mothers-join-in-next/

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