

Citizen Perceptions of Public Safety Levies in Josephine County, Oregon:  
A Test of Group Engagement Theory

by

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## ABSTRACT

Group Engagement Theory describes the relationship between citizen perceptions of policy, individual identity and status judgements, and individual group engagement decisions. Utilizing a least likely crucial case methodology, this paper uses the case of Josephine County, Oregon to determine the validity of the Group Engagement Theory prediction that citizen identity and action are primarily driven by citizen perceptions of procedural justice. Josephine County has been struggling to raise funding through taxes for public safety services. Referenda in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 all failed to garner the support of the public resulting in cuts to public safety services. This research analyzed letters to the editor to a local newspaper to determine citizen opinions and engagement decisions. Through this analysis, this paper determined that concerns over the distributive fairness of policy instruments, the riskiness of policy, and the trust of individuals in the government all played a role in determining citizen engagement decisions. These results suggest a falsification of the prediction by Group Engagement Theory that the primary motivating factor of individual group engagement decisions is perceptions of procedural justice.

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding how and why individuals make decisions within a group is vital to making policy within a democracy. Governments need to understand the perceptions that individuals have of policy outcomes and policy processes to engage with individuals within the policy process. The Group Engagement Theory (Tyler and Blader, 2003) attempts to tie together individual policy perceptions with citizen engagement decisions through the concept of identity. This theoretical framework can be used to predict citizen behavior given citizen perceptions of fairness within the policy making process, and the fairness and quality of policy outcomes. A prediction of Group Engagement Theory is that identity judgements are shaped more by perceptions of procedural justice rather than through resource judgements (Tyler and Blader, 2003). This paper seeks to test the validity of that prediction.

This paper uses a least likely crucial case analysis to determine the validity of Group Engagement Theory. The case study of Josephine County, Oregon is used as a case in which Group Engagement Theory is likely to fail. After a reduction in funding from the federal government to fund public safety services in 2012, the County has attempted to raise funding for public safety services through increases in property taxes. The County has attempted to gain public support for this policy, however, referenda in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 all failed. This paper predicts that this is a result of ideological opposition to the tax instrument, given the County's staunchly conservative electorate. For this reason, Josephine County is a least likely crucial case, and potentially could break from the predictions of Group Engagement Theory. Further analysis of letters to the editor to *The Grants Pass Daily Courier* (the newspaper of record in Josephine County) (Martin & Hansen, 1998) will reveal if this is the case.

This paper will first discuss why the Group Engagement Theory (GET) framework was selected, how the GET works, critiques of the model, and rebuttals to those critiques. Secondly, a

deeper look into the literature will then discuss factors that influence the determinants of the GET model. Then, the situation in Josephine County will be discussed to understand the problems facing the County and to identify the underlying variables in the County that might have an effect on citizen engagement decisions. In the methods section, I demonstrate how these variables might be considered using letters to the editor, I discuss the critical case methodology, reasons why the situation in Josephine County is a critical case, the questions used to test the GET model, and how data were selected, coded, and analyzed. The Results section will discuss the basic findings of the analysis. The Discussion section will expand upon these results and utilize the results to answer the primary research question. Finally, the Conclusion will discuss the policy implications of this research, limitations of this research, areas for future study, and final thoughts on the research topic.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

