Newspaper endorsements: how editorial writers view their influence

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NEWSPAPER ENDORSEMENTS: HOW EDITORIAL WRITERS VIEW THEIR INFLUENCE

BY

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THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Communication in the Graduate Studies Program of the College of Arts and Sciences University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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Florida's 1988 U.S. Senate race proved to be an excellent illustration of the influence of newspaper editorial endorsements on elections.

Going into the September primary, Democratic underdog Buddy MacKay drew endorsements from newspapers all over Florida. MacKay's strong showing in the primary forced Republican Bill Gunter into a runoff, which MacKay won in October.

MacKay faced a strong, well-known Republican opponent, state Rep. Connie Mack, in the November general election. A week before election day, a survey of the state's medium and large newspapers showed that MacKay had racked up 14 endorsements in the contest, while Mack had only one.

Although opinions and research on the effects of editorial endorsements vary, political experts said such strong support for a single candidate was rare in Florida, and they predicted it would affect the outcome of the election. MacKay's media consultant said such endorsements are more important in Florida than any other state because voters have fewer ties with groups that provide guidance about how to vote, such as political parties.

The race went down to the wire, and a full day after the polls closed, it remained too close to call. After absentee ballots were counted, the candidates' vote totals
were close enough to require an automatic recount. However, Mack emerged the winner.

Editorial endorsements provide newspapers a way to inform the public about candidates and to interpret issues. But they also are a direct attempt to persuade readers to vote for candidates a newspaper feels are the most qualified to hold office.

During the past four decades, research of national, state and local elections has yielded a variety of results on the effectiveness of endorsements. But after dozens of studies, editors and social scientists still are hard pressed to say exactly how endorsements affect elections.

State and Local Elections

McCombs (1967) suggested that at the state and local levels there are fewer salient variables affecting voter behavior than at the national level. For that reason, he says, newspaper endorsements of a candidate may be very important to a voter. To test that notion, McCombs studied the 1966 election in Los Angeles to explore the relationships between variables affecting voter behavior.

He hypothesized that the influence of newspaper editorial endorsements is greater when few other variables affect the voter's decisions.

The ballot included the Brown-Reagan governor's race, several state and local offices, a controversial ballot measure on obscenity and 15 other amendments and
propositions. He chose to study the balloting for governor, secretary of state, state senator, district member of the board of equalization, an amendment dealing with taxing insurance companies and the obscenity measure.

Sixty-one people selected randomly (McCombs does not say how) from voter registration rolls were interviewed the day after the election. They were asked how they voted for the four offices and two measures. The author acknowledges that the sample is hardly representative of the national population or even that of Los Angeles. He states that the study's aim is not to generalize to the population but to examine the relationship between variables.

Respondents were asked to recall what political endorsements they had seen on television and read in newspapers. Later in the interview, they were asked how they voted on the four offices and two propositions.

McCombs then took the questioning a step further. The notion of selectivity states that a decision leads to seeking out and/or recalling compatible information. That notion is reversed with studying influence of editorial endorsements, so respondents were asked outright whether they made their decisions before or after encountering an endorsement.

The insurance proposition showed the most respondents
voting in the direction of the endorsements. The governor's race was second, followed by the obscenity measure.

An editorial endorsement's usefulness to the reader depends on how much he or she needs it. Party identification, attitudes and knowledge all help a voter make decisions, and if those things are enough for the voter, an endorsement matters little. But, McCombs suggests, when those variables are operating at minimal levels, as with the ballot measure dealing with taxing insurance companies, an endorsement suddenly becomes very important to the voter.

McCombs added a hypothesis: The greater the disagreement among the variables that typically shape a ballot decision, the greater the influence of the editorial endorsement.

For those items on the ballot in which party identification, attitudes and at least some information were available to the voter, editorial endorsements were somewhat useful. McCombs found that for those offices (governor, the obscenity measure and secretary of state), most respondents influenced by endorsements voted a split ticket.

McCombs' study, like most dealing with editorial endorsements, shows that endorsements are just one of many variables that shape voting behavior.

Influence of endorsements was just one measurement examined in a study by Blume and Lyons (1968), who sought to evaluate the effect of the monopoly-owned Toledo Blade on a
local election. Besides editorial endorsements, other measurements were citizen exposure to mass media, use of the newspaper by the candidates and voter turnout. The study took an interesting turn when a strike closed the newspaper two weeks before the election.

A sample of 383 people 21 or older was drawn from the telephone directory for a survey of media exposure. A sample of 10 candidates was randomly drawn from the slate of candidates in the 1966 election. The candidates were running for U.S. representative, state senator, state representative, county commissioner and common pleas court judge. Voting data was gathered from election statistics.

More than 81% of the respondents said they obtained local political news from the newspaper and television. Fifty-seven percent said they regularly listened to local radio news. The exposure was true regardless of sex, length of residence, education, party affiliation and occupation. Longtime residents said they read the local section of the *Blade* and watched local news on TV more often than new arrivals. The college-educated respondents read newspapers and news magazines more often than the less-educated respondents. And those who said they regularly read the newspaper voted in larger numbers than those who regularly watched television or listened to the radio.

No single medium emerged as the primary source of political information. The largest number—60%—said they
relied on TV, but of those who had gone to college, only 35%
relied on TV for their local political information.

The lack of dependence on any one medium became
especially apparent after the newspaper stopped printing
because of the strike. There was no appreciable shift to
other media by the respondents during the strike--5% of
newspaper readers indicated they shifted to TV during the
strike.

To gauge the effect of the newspaper's endorsements,
respondents were asked a series of questions, including
whether the respondent took endorsements into account. The
survey also included two questions to see how much the
respondents knew about the election and its outcome.

About 25% of those surveyed said they consider
newspaper endorsements when deciding how to vote. But fewer
than 30% of those people said they considered the
endorsements most of the time. On the knowledgeability
questions, half correctly identified the endorsed candidate
for governor. Only 22% correctly identified the endorsed
candidate for state Senate.

Only 21 of the 292 respondents who said they voted
indicated they considered endorsements most of the time. Of
those, 12 identified the endorsed candidate for governor;
five identified the state Senate candidate. The data
suggests that a small percentage of the population regularly considers endorsements when deciding how to vote.

As to the candidates, all agreed that the newspaper had influence, but they differed on its political importance. The candidates all said the newspaper was the top form of media for campaign purposes and indicated they thought the paper’s sample ballot was important. All indicated the paper was a major form of political publicity during campaigns. About a third of the candidates’ combined campaign treasure chest was budgeted for newspaper advertising. After the strike, the money went for radio and TV spots, weekly newspaper ads and mailouts.

Although all the candidates surveyed sought the Blade’s endorsement either directly or indirectly, the incumbents were generally less sensitive to the paper’s endorsement policy.

In terms of generating interest in the election and communicating the excitement of campaigns, it is more difficult to gauge a newspaper’s influence, the authors say. The results suggest, however, a strong tie between readership and voting. More than three-fourths (78%) of the voters in the study said they regularly read local news in the paper; only 59% of the non-voters did the same.

The authors conclude that the Blade played an important role in reporting local news, since 75% of the respondents read the paper daily, regardless of most demographic
factors. The results showed that contrary to other research, a newspaper endorsement was more influential in the highly visible governor's race than in the less well-known state Senate race. The authors concede that those findings may be because one of the candidates for governor was a "hometown product." However, the lack of endorsements because of the strike apparently had no effect on about three-quarters of the voters.

Finally, the authors indicate that the paper's election coverage stimulates voter turnout, since turnout dropped off when the paper was not publishing. In 1966, an off-year election, voter turnout fell 3% compared with two past off-year elections.

Hooper (1969) set out to show the effects of party and newspaper endorsements in Chicago and suburban Cook County in the 1964 at-large election for the Illinois state House of Representatives.

The ballot was complex. Voters could cast a total of 117 votes for a slate of 236 candidates. They were allowed to vote for candidates of both parties on the same ballot without canceling their ballots. Hooper wanted to find out what factors help explain how the voters made their choices. Dependent variables were the votes received by the candidates; independent variables were political party and
newspaper endorsements. Correlation and regression analysis were used.

On the question of political party affiliation, the study found that party was very important in determining how a voter marked the ballot. By correlating party and vote and squaring the coefficients, he found that the correlation between a candidate's party and his vote was nearly perfect: in Chicago, 99.6% of the variance was explained by party affiliation; in suburban Cook County, 98.8% was due to political party. Because the correlation was so high, there was not much variance left to be explained by other variables.

However, Hooper wanted to know why some Democrats got more votes than other Democrats and why some Republicans drew more votes than other Republicans. By controlling for party, he tried to find out how important newspaper endorsements were in explaining the differences among Democrats and the differences among Republicans.

The study considered only the endorsements of the Chicago Sun-Times and Daily News, both Field newspapers, and Chicago's American. Results must be interpreted in terms of cumulative endorsement effect, because Hooper could not determine the separate effects of the newspapers.

In Chicago, 73.22% of the variance among Republicans and 78.49% among the Democrats was explained by endorsement effect. In suburban Cook County, the figures were 91.81% for
Republicans, 94.26% for Democrats. Those results show a fairly high correlation between endorsement and votes received.

Hooper acknowledges that because candidates' votes were summed over dozens of wards and townships, many possible sources of influence are not taken into account, thus overemphasizing the effect of newspaper endorsements.

