

 <p>Political Psychology Research, Inc. William A. McConochie, Ph.D. 71 E. 15th Ave. Eugene, Or. 97401 Ph 541-686-9934 Fax 485-5702 Bill@Testmasterinc.com</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Research Report: Studies of desired government services at the local and national levels, 11 politically related traits, interest in current political parties and interest in a possible new political party. Implications for rapport between government and citizens.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">William A. McConochie, PhD. Dec 4, 2006; Feb 17, 2007</p>
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Abstract: 11 politically relevant psychological traits are measured, as are preferences for specific government services and interests in current political parties and a hypothetical new party. Prior findings are confirmed. Interest in government services and a new political party are found to reflect pro-social attitudes. Suggestions for applying findings in politics are offered.

Introduction: The author has been studying the psychology of political issues since the spring of 2003, developing measures of many traits and exploring the relationships between them. The findings are written up in four publications (McConochie, 2006a,b,c and d). These studies have led to the present ones, which include a 100-item traits questionnaire and a 69-item government service preferences questionnaire. The content of these questionnaires is designed to explore three issues:

1. A replication of the major prior findings as a pilot study that will eventually be done on a random sample of Americans.
2. An exploration of what specific services citizens want from government, rank ordered.
3. An exploration of how pleased citizens are with current political parties, or a new one, and how they would want a new party to hold meetings.
4. An exploration of the relationships between the traits and other data measured by the two questionnaires.
5. A discussion of implications of findings for current relationships between government agencies and voters, as in seeking funding for road maintenance and public safety programs.

While the sample sizes of the present studies are not random or particularly large, they provide enough interesting data to be clearly suggestive of how larger random samples could provide data of considerable relevance and value to government planners, particularly in terms of taxation for funding government services and how tax revenues should be allocated.

Method: The questionnaires and machine-scored answer sheets were administered to 11 churchgoers and up to 60 community college students in Eugene, Oregon. The churchgoers only completed the government service preferences questionnaire. Most of the students completed both of the questionnaires for extra credit in psychology classes taught by a professional colleague of the author. All participants received written feedback appropriate to their specific participation. The questionnaires presented all issues with brief written introductions and items in Likert scale format with 5 levels of response ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Results:

Traits Questionnaire Results:

Basic Data: The traits questionnaire provided reliable measures of the 11 traits measured, with data as in Table I. The last column is the percentage of persons in the sample with mean item scores equal to or greater than 3.5. These are considered to be persons who endorse the trait or issue measured.

Table I. Basic Data for 11 Traits.

Trait	No. of items	Sample Size (N)	Mean item score	Standard Deviation	Alpha reliability	% => 3.5 (endorsers)
1. U.S. should get out of Iraq	3	52	3.56	1.02	.75	58
2. Endorse public democracy	5	52	4.12	.79	.79	83
3. Endorse citizen participation in government	6	51	3.25	.59	.76	53
4. Endorse kind, positive foreign policy	4	52	3.78	.70	.71	75
5. Endorse environmental protection	4	52	4.32	.66	.86	92
6. Religious fundamentalism	14	52	2.83	.76	.88	21
7. Kindly religious beliefs	15	52	4.15	.53	.86	92
8. Religiosity/religiousness	4	52	2.85	1.30	.86	33
9. Value religion comprehensively	6	51	2.69	1.31	.96	28
10. Endorse human rights	16	52	4.23	.43	.86	98
11. Endorse warmongering	10	52	2.20	.74	.86	2
7 Pro-social traits.*	7	51	3.91	.47	.56	84

4 Anti-social traits.*	4	51	2.63	.89	.86	14
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* See discussion, p. 4, below. These scores are based on 7 and 4 trait scores respectively, each made up of several items.

The traits in Table I are relatively self-explanatory regarding content, with the following exceptions. Public democracy is government serving the best interests of the community overall as opposed to special interest groups. Citizen participation in government refers to more active, direct participation of citizens in specific government policy formation, such as how budgets are allocated. Religious fundamentalism is a belief orientation characterized by literal interpretation of scriptures, submission to political and religious authority, strong preference for one=s in-group and prejudice against out groups. Kindly religious beliefs are the other major belief system represented among major world religions and characterized by love, kindness, helpfulness and tolerance for persons and groups different from one=s own, and eschewing violence and cruelty. Religiousness is engaging regularly in formal religious activities. Valuing religion comprehensively is using one=s religion for comprehensive guidance in understanding the world, one=s place in it and how to manage personal emotions and problems of all sorts. Warmongering is endorsing the development and use of military might to dominate other nations.