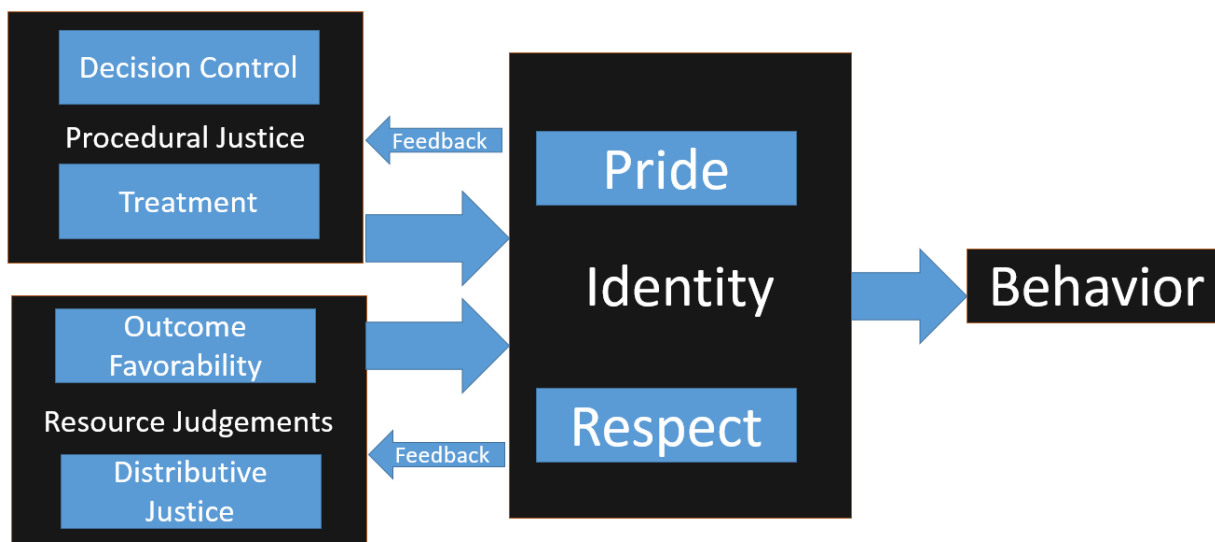
The opinions held by Josephine County residents about taxation, public service provision, and government are as wide and diverse as the history of Josephine County itself. Separate from any context or theoretical grouping, the opinions held by residents have limited meaning. Without theoretical ties, creating a greater understanding of the connections between individual beliefs to individual actions is impossible. Thus, finding a theory that properly ties together individual action with individual opinions and status is vital towards understanding the issues of ensuring funding for a minimal level of public safety in Josephine County.

Initially, a number of theories were considered for analyzing the case of Josephine County. Preliminary analysis of themes within letters to the editor were able to guide theory choice. Simple economic models, including social exchange theory, were first considered as possible options for understanding how Josephine County residents make levy decisions. Within

these models, individuals determine their preferable level of taxation and service provision through simple cost-benefit analyses. Under these theories, if the cost associated with raising taxes is higher than the benefit of extra service provision, an individual will oppose the levy. Alternatively, if benefits are higher than costs, an individual will support the levy. Analysis of letters to the editor found that while these predictions were true in some cases, these theories were far too simple to apply to the Josephine County case. In addition to caring about the quality of outcomes, individuals care about the fairness of outcomes. Distributive justice models, which look at the fairness in resource allotment, were also considered. However, these frameworks also left out an important variable often discussed within letters to the editor: trust in government. Procedural justice models were also considered, however, the ideal model would be able to account for procedural justice, distributive justice, and outcome favorability. Based on these considerations, the Group Engagement Model was chosen to analyze the Josephine County case.

The Group Engagement Model ties together theories about individual perceptions of justice and the construction of identity judgements within a society to better understand why individuals choose to engage (or not engage) in an authority-supported behavior. This theory suggests that the relationships that individuals have with groups are defined by the perceived fairness of group decision-making processes, the quality of treatment individuals receive, the level of resources given to the individual, and the perceived fairness in distribution of those resources. Based on these components, individuals judge their connectivity to the group and their position within the group to determine their level of group engagement. The relationships between these variables is pictured in the chart below.



**Chart 1**

The Group Engagement Theory model highlights two types of behavioral engagement: mandatory behavior and discretionary behavior. As the names suggest, mandatory behaviors are determined by the group and required of the individual, while discretionary behaviors are determined by the individual group member. Mandatory behaviors require enforcement mechanisms and possible sanctions to ensure group member compliance while discretionary behaviors are shaped by individual motivations. Values and attitudes are the main determinants of willingness to comply with the group in individual discretionary behavior. The group can adjust an individual's willingness to comply through discretionary behavior by using psychological engagement. However, the effects of psychological engagement on attitudes and values are limited as willingness to comply is mostly determined by individual identity judgements (Tyler and Blader, 2003).

A core principle of the group engagement model is the concept of identity. Where an individual identifies him or herself in relation to a group and the members of that group dictates whether or not that individual will engage in a group/authority sanctioned behavior. Individuals

receive information about themselves based on their treatment within the group. Individuals use groups to construct a concept of social identity; self-definition, self-worth, and well-being, which are all shaped by relationships formed with and within groups (Sedikides and Brewer, 2001).

This self that is created through group interactions is commonly referred to as the collective self.