To check the endorsement effect, he used downstate Illinois as a sort of control group. The circulation of the three newspapers used in the study is concentrated in Cook County; elsewhere in the state it is much smaller. From that one can assume the correlation between votes received and downstate endorsements by the Field papers would be low to non-existent. The study showed that for Republicans, 5.5% of the variance could be explained by the endorsements. For Democrats, it was slightly higher, 8.8%.

In terms of votes received, endorsed candidates got an average of 24,341 more votes than non-endorsed candidates. That may be a slight difference, Hooper admits, but the difference can be explained for the most part by newspaper endorsements.

Obviously, party affiliation was the overriding factor in the election. But, Hooper says, "When we ask what is the major source of variation that distinguishes one Democrat from another and one Republican from another, the answer is
newspaper endorsements. There is little other variance left to explain." (p. 305)

Mueller (1970) also took advantage of an unusual election to study the sources of influence on voters, including endorsements. Los Angeles voters were asked in 1969 to elect seven people to a newly established Junior College Board of Trustees. Each voter had seven votes to distribute among 133 candidates in the non-partisan election. The top 14 vote-getters would face each other in a runoff.

Two factors that normally play a strong role in voting decisions were absent from this election: party affiliation and incumbency. This provided a special opportunity to examine what effect newspaper endorsements had.

The ballot listed the candidates in alphabetical order. Beside each name was a brief indication of the candidate’s occupation (homemaker, engineer, etc.). Also on the ballot were several other races: a hard-fought mayoral campaign in which 13 candidates were trying to unseat Sam Yorty, and some hotly contested races for seats on the Board of Education. Because much attention was focused on those races, there was little notice paid to the scant campaigning in the college board race.

Mueller used multiple regression to find the impact of different factors. The dependent variable was the number of votes received by a candidate. Independent variables were
the predictors of vote results: ballot order, endorsement by newspaper or campaign group, occupation identification, ethnic identification and name identification.

He hypothesized that a candidate's vote total would be larger if:

1. His name appeared near the top of the ballot.
2. He was recommended by a paper or campaign group.
3. He listed an education-related occupation.
4. He had a name that appealed to ethnic groups.
5. His name had a special identification.

Mueller found that the three most important cues for voters in this election were the Los Angeles Times' endorsement, the endorsement of a conservative campaign group and ethnic identification.

The results showed that ballot order played a significant part in the election. Although the effect was not linear, results showed that a candidate in 50th place on the ballot probably lost about 70,000 votes over the candidate at the top of the ballot, and a candidate at the bottom stood to lose about 81,000 votes.

Newspaper endorsements were especially helpful to the candidates. Los Angeles' two major newspapers, the Times and the Herald-Examiner, endorsed 17 to 18 of the candidates. Only five candidates received endorsements from both papers. Two civic groups were active in the campaign: a liberal teacher-oriented group that recommended a slate of eight
candidates, and a conservative group that endorsed seven candidates. The two groups agreed only on one candidate.

Candidates endorsed by the Times got an extra 24,000 votes, with an extra 9,000 votes going to those endorsed by the Herald-Examiner, which had a smaller circulation. Most effective was the conservative campaign group--its candidates received 56,000 votes beyond what was expected. The liberal group's endorsement was worth about 8,000 votes to a candidate. All of the conservative candidates made the final cut for the runoff. Mueller attributes the success of that group to the conservative atmosphere over school issues in Los Angeles at the time.

The effects of occupation on the vote were fairly small. Candidates with education-related occupations gained about 5,000 votes. A variable was included to check for notable bias against women on the ballot, but none was indicated.

The study showed that for some ethnic groups, especially Mexican-Americans, ethnic identification was important. Candidates with Spanish surnames received an extra 15,600 votes.

And last, the results indicated that candidates with the name of Edmund G. Brown Jr. were especially lucky, since
that was worth an extra 135,000. Of course, there was only one.

Mason (1973) took advantage of a highly unusual election to study the effects of editorial endorsements and other factors. He analyzed the outcome of the 1964 Illinois at-large election for state representatives, in which each voter was allowed to cast 177 votes.

The Illinois General Assembly had deadlocked over how to reapportion the House of Representatives and a bipartisan commission appointed to try to solve the problem also was unsuccessful. So in November 1964, candidates for state representative were forced to run at-large throughout the state.

One hundred seventy-seven seats were up for grabs. Each party limited its ballot to 118 candidates so that neither would have more than a two-thirds majority. Thus, each voter had 177 votes to distribute among the candidates in any combination.

Voting was done largely according to party. Eighty-five percent of the ballots had been marked straight ticket for one party or the other. Ten percent of the ballots had been marked straight ticket and selectively for other candidates; only 5% of the ballots were marked selectively for both parties.

Mason chose to concentrate on the voters who did vote selectively, since those who only voted a straight ticket
likely were not affected by any of the three factors this study examines: media endorsements, endorsements from special interest groups and local incumbency. Those non-party votes provide an opportunity to study whether media endorsements made a difference.

A voter in this election had quite a task. If he voted straight ticket, he had 59 votes to distribute among the other party’s 118 candidates. Presumably, he at least had to learn enough about those 118 candidates to vote intelligently. A voter who did not want to vote a straight ticket, but instead chose to use all 177 votes selectively, was forced to learn about all 236 candidates.

The candidates were not listed alphabetically or by number, and the voter was allowed only five minutes in the voting booth. So besides having to make a choice for whom to vote, the voter also had to remember all of his choices.

Voters were not without sources of help, however. Newspapers, civic groups and special interest groups all provided information, opinion and sample ballots.

Mason hypothesized several things:

1. Newspaper endorsements: Because every paper that endorsed candidates also provided a sample ballot, newspapers were effective in helping the voter who wanted to vote selectively.

2. Civic organizations: The Independent Voters of Illinois, an affiliate of Americans for Democratic Action,
was the only civic organization that actively contacted voters before the election, distributing sample ballots marked with its endorsements. Its endorsements were regarded as a respectable source of information and were used by part of the better-educated, liberal population.

3. Special-interest groups: Two groups presented endorsements—the AFL-CIO and the Illinois Agricultural Association, a branch of the American Farm Bureau Federation. Voters sympathetic to the AFL-CIO, whether members or not, were influenced by those recommendations, and the agricultural association's endorsements influenced voters in farming areas.

4. Other factors: Although Mason hypothesized that endorsements in those three areas influenced the outcome of the election, he mentions other ways people could have selectively voted. Those factors must be taken into account if estimates of the effects of the endorsements are to be unbiased. He suggests that ballot order and whether a candidate was local would have been factors.

Voting data was gathered from two places, the Illinois Secretary of State and the Board of Election Commissioners.

To study the effect of endorsements, all Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas were chosen as one set of
units. Most papers that made endorsements were in the central city of each metro area.

Mason found the best unit for jointly studying endorsement effects and localism was the county, because in Illinois the SMSA boundaries are the same as county boundaries. The only exception was Chicago and its suburbs, where localism also occurs within city and county boundaries.

The data used pertained to candidates, not voters. Mason made some assumptions in order to make inferences from vote distribution to voters: If endorsements, localism or any of the other factors he mentioned did influence voters, then endorsed candidates or local candidates should have received more votes than they would have otherwise. Also, beyond the effects of the measured factors, the distribution of candidates over votes received should be random.

Mason decided aggregate statistics would provide the basic and most appropriate data source. Because he wanted to simultaneously assess the effects of endorsements and candidates' residence, among other variables, he used multiple regressions in which the regressors were dummy variables or classifications expressed as sets of dummy variables.

The endorsement hypothesis was confirmed. Newspaper endorsements were helpful in almost every area. All metro areas in the state had at least one paper that made
endorsements, with two exceptions (the Champaign-Urbana area). The study showed that the papers' endorsements significantly boosted a candidate's vote totals. Even smaller papers had notable effects. Up against the powerhouse Chicago newspapers, the endorsements of the much smaller Chicago's American had an effect.

As for the hypothesis about civic and special interest groups, Mason found that the Independent Voters of Illinois canvassing significantly affected voting in all but one case, the outlying areas of the Chicago metro area. In the Peoria metro area, the AFL-CIO's recommendations were significantly effective.

The localism hypothesis also was supported. In most areas, local candidates got more votes than non-local candidates, with the exception of the Chicago area, where localism was not always beneficial to the candidate. Mason suggests that if that area's vote distributions were disaggregated to the constituent districts, localism would be more significant.

Ballot order did not seem to be a factor in voting. Before the election, some had expressed concerned about the ballot order. So both parties listed incumbents above non-incumbents, and among incumbents listed the candidates in order by seniority, alternating Cook County candidates with the others. The non-incumbents were in no particular order. Because only names were on the ballot, this manner of
listing the candidates was not apparent to the voter. With regards to incumbency, only in inner-city Chicago did incumbents receive more votes than non-incumbents.

Mason also found other factors played a part in the election's outcome. Being a local candidate was a greater advantage for incumbents than for non-incumbents. Also, two candidates benefited because they had well-known last names: Adlai E. Stevenson III, who received more votes than any other Democrat, and Earl D. Eisenhower, who received more votes than any other Republican.

By taking advantage of the unusual circumstances of the election, Mason was able to account for selective voting in an at-large election. Endorsements of newspapers, special groups and civic organizations, in addition to localism, explain most of the variance in the votes received by candidates in the election.

At the local level, McCleneghan (1983) tracked over several years the effects of newspaper endorsements on mayoral elections in Texas. In 1973, he found that 10 newspapers had racked up an 82% success record with their endorsements of mayoral candidates between 1960 and 1971. Then, in 1978, after studying 15 papers' endorsements in mayoral races between 1975 and 1977, he found that only 54% of the endorsed candidates in 11 elections had won.