For the Pro-social 7 measure the modest reliability of .56 is probably due to the small standard deviation for this measure, as 84 percent of persons fall at the upper end of the range of scores for this trait.

The data in Table I is roughly commensurate with data from many other studies by the author of hundreds of subjects, with a few exceptions. The most notable exceptions are that in larger samples religious fundamentalism is found in only about 6 percent of the public and warmongering is endorsed also by about 6 percent.

Relationships between traits:

The relationships between the 11 traits are presented in Table II.

Table II. Pearson Product Moment Correlations between Eleven Traits. N = 51-52. * = significant at .05 level; ** at .01 or better.

Trait	1. Out Iraq	2. Pub Dem	3 Cit partic.	4 For. polic.	5 Envir	6 Rel Fun	7 K. Rel.	8 Rel=osity	9 Val relig	10 Hum Rts
1 Out	1.00									
2 Pub	.27	1.00								
3 Cit	.24	.51**	1.00							
4. For	.41**	.41**	.42**	1.00						
5 Env	.32*	.48**	.50**	.58**	1.00					
6 Rfun	-.36**	-.20	-.24	-.58**	-.53**	1.00				
7 K rel	.04	.55**	.32*	.26	.46**	-.03	1.00			
8 R=sity	-.31*	-.20	-.20	-.51**	-.44**	.88**	-.01	1.00		
9 Val relig	-.34*	-.29*	-.35*	-.63**	-.51**	.79**	-.03	.87**	1.00	
10 Hum rts	.28*	.33*	.26	.61**	.56**	-.37**	.54**	-.25	-.30*	1.00
11 Warm	-.47**	-.42**	-.32*	-.48**	-.42**	.40**	-.25	.34*	.47**	-.50**

The correlation data in Table II also is consistent with data from other studies. The data show a pro-social cluster of traits (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10) and an anti-social cluster (6, 8, 9 and 11).

The 7 pro-social traits tend to be negatively related to warmongering and positively related to each other. For example, Human Rights Endorsement is negatively related to Warmongering, Religious Fundamentalism and Valuing Religion Comprehensively but positively related to Getting Out of Iraq, Endorsement of Public Democracy, Endorsement of Positive Foreign Policy, and Endorsement of Environmental Protection.

The 4 anti-social traits cluster together. Warmongering is positively associated with Religious Fundamentalism, Religiosity, and Valuing Religion Comprehensively. It is negatively related to Getting Out of Iraq, Endorsement of Public Democracy, Citizen Participation in Government, a Positive Foreign Policy, and Endorsements of Environmental Protection and Human Rights.

A total pro-social score was created by combining the seven pro-social traits. A total anti-social score was created by combining the four anti-social traits. The basic data for these the pro-social and anti-social traits as clusters is presented in Table I, last two rows.

Table III presents correlations between these scores and warmongering and two questionnaire items asking whether people should cooperate or compete as a general rule.

Table III. Relationships between Pro-social and Anti-social measures and other scores. N = 52.

Trait	Pro-social cluster	Antisocial cluster	Cooperate	Compete
Pro-social cluster	1.00			
Anti-social cluster	-.57**	1.00		
Cooperate	.56**	-.30*	1.00	
Compete	-.64**	.29*	-.31*	1.00
Warmongering	-.60**	.57**	-.37**	.55**

In Table III, first column, we see pro-social traits positively related to cooperating (.56) and negatively related to competing (-.64) and warmongering (-.60). Conversely, as expected, antisocial traits are positively related to competing (.29) and warmongering (.57) and negatively related to cooperating (-.30).

The proportion of persons falling in the pro-social and anti-social groups was calculated by computing the frequencies of persons with mean item scores of 3.5 or above on the mean item scores for the pro-social total and anti-social total scores. 84% of these 52 subjects fall in the pro-social category; 14% fall in the anti-social category. In studies by the author of many larger samples using a variety of similar measures, the overall parallel calculations were about 92% pro-social and 8% anti-social. (McConochie, 2006 a, p. 187).

The last nine items in the 100-item questionnaire asked how strongly persons endorse various political party issues. This section is presented below, with the percentage of persons who marked the item 4 or 5, indicating endorsement of the item. First, consider items 92-95.

