



Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review 2012: An Analysis of Media Coverage

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CIRCLE was asked to conduct a media analysis of the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR) along with several other evaluation efforts for the Omidyar Network. This analysis sought to understand the extent to which the CIR influenced coverage of two separate ballot measures considered by Oregon voters in the 2012 November election.

Using Google's News Alert service from July 27, 2012 to November 28, 2012, CIRCLE captured 82 separate instances where "citizens' initiative review" was mentioned on the Internet. Publication dates for "news" items ranged from July 11, 2012 through November 28, 2012. Of the 82 items captured by the alert service, 10 items returned a search error or "item not found." A media log of items analyzed can be found at: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/ccc?key=0AmrdYqUcYRPYdG9SQUI1VG1wSWVmRVNhOUppQy1va3c>

While the results returned by Google News Alerts are not exhaustive, we do believe that the 72 items analyzed provide a valid representation of narratives and viewpoints related to reporting on the CIR in 2012. Prior research has shown this particular method for seeking content on the Internet to return results consistent with terms searched in a variety of search engines and near exhaustibility of related news items (Toft and Cunningham, 2007; Earl 2006; Jarboe, 2005). It should be noted that news outlets that do not publish their content online or that do not provide meta search terms or textual elements are not captured by this particular analysis.

Sources: Types and Geographical Reach

Fifty-three percent of the items reviewed were in news-oriented sources. Of these news items most (82%) were from primarily print publishers with smaller numbers coming from television (8%), radio (8%) and online-only (2%). Of print publications, *The Oregonian's* online service, *Oregon Live*, and the *Statesman Journal* each published eight items on the CIR. Both of these publications have a statewide readership of about 1.3M. *The Daily Astorian*, serving the Columbia-Pacific region of Oregon, published three items, followed by *The Portland Tribune* and *The Register-Guard* with two items each. The remaining print publications were split between small Oregon-based

publishers and publishers outside of the state.

Twenty-eight percent of items were organizational communications from entities engaged in the ballot initiatives undertaken by the CIR. Of these items, 85% were either from Healthy Democracy or the Citizens’ Initiative Review Commission (CIRC), the entities responsible for overseeing and implementing the CIR process. Many of the Healthy Democracy items were reprints or “press clipping” type items from other entities. One item (5%) was from Our Oregon, the sponsor of Measure 85, a measure that would redirect the corporate “kicker” tax to educational funds. Two items (10%) were from The Confederated Tribes of Grand Rhonde which were in opposition to Measures 82/32 that would allow for private casinos.

The remaining fourteen items (19%) were from individuals in academic or interested fields. Of these, half were related to political communications or deliberative democracy practices. Five items (36%) were in legal venues and two items (14%) were in publications related to business climate or industry and trade.

News	38	Organizational	20	Academic / In the Field	14
Print	31	Healthy Democracy	15	Delib.Dem/ Comm.	7
Television	3	CIRC	2	Law	5
Radio	3	Our Oregon	1	Business / Industry / Trade	2
Online-only	1	Confederated Tribes of Grand Rhonde	2		

In terms of geographical reach, it should be noted that all of these items exist on the web so the potential reach is global. However, the entities producing these communications have specific audiences to whom they are speaking. Two thirds of all of the items were distributed by entities within Oregon and of these, 43 or 90% were located in the three main urban centers of Portland, Eugene and Salem which are home to nearly a quarter of all Oregonians. The Eugene located items were primarily disseminated by Healthy Democracy with the others published by *The Register-Guard*. *The Oregonian / Oregon Live* is located in Portland and the *Statesman Journal* is in Salem.

Publications outside of Oregon were primarily located in California (7%) and Pennsylvania (10%). It should be noted that one of the CIR’s main evaluators, John Gastil, is located in Pennsylvania and most of the items disseminated in this location are related to him or his work in this area. The online items (6%) were primarily from those

in academic or practitioner fields and the one national item was in the *New York Times* (discussed below).

Oregon	48	Pennsylvania	7	California	5
Eugene	17	State College	4	Statewide	2
Portland	13	Bolling Spring	1	Los Angeles	1
Salam	13	Center Valley	1	Malibu	1
Astoria	3	Philadelphia	1	Southern CA	1
Albany	1				
Cannon Beach	1	Missouri	2	Ohio	1
Seaside	1	Columbia	1	Columbus	1
		St. Louis	1		
National	1			No Geography	4
New York	1			Online	4

Intent and Bias

Of the 72 items analyzed, 47% were informative in nature, providing straight description or details about the CIR process or the ballot measures under consideration. Another 43% were items either advocating or presenting arguments for or against the CIR process or the ballot measures. The remaining 10% of items were analysis, theoretical explorations, or hard to define.

Over half (51%) of the items had no particular tone or bias with most of the items in the descriptive or informational category sharing this feature. Of the 35 items that had a discernible tone or bias, 89% were clearly positive of either the CIR process or the particular ballot measure being discussed. The remaining 11% were negative or critical of the CIR process or in opposition to the ballot measure being discussed.