In 1980, McCleneghan had found that non-media variables had a slightly greater effect than media variables on the
outcome of 23 Texas city elections. Those non-media variables included campaign spending by candidates, voter turnout, incumbency and political philosophy.

Continuing his sequence of study, in 1983 McCleneghan examined the effects of print and electronic media on mayoral races in several New Mexico communities.

McCleneghan analyzed 10 independent variables that have been accepted as reliable predictors of election winners. The 10 variables were incumbency, newspaper coverage, newspaper editorial endorsement, newspaper advertising, television news coverage, television advertising, candidate's sex, campaign spending, a city's economic climate and voter turnout.

The study sought to cover a full range of election conditions from 1981 and 1982: races incumbents lost, races incumbents won, races in which two new candidates faced each other after an incumbent had quit, races with low voter turnout and races with high turnout, elections won by women, cities with strong television and newspaper competition, towns with a strong weekly paper and weak media competition.

A content analysis of 14 newspapers was conducted for the two weeks before election day. If a runoff occurred, the content analysis continued until the runoff election. All election news stories, pictures and campaign ads were tallied to the nearest column half-inch on a six-column format. For the television portion, news scripts from four...
stations' newscasts were content-analyzed. News stories and campaign ads were tabulated into seconds to see which candidate had the most.

Using the raw data, proportions were figured for the winning and losing candidates on all variables.

Data was gathered from various sources on the non-media variables. Unemployment figures were obtained from the New Mexico Employment Commission. A figure of 7% or above was considered high unemployment. Voter results were proportionally coded for each city. Eleven of the 14 races had "moderately high" turnouts of 35% or more.

Discriminant analysis, a multivariate statistical tool, correctly classified 93% of the winners in the 14 mayoral elections. Newspaper endorsement was the dominant variable, significant at the .05 level.

The other nine variables were not significant.

Although much research has been done on what makes voters choose candidates in state and national elections, there still is a question of what effects media variables have on local elections. McCleneghan argues that this study is a valuable step in helping us get a glimpse of the answers.

**Presidential and Local Elections**

Although most endorsement research compares voting data to endorsements made, Fedler, Smith and Counts (1985) used a
different methodology to find out whether voters perceived endorsements as helpful in making voting decisions.

Using six trained interviewers, the authors went straight to the source, conducting exit polls at a random sample of precincts in Orlando, FL, during the 1984 presidential election. Out of 562 voters stopped, the interviewers completed 426 interviews (75.8%) asking voters about their use of sample ballots or lists of candidates inside the voting booth and whether they had consulted news stories or endorsements when compiling those lists.

Voters also were asked if they thought endorsements were helpful in general, whether endorsements were useful in local or in national races and whether they helped the voter make a choice in the election. They were also asked to list as many candidates endorsed by the local newspaper, The Orlando Sentinel, as they could remember.

The Sentinel, Orlando's only daily newspaper, endorsed a candidate in almost every race during the campaign and published an election guide the Sunday before the election.

The authors formed eight hypotheses:

1. Candidates endorsed by the Sentinel would be more likely to be elected than unendorsed candidates.

2. Voters would be more likely to support local
candidates than state or national candidates endorsed by the local paper.

3. Endorsed candidates would receive more votes than unendorsed candidates from the same party.

4. Voters would be more likely to support the referendums or issues than the candidates supported by the newspaper.

5. Voters new to the county would be most likely to vote for the candidates endorsed by the paper.

6. Voters who read the paper most often would be most likely to vote for the endorsed candidates.

7. Independents would be more likely to vote for endorsed candidates than Republicans or Democrats.

8. Well-educated voters would be more likely to vote for endorsed candidates than those with less education.

Forty-seven percent of those interviewed said the Sentinel's endorsements were "very helpful" or "somewhat helpful." Forty-six percent said they were either "not very helpful" or "not helpful at all." The remaining voters did not answer or did not know. Those who didn't consider the endorsements helpful said it was because they didn't need help, they used their own judgment or they did not want to be told whom to vote for.

Most voters (64%) who considered the endorsements useful said they were more helpful in local elections than
in national elections, supporting much of the previous research.

More than half of the voters (62.8%) were unable to name any of the candidates endorsed by the Sentinel. However, 16.2% could name one, 7.6% named two, 3.2% named four, and 3.4% named five or more. Almost a fourth (24.3%) said the endorsements helped them make voting decisions.

Almost one-quarter of the respondents said they had prepared a sample ballot and carried it with them into the voting booth. Half of those who did said they used the Sentinel's news stories or endorsements when preparing their lists.

The findings supported three of the first four hypotheses.

The Sentinel endorsed 17 candidates. All seven Republicans and five of the seven Democrats were elected, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

As predicted in Hypothesis 3, the endorsed Democrats and Republicans got a higher percentage of the vote than those who were not endorsed. The seven endorsed Democrats received an average of 62% of the vote compared with the unendorsed Democrats, who got 40.8%. The seven endorsed
Republicans got 59.2% of the vote compared with 38% for unendorsed Republicans.

The paper endorsed six amendments and opposed two others. All six of the supported amendments won a majority of the Orlando vote. One of the opposed amendments passed, the other failed. The endorsed amendments received an average of 77.4% of the vote in Orlando. One unendorsed amendment got 68.7% of the vote, the other 28.7%. A comparison of those percentages to the average vote received by the Sentinel's endorsed candidates shows that Hypothesis 4 was supported. An endorsed candidate received an average of 60.6% of the vote in Orlando, compared with 77.4% for the amendments.

To find out what factors helped determine endorsements' helpfulness and the number of candidates a voter could remember, the authors used multiple linear regression.

A voter's age and how often he read the newspaper helped predict an endorsement's helpfulness. Five variables did not help predict those two factors: a voter's sex, race, education, political party and length of residence. Three variables apparently helped to predict how many endorsed candidates a voter could remember—sex, education and frequency of newspaper reading.

Hypothesis 5 was not supported. New residents were not more likely to consider the endorsements helpful in making voting decisions. Those who did were more likely than
longtime residents to say they were helpful in national rather than local elections, contradicting previous research.

As for Hypothesis 6, results were mixed. More than three-quarters of college graduates and non-graduates alike said the endorsements did not help them decide for whom to vote in the 1984 election. However, the college graduates were more likely to be able to list more candidates endorsed by the paper. Fifteen percent of the graduates were able to list three or more, compared with 6.2% of the non-graduates. Graduates who read the paper daily listed more candidates than non-graduates who read the paper daily (30% who could list three or more, compared with 11.2%).

Hypothesis 7 was not supported; there was no significant difference among parties as to how much endorsements were used in voting decisions.

Voters who read the paper most often considered endorsements most helpful, supporting Hypothesis 8. Those respondents were also more likely to be able to recall the endorsed candidates.

Daily readers also were more likely to say the paper's endorsements helped them. Almost a third of the daily readers said endorsements were helpful, compared with 20% for those who read the paper two to three times a week.
Daily readers also were able to remember more candidates endorsed by the newspaper.

Taking a different perspective, Gafke and Leuthold (1982) used a persuasion theory model to study endorsements in the 1976 presidential election and in 13 local elections. The study examined endorsements in terms of four characteristics: the sender, the message, the recipient and the environment.

Those four characteristics tested were editorial prestige (the sender), clarity of an endorsement (the message), reader awareness, understanding and acceptance of endorsements (the recipient) and presence of conflicting or reinforcing endorsements by newspapers and reference groups (the environment).

Their hypotheses:

1. People who have already made up their minds on an issue are likely to resist persuasive attempts (endorsements), and may even become more stubborn as a result of an attempt to persuade them otherwise.

2. Assuming that voters decide later on lower profile races than on top-of-the-ticket races, later on ballot issues than on candidate races, and later on nonpartisan races than on partisan ones, the persuasiveness of
endorsements among readers who are aware of them should be higher in each of the former than in the latter.

3. Readers who are aware of endorsements are by no means a random sample; more highly educated readers are more likely to read and remember endorsements.

4. Voters are more likely to be influenced by the endorsements of newspapers with which they more frequently agree, or newspapers for which they have the greatest respect.

5. Clearer endorsements are more persuasive than unclear ones.

6. The effectiveness of an endorsement depends upon the surrounding circumstances—-in this case, reinforcing endorsements from other sources and the impact of reference groups to which the voter belongs.

Data for this study was gathered from two sources: the 1976 national presidential election survey conducted by the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan, and from three election-day surveys conducted in Columbia, MO, in 1975 and 1976.

Using data from national and local surveys and from surveys on different elections increased the authors' opportunities to test hypotheses drawn from the persuasion model.

In the presidential survey, a random probability sample of 1,909 respondents was drawn, and interviews were
conducted before and after the election. In the local surveys, trained interviewers assigned to randomly selected voting precincts conducted exit polls.

Two daily papers in Columbia, the Tribune and Missourian, endorsed candidates and propositions in the three races about which voters were questioned. Those races were:

1. The April 1975 nonpartisan mayoral race, which had 583 respondents.

2. The April 1976 nonpartisan race (two seats on the board were up for election, for a total of four endorsements by the papers) with 373 respondents.

3. The August 1976 primary. Interviews also were conducted for this race in randomly selected rural precincts. The primary election included the Democratic nomination for sheriff (497 respondents), the Republican primary for sheriff (142 respondents), and a constitutional amendment on aid for parochial schools (639 respondents).

The national survey enabled the authors to measure the extent to which respondents voted in the recommended direction, and the local surveys provided a measure of whether the endorsements had influenced voters' attitudes.