Questionnaire Data on Political Party Endorsements.

APlease indicate how strongly you would support the political interests of each of the following types of political parties:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all.	A little.	Some.	Much.	Very much.
	(% endorsing)				
3.8	92 One that represents primarily the interests of business managers, owners and stockholders.				
59.6	93. One that represents primarily the interests of unions, laborers, the elderly, children and the needy.				
46.2	94. One that represents primarily the interests of protecting the environment.				
75.0	95. One the represents no particular special interests groups but rather the best interests of the community overall, including future generations.@				

These endorsement proportions are roughly similar to ones obtained in other studies by the author with larger samples, though as many as 90% have endorsed item 95 in other studies.

Questionnaire items 96-100 are preceded with a description of a hypothetical new political party of a sort representing the best interests of the community overall:

AAssume there was a new political party dedicated to creating government that serves the best interests of the community overall (item 95) and that it had a chapter in your town that met regularly. Assume that it:

- 1. Determined what the people in your community want from government by regular polls of your community.**
- 2. Developed reasonable policies and programs by which government could deliver what the people want,**
- 3. Promoted their own candidates for office who would strive to realize these policies and programs in government,**
- 4. Paid all their candidate campaign expenses only out of chapter member dues (no special interest group money allowed),**
- 5. Had interesting monthly meetings for chapter members during which political issues were discussed by a guest lecturer, food was served and members were thanked publically for their contributions,**
- 6. Had meaningful activities for all chapter members, such as holding office, heading committees, studying needed public services, conducting polls of the public and of the chapter members, and working on community service projects.**

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with these statements about such a new party :

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

(% Endorsement)

- 63.5 96. I would be interested in learning more about this party and attending a meeting to check it out.
- 28.9 97. If I liked it, I would be willing to pay annual dues of \$200 to belong to the chapter and support its activities and candidates for office.
- 19.2 98. I would probably want to serve on one or another of its committees or service projects.
- 48.1 99. I have thoughts and concerns about government that I would want such a party to address.
- 19.2 100. I already know about a political party that I belong to and feel a meaningful part of. @

The endorsement level of item 96 is encouraging. The response to item 97 is not, but most of these respondents are students who may not have much money. The majority of older churchgoers in another study were comfortable with this item. The endorsement level of item 98 is perhaps what one would expect, as in most organizations a minority of members do the committee work. The endorsement level in item 99 also is as might be expected, considering that 64% of these respondents are interested enough to attend a meeting to check out the new party (item 96). The low endorsement to item 100 is consistent with the relatively low level of endorsement of the focus of current U.S. political parties (serving special interest groups) compared to a new hypothetical party representing the best interests of the community overall, as reflected in items 92-95, above.

Correlations between items 95 and 96 and the 11 traits measured earlier in the questionnaire reveal the basically pro-social disposition of persons who are interested in a new focus in politics. These are presented in Table IV.

Table IV. Correlations between politically relevant traits and interest in a new type of political party representing the best interests of the community overall. * = .05, ** = .01 or better.

Trait	95. Interest in best interests of the community overall party	96. Interest in attending a best interests party meeting
1. U.S. should get out of Iraq	.21	.13
2. Endorsement of public democracy	.17	.36**
3. Endorsement of citizen participation in government	.31*	.44**
4. Endorsement of a kind, positive foreign policy	.27	.44**
5. Endorse environmental protection	.09	.23
6. Religious fundamentalism	-.14	-.44**
7. Kindly religious beliefs	.22	.16
8. Religiosity/religiousness	-.07	-.27
9. Value religion comprehensively	-.18	-.34**
10. Endorse human rights	.32*	.36**
11. Endorse warmongering	-.24	-.32*
Pro-social 7 traits total	.32*	.42**
Anti-social 4 traits total	-.19	-.39**

Thus, we see a general tendency for the previously identified pro-social traits to correlate positively with endorsement of this new hypothetical political party representing the best interests of the community overall. Conversely, the four anti-social traits correlate negatively with the new party model. These correlations are reflected also in the restatement of them as represented by the Pro-social 7 traits score and the Anti-social 4 traits score, last two rows. Thus, the idea of public democracy representing the best interests of the community overall appears to represent a pro-social public attitude, not an attitude of causing trouble for or rebelling against authority. Notice that the correlations are higher for the attending a meeting item, 96, suggesting that people may be more willing to take action than just think about new possibilities for politics.