The group engagement model identifies three aspects of this form of self: pride, respect, and identification. Within the theory, pride is defined as how an individual evaluates the status of their group. Some research (Fuller, et al. 2009) suggests that organizational prestige is overlooked by Group Engagement Theory. However, Group Engagement Theory does not overlook organizational prestige as it predicts that an individual who believes that their group is of high status will have high levels of pride. Respect is an individual's evaluation of their status within the group. These two concepts combine to form identification, which ascertains how closely an individual relates with a group and the status that an individual feels within the group. This identification then informs decision-making.

This attention to the concept of identity in individual decision-making is what places this model in stark contrast to resource-based decision-making. However, the group engagement model does not completely ignore material motivations. Informing this concept of identity are two components: resource judgements and procedural justice. The resource judgement component of the model incorporates some of the assumptions of resource judgement models. Both the group engagement model and resource judgment models assume that individuals make judgements based on the level and quality of resources that they receive from the group.

However, unlike resource judgement models, the group engagement model does not assume that there is a direct connection between resource judgements and individual decisions. Instead, the group engagement model assumes that resource judgements inform individual

concepts of identity, which, in turn, shape individual decision-making. Resource judgements are also more complex in the group engagement model. Individuals do care about favorable outcomes in the level and quality of goods received. Individuals prefer to maximize their public goods and minimize their public costs. However, they also care about the level and quality of goods received in comparison to other members of the group. Resource judgements are (at least partially) perceived through the lens of distributive justice.

Distributive justice is defined as the fair allotment of goods in a society (Törnblom & Vermunt, 2007). In the case of Josephine County, citizens care about their allotment of public goods and costs in comparison to other Josephine County residents. While one would assume that individuals would want to maximize goods for themselves while minimizing costs to themselves, individuals who are viewing governmental allocation through a lens of distributive justice may be willing to take fewer resources or absorb more cost if they view the allocation of resources as fair. This contrasts the basic model of outcome favorability, which only concerns individual judgements of personal allocations.

Along with distribution and the perceived fairness in distribution, an individual's perceptions of justice in group processes informs individual identification within a group. This is what is referred to as procedural justice. Procedural justice is commonly defined as the idea of "fairness in the processes that resolve disputes and allocate resources" (Thibaut and Walker, 1975). Whether a process is fair can be measured across a variety of criteria. In order to be fair, a process must be impartial, ethical, consistent, representative of the needs of the group, accurately informed, and correctible in the event of a mistake (Leventhal, 1980). The group engagement model simplifies these criteria by narrowing procedural justice into four different

groups: formal decision control, informal decision control, formal treatment, and informal treatment.

First, processes are divided by formality. Formality in decision-making procedures refers to processes that are clearly codified in group rules. Informal procedures refer to how the rules of the group are actually applied in practice. Components of procedural justice are divided further by distinguishing between decision-making processes and treatment. Decision-making processes are judged based on the amount of control that an individual has over outcomes. Self-interest is tied into this need for decision control, as decision control can aid in individual outcome maximization. Because of this, procedural justice cannot completely be divorced from outcome favorability. An individual with a high level of control over a decision-making process will likely have more power in determining outcomes, and will be more likely to structure outcomes to favor them. Treatment, on the other hand, refers to the neutrality of the process, trustworthiness of the decision makers, and the process's respect of the individual. All of these aspects of treatment are necessary in order for an individual to feel that a process is procedurally just. When individuals feel a process is procedurally just, they are much more likely to be satisfied with their position and to trust those in management (Rubin, 2009).

These assumptions of Group Engagement Theory make some assertions about the relationship between members of a group and the decision makers of the group. Group Engagement Theory asserts that citizen perceptions of control over group processes scale from high levels of perceived control to low levels of perceived control. This matches well with the assertions of theories of co-production, which claim that levels of citizen control over designing and implementing policy is variant (Bovaird, 2007). Citizen perceptions of control and treatment can be adjusted through granting the public control over decisions and policy implementation,

The group engagement model suggests that individuals who perceive group resources to be sufficiently and justly distributed and perceive the processes that determined distribution of those resources to be just will have high levels of group pride and self-respect. Several studies have confirmed this relationship between organizational fairness and identity judgements by looking at employees working within organizations (Hassan, 2013, Alexandra et al. 2010, Hameed, et al., 2013). Individuals who perceive an organization to be fair, will have high levels of self-respect and group pride, and will be likely to engage in group-sponsored discretionary behavior. In contrast, individuals who experience injustice in the decision-making process, or believe that group resources are insufficient or unjustly distributed will have a diminished social identity and will be unlikely to participate in group-sponsored discretionary behaviors. Thus, in order to determine an individual's likelihood of engagement, one needs to look at an individual's perceptions of procedural and distributive justice.

