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Will ballot questions, money matters

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By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF MARCH 25, 2015

Statewide ballot questions, like the one being proposed on whether Boston should host the 2024 Olympics, have historically swung in favor of whichever answer — yes or no — had more money behind it.

However, outspending the opposition has not always meant victory.

Of the 31 statewide ballot measures since 1998, eight have resulted in wins for the side that spent less money, state campaign finance and





LANE TURNER / GLOBE STAFF

Boston 2024 Chairman John Fish is pushing for a statewide referendum on the Boston Olympics.

election records show.

And even heavily outspending is no guarantee of success.

On two different ballot questions during the 2006 election, not a single penny was spent officially advocating for the side that a majority of voters ultimately chose, according to state records.

Those questions, which both failed, were: Question 2, which called for allowing candidates for public office to be nominated by multiple political parties and to have their names appear on the ballot once per nomination; and Question 3, which called for allowing providers of home-based child care providers who give state-subsidized care to unionize.

Just this past fall, voters favored “Yes” on Question 1, eliminating a requirement that the state gasoline tax be adjusted each year based on changes to the Consumer Price Index. That victory came even though records show that more than \$2.7 million, or about 97.7 percent of all spending on Question 1, went toward opposing the measure.

Still, in most cases, voters have sided with the biggest spenders. Twenty of the 31 ballot questions since 1998 have resulted in victories for the choice with the greater financial backing, according to state records.

In some cases, substantial differences in spending have coincided with dramatic shifts in voter sentiment.

In 2012, Question 2, which would have let terminally ill people obtain a prescription drug to end their lives, fell short of passing by 2 points. But just a month earlier, polls suggested about two-thirds of voters supported the measure. Opponents of the question spent \$5.6 million, while supporters spent \$1.9 million, records show.

There is no limit on how much any person or organization can give for or against ballot questions.

How spending compares with results on statewide ballot questions

On most questions put before Massachusetts voters since 1998, the side that spent the most has won

Year	Ballot question	Adopted	Yes supporters spent	No supporters spent	Top spender won
2014	Eliminating gas tax indexing	Y	\$69,696	\$2,950,909	N
2014	Expanding the beverage container deposit law	N	\$1,591,538	\$9,536,205	Y
2014	Expanding prohibitions on gaming	N	\$854,820	\$15,087,434	Y
2014	Earned sick time for employees	Y	\$2,002,402	\$56,542	Y
2012	Availability of motor vehicle repair information	Y	\$2,379,490	\$442,450	Y
2012	Prescribing medication to end life	N	\$1,909,423	\$5,626,597	Y
2012	Medical use of marijuana	Y	\$1,287,493	\$41,353	Y
2010	Sales tax on alcoholic beverages	Y	\$3,180,203	\$253,600	Y
2010	Comprehensive permits for low- or moderate-income housing	N	\$367,096	\$1,254,713	Y
2010	Sales and use tax rates	N	\$285,005	\$4,888,894	Y
2008	Repeal state personal income tax	N	\$572,465	\$7,578,652	Y
2008	Make marijuana possession civil, not criminal, offense	Y	\$1,576,836	\$80,671	Y
2008	Ban dog racing	Y	\$1,354,817	\$679,582	Y
2006	Sale of wine by food stores	N	\$7,856,065	\$5,345,615	N
2006	Nomination of candidates for public office	N	\$542,830	\$0	N
2006	Family child care providers	N	\$1,866,750	\$0	N
2002	Eliminating state personal income tax	N	\$535,507	\$4,600	N
2002	English language education in public schools	Y	\$446,566	\$645,018	N
2002	Taxpayer funding for political campaigns	N	\$103,059	\$678,002	Y
2000	Earlier redistricting for state legislators and governor's councillors	Y	\$0	\$0	N/A
2000	Voting by incarcerated felons	Y	\$0	\$0	N/A
2000	Dog racing	N	\$956,167	\$2,026,874	Y
2000	Income tax rate reduction	Y	\$1,381,065	\$3,521,222	N
2000	Health insurance and health care	N	\$469,057	\$5,320,928	Y

2000	Tax credit for tolls and motor vehicle excise taxes	N	\$288,228	\$3,538,135	Y
2000	Tax deduction for charitable contributions	Y	\$470,772	\$0	Y
2000	Drug-dependency treatment and drug-crime fines and forfeitures	N	\$1,685,866	\$38,216	N
1998	Setting compensation of state legislators	Y	\$0	\$0	N/A
1998	Public campaign financing	Y	\$1,325,542	\$65,842	Y
1998	Tax rate on interest and dividend income	Y	\$490,630	\$0	Y
1998	Electric utility industry restructuring	Y	\$8,741,652	\$287,346	Y

DATA: Secretary of the Commonwealth, state Office of Campaign & Political Finance

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Money spent per vote on statewide ballot questions

A look at how ballot question support and opposition spending compared with actual votes

Year	Ballot question	Adopted	Yes spending per vote	No spending per vote
2014	Eliminating gas tax indexing	Y	\$0.06	\$3.04
2014	Expanding the beverage container deposit law	N	\$2.82	\$6.11
2014	Expanding prohibitions on gaming	N	\$1.01	\$11.87
2014	Earned sick time for employees	Y	\$1.59	\$0.07
2012	Availability of motor vehicle repair information	Y	\$1.01	\$1.13
2012	Prescribing medication to end life	N	\$1.30	\$3.67
2012	Medical use of marijuana	Y	\$0.67	\$0.04
2010	Sales tax on alcoholic beverages	Y	\$2.77	\$0.24
2010	Comprehensive permits for low- or moderate-income housing	N	\$0.41	\$1.00
2010	Sales and use tax rates	N	\$0.29	\$3.84
2008	Repeal state personal income tax	N	\$0.63	\$3.66
2008	Make marijuana possession civil, not criminal, offense	Y	\$0.81	\$0.08
2008	Ban dog racing	Y	\$0.81	\$0.52
2006	Sale of wine by food stores	N	\$8.56	\$4.51
2006	Nomination of candidates for public office	N	\$0.79	\$0.00
2006	Family child care providers	N	\$1.96	\$0.00
2002	Eliminating state personal income tax	N	\$0.60	\$0.00
2002	English language education in public schools	Y	\$0.33	\$1.01
2002	Taxpayer funding for political campaigns	N	\$0.20	\$0.46
2000	Earlier redistricting for state legislators and governor's	Y	\$0.00	\$0.00

councillors

2000	Voting by incarcerated felons	Y	\$0.00	\$0.00
2000	Dog racing	N	\$0.75	\$1.53
2000	Income tax rate reduction	Y	\$0.90	\$3.34
2000	Health insurance and health care	N	\$0.38	\$4.01
2000	Tax credit for tolls and motor vehicle excise taxes	N	\$0.26	\$2.39
2000	Tax deduction for charitable contributions	Y	\$0.26	\$0.00
2000	Drug-dependency treatment and drug-crime fines and forfeitures	N	\$1.39	\$0.03
1998	Setting compensation of state legislators	Y	\$0.00	\$0.00
1998	Public campaign financing	Y	\$1.17	\$0.12
1998	Tax rate on interest and dividend income	Y	\$0.35	\$0.00
1998	Electric utility industry restructuring	Y	\$6.98	\$0.56

DATA: Secretary of the Commonwealth, state Office of Campaign & Political Finance

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