Government Services Questionnaire Results.

The second questionnaire in this study consisted of 69 items. Most of these items ask persons how strongly they want government services of various sorts. The rank-ordered results are presented in Table V. Higher mean item scores reflect stronger desires for services. The content of most of the New Party items is omitted from this paper, as it is of peripheral interest to the general reader (they ask about how often the new party should hold meetings, how long the meetings should last, etc).

Table V. Desired Government Services, Rank-Ordered. N = 71.

Number/Color coding of categories:

1.Health care. 2.Education. 3.Housing. 4.Employment. 5.Environment. 6.Government/Politics.
7. Public Safety. 8.Transportation. 9.Welfare & Human services. 10.Parks and Recreation.
11.Current Party Satisfaction 12.Miscellaneous.

Mean item score	General content category	Item as presented in questionnaire, with questionnaire item number.
4.51	1.Health care	18. Affordable health care services for all citizens.
4.33	2.Education	3. More affordable public higher education (community college and university admission fees).
4.32	3.Housing	10. More affordable housing, especially for young families seeking to buy their first home.
4.32	2.Education	2. Improved public schools at the kindergarten through high school level.
4.29	1.Health care	32. An effort to develop an effective, affordable national health care system.
4.28	4.Employment	11. More full-time jobs that pay enough for one adult to support a family of 4 or 5 persons.
4.26	4.Employment	20. A local economy that stimulates family wage jobs.
4.23	5.Environment	22. A reasonable program to protect rivers from pollution.
4.22	5.Environment	23. A reasonable program to protect wildlife habitat, both on land and in rivers, lakes and the ocean.

4.22	5.Environment	7. Cleaner, less polluted rivers, wells, etc.
4.22	2.Education	14. Stable, adequate public school funding.
4.20	1.Health care	17. Affordable health care services for poor people.
4.19	2.Education	19. K-12 public education with balanced and effective programs (counselors, sports, reasonable class sizes, variety of course offerings) that can=t be eroded by pressure groups influencing budget decisions).
4.09	6.Government Finances	25. An effort to balance the federal budget, paying off the national debt.
4.04	6.Government structure & function	24. An improved form of State government that is more immune from distortion of the best interests of the community overall by the influence of special interest group money and pressure.
4.04	6.Politics	66. During election campaigns, candidates for office proposed by [a] party should not bad-mouth candidates from other parties but just focus on what the party platform proposes to improve government.
4.01	5.Environment	35. An effort to protect the environment through national programs (research on non-fossil fuels, air pollution regulations, protection of oceans and forests, water-pollution regulations, etc.).
4.01	5.Environment	6. Cleaner, less polluted air.
3.99	6.Government structure & function	13. An improved form of city government that is more immune from distortion of the best interests of the community overall by special interest group money and pressure.
3.99	9.Welfare	16. Food, housing and job-finding services for poor people.
3.97	9.Human services	29. An effort to increase spending for human services (health, education, welfare, etc.).
3.94	6.Gov=t structure & function	37. An improved form of national government that is more immune from the distortion of the best interests of the community overall by the influence of special interest group money or pressure.
3.90	6.Gov=t structure & function	26. A reduction in specific military activities in foreign lands unless approved by the majority of the voting citizens of the country.
3.90	5.Environment	21. A reasonable program to protect agricultural land from being built over with housing or commercial projects.

3.90	9.Welfare	31. An effort to improve Social Security benefits to the needy, elderly and disabled.
3.87	6.Government	33. An effort to create a fair and affordable tax system to support the national government.
3.86	6.Government	15. Adequate, fair tax income to support local and state services (education, highways, parks, job promotion, etc.).
3.74	7.Safety	1. Improved public safety (police, fire, highway patrol services).
3.64	8.Transportation	4. Improved town and city streets.
3.59	10.Parks	8. Improved services at public parks in towns and cities.
3.59	10.Parks	9. Improved services at county, state and national parks.
3.55	Internet	36. An effort to protect the Internet from excessive control by phone or other companies.
3.54	10.Parks, 5.Environment	28. An effort to increase spending for national parks and other national resources (forests, mineral deposits, ocean fisheries, etc.).
3.52	New party	64. New party item.
3.51	New party	65. New party.
3.51	8.Transportation	5. Improved county and state highways and bridges.
3.34	New party	64. New party.
3.33	10.Recreation	12. More recreational facilities (parks, ball fields, swimming pools, etc.).
3.30	New party	51. New party.
3.29	6.Government	34. An effort to develop a reasonable long-term population control program for our nation.
3.24	New party	58.New party.
3.22	6.Government	30. An effort to increase spending for general government services (courts, legislative activities, treasury, FBI, immigration, passports, transportation, communications, public safety, financial market oversight, disease control, energy research, etc.).
3.20	New party.	63.New party