The Group Engagement Theory predicts that perceptions of distributive justice and procedural justice will inform identity, which, in turn, will determine behavior. However, the relationship between perceptions and identity is not necessarily a one-way relationship. Other theories argue that perceptions can be influenced by an individual's identity status judgements. This reverse-causation hypothesis has been utilized in several theories to suggest that rather than perceptions of justice shaping identity, identity shapes perceptions of justice (Shao, et al. 2013). Culture, ideology, and other societal factors can play a role in determining whether an individual perceives group procedures and resource allocations as just (Jackson, et al., 2012). While this potential reverse-relationship is not clearly explained in the original theory by Tyler and Blader, this paper will take this into account by allowing for a feedback loop between perceptions and identity (as depicted in Chart 1).

In addition, the divisions between the categories of procedural justice and resource judgements are likely not as clean as the theory would suggest. Perceptions of government treatment, decision control, outcome favorability, and distributive justice likely hold effect on one another (Bradford, 2014). If an individual believes that the outcome of a policy results in an unjust distribution of resources and costs, an individual is more likely to believe that the process of making that unfair decision is not neutral, not trustworthy, or otherwise does not treat them well. Similarly, perceptions of outcomes can be tied to perceptions of decision control. If an individual votes for a policy that passes that results in positive outcomes for them individually, that individual will likely have more positive perceptions of decision control than an individual who voted in opposition to the policy. This complexity suggests that the initial motivations for group engagement decisions may be “un-pure” and contain more nuance than the theory might suggest. Thus, there exists a need to account for multiple motivations within each perception when utilizing Group Engagement Theory.

One question that might challenge the appropriateness of the use of Group Engagement Theory in this particular case lies in the name of the theory itself. Group Engagement Theory, as the name suggests, has primarily been used in group contexts, particularly intra-organizational contexts. This begs the question of whether Group Engagement Theory can be applied at a larger scale to the relationship between citizens and their government. However, components of the Group Engagement Theory, including the ties between justice perceptions and identity (Skitka, 2002—which looked at the connection between individual pride and respect in a state decision depending on if that decision was made by court decision, legislative act, or referendum) and identity and behaviors (Dovidio et al., 2009—which looked at how individuals make decisions based on their social status) have been tested at the citizen-governmental level. This adaptability

of components of the model suggests that Group Engagement Theory itself could also apply at this level.

#### VARIATIONS IN RESULTS OF GROUP ENGAGEMENT THEORY

In the case of Josephine County, the discretionary behavior in question is the choice to vote for a proposal to levy property taxes in order to fund public safety services. The Josephine County Charter requires public approval in order to raise taxes on private property (Charter for Josephine County, Oregon, 1996). The Josephine County Board of Commissioners have requested the support of Josephine County citizens in order to raise property taxes. Viewed through the lens of group engagement theory, individuals choose to participate in discretionary behavior depending on whether they feel pride and respect based on the changes proposed by the group authority, rather than their feelings held within in the status quo. In this section, I will look at how individuals make resource judgements, the factors that individuals analyze to determine if a decision-making process is procedurally just, and the characteristics of people who choose to vote in favor or in opposition of taxes for public services.

#### TAXES, PUBLIC GOODS, AND RESOURCE JUDGEMENTS

When individuals attempt to determine whether they support proposed change in resource distribution, they perceive this change through multiple perspectives. Individuals first judge redistribution through basic outcome favorability, in which outcomes are rationally judged based on their costs and benefits. Taxes are seen as a cost, and without clear benefit will be avoided (Citrin, 1979). Alternatively, public goods received are calculated as a benefit, and, if possible, will be maximized (Citrin, 1979). Thus, the basic economic motivation behind redistribution support or opposition depends on the balance of taxes and public services.

However, in order for an individual to determine this balance, a certain level of knowledge about the nature of taxes and services is necessary. The level of individual knowledge often depends on the level of clarity of the tax. While some tax instruments may clearly state the costs to the individual, many instruments are more complicated and do not allow for simple calculation of costs. Benefits can be even more difficult to calculate due to the abstract nature of public goods (Ostrom and Ostrom, 1977). The value of public goods like public safety, fire protection, and public education can be difficult to ascertain because they are not easily measurable. Individuals often have limited information about public goods unless they have personal contact with the delivery of the good (Chingos, et al. 2012; Yusef and O'Connell, 2015). Because of these limitations, the favorability of outcomes of a decision can only make up a part of resource judgements.