To test Hypothesis 1, data about endorsements for Carter and Ford in 1976 was used. Voters who favored Carter before the election were asked afterward about the endorsement, if any, of their paper and how they voted.
Ninety-seven percent of those who knew their paper endorsed Carter voted for him. Eighty-seven percent who knew their paper endorsed neither candidate voted for Carter, and 97% who were aware their paper had endorsed Ford voted for Carter. The results clearly suggest that an endorsement for Ford reinforced Carter supporters almost as much as a Carter endorsement did. Although the pattern was less pronounced, the results were similar for Ford.

Because 90% of the voters said they had made up their minds before the presidential election, there were too few cases of undecided readers to study whether endorsements helped them make up their minds before the election. About 85% of the editorial endorsements for president were not published until the last 10 days before the election.

The authors suggest that editors who want their endorsements to have the most effect on readers endorse as early as possible to reach those who have not made up their minds.

Hypothesis 2, that the persuasiveness of endorsements would be higher for the bottom-of-the-ticket races, ballot issues and non-partisan races, was supported.

In the Columbia primary, respondents were asked about the Tribune's endorsements for sheriff, U.S. Senate, and an amendment. The endorsements were shown to be more persuasive on the ballot issue than on either of the candidate races, and more persuasive in the sheriff's race than in the Senate
race. Among respondents who knew who or what was endorsed, 80% said they were more likely to follow the recommendation for the amendment; 15% said they voted for the endorsed sheriff's candidate, and 9% said they voted for the endorsed Senate candidate.

Much research has indicated that readers rely more on endorsements for ballot measures than they do for candidates, which could explain much of the difference.

Data from the 1976 national election survey supported Hypothesis 3. In applying the persuasion model to the effects of endorsements, the authors suggest readers affect the persuasion process by their awareness or lack of awareness. The researchers found that a great many of the respondents were unaware of endorsements. About 25% said they did not follow the campaign in the paper; many of those who did were unaware of the paper's choices in the election. In the national survey, 38% correctly knew their paper's endorsement; in the Columbia surveys, an average of 23% correctly knew their paper's endorsement.

The data showed, however, that the more educated readers remember endorsements. In the national survey, awareness ranged from 25% for those with less than a high school education, to 55% for those who had college degrees. In the Columbia school district election, 2% of those with a high school diploma or less correctly knew the Tribune's
endorsement; 33% of those with post-graduate education were aware of the paper's endorsement.

Based on the combination of more educated readers' awareness and voter reinforcement, the authors found that two editorials were a "kiss of death" for two candidates.

Presidential Elections

In research on the 1968 presidential election, Robinson (1972) found a persistent relationship between newspaper endorsements and voting behavior. Although most voters were unaware of partisan positions of reporting on television, on radio and in magazines, they did know where their newspaper stood.

Controlling for personal factors such as party identification and pre-election vote intention, that study found a clear relationship between newspaper endorsements and how people reported voting. Because the 1968 presidential election was hardly normal, Robinson (1974) decided the 1972 election might provide a better contest in which to examine the effect of newspaper endorsements.

He used as his sample 1,119 people interviewed by the Center for Political Studies of the University of Michigan. In post-election interviews, those people were asked about their media use before the campaign and how they voted. Of those interviewed during the campaign about their political
attitudes and how they intended to vote, 501 said they voted in the election and followed the campaign in a newspaper.

Respondents who said they read newspapers were not asked about how their newspaper stood (respondents in the 1968 election were), but only were asked the name of the paper they read most closely. Endorsements of those papers were obtained from Editor & Publisher listings. According to the list, 93% of newspapers making endorsements in 1972 endorsed Richard Nixon; 7% endorsed George McGovern.

Results were similar to those from the 1968 election: Independent voters who read a paper endorsing McGovern were twice as likely (50%) to vote for him as were Independents who read a paper endorsing Nixon (26%). Similarly, there also was a 25% difference between Democrats who read a paper endorsing McGovern and those who read pro-Nixon papers. The second differential did not show up in the 1968 study, however.

Robinson then controlled for 12 predictors of voting behavior, such as interest in the race, vote intention and several demographic variables. Using a statistical program that provides estimates of the effects of single variables while controlling for the effects of several other variables, he found that introducing the 12 variables substantially reduced the differentials. Results showed that newspaper endorsements were responsible for a 7% difference in voting behavior (40% versus 33%). In the study of the
1968 election, after a similar statistical analysis, results showed a 6% difference after controlling for other variables. Robinson concluded that the similarity is strong evidence that newspaper endorsements do affect voting behavior.

He suggested that if newspaper endorsements really do affect voting behavior, readers exposed to uncommitted papers or those whose endorsements were unknown would exhibit voting behavior that would fall somewhere between that of readers of McGovern papers and Nixon papers. Although their behavior did not fall at the midpoint, it did stay within the interval defined by readers of McGovern papers and Nixon papers, further evidence that endorsements do have an effect.

Robinson also compiled data showing a highly consistent relationship between voting behavior and readers' exposure to newspaper endorsements for the elections between 1956 and 1972.

Fedler, Lowndes and Counts (1981) examined some criticisms often leveled at chain newspapers and found that, with regards to political endorsements, many accusations seem to be unfounded.

Critics of newspaper chains argue that because more and more newspapers (and television and radio stations) are owned by fewer companies, diversity of opinion is in danger of disappearing. Also, critics say, people who run chains
are in a position to control what Americans read or view, and thus what they think. Results of the survey, however, tended to refute those criticisms.

The authors classified all daily U.S. newspapers as chain (a company that owns two or more papers in different metropolitan areas) or independent (a company owning one or more dailies in a single metropolitan area). The editorial page editor at each newspaper was mailed a survey a day before the 1980 presidential election. Responses from 1,143 papers were received, and the authors were able to determine endorsements of 171 more dailies through further research.

The survey showed that, contrary to some criticisms, chain dailies are not necessarily conservative and hesitant to take a stand on controversial matters.

Of the 835 chain papers (64.7% of all dailies), three-quarters endorsed a candidate for president in 1980, compared with 65.1% of the independent papers.

Not surprisingly, chain papers were more likely to endorse the conservative—Republican Ronald Reagan—than the independents were (52.3% compared with 45.8%). But the chains also were more likely to endorse Democrat Jimmy Carter (16.2% compared with 13.6%) and Independent John Anderson (5.9% compared with 3.5%). The authors caution, however, that because many independent dailies did not
endorse, the number of papers that might have endorsed Carter and Anderson may have been reduced.

The results seemed to support long-held claims that when a chain owns both newspapers in a two-paper town, there is a decreased diversity of opinion. In two-paper cities where the papers were owned by different companies, there was more diversity of opinion.

Of the 170 two-paper cities, 69 are home to papers owned by the same chain. In 45 of those cities (65%), the papers endorsed different candidates, and in four cities (5.8%) the papers remained neutral. (Because some editors didn't respond, endorsements for the remaining papers are unknown).

In contrast, papers in 25 two-newspaper cities are owned by different chains. Papers in 10 of those cities (40%) endorsed different candidates; in six cities (24%) papers endorsed the same candidates, and in three cities (12%) the papers remained neutral.

Contrary to charges that there often is a lack of editorial autonomy among papers in a chain, the survey showed that few chains dictated to their member papers whom to endorse. However, when all (or, in once case, all but one) of the properties in a chain did endorse the same candidate, for whatever reason, it most often was Reagan. Those chains included Scripps-Howard, Copely Newspapers,
Central Newspapers Inc. and Morris Communications Corp., which account for a total of 41 papers.

No large chains gave unanimous support for Carter, although several smaller ones did, including Guy Gannett Publishing Co., McClatchy Newspapers, the Lavine Newspaper Group and Mystic Valley Newspapers. The 21 papers in the Freedom chain did not endorse because it is against the company's policy.

Of 53 Gannett dailies, 32 supported Reagan, eight went for Carter, six endorsed Anderson and seven were uncommitted. Of 26 Knight-Ridder papers, 13 endorsed Carter, seven supported Reagan, and six chose not to endorse.

The results also showed that size and location of a paper were related to endorsements.

Large dailies made more endorsements than smaller papers, and were more likely to endorse Carter. Only 12.4% of the dailies with circulation above 100,000 did not endorse a candidate, compared with 37% of the papers with less than 25,000 circulation. Almost a third of the papers above 100,000 circulation endorsed Carter; by contrast, only 12% with circulation below 25,000 endorsed him.

The authors suggest that the smaller papers' reluctance to make presidential endorsements may stem from the fact that editors at those dailies choose not to get involved in
controversies, and that those papers often do not have full-time editorial staffs.

Papers in the West, Midwest and Southwest were more likely to endorse Reagan (55%), compared with 40% of the papers in the South and Northeast. Ten percent of the Western papers endorsed Carter, compared with 25% in the South and Northeast.

Results seemed to support critics' claims that the press in the East tends to be more liberal (and thus unrepresentative of the nation as a whole and the rest of the media). Eastern papers were significantly more likely to endorse a liberal candidate.

The study found that an unusually large number of papers—129—did not endorse a candidate in 1980. Editors at 60 of those papers said it is their paper's policy not to endorse; 18 editors said they remained uncommitted because of the quality of candidates.

In addition, those editors who commented on the survey indicated that many who endorsed did so reluctantly, choosing a candidate who was the "lesser of two evils." Those who said they endorse Reagan indicated they only did so to oppose Carter. In addition, Carter supporters were most likely to express reluctance in their decisions.