3.13	New party.	62. New party.
3.11	New party.	50. New party.
3.10	New party.	43. New party.
3.06	New party.	59. New party.
2.99	New party.	57. New party.
2.96	New party	56. New party.
2.93	11.Current Party Satisfaction	39. I think the Democratic party currently represents the majority of my personal interests and concerns.
2.91	New party	60. New party.
2.84	New party	46. New party.
2.83	New party	45. New party.
2.76	New party	69. New party.
2.76	New party	68. New party.
2.63	New party	48. New party.
2.61	New party	49. New party.
2.58	New party	55. New party.
2.58	11.Current Party Satisfaction	40. I think another national political party currently represents the majority of my personal interests and concerns.
2.48	New party.	52. New party.
2.42	11.Current Party Satisfaction	41. It is easy for me to participate in a meaningful way in a current political party=s activities, meetings, decisions, etc.
2.36	New party	61. New party.
2.26.	New party	47. New party.
2.23	6.Government	27. An effort to increase spending for current military activity.
2.23	New party	54. New party.
2.14	11.Current Party Satisfaction	38. I think the Republican party currently represents the majority of my personal interests and concerns.
2.11	New party	67. I would be interested in running for office as a candidate of this

		new party.
2.07	New party	53. New party.
1.72	New party	44. New party.

The 37 items above that measure public interests in government services (4 satisfaction with current party items omitted) form a reliable measure of this government services desire@ trait with an alpha coefficient of .95. On most of these items response scores ranged from 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Citizens vary considerably on how much improvement in government service they want in each of these topic areas (housing, education, improved government itself, etc.).

While this sample of 71 persons is not particularly large and is not a random sample of the population in question (the city of Eugene, Oregon) the data provide an example of how a study that *is* large and random could provide interesting information. Items with scores at or above 4.00 can be considered to reflect substantial public desire for government services. Health care, housing, education and employment are strong in the list. Concern for the environment is also strong. A desire for improved management of government spending and for improved government itself is evident. Disenchantment with current political parties is evident, but Interest in a new political party is not foremost in citizens= minds. Public safety and road conditions do not rank very highly, suggesting that voters are relatively content with government services in these areas compared to the other areas.

When clustered by content area, reasonably reliable measures are obtained, as reflected in Table VI.

Table VI. Basic Data for Content Area Scores, rank ordered by means. N = 69.

Content area	Number of items	Mean item score	Standard Deviation	Reliability (Alpha or KR-21)
Health Care	2	4.40	.79	.74
Affordable Housing	1	4.32	.93	.95
Jobs, Wages	2	4.27	.69	.64
Education Svcs.	4	4.26	.70	.76
Environment protection	6	4.10	.73	.91

Welfare and Human services	4	4.02	.79	.83
Improved government	7	3.95	.70	.85
Public safety	1	3.74	.92	.94
Roads and highways	2	3.58	.84	.90
Protect Internet access	1	3.55	.96	.92
Parks and recreation	3	3.51	.78	.81
Satisfaction with political parties	4	2.53	.62	.35
Overall desire for improved government services	37	3.94	.57	.95

The reliability of the ASatisfaction with political parties@ measure is low, as can be expected because these items are asking about endorsement of different parties. Overall, we see that in many cases just a few items, or even a single good item, in 5-option Likert format (1-5) can provide reasonably reliable measures.

Because 37 of these items as a group provide a reliable measure of Adesire for improved government services@ (alpha .95), with some persons consistently *disinterested* in this and some interested, we can explore the relationship between this trait and the 11 other pro-social and anti-social traits. This will tell us if desire for improved specific government services is characteristic of pro-social more than anti-social persons. The correlations are presented in Table VII.

Table VII. Relationship between Desire for Improved Government Services and other traits. N = 58.