Difficulties in judging public goods require individuals to use comparisons of themselves with others in order to make proper resource judgements. Through the lens of group engagement theory, citizens are able to compare their personal situation with others to determine if public goods and costs have been appropriately distributed. Along with judgements about the quality of public goods, individuals make this judgement based on two different forms of distributive justice: horizontal and vertical equity (Wenzel, 2002).

The concept of horizontal equity suggests that similarly situated individuals should face similar tax burdens and should receive similar levels of public goods (Elkins, 2006). The key point in this principle is the idea of “similarly situated” rather than “identically situated” individuals. Individuals determine for themselves who is “similarly situated” and expect those individuals to have similar tax burdens and access to public resources. Injustice is perceived when individuals believe that the tax/benefit system disadvantages them in comparison to their



similarly situated peers (Hall and Ross, 2010). This makes increasing taxes particularly difficult in counties surrounded by jurisdictions with comparatively low tax rates.

Individuals also take into account their resource allocation and tax burden in comparison to people who are situated outside of their social strata. This is referred to as vertical equity. While horizontal equity focuses on individual evaluations of fairness within a single social strata, vertical equity is concerned with the fairness of the tax system as a whole (Wenzel, 2002). Individuals judge this equity based on the perceived fairness of the tax instrument. For progressive tax structures, political ideology frames the perceived fairness/unfairness of the tax system; ideological liberals are more likely to perceive a progressive system as fair, while ideological conservatives are more likely to prefer a less progressive, “flatter” tax system (Foster, 2012). Individuals will also classify themselves within a particular strata depending on the tax instrument. In the case of property taxes, individuals will stratify themselves based on the amount of property that they own (Hale, 1985). Similarly, in the case of service delivery, individuals will stratify themselves based on the level of service delivery they expect from a given policy change (Hartner, et al. 2008). These comparisons inform individual resource judgements which allow individuals to identify their societal status. Therefore, resource judgements influence individual engagement decisions. This means that Josephine County residents will take into account their public resources and taxes, their public resources and taxes in comparison with others, and the overall distribution of taxes and public resources in the community.

#### REFERENDA, LOCAL CONTROL, AND PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

The Group Engagement Model identifies treatment of the individual and individual decision control as the two main criteria for how citizens determine if a process is procedurally

just. These two criteria are weighed both in formal and informal applications of the process. As much as these factors matter in determining perceptions of procedural justice, they do not completely determine citizen identity or engagement. If a decision-making process contains enough complexity, separate aspects of the same decision-making process may be judged differently. These judgements depend on individual relationships with the decision makers, treatment that they have experienced from decision makers in the past, and the level of control that individuals have over different parts of the decision-making process. In the case of Josephine County, where the decision to levy taxes for public safety is due to decisions made at the County level, federal level, and through referenda, individuals have varying levels of trust in the overall process due to experiences with decision makers at any of those levels.

The recent public safety service funding crisis in Josephine County began when Congress decided not to renew federal funding for rural Oregon counties. Thus, perceptions of the levy process may be skewed negatively based on perceptions of the quality of treatment that Josephine County residents have received at the hands of the federal government. Centralized governments often struggle to be perceived as procedurally just when their actions have effect at a local level, particularly if those effects are perceived as negative. Due to the size of the federal government, individuals perceive that federal government is significantly less responsive to citizen needs, and that the individual citizen has significantly less control over decisions at the local level (Sharpe, 1970).

In contrast, local government is often perceived as being more procedurally just than federal government. Individuals have greater connections to those in power at the local level which creates a greater sense of attachment to those in power (Vetter, 2007). The level of closeness to the population and the level of transparency and openness within local government

ensure that the perceived legitimacy of local government is maximized (Sharpe, 1970).

Maximized local control is also often preferable because local control can be used to limit the influence of the central government (Baker, et al. 2011). However, if individuals feel separated from the processes of local government or feel that local government is incompetent or untrustworthy, perceptions of procedural justice in local government will be diminished. Local governments must ensure that citizen voices are heard and taken into consideration in order to maximize perceptions of procedural justice.