The 60 editors at dailies that do not endorse cited different reasons for their papers' policies. Four said endorsements undermine a newspaper's objectivity; seven said
their readers are smart enough to make up their own minds. Other reasons included: the paper is non-partisan, the paper's chain has banned endorsements, the paper publishes a community paper that endorses only local candidates, or the town is too small.

Some editors discussed the value of political endorsements. Several said they no longer endorse because endorsements have no influence on voters. Others, however, insisted that their endorsements gave the candidates the edge.

Although it shouldn't be assumed in this study that endorsements influenced voters, the survey showed that endorsements in some areas corresponded with votes cast in those states. For example, Carter carried only five mainland states (Minnesota, West Virginia, Maryland, George and Rhode Island) and the District of Columbia in 1980. Papers in those states were more likely to endorse Carter, less likely to endorse Reagan and less likely to withhold an endorsement than papers in the rest of the nation. On the other hand, the authors note that candidates supported by most of the nation's papers have won only six of the 13 elections up until 1980.

Results also indicated that, contrary to popular criticism of newspapers in general, editors and publishers did not dictate what their papers' endorsements would be. Twenty-one editors said the decision had been arrived at by
an editorial board. Several others said they had polled their whole staffs before making a decision. Seven editors said endorsements at their papers had been handed down by a single editor or the publisher.

Because the 1980 presidential race was unusual in that neither candidate seemed satisfactory to most of the editors who responded, the authors cautioned that it is risky to conclude that fewer papers are willing to endorse.

Other researchers have examined the level of independence claimed by editorial page editors at chain newspapers.

A survey of editorial page editors by St. Dizier (1987) also showed that editors at chain papers say they enjoy independence from their publishers. However, St. Dizier found little to support that claim.

In a survey comparing editor-publisher relationships at chain and independent papers, St. Dizier found that there may be more similarities than differences between editorial page editors at the two types of papers. The study compared 1984 presidential endorsements made by chain papers and non-
chain papers. It also asked about the political leanings of editorial page editors and publishers.

St. Dizier wanted to find out whether presidential endorsements more closely reflect the choice of the paper's publisher or the editorial page editor.

A three-page questionnaire was mailed to half of the editorial page editors at 228 U.S. dailies with circulation over 50,000. Nine of the 22 questions were about issues in the election, such as abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, tax increases and aid to the Nicaraguan contras. Other questions dealt with the process the paper used in arriving at an endorsement. Questions seeking descriptive data about the paper also were asked. The editors were queried about their politics and those of their publisher and were asked to indicate how they voted in the presidential election.

Eighty-five editors returned the surveys, for a response rate of 75%. More than half--58%--worked for chain papers.

Sixty-one percent of the editors at chain papers said their paper's endorsement was made after consultation with the publisher, compared with 64% at non-chain papers.

Editors at both papers indicated satisfaction with the way they arrived at endorsements. At chain papers, 66% of
the editors said they were "very satisfied," compared with 64% of the non-chain editorial page editors.

Most of the editorial page editors at both types of papers said they voted for their paper's candidate at least 75% of the time, although the figure for non-chain editors was higher (88% compared with 78%).

Similarly, the editors at both types of papers said they agreed with their publisher more often than not. Almost half--49% --of the chain editors said they never disagreed with the publisher over endorsements, compared with 53% at independent papers.

However, in terms of personal politics, chain editors claimed to be more Independent and less Democratic that their peers at non-chain papers. Most editors at non-chain papers (56%) said they were Democrats, compared with 33% at chain papers. Almost half the editorial page editors at chain papers (48%) called themselves Independents, compared with 24% of the non-chain papers' editors.

Most of the editors at both types of papers said they were more liberal than their publishers--72% at the chain papers, 68% at the non-chain papers.

However, when described by their editorial page editors, the publishers at the non-chain papers seemed to be a more politically diverse group than publishers of chain papers. At non-chain papers, the political makeup of publishers was labeled 37% Republican, 33% Independent and
30% Democrat. At chain papers, most of the publishers (56%) were labeled Republicans, 40% Independents and only 4% Democrats.

Endorsements for president in 1984 strongly reflected the political beliefs of publishers as described by their editorial page editors. Ronald Reagan got a big nod from the chain papers--65% to 25% for Walter Mondale. The non-chain papers split evenly between the two candidates, with 44% apiece.

Despite the fact that almost two-thirds of the chain papers went for Reagan, editors at most of those papers said they supported Mondale. Likewise for editors at the independent papers. Mondale enjoyed a 57%-to-35% edge among chain editors; non-chain editors supported Mondale 58% to Reagan's 40%.

Although Reagan got almost three times the support as Mondale from chain papers, the papers gave little support to Reagan's positions on the campaign issues. The stands taken by chain papers on those issues differed little from their independent counterparts. Both types of papers opposed constitutional amendments on abortion and school prayer by a 7-to-1 margin. Chain and non-chain papers alike supported the ERA by a 3-to-1 margin. Both types of papers supported a tax increase, and most advised against aid to the contras.

St. Dizier's study showed more similarities than differences among the two types of editorial page editors.
Editors at chain and independent papers say their publishers are more conservative than they are. Most are satisfied with how their papers arrive at endorsements. Few editors at either type of paper disagree with their publisher over an endorsement, and most support their paper's candidate most of the time.

The results, however, point out an inconsistency. Although most editors at chain papers were satisfied with the endorsement process in which they have a strong role, most of their papers endorsed a candidate whom the editors personally opposed and whose stance on the issues they had editorialized against.

St. Dizier concludes that because studies continue to indicate that endorsements do affect voters, it would be worthwhile to study why editorial page editors at chain-owned papers are not more effective in winning an endorsement for the candidates they personally support.

St. Dizier's contention that editorial page editors should more strongly lobby for their favorite candidate fails to take into account the participatory nature of the endorsement process at most papers. Rarely does an editorial page editor make the decision single-handedly—especially at papers above 25,000 circulation. The editorial board that decides what the paper will support on the editorial page
every day most likely is the same group that will decide whom the paper will support in elections.

Most of this research seems to show that endorsements do affect voting behavior to some extent, depending on the election. Although there are many other variables that more strongly affect how voters cast their ballots on election day, the influence of political endorsements by newspapers certainly cannot be discounted.

However, many newspapers are choosing not to take a stand during political campaigns. Some have sworn off the practice of endorsing candidates for good; others may just be unable to make a choice in a particular election. Although the number of newspapers that decide to remain uncommitted is growing, some editors feel endorsements are a service and an obligation to the public: "Newspapers are in a better position to know the strengths and weaknesses of all the candidates for all public offices than most voters could possibly be, and it is a distinct service to the public to share that knowledge with the electorate and to help them make a choice," an Editor & Publisher editorial declared in 1980.

That voters may not follow a newspaper's advice does not matter, some say. Newspapers have fulfilled their obligation if they have told all they know about a candidate and have recommended who is best fit to hold public office.
Most research has dealt with the extent to which voters follow that advice. Researchers have interviewed voters, compiled voting statistics and looked at winners of elections at all levels. But what about those people who make those recommendations, telling voters whom they should send to the White House, the Legislature or the city council chambers? This study will examine just how much influence editorial writers feel their endorsements have on the voting public.
METHODOLOGY

One hundred fifty newspapers were randomly selected from the 1988-89 circulation list published by American Newspaper Markets Inc., a member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation. According to that list, 457 newspapers have more than 25,000 daily circulation. By selecting every third paper on the list, about half of the sample consisted of papers above 50,000; the other half between 25,000 and 50,000.

After being pre-tested by the editorial board of The Orlando Sentinel, a five-page survey (Appendix A) was sent in May 1989 to the editorial page editor at each newspaper. Fifteen of the 22 questions on the survey dealt with the editorial board members' attitudes about endorsements and the process used in selecting endorsees. The remaining seven questions gathered descriptive data about the respondent's newspaper. Accompanying the survey was a cover letter (Appendix B) and a letter endorsing the study written by Larry Hayes of the Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette, chairman of the professional standards committee of the National Conference of Editorial Writers (Appendix C).

Names and addresses were obtained from the Editor & Publisher 1989 yearbook. When an editorial page editor or editorial board member was not listed, the survey was
addressed to the managing editor. Because addresses for three of the sampled papers could not be found, a total of 147 surveys were mailed.

One follow-up mailing was made, with a letter (Appendix D) and another survey sent only to those editors who had not responded up to that point.

Seven research questions were posed to determine editorial board members' attitudes about the influence of editorial endorsements on voters:

1. In editorial writers' opinions, how do newspaper endorsements rate in terms of influence compared with other factors that are known to affect voters' choices?

2. To what extent do the board members feel endorsements influence voters in elections at different levels?

3. Do they ever suspect a "backlash effect," that is, do they feel voters make a conscious decision to vote opposite the endorsement?

4. If the choice were left up to the respondents, would they discontinue the practice of endorsing political candidates?

5. Are editorial writers' attitudes about the influence of endorsements significantly different according to the circulation size of the paper?

6. Are their attitudes significantly different according to the geographical location of the paper?
7. Are attitudes with regard to influence significantly different among editorial board members at chain newspapers compared with those who work for non-chain papers?
RESULTS

Of the 147 surveys mailed, 103 were returned, for a response rate of 70%. Half of the papers—51.5%—responding had a daily circulation of 50,000 or below; 19.6% were between 50,000 and 100,000; the rest were above 100,000. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents said they worked for chain newspapers; the other 32% worked for independent papers.