Trait	Pro-social disposition	Anti-social disposition	Endorsement of Citizen Direct Participation in Government
Health Care	.36*	-.26	.17
Affordable Housing	.22	-.04	.14

Jobs, Wages	.41**	-.10	.16
Education Svcs.	.58**	-.50**	.40**
Environment protection	.48**	-.36*	.17
Welfare and Human services	.48**	-.29	.19
Improved government	.76**	-.60**	.48**
Public safety	.19	-.07	.17
Roads and highways	.22	-.36*	.21
Protect Internet access	.02	.10	.22
Parks and recreation	.37*	-.25	.41**
Satisfaction with political parties	-.25	.20	-.09
Overall desire for improved government	.68**	-.50**	.40**

We see consistently positive correlations in the first and third columns and consistently negative correlations in the second column, with the exception of the next to last row. This appears to indicate that desire for improved government services is more likely to characterize pro-social citizens than anti-social citizens. Anti-social citizens appear satisfied with current government or disinterested in wanting improvements in government services, or perhaps disinterested in society in general. The figures in the next to last row, while not statistically significant, are in a direction consistent with this; anti-social persons tend to be satisfied with current political parties (.20), while pro-social persons are not (-.25).

Discussion:

Considering the 4 initial research objectives, the present findings provide data that help justify larger random samples of voters at both the local and national level. Citizens have reliably

measurable opinions and desires regarding government services. Desires for improved government services appear to reflect constructive pro-social interest in society rather than disgruntlement or rebellion.

Poll data can help prioritize citizen desires. This can help government agencies design and prioritize government services. Poll data combined with other information can help government agencies design ballot measures to establish taxation and budget allocation systems more to the liking of voters. This may promote greater citizen respect for and cooperation with government.

While not particularly high on their list of priorities, citizens do have opinions about political parties per se. There appears to be rather weak satisfaction with current political parties and a willingness to be open to a new political party representing the best interests of the community overall, as opposed to special interest groups.

Implications for Local Eugene and Lane County Ballot Measure Issues.

In November, 2006, at the time of the present studies, city council members were expressing frustration with years of unsuccessful attempts to get voters to approve taxes for local roads. Also, the public safety organizations within government were disappointed with repeated failures to get voters to pass funding measures to improve seriously strained services in the many departments involved (police, courts, jails, treatment and prevention programs).

The above data provides hints as to why local voters may hesitate to fund public safety and roads. These two areas of service fall well below many other areas of greater voter concern, including health care, education, jobs and housing. Why, we might imagine the voter thinking, should I pay more taxes for police, courts and roads when I see little evidence of government action to assure good jobs, and affordable health care, educational programs and housing?

A local professional pollster, Rick Lindholm (see references), was hired by local concerns to do follow-up studies of voter attitudes, specifically on the close but still negative response to a November, 2006 public safety tax measure. In a meeting with public officials he offered the opinion that voters tend to approve ballot measures for increased taxes, as via bonds, that are presented by government entities that the public trusts. Without consistent overall trust, voters tend to disapprove funding measures. More specifically, he said that many voters vote against ballot measures that are worded in confusing ways, implying that they don't trust governments to be honest and clear in stating their desires and intentions on ballot measures.

Voters in the State of Oregon have passed tax limiting measures via initiative and have never in the history of the state approved a sales tax. Citizens have required governments to fund all services primarily from income and property taxes, but have capped property taxes. As a result, governments have been hard-pressed to provide adequate affordable services, for example cutting higher education funding drastically over the past several years. Some types of crime in Oregon are the highest in the nation due to very restricted law enforcement budgets.

We can imagine the voters, collectively, think:

AWhy should we give government money via increased taxes of any sort?

AWe have serious government service problems: deteriorating school programs, increasing crime, limited job opportunities for decent wages, limited affordable housing, limited affordable health care and poor roads. We're not impressed with the quality of services we're receiving for our dollars.

AAAnd more tax dollars won't guarantee a fix. For example, teacher wages and benefits went up steadily for 20 years but because they took so much of the budget, many good school programs were eliminated. If we, the voters, have no say over how money is spent, we can pour money into government coffers and get lousy government services. The Public Employees Retirement System program would have bankrupted the State if it had not been reined in. There is evidence that State legislators make public money available to selfish ends.@

So, the challenge to the State, the voters, taxpayers and government workers, is significant. How can we maintain a good level of government services at a reasonable funding level, with a guarantee of efficiency versus greed and with spending priorities in line with voter rank-ordered preferences?