Utilizing referenda is one method that local governments can use in order to increase citizen voice in policymaking. In the case of Josephine County, referenda are encoded in law whenever policymakers seek to change property taxes (Charter of Josephine County, 1996). Referenda are seen as a more procedurally just means of decision-making than mandates from authority (Skitka, 2002). However, referenda can be perceived as procedurally unjust if the individual feels they are part of a minority whose voice is not heard within the referenda process. For example, some ideological liberals in Josephine County often feel as if their voice is never heard in county government because they make up a minority of the population. Additionally, individuals will likely view the referenda process unjust if they feel they have a strong moral opposition to the subject being voted upon (Stitka, 2002). Ideological opposition to a particular policy can ensure that an individual will perceive a process as procedurally unjust, regardless of the amount of voice given in a process.

#### QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY: WHO FEELS INCLUDED?

Within group engagement theory, procedural justice and resource judgments impact identity which then determine individual decisions to engage in discretionary group sponsored behavior. A significant amount of research has dealt with the characteristics of individuals that

choose to support tax increases to provide for public services. Both socioeconomic and ideological characteristics of individuals impact decisions regarding taxes and public expenditures. Analyses of these characteristics should shed light on the nature of the relationship between perceptions of justice, identity, and individual decision-making.

Individuals coming from lower socioeconomic status are more likely to support policies that result in redistribution. The choice to support these changes likely comes from self-interested motivations to increase personal share of public goods (Beck et al., 1990). Additionally, older individuals, women, racial and ethnic minorities, and individuals with higher levels of education in Oregon and Washington have been shown to have a higher preference for increases in taxes to support public expenditures (Beck et al., 1990).

Differences in ideology and knowledge have a major impact on the decision to vote for tax and expenditure proposals. Individuals that perceive government as wasteful and conservative voters are likely to vote against such proposals (Foster, 2012., Steel and Lovrich, 1998). However, opposition to such proposals is diminished by higher levels of connectivity within the political system and higher levels of policy knowledge (Chingos, et al. 2012). Based on the results of this literature review, we should expect a set of characteristics amongst individuals who support public service tax levies and individuals that oppose such levies. Analysis of the writings and arguments of both sides should clearly display this distinction.

## BACKGROUND OF PUBLIC SERVICE FUNDING IN JOSEPHINE COUNTY

### HISTORY OF PUBLIC LANDS AND FEDERAL FUNDING

Understanding public funding issues in Josephine County requires an understanding of the history of the relationship between Josephine County and the federal government. This section describes some of the historical circumstances within Josephine County to illustrate the

County's history with the federal government, government spending, and public service funding. This history includes a discussion of federal ownership of lands within county jurisdiction, federal payments plans tied to timber harvesting in federal lands, and a decline in payments due to restrictions on timber harvests. This section then discusses government solutions to county funding problems through the Secure Rural Schools Act (P.L. 106-393) and how the intent of this policy resulted in the funding issues that Josephine County is facing.

While Josephine County was founded in 1856, Josephine County's relationship with the federal government truly began in 1866 with the passage of the Oregon and California Railroad Act. This act set aside lands ranging from San Francisco to Portland for development by railroad companies. Land was also set aside for settlement to encourage development of the region. Unfortunately, since the land was undeveloped for settlement, few settlers sought to move to the area. Instead, timber companies looking to utilize the area's heavily forested landscape fraudulently purchased land. This problem became so endemic that in 1904 *The Oregonian* reported that more than 75% of land sales had violated federal law (Blumm & Wigington, 2013). Due to the widespread nature of this problem, the federal government indicted nearly a hundred people for fraud. The railroad companies, fearful of suit but also looking to maintain timber profits, terminated land sales. This action was in direct violation of the original 1866 grant.

This launched a series of lawsuits between the U.S. Government, the State of Oregon, and the railroad companies. This eventually resulted in the 1915 Supreme Court case *Oregon & California Railroad Company v. United States*. This case ruled that the railroad companies were in violation of the grant when they terminated land sales. However, since the railroad had been built, the railroad companies were entitled to compensation. Shortly thereafter, Congress passed the Chamberlain-Ferris Act, which compensated the railroads for their land, revested 2,800,000

acres of land covered by the 1866 Oregon and California Railroad Act back to the federal government, and set up an account from which the State of Oregon, the State of California, and counties affected by the reversion (O&C counties) could earn money from timber revenues on the federal land.