Of 103 respondents, almost a fourth—23.3%—had two or fewer years membership on the editorial board of that particular paper. Most of the respondents (38.8%) had three to 10 years of experience; 14.6% had 11 to 15 years; and 14.6% had 16 to 25 years service.

A total of 44.7% of the editorial boards represented by the survey consisted of all men. A little more than a third, 35.0%, had one woman. Only 20.3% reported having two or more women on their board. Although the difference was not statistically significant, it is worth noting that non-chain newspapers reported having more men (M = 4.80 for non-chain papers, compared with M = 3.92 for chain papers). (F=1.30, df=51.31, p=.06)

Geographically, the western United States was the most well-represented, with 31.1%; 26.2% of the respondents were
from the Midwest; 15.5% from the Northeast, and 27.2% from the South.

The first research question simply sought to find out how much influence respondents felt endorsements have in relation to other factors known to affect voters.

Editorial page editors were given a list of eight factors and asked to rate each according to how much influence they felt it had.

Surprisingly, of the eight factors, the editorial writers rated newspaper endorsements dead last in the amount of influence they have on voters. (Table 1)

With 1 being "no influence at all" and 4 being "a great deal of influence," three factors were rated virtually the same. A voter's education level was rated the most influential, with a mean of 3.078. Voter party affiliation was next (M = 3.029), followed by "talking to people" (M = 3.00).

Two other factors also followed closely. A voter's knowledge of the issues (M = 2.951), and a voter's income level (M = 2.942).

Writers gave "how family members vote" a mean rating of 2.709. A voter's age had a mean of 2.680.

Newspaper endorsements were rated far below the others, with a mean of 2.291. More than two-thirds of the respondents—67%—said endorsements had little or no influence on voters' decisions.
Although editorial writers indicated that, compared with other factors, an endorsement has little influence, a majority said that in very close races, endorsements are decisive.

Not a single writer said endorsements are "definitely not" decisive in close races. Three-fourths of the respondents said endorsements are either "definitely" or "probably" decisive. A total of 19.4% said endorsements are "probably not" decisive, and the remaining 4.9% did not respond. (Table 2)

Studies have shown repeatedly that endorsements have different levels of influence, depending on the race. Research question 2 sought to find out how much influence respondents felt endorsements have in different elections. (Table 3)

Not surprisingly, respondents said endorsements were least influential in presidential elections. With 1 being "no influence at all" and 4 being "a great deal of influence," presidential endorsements had a mean of 1.709. A large majority--91.2%--of the respondents said the endorsements have little or no influence on voters in presidential elections. A total of 82.6% said endorsements have some influence or a great deal of influence in state elections.

However, the writers indicated that newspapers seemed to be able to make the most difference at the grass-roots level--in local elections and ballot measures such as
constitutional amendments and referendums. Board members indicated endorsements had some influence in local elections (M = 3.097). Amendments were rated slightly lower (M = 2.913), followed by referendums (M = 2.903). More than two-thirds—68.9%—of the respondents said endorsements have some or a great deal of influence on those who vote on constitutional amendments. A total of 71.9% said endorsements have some or a great deal of influence in referendums.

The results are not surprising. Every four years, newspapers face the question of whether their presidential endorsement—if they choose to make one—will have an effect on readers, and thus the election.

Some journalists argue that presidential endorsements are pointless because television dominates national campaign coverage. Newspapers can provide more comprehensive information about the issues, but voters pay more attention to TV.

"Television has virtually replaced the newspaper editorial. People will go with their viscera," said Chicago Sun-Times deputy editorial page editor Edward S. Gilbreth (Fitzgerald, p. 9).

Others say that endorsements make a difference in voter "defection."

"In other words, if you're a Democrat inclined this year to support a Republican, and your hometown paper which you read every day endorses a Republican, then you are more
influenced by the endorsement," said Dennis Ryerson, editorial director of the Cleveland Plain Dealer. (Fitzgerald, p.10)

However, most editorial writers say the rule of thumb is that newspapers play a greater role in local elections.

"...The influence of an endorsement is in indirect proportion to the visibility of a race," one editor wrote in the survey. "Voters are bombarded with information about president, governor, etc., and we have little influence. But most can't even name a city council or school board candidate, even the incumbent representing them. There, we can have a very great influence."

More than half the respondents--54.4%--said the greatest service their editorials can provide is information about the candidate or a thorough explanation of the issues. (Table 4) Presumably, then, editorial writers feel that service plays the biggest role in local elections.

Research question 3 sought to find out how often editorial writers suspected a "backlash effect," that voters deliberately vote opposite their newspaper's recommendation.

More than a third of the 103 editorial board members--35%--did suspect such an effect. (Table 12) A total of 60.2% said they did not suspect a backlash effect. The remaining respondents either did not answer or indicated their paper does not make endorsements.

Attitudes about a backlash effect were significantly different among editorial writers from small, medium and
large papers. More than half (51.6%) of the board members from larger papers (over 85,000 circulation) said they suspected a backlash effect. A total of 20% of those from medium papers thought there was some backlash, compared with 40% from small papers (under 38,000 circulation) \( \chi^2(2, N = 96) = 7.32, p = .02 \).

Despite suspicions of a backlash, 85% of the editors indicated in response to research question 4 that if it were left up to them they would not stop endorsing. (Table 13) Most either felt that it was still the paper's obligation and responsibility to recommend candidates for office, or that because the newspaper editorialized every day on other matters, elections should not be excluded.

"The public wants to know where a newspaper stands. An endorsement is one way of filtering a little more knowledge to the public about their officials and would-be officials. It stirs discussion and makes the paper a participant in the process," wrote an editor at a Southern newspaper.

An Indiana editor agreed. "It's part of election time vitality—or lack thereof. Unless you work at it, you help the election become so dull that no one votes."

Research question 5 was aimed at finding out if there was a difference in attitudes according to newspaper circulation. Results did not indicate a significant difference in attitudes according to the size of the newspaper.
Similarly, research question 6 asked if there was a significant difference in some answers from papers according to geographical region.

Results showed a significant difference in some areas. For example, board members from Northeastern papers were far less likely to say endorsements were decisive in close races. Most of the respondents at papers in the West (82.8%), Midwest (85.2%) and South (85.2%) said endorsements do make a difference in close races, compared with 53.5% of their Northeastern counterparts. $X^2(3, N = 98) = 7.58, p = .05$

Respondents from Northeastern papers also rated the influence of their endorsements lower for ballot measures such as constitutional amendments. $X^2(9, N = 102) = 22.07, p = .009$

Editors from Midwestern papers were less likely than the others to say endorsements are influential in state elections. With 1 being "no influence at all" and 4 being "a great deal of influence," the mean was 2.18. Southern papers gave the highest average rating ($M = 2.64$). ($F=2.44, df=3, p=.06$)

On constitutional amendments, there was also a significant difference in answers by geographical region. Southern respondents seemed more likely to say endorsements were influential ($M = 3.35$). Western papers gave an average rating of 2.96; Midwestern papers, 2.59; and Northeastern papers, 2.73. ($F=5.23, df=3, p=.002$)
Overall, the results seemed to suggest that editorial writers at Southern newspapers feel their endorsements are more influential in elections at more levels than in the rest of the country.

Research question 7 was aimed at finding out whether attitudes differed between chain editorial writers and non-chain writers.

Results showed a significant difference in some areas. Most respondents reported that the final decision on an endorsement is made by a vote of the editorial board, although many said the publisher gave final approval, especially in presidential elections. In state and local races, half—51.5%—of the respondents said the final decision was made by a vote or consensus of the editorial board. (Table 11)

Answers from editors at chain papers seem to indicate they have more autonomy than their peers at independent papers. In national elections, 70.3% of the editorial board members at chain newspapers said the actual decision for a presidential endorsement is made by a vote of the board, the editorial page editor or the editor, compared with 29.7% who said the endorsee is picked by the chain, the owner or the publisher. Of the non-chain editors, 44% said the decision is made by the board, the editorial page editor or the editor. More than half—55.6%—said the publisher, owner or chain makes the decision. $X^2(1, N = 91) = 4.38, p = .03$
In state and local elections, 87% of the board members at chain papers said their paper's employees (the entire board, the editorial page editor or the editor) make the actual decision on endorsements, compared with 13% who said the choices are made by the chain, publisher or owner. In contrast, 66.6% of the non-chain respondents said newspaper employees make the endorsement decisions, and 33.4% said the endorsements are handed down from above. Although the difference was not significant, it was close enough to note. \( X^2(1, N = 86) = 3.515, p = .06 \)

Chain and non-chain employees also differed on which factors influence voters the most.

Board members at non-chain papers gave more weight to a voter's party affiliation \( (M = 3.33) \) than did board members at chain papers \( (2.985) \). \( (F=1.96, df=75.93, p = .02) \)

Respondents from chains thought endorsements had more influence on voters \( (M = 2.37) \) than did non-chain respondents \( (M = 2.12) \). \( (F=1.53, df=70.39, p = .04) \)

Board members of chain papers also were more likely to say their endorsements were influential in local elections than non-chain board members \( (M = 3.24 \text{ compared with } M = 2.89) \). \( (F=1.38, df=97, p = .04) \)
DISCUSSION

This study supported findings of other researchers, failed to shed new light on some issues and revealed some startling attitudes on the part of editorial writers at all sizes and types of newspapers.

The biggest surprise was that editorial page editors rated endorsements at the rock-bottom of a list of variables known to influence voting behavior.

Such ratings may reflect some of the cynicism that is a trademark of most journalists. Although endorsing candidates is a function of a newspaper's editorial board, editorial writers seem to assume their work will not make a difference to the readers.

When it comes to covering political campaigns, the immediacy of television makes it the medium many voters choose as a source of information. Editorial writers may feel endorsements have lost their effect on readers because so many newspaper readers have been lost to television.

The low ranking that editorial writers gave to endorsements contradicts their response to the question of whether they would discontinue endorsements. It's a puzzling combination: They seem to be saying "We are doing something
we don't think will influence our readers, but let's not stop doing it."

There were some important factors that were not included on the survey, however, that might have given a clearer picture of where newspaper endorsements stand in the minds of editorial writers. Two factors that should have been listed on the survey are advertising by candidates and news media coverage of the campaign.

It also would have been helpful to have each of the eight factors ranked separately for national, state and local elections, since it is widely accepted that endorsements have different effects in different elections.

This study supports that notion. For example, most respondents in this study said endorsements have little or no influence in presidential elections.

The reasons seem obvious: A presidential race has the highest profile of any other. Candidates' campaigns start years before the election and are covered heavily by all news media. Party affiliation is recognized by most researchers to carry the most weight in a voter's decision. Because of the length of campaigns, voters often make up their minds on whom they will choose months before election day. Newspaper editorials that are published a week before the election do little to sway voters.

This study also supports McComb's (1967) contention that an editorial's influence depends on how much a voter
needs it. Party affiliation, attitudes and knowledge of the issues all help a voter make a decision, and if those things are enough to enable a voter to make a choice, an endorsement matters little. But when those variables are operating at minimal levels, such as in local elections where there often are dozens of races and ballot measures, an endorsement becomes important to the voter.

The number of writers who suspected a backlash effect from their endorsements was surprisingly high. Again, this may be a symptom of journalistic cynicism. It also indicates that editorial writers are acutely aware of the public's distrust of the media, especially newspapers. That distrust could translate into a backlash effect for an endorsement.

Yet despite their lack of confidence in the influence of endorsements and their suspicions that voters purposely vote the opposite way, editorial writers said they would not choose to stop endorsing candidates.

Most respondents cited similar reasons for continuing to make endorsements.

"We take stands on issues all the time--so why not on candidates?" asked Leslie Gelb of the New York Times.

"If we daily take editorial stands on issues, what kind of a paper are we if we duck the important question of who is the better candidate?" wrote Morgan McGinley of The Day in Connecticut.
Lois Willie of the Chicago Tribune echoed their sentiments. "We speak out on a broad range of issues of lesser importance--certainly shouldn't duck this one."

Those who said they would stop endorsing if the decision were theirs cited a lack of effectiveness on the part of endorsements.

"I no longer believe voters are impressed by newspaper endorsements," wrote an editor at the Salt Lake Tribune.

A California editor agreed. "I doubt that many people are favorably impressed these days by such Olympian pronouncements--it hampers credibility when we comment on a person's performance once they're elected."

Some editors said they were not comfortable making endorsements. "I don't like them. They smack of the old days of power journalism," wrote an editor from Kankakee, IL.

And some said they would stop the practice of endorsing because of the tremendous time it takes to interview candidates and discuss the issues.

A Milwaukee, WI, editor said he would stop endorsing for reasons of "pure greed. Local elections sometimes involve 30 to 50 interviews. It's time-consuming and the scheduling is next to impossible."

The issue of whether to endorse is not new--papers have wrestled with the question for decades. Some papers make it a policy not to endorse in any election. Some refrain from
endorsing in national elections but do endorse in state and local elections.

An Editor & Publisher poll reported four days before the 1988 presidential election that 63% of the 662 papers that responded were uncommitted. Those papers had a combined circulation of 11,816,001. (Radolf, p.9)

In 1972, New York's Newsday announced it was breaking its tradition of making political endorsements. In an editorial written by then-president and publisher William Attwood, the paper gave several reasons for halting the practice.

First, it said, a paper's primary responsibility is to give its readers sufficient information to make a thoughtful choice, not to tell them for whom to vote.

In stopping endorsements, Newsday sought to avoid even the slightest appearance of bias on its news pages and to maintain its independence in investigative reporting, criticism and its watchdog role.

Finally, the paper said, because it was ill-advised for the executive board of the Newspaper Guild that year to endorse a presidential candidate, it was equally ill-advised for a publisher to do so.

"There is enough unwarranted suspicion among readers and viewers about the alleged slanting of news without nourishing that suspicion," the paper stated. (Editor & Publisher, 1972, p. 11)
But just nine years later, the management at Newsday changed its mind. Sylvan Fox, then editor of the editorial pages, said the resumption was made for several reasons. The paper wondered if endorsements might stem the apparent growing voter apathy. Editorial board members also had conflicting feelings about urging people to vote while at the same time not indicating any preference for candidates themselves. But the paper also realized that it must be selective in which races it chose to endorse candidates.

One reader wrote the paper to voice his support: "Look, I'm sure I won't agree with most of your endorsements, but you ought to take a stand. Newsday knows a lot more about candidates than most voters do; you ought to share that knowledge." (Fox, p. 10)

The geographical difference in attitudes about endorsements' influence is less clearly explained. The respondents' answers may be linked to the presence of competing influences and their newspaper's relationship with its readers.

In the Northeast, competing influences on voters may dilute the strength of editorial endorsements.

For example, political party affiliation has traditionally played a strong role in the Northeast, perhaps even more so than in other areas of the country.

But more than party affiliation, union endorsements have a tremendous influence on Northeastern voters. For
decades, unions have been an integral part of life the Northeast and Midwest.

Although labor experts argue that unions are becoming less needed as we move out of the industrial age and into the information age, their influence on everyday life in those areas has been slow to fade. Union support of a political candidate carries a great deal of weight with a great number of voters in the Northeast.

On the other hand, editors at Southern papers indicated in this study they thought their endorsements influence voters at more levels—in presidential and state elections and on constitutional amendments—than respondents in other areas. Although the differences were not significant in each case, the answers do indicate a trend.

The Southern editors’ responses reflect the tradition of Southern newspapers—and their editorial pages—playing strong roles in their communities.

Grassroots journalism has deep roots in the South. Since the days of the civil rights movement—and even before—Southern papers have taken strong stands to help shape the ideals and progress of their communities. Papers in small Southern towns and cities work hard to form ties with the community, to cultivate a relationship with readers that is not always evident in larger cities. The ties with readers forged through community-level journalism may translate into political endorsements that pack more punch.
The differences in answers from editors at chain and non-chain newspapers are more clearly explained.

Answers from chain and non-chain respondents alike indicate that publishers still play strong roles in the more important endorsements, especially the presidential elections.

John J. Zakarian (1973), an editorial writer at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, had this to say about publishers' roles in presidential endorsements:

The late Adlai Stevenson, who had more reason to complain, once said with frustration, "This country has a one-party press." Actually, he was exaggerating. This country has a one-party publishers' establishment, with some notable exceptions. This establishment, capital heavy as it may be, is not the whole of the press. As a rule, it cannot and does not supervise the daily operation even of its opinion pages. But it does have a decisive influence in the biennial and quadrennial endorsements.

Thus it happens that so many editorial pages carry a moderate-to-liberal tone on 47 months, and on the 48th month of reckoning turn conservative. Perhaps that is why so many newspapers carry the "independent-Republican" label. Some call the presidential endorsements the publishers' four-year itch and others, the editorial writers' agony.

This study showed that editors at chain newspapers feel they have more autonomy in making their choices on whom to endorse than their peers at independent newspapers.

Those answers may seem surprising on the surface. Critics of chain papers often have charged that chain owners dictate editorial policy to their properties, stifling a free flow of varying opinions.

However, publishers at independent papers are more likely to have a closer relationship with the community and
with the employees of the paper, and thus play a more active role in forming editorial policy.

The mindset of publishers at chain newspapers is much more bottom-line oriented. Rarely do chain publishers get involved with editorial policy in any detail; they are more concerned with the balance sheet.

Independent newspapers often are different. Barry Bingham Jr. (1973), then editor and publisher of the Bingham family-owned Courier-Journal and Louisville Times in Kentucky, said newspapers are asking for trouble when the publisher is not closely involved on a daily basis with the editorial board.

Publishers should be the ones to write important endorsements, he said, especially if the endorsement is one that an editorial writer does not agree with.

In fact, he said, "If a writer feels that he is out of sympathy with his publisher, whether over an editorial endorsement or any other issue, he would probably be wise to start looking around." (Bingham, p.1)

However, a chain publisher is obviously less likely to be involved in races at lower levels, except perhaps in key state races such as governor, Legislature and Cabinet.

On the local level, papers often make dozens of endorsements, which could mean three of four times that many interviews. It simply is not practical—except at small newspapers—for publishers to be highly involved.
SUMMARY

In this study, editorial board members expressed an astonishing ambivalence about endorsing candidates. They have indicated that although few would ever stop the practice of endorsing if it were up to them, they do not put much stock in endorsements.

Endorsements were rated dead last in a list of eight factors known to influence voters. And more than a third of the editors suspected that voters deliberately vote opposite their newspaper's recommendations.

The obvious question is: If editorial writers feel that endorsements have so little influence, do they likewise lack confidence in their ability to persuade on everyday issues?

Dozens of respondents in this study said that because a newspaper takes a stand on daily issues, it should not duck making endorsements. But do they feel—as with endorsements—that the other editorials they write on any of the hundreds of other daily issues go largely unheeded by readers?

If that is the case, it is hard to imagine how editorial writers can continue writing day after day with such a feeling of dissonance about their job.

Their attitudes reflect how much credibility they perceive their newspaper has in the community. It is a sure
bet that the respondents who ranked endorsements last in terms of influence also would say their readers do not pay much attention to the editorial page.

And that is too bad, because those editors are the very ones who should be working harder to identify areas to improve in order to build a strong relationship with readers. They obviously need to take stock of the paper's editorial policy, the mix of columns they provide and the kind of forum they offer readers to sound off on various issues. Something somewhere is obviously lacking.

Also at the root of the issue is an editorial writer's motivation for endorsing a candidate. Some editors say the goal obviously is to influence a voter to choose the candidate of the paper's choice. Others argue that a paper's role should only be to provide the voter with enough information to make an informed choice. That, however, is what news stories are for. Voters can glean information from news pages that will help them sort out issues and where the candidates stand. An endorsement is printed solely to persuade—just as editorials every other day of the year are written to persuade.

Further research should explore the very important question of whether the attitudes reported in this study by editorial writers about the influence of candidate endorsements carry over to editorials that appear in newspapers the rest of the time.
### TABLE 1

**MEAN RATINGS OF CHARACTERISTICS THAT AFFECT VOTING BEHAVIOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking to people</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter's party affiliation</td>
<td>3.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter's education level</td>
<td>3.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter's income level</td>
<td>2.942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter's age</td>
<td>2.680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper endorsement</td>
<td>2.291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the issues</td>
<td>2.951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How family members vote</td>
<td>2.709</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The characteristics were rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being "no influence at all" and 4 being "a great deal of influence."
TABLE 2

AS AN EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBER, DO YOU BELIEVE THE ENDORSEMENTS OF YOUR NEWSPAPER ARE DECISIVE IN CLOSE RACES?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCALE</th>
<th>% RESPONDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, definitely</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, probably</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably not</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 3

**MEAN RATINGS OF ENDORSEMENTS’ INFLUENCE IN ELECTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF ELECTION</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>1.709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>3.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional amendments</td>
<td>2.913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendums</td>
<td>2.903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Each election level was rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being "no influence at all" and 4 being "a great deal of influence."*
### TABLE 4

**WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS THE BIGGEST SERVICE AN ENDORSEMENT PROVIDES VOTERS?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF SERVICE</th>
<th>% RESPONDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about the candidate</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or explanation of the issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting both sides of the race</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompting thought or debate</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing voters, shaping opinion</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving reader something to compare</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his/her opinion with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** This was an open-ended question. A content analysis was conducted to yield these categories of answers.
TABLE 5
DID YOUR PAPER ENDORSE A CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT IN THE 1988 GENERAL ELECTION?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER</th>
<th>% RESPONDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 6
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ENDORSED BY RESPONDENTS' NEWSPAPERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CANDIDATE</th>
<th>% RESPONDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dukakis</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 7

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES ENDORSED BY RESPONDENTS' NEWSPAPERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>% RESPONDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 8

NUMBER OF ENDORSED CANDIDATES ELECTED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CANDIDATES ELECTED</th>
<th>% RESPONDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None or no answer</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 60</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 9

DOES YOUR EDITORIAL BOARD MAKE ENDORSEMENTS ON THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL WITHOUT INTERVIEWING THE CANDIDATES?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER</th>
<th>% RESPONDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 10

**IF YOU DO NOT INTERVIEW CANDIDATES, ON WHAT DO YOU BASE YOUR ENDORSEMENTS?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWERS</th>
<th>% RESPONDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate's record/performance</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News stories or clips</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate's platform</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer's knowledge of candidate</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with leaders, reporters</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous interview or endorsement</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** This question was open-ended, and a content analysis was conducted to yield these categories of answers.
**TABLE 11**

**IN THE GENERAL ELECTION, WHO MAKES THE ACTUAL DECISION ON AN ENDORSEMENT?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>% RESPONDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LEVEL OF ELECTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRESIDENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial page editor</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote of the board</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The chain</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The editor</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANSWER</td>
<td>% RESPONDING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>60.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 13

IF IT WERE LEFT TO YOU,
WOULD YOU STOP MAKING ENDORSEMENTS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER</th>
<th>% RESPONDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>85.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX A
SURVEY
1. Many factors influence a voter in making choices for whom he or she will vote. Here is a list of some characteristics that have been recognized as affecting voters’ decisions in elections.

With 1 being "no influence at all" and 4 being "a great deal of influence," please rate each of the following according to how much influence you think they have on voters' decisions. (Circle one number beside each item)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No influence at all</th>
<th>A great deal of influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking to people</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter's party affiliation</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter's education level</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter's income level</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter's age</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper endorsement</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the issues</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How family members vote</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. As an editorial board member, do you believe the endorsements of your newspaper are decisive in very close races? (Check one)

______ Yes, definitely
______ Yes, probably
______ Probably not
______ Definitely not
3. In general, to what extent do you feel newspaper endorsements influence voters in elections at different levels? With 1 being "no influence at all" and 4 being "a great deal of influence," please rate each of the following according to how much influence endorsements have in different elections. (Circle one number alongside each item)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Type</th>
<th>No influence at all</th>
<th>A great deal of influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential elections</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State elections</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local elections</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional amendments</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendums</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. What do you feel is the biggest service that an editorial endorsement provides to voters in helping them make their voting decisions? ____________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

5. Did your paper endorse a candidate for president in the 1988 general election? (Check one)

_____ Yes    _____ No

6. If you said yes, whom did your paper endorse?

_____ Bush    _____ Dukakis    _____ Other (specify:__________________________
7. About how many candidates did your newspaper endorse in the 1988 general election? __________

8. Of those you endorsed, about how many were elected? __________

9. Does your editorial board make endorsements on the state and local level without interviewing the candidates? (Circle one)
   - a. Usually
   - b. Sometimes
   - c. Never

10. If you do not interview the candidate, on what do you base your endorsement? __________________________________________

   __________________________________________

11. In the general election, who makes the actual decision on an endorsement? (Check one in each column)

    President                      State and local races
      _____ Publisher              _____ Publisher
      _____ Owner                  _____ Owner
      _____ Editorial page editor  _____ Editorial page editor
      _____ Vote of the board     _____ Vote of the board
      _____ The chain              _____ The chain
      _____ The editor             _____ The editor
      _____ Other. Explain:        _____ Other. Explain:

    __________________________________________

    __________________________________________

    __________________________________________
12. Has your paper ever made an endorsement that you suspect had a "backlash" effect; that is, voters made a conscious decision to vote opposite the endorsement? (Check one)

    ______ Yes    ______ No

13. If it were left to you, would you stop making endorsements? (Check one)

    ______ Yes    ______ No

    Please explain your answer: ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________

14. Has your newspaper ever decided not to endorse any candidate in a presidential race?

    ______ Yes    ______ No

    If you said yes, please explain why: _________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________

15. Please briefly describe the process that your editorial board goes through when endorsing candidates:

    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
16. What is your newspaper's circulation?
   Daily ________  Sunday ________

17. Is your newspaper a morning or afternoon paper? (Check one)
   ______ A.M.     ______ P.M.

18. How many people are on your editorial board?
   Men ________  Women ________

19. What are your duties as a member of the editorial board? ________

20. How long have you been a member of the editorial board at your newspaper? ________

21. Is your newspaper chain-owned or independent? (Check one)
   ______ Chain-owned     ______ Independent

22. In what state is your newspaper? ________

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. If you are interested in getting a copy of the results, please write or call me: Lisa F. Chandler, Assistant regional editor, The Orlando Sentinel, 633 N. Orange Ave., Orlando, FL 32801; (407) 420-5220. Or check below and provide your name and mailing address.

_____ Yes, please send results to: ______________________

__________________________

__________________________
APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER
May 8, 1989

Dear editorial writer,

As an editorial writer, do you feel your political endorsement makes a difference to voters? If it were left up to you, would you discontinue the practice of endorsing candidates in elections?

Those two questions, which have been debated for years, are part of a scientific survey I am conducting. As a newspaper editor, I am committed to understanding the role papers play in the lives of their readers. As a graduate student at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, I am in a position to conduct research to broaden that understanding.

A 22-question survey is enclosed that should take you about 10 minutes to fill out. Please take the time to complete the survey. A stamped, self-addressed return envelope has been provided to make it convenient to reply promptly.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lisa F. Chandler
Assistant regional editor
APPENDIX C

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF EDITORIAL WRITERS
ENDORSEMENT LETTER
April 14, 1989

Dear Editorial Writer:

I want you to know that Lisa Chandler has my unqualified support in her research on the influence of editorial endorsements.

I am sure that Lisa’s findings will be extremely interesting and useful to all editorial page editors and editorial writers.

Sincerely,

Larry J. Hayes, Chairman
NCEW Professional Standards Committee
APPENDIX D

FOLLOW-UP LETTER
May 31, 1989

Dear editorial writer,

About two weeks ago, I sent you a questionnaire seeking your attitudes about the influence of editorial endorsements on elections. If you already have returned the survey, thanks.

If you have not, I would be grateful if you would do so now. For your convenience, I've enclosed another copy of the survey and a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The 10 minutes or so it will take you to complete the survey will go a long way in helping me to get credible results. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Lisa F. Chandler
Assistant regional editor
REFERENCES


Newsday ends its endorsement of candidates. (September 9, 1972). Editor and Publisher. p. 11.

Presidential endorsements: Will they make a difference?. (October 1, 1988). Editor and Publisher. pp. 9-10.