The above research data and Dr. Lindholm's insights provide a few hints as to how a more successful funding strategy might be designed.

In addition, we can learn from strategies such as search conferences. These are systems for getting conflicting groups to work cooperatively together to solve complex community problems. These conferences build trust and understanding among participants to the conference, who are community leaders representing major constituencies. Conferences build trust first by having participants tell their personal stories about the issues at hand. Later participants work in small groups to design constructive solutions to their mutual problems.

James Fishkin heads the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. He has perfected a form of search conference which has been used successfully dozens of times. It has helped the State of Texas develop a public utility energy use plan and a province in mainland China choose options for community services provided by government (see references). Indeed, we could imagine that at some future stage in the evolution of democracy government statutes will specify such search conferences as the mechanism by which many government decisions are made, at least for making basic policy decisions, such as how tax revenues are raised and in what proportions they are allocated to various spending categories.

Long-term strategies.

Several general principles gleaned from the above information could be used to help government agencies specifically and governments in general. For example, for long-term strategies the following would seem worthy of consideration:

1. Build trust with voters. Work to convey to voters an understanding by government agencies that they care about and understand the voters= feelings and desires about government services and preferences.
2. Also to build trust, convey to voters sophisticated understanding of issues. Do research to clarify the relative quality of government services in, say, your County relative to other similar counties around the country. This would include problem descriptions, dollars per capita dedicated to addressing the problems and level of services rendered. Explain Abest practices@ in various government departments and how they are determined and updated, or could be if they are not at present. Convey a summary of this information to voters.
2. Conduct random, adequately sized polls of the public to convey the above data and ask the public for their levels of satisfaction with current services and their desires for improved services in specific areas, such as those reflected in the studies above.
3. Then, perhaps in a subsequent poll, inform the voters of the increased dollars needed to provide services at various levels. Present various options for taxes to generate those levels of revenue (income, property and sales). Describe the pros and cons of each tax system. Describe the tax systems used by other counties and States around the nation. Ask the voters to state their preferences among the options.
4. Give the voters more direct and real control over both how they are taxed, how much, and how the revenues thus obtained will be proportionally allocated to specific areas of government service, in line with voter preferences as measured by good random samples of voter opinion.

For example, consider proposing a ACitizen=s Sales Tax@ as one option, with the following provisions:

The tax money raised would be dedicated exclusively to the top 5 or 6 category areas of services most desired by the public. A fixed proportion of the money would be dedicated to each category. A fixed proportion of the money in each category would be earmarked for salaries and benefits, a fixed portion for other needed expenses. Each government department thus funded would be obligated to function in line with Abest practices@ in their industry, in a manner to be spelled out. The performance of the department would be periodically monitored by an independent assessment agency, to include a board with citizen/voter representation. This information would be made available to the public prior to the next funding vote, which would recur every two to four years. Specific experimental projects could be mandated by the measure, such as a trial of a proportional budgeting system for some public schools at the K-12 level in districts volunteering to try such an option. The effectiveness of such trial programs would be assessed scientifically by an independent agency, with results conveyed to voters. The voters might also prioritize which roads are fixed first, choosing from a list provided by government transportation officials.

5. Make sure that wording in ballot measures is very clear and easily understandable by voters. Do pilot studies with samples of voters to assure this before submitting ballot measures to the

voters in general.

Short-term strategy.

For immediate application of the above data, a government department could do the best it could to apply as many of the long-term strategies as practical. For example, if a one-shot method is to be used, such as a tax proposal ballot, the ballot could include brief introduction and background information to convey some of the above data and data specifically relevant to the issues addressed. The ballot measure could include provisions for citizen input as to how the money is allocated within the department to assure some goes to each of two or more features or services desired by the public, such as jail space and patrol officers on the one hand and prevention and treatment services to first-time offenders on the other. Or, the ballot could include a provision for Best practices@ obligations within the government service departments funded and with some citizen advisory committee oversight to assure this. The ballot measure should not be ambiguous or confusing. Small samples of citizens could be asked to read drafts to maximize clarity and understanding via re-writes until the draft is clear.

Conclusion.

Initial studies of voter traits and government service preferences yield information that can be clarified by further and larger studies and that can help professionals and government officials develop more sophisticated and successful policies, procedures, programs and services.

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