



**55% “RULE OF THUMB” FOR BALLOT MEASURE CAMPAIGNS?**

For many years, a standard rule of thumb for ballot measure campaign managers has been – measures that don’t start off with at least 60% support in the initial pre-campaign benchmark poll, will most likely be defeated on Election Day. To put this rule to the test, we looked at some of our most recent statewide ballot measure campaigns (1998 to 2004) and compared the initial pre-campaign ballot measure polling results (using actual ballot language as it appeared on voters’ ballots) with the end results on Election Day.

Our summary, highlighted in the table below, reveals that seven out of eight measures starting with at least 55% passed on Election Day. As a result, we would suggest that perhaps this rule of thumb should instead be a “55% rule of thumb,” rather than a 60% rule. Though measures with lower support levels in early polls are not doomed to failure (as the table shows, a number of these measures also passed due to effective and well-funded campaigns), the most viable measures need at least 55% support initially.

One cautionary note, the 55% “rule of thumb” may not apply to measures that increase taxes. Only two of the measures we tested increased taxes. The tax increase that passed began with 65% support.

**55% “Rule of Thumb” for Ballot Measures**

<b>Year</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>MI Initial Pre-Campaign Poll Results (For-Against)</b>	<b>Election Results (For-Against)</b>	<b>Result</b>
1998	CA	Proposition 227	English language	76-17%	61-39%	PASS
2000	OR	Ballot Measure 5	Gun show background checks	66-25%	62-38%	PASS
2004	MT	I-149	Tobacco tax	65-33%	63-37%	PASS
2000	OR	Ballot Measure 4	Tobacco settlement funds	64-18%	45-55%	FAIL
1998	WA	Referendum 49	Transportation funding/car tax cuts	63-18%	57-43%	PASS
1998	WA	I-200	Affirmative action	60-32%	58-42%	PASS
1999	WA	I-695	Car tax cuts	58-30%	56-44%	PASS
2002	ID	Proposition 1	Indian gaming	55-34%	58-42%	PASS
1998	CA	Proposition 8	Education funding	54-22%	37-63%	FAIL
2004	CA	Proposition 68	Gaming	54-30%	16-84%	FAIL
2004	OR	Measure 35	Medical malpractice	52-39%	49-51%	FAIL
2000	WA	I-713	Trapping ban	51-30%	55-45%	PASS
1998	UT	Proposition 5	Wildlife laws	49-30%	56-44%	PASS
2002	WA	Referendum 51	Transportation funding	47-37%	38-62%	FAIL
2002	MT	I-145	Dams buy back	45-31%	32-68%	FAIL
2002	ID	Proposition 2	Term limits repeal	42-41%	50-50%	PASS
1998	OR	Measure 59	Paycheck protection	41-35%	49-51%	FAIL
1998	AK	Measure 9	Wolf snaring ban	40-50%	37-63%	FAIL
2004	MT	I-147	Mining	37-53%	42-58%	FAIL
2004	CA	Proposition 70	Gaming	36-43%	24-76%	FAIL
2004	OR	Measure 38	SAIF	35-41%	39-61%	FAIL
2000	AK	Ballot Measure 4	Tax cap	34-46%	29-71%	FAIL
Feb. 2004	OR	Measure 30	Income tax surcharge	33-48%	41-59%	FAIL
1998	MT	I-136	Regulation of guides/outfitters	30-49%	44-56%	FAIL
2000	OR	Ballot Measure 82	Gas tax	22-62%	12-88%	FAIL

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