Unfortunately, the payments given to these counties were far too small to solve any financial problems from which rural Oregon counties were suffering. The timber harvests in O&C counties were too small to generate revenue for the county governments. Additionally, since much of the land in rural counties were owned by the federal government, counties could not collect property taxes on these lands to pay for public services. In 1926, Congress voted to alleviate some of these problems through the passage of the Stanfield Act, which would allow counties to receive payments from the federal government based on the amount of federally owned land within each County. This would reimburse the counties for funds that they would normally make if the land were privately owned. Unfortunately, this system also depended on timber revenues to provide funding to the counties. Since timber revenues were still very low, very few payments were made to the counties.

In 1937, Congress again attempted to better ensure funding for Oregon and California counties negatively affected by federal ownership of land by passing the Oregon and California Revested Lands Sustained Yield Management Act of 1937 (O&C Act). The O&C Act required the U.S. Department of the Interior to harvest timber from the O&C lands, sustaining a certain yield from year to year. 50 percent of revenues from this harvest was required to be returned to the counties, while 25 percent were to be given to the U.S. Treasury to reimburse the U.S. government for payments made to the counties prior to the passage of the O&C Act. By 1951, the federal government had been reimbursed for these payments, and so the 25 percent per year

previously given to the Treasury was returned to the counties themselves. Through this system, the O&C Act was successful at creating a sustainable method of ensuring the public funding of Oregon and California counties. Counties used these payments to provide for public services including law enforcement, education, and health and social services. In Oregon, this allowed several counties, including Josephine County, to have some of the lowest property taxes in the state.

#### DECLINE IN TIMBER REVENUE AND FEDERAL FUNDING

This system worked very well for several decades ensuring funding for many rural Oregon counties. As timber revenues grew, funding for public services increased. This continued until 1989, when timber harvest revenue in the O&C counties peaked at \$1.5 billion. After 1989, timber sales began to decrease. Economic recession, international and domestic competition, timber industry restructuring, and decreased timber yields due to overharvesting and increased environmental concerns resulted in fewer timber sales, which, in turn, led to a decreased level of funding for rural Oregon counties (Charnley, et al., 2008). By 1998, revenue collected from federal forest lands fell to a third of what was collected in 1989.

Timber harvests were additionally restricted by environmental concerns in the early 1990s. These environmental concerns began having an effect in 1990 with the listing of the northern spotted owl as an endangered species. This resulted in a number of court injunctions to halt the flow of federal timber from owl habitats. In 1994, the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) was implemented to officially codify the changes in federal forest management policy. The Northwest Forest Plan sought to coordinate management of public forests in northern California, Oregon, and western Washington between the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service,

and other federal agencies. The goal of the plan was to ensure that forest products could be harvested sustainably while still providing protections for forest habitats.

These government actions resulted in additional restrictions for the timber industry, and were commonly blamed for the elimination of timber industry jobs. Counties affected by these changes sought to rebound from loss of timber industry jobs by finding other economic specializations to gain revenue. Some sought to increase the level of agriculture while others maximized recreation and tourism opportunities in their counties. Others looked to become retirement and bedroom communities, utilizing the low taxes and low cost of living within their counties to attract residents (Charnley, et al., 2008). Unfortunately, for some Oregon counties, these changes failed to bring in funding for government services that had been formerly collected from federal timber revenues.

#### FEDERAL FUNDING SOLUTIONS

In 1993, the federal government attempted to make up for gaps in funding by creating a ten-year payment plan within the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (P.L. 103-66). The plan attempted to stabilize county funding by tying county payments to 85 percent of average payment levels from 1986 to 1990. Payments would be decreased by 3 percent each year over the course of ten years to slowly wean counties off of federal assistance and to allow for time for other funding mechanisms to be developed.

Payments continued to decrease until 2000 when Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, which would provide another source of federal funding for rural counties until 2006 (P.L. 106-393). This bill was meant as a temporary solution to stabilize county funding by providing payments from the federal government to rural counties. This act intended to give counties additional time to find other funding mechanisms for county



services. Under this act, counties could receive monies from two different federal sources: payments from the Forest Service for specific projects and payments in lieu of taxes from the Bureau of Land Management. These payments in lieu of taxes were first made legal by P.L. 94-565 and P.L. 97-258 to compensate local governments for lost tax revenue due to the nature of the ownership of property within a government's jurisdiction. Oregon has received a significant portion of the funding from this act. This bill was extended for one year in 2007, and for four additional years in 2008 as a part of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-343). An extension plan was