The majority of items that were either arguing or advocating had a detectable tone or bias. Of those items which were analytical or theoretical in nature, half had a positive tone or bias towards the CIR process in particular and half had no tone or bias.

Intent		Tone / Bias*	
Describe / Inform	34 (47%)	Neutral	37 (51%)
Advocate / Argue	31 (43%)	Positive	31 (43%)
Analyze / Theorize	6 (9%)	Negative	4 (6%)
Other	1 (1%)		

*The tone / bias in most cases relates to the CIR. However, in a couple of instance the item is primarily about one of the ballot measures and the tone / bias relates to the ballot measure.

Narrative Themes

A number of narrative themes resonated throughout the various media items. These ranged from descriptive and procedural in content to more theoretical and philosophical. What follows are the main narrative threads that were evident in the items analyzed.

The Ballot Measures

Almost every item referenced either one or both of the ballot measures being considered by the panels. The information shared ranged from short synopses of the measure(s) to full statements by the panels regarding the key findings about each measure in relation to reasons to support or oppose the measure. At times links to the text of the ballot measure would be provided. In general, these posts provided informative and descriptive information about the measure or measures. A very small number of the items were actually statements in support or opposition to one of the measures. However, many of the items analyzed focused on the CIR process or the theoretical underpinnings of the process as the main thrust of their coverage.

Describing the Process

The bulk of the descriptive or informational items concerned themselves with details on the CIR process and giving regular updates. Items of this type were published throughout the entire analysis period. These items would include things like meeting dates and locations of the CIR, composition of the panels, history of the CIR process, and a synopsis of the ballot measure or measures under review. Often these would include quotes from Healthy Democracy’s Executive Director Tyrone Reitman about the value or intent of the CIR. Additional links to information about the CIR or ballot measures were often included. An example of this type of communication can be found here:

<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/article/20120806/NEWS/308060020/Citizen-reviews-initiatives-questioned?odyssey=tab%7Ctopnews%7Ctext%7CNews>

Communicating the Results

Post CIR items included additional information on the findings of the panels with both pro and con statements along with greater details about key points related to the particular measure under review. In addition to quotes from Mr. Reitman, these posts would often include two to three additional quotes from panel members. These quotes often focused on the value of the process. Additional links to the Citizen Statements produced by the panels or CIR reports were often included. An example of this type of communication can be found here: <http://healthydemocracy.org/cir-panelists-release-key-findings-recommendations-on-measure-82/>

The Our Oregon Controversy

At the end of July 2012, the sponsor of Measure 85, Our Oregon, declined to participate in the Citizen Initiative Review process. Their announcement was made just prior to the convening of the Measure 85 CIR panel. The announcement was controversial in that Our Oregon indicated that they thought the CIR process would be a waste of time and effort on their part. Additionally, they stated that the pilot process in 2010 was not effective, referencing research conducted on that process. It also stated that the process was costly to taxpayers. This statement generated a number of editorials and commentary over the following two weeks. These mostly refuted Our Oregon's claims including the cost to taxpayers, clarified the research findings of the 2010 process or provided support for the CIR process.

In support of CIR

There were a number of repeating claims used to provide validity, credibility, and support to the CIR process and results. These claims were repeated in many posts throughout the entire CIR process and media analysis period. It is likely that many of these claims had their roots in organizational communications from Healthy Democracy. The key claims were:

1. CIR panel members are randomly chosen and representative of Oregon's registered voters in every way (i.e. gender, race, geography, political identification, educational attainment). Some of the items in the analysis provided great detail about the selection process for panel members.
2. The CIR process is free of coercion from moneyed interests. The CIRs are financially supported through private donations. No state funds go towards these

- efforts and no corporate or union dollars are accepted. This claim was particularly visible after the Our Oregon controversy.
3. The CIRs are about the public vetting important ballot measures to inform and engage citizens in a new way. They are not about ensuring voters vote with the majority stance on each measure. They are not an advocacy communication tool.
 4. This process is the first of its kind in the nation, and other states are here to observe.

Strengthening Democracy

Ideas of citizen engagement, increased deliberation, and democratic learning experiences were also seen throughout the various items. These were evident in the academic and practitioner oriented items. However, quotes from CIR panelists and a couple of more human-interest-oriented pieces also expressed these themes. These quotes are examples of this particular narrative thread:

We were asked to come with an open mind and to keep an open mind for the week, . . . It was like a jury: We weren't allowed to talk to the other people about the topic. – Susan Meyer

http://www.dailyastorian.com/news/local/cannon-beach-woman-has-a-new-respect-for-voters-pamphlet/article_79ffedaa-1ed2-11e2-82c8-0019bb2963f4.html

There are many successful public deliberation processes, and the Oregon CIR represents a newer kind that aims to use small group deliberation to inform the discretion of a mass public. . . . Those who work in political communication professionally are right to be concerned that processes like the CIR operate beyond their control. – John Gastil

<http://www.culturalcognition.net/blog/2012/8/12/cultural-cognition-and-the-oregon-citizens-initiative-review.html>

The process and mandate of panelists in citizen deliberative councils tend to make randomly selected people act much more responsibly as citizens while on the council. . . . This is one reason such panels tend to produce more thoughtful, wise recommendations than we usually find in the general public discourse on public issues — recommendations that, under the right circumstances, can then shift the opinions of voters.

http://ncdd.org/9473?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=citizen-deliberators-generate-well-considered-recommendations

Influence and Use

In addition to the thematic content of the media items themselves, the CIR process and the results of the panels were used by other entities to support or explain work in other realms. These instances came later in the analysis period after the CIRs were well under way or findings of the CIR panels had been communicated to the public.

In the Realm of Ideas

One set of uses of the CIR looked at theories or concepts around political communication or deliberative dialogue. In these instances, the CIR was used as an example to support the theory or concept being detailed.

For instance, the most visible piece throughout the period was one in the *New York Times* that looked at the ways in which political decisions are made and the power of emotional content and storytelling over rational, decision-making. The CIR is referenced as a communication and decision process that attempts to circumvent the effects of emotional political communications through deliberation and careful consideration of opposing points of view. The CIR project's evaluator, John Gastil, is referenced as an expert within the context of this article which can be found here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/magazine/the-mind-of-a-flip-flopper.html> .

A similar piece by Ryan Richards on the blog *Making Lasting Change* also talks about the theoretical implications of the CIR's deliberative process and the ways in which it could advance democratic processes. This piece is found here:

<http://makinglastingchange.com/tag/citizens-initiative-review/>

Exemplar for Others

CIR was also used during the analysis period as an example or model for others. In particular, the items published from California made particular pleas that the CIR process in Oregon be considered for the ballot initiative process in California. This quote from Pete Peterson at *Fox & Hounds* captures this sentiment well:

Could something like this work in California? Possibly. I know folks from the Secretary of State's office are interested. Some might question, "how could a state the size of California possibly turn the responsibility for something like this over to a group of 24 citizens?" But we entrusted 14 Californians in the Citizens' Redistricting Commission with actually redrawing our state and congressional district lines; the "product" of the CIR is only (though importantly) meant to inform voters who are making their final decisions.-

<http://www.foxandhoundsdaily.com/2012/08/greetings-from-portlandwishin-were-here/>

And in a direct nod to the CIR process in Oregon, an undergraduate communications class at the University of Missouri ran a deliberation process on one of Missouri's ballot initiatives. They directly attribute their efforts to Oregon's CIR:

The panel and comprehensive examination of the ballot measure was part of an academic learning exercise in an Argumentation and Advocacy course in Mizzou's Department of Communication and was modeled after the Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR) process in Oregon. The purpose of the CIR is to publicly

evaluate ballot measures so voters have easy access to clear, useful, and trustworthy information at election time. - <http://interact.stltoday.com/pr/local-news/PR103112114810894>

Their final report mirrors almost exactly those of the Organ CIR panels' reports on Measures 85 and 82.

Communication Strategy within Ballot Process

One of the most interesting uses of the CIR was as a communication strategy within the Oregon ballot process itself. Clearly, Our Oregon early on positioned its sponsorship and advocacy work related to Measure 85 in opposition to the efforts of the Healthy Democracy and the Citizens' Initiative Review Commission to engage citizens in a deliberative process. It is not clear if Our Oregon thought that their advocacy communication efforts and arguments related to the measure would fail under tougher scrutiny. Ironically, the majority of panel members reviewing Measure 85 voted to support the Our Oregon backed effort. If the CIR process takes hold and gains greater visibility, it is possible that future measures might be more strongly crafted and presented by their sponsors and the arguments by supporters and opposition more reasoned.

Additionally, the panel findings and results were used by those supporting and opposing ballot measures. In this regard, the CIR became another data point and interest used in standard political advocacy communication. A piece published by *The Confederated Tribes of Grand Rhonde* referenced the majority stance of the CIR in opposition to Measure 82 which would allow for private casinos. Standing in opposition to the measure, The Confederated Tribes positioned the CIR and its panel findings as part of its position argument. In a slightly more nuanced item, the Editorial Board of *The Oregonian / Oregon Live* encouraged voters to vote "No" on Measure 85. They too used elements of the CIR citizen statement and findings to support their position. What is interesting in this instance is that the majority of the CIR panel reviewing Measure 85 was in support of the measure with a vote of 19 to 5. But because the minority position is also articulated and several key findings in support of the minority opinion are detailed, the CIR report created space or room for advocates to use elements within the CIR statements for their own purposes.

These last two instances open up new questions to explore regarding deliberative processes such as the Citizens' Initiative Review in Oregon. Do the deliberative and reasoning effects experienced by panel members translate to the larger voting public? Does having access the citizen statements, key findings, and opposition / support statement mean that voters are more reasoned in their decision making or do they simply pick and choose the facts to suit their own position? Results from John Gastil and his evaluation team on the most resent Oregon CIR efforts suggest voters do indeed use the citizen statements as part their electoral decision processes and that these process seek information and understanding.

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