

## Seeing What's There

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“One can squint and see ballot measures as a kind of super-survey of the electorate, with much larger samples and actual stakes,” wrote Sasha Issenberg over the weekend in *The Washington Post*. “The results then can be interpreted as a pure representation of voter preferences on discrete issues, without the vexing overlay of partisan polarization, incumbency, candidate personalities, scandal or gaffes.”\*

Which “can be seductive,” he warns in an essay entitled, “Ballot measures don’t tell us anything about what voters really want.”

*Nothing?*

Mr. Issenberg is willing to toss out these results because “ballot measure contests operate within a framework so different from elections for public office — with few financial limits”\*\* and “lopsided spending.”

He cites Florida’s Amendment 2, pushing the state’s minimum-wage up to \$15, where the yes-side spent

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nearly 10 times as much as the no-side. And California’s victorious Proposition 22, which he argues “declined to protect gig workers” even though that is exactly what it does, and where supporters also outspent opponents roughly ten to one.

Issenberg also points to marijuana-related issues



passing while widely outspending opponents. “In New Jersey, where more than two-thirds of voters said yes to legalization,” he explains, “supporters spent 65 times more than the leading opposition committee . . .”

But that only amounts to proponents spending half-a-million, which doesn’t go very far in Jersey.

While Issenberg, the author, journalist, and UCLA political science teacher, acknowledges that “a higher minimum wage and marijuana legalization are broadly popular” and don’t require greater spending, he argues that lopsided “multiples” of spending, like in New Jersey, “are unimaginable in the world of people running for office.”

*Really?*

Just try. Numerous candidates for office run without any opposition at all or completely token competition. Take Illinois’s 4th congressional district, where incumbent Democrat Jesús Garcia outspent his Republican challenger by a margin of 704 to one — \$593,219 to \$843.

Look at the ballot measures decided weeks ago. Don’t squint; put your glasses on, if you need them. And unlike Issenberg, believe your eyes.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.

\* Initiatives can suffer from the “personalities, scandal or gaffes” of their proponents. Still, there is clearly far less partisanship and no incumbent, per se.

\*\* Actually, ballot measures have no limits at all. The federal courts have ruled that campaign contributions *can* corrupt candidates receiving them, but since ballot initiatives are written down in black-and-white and cannot be changed after the election, financial contributions *cannot* corrupt a ballot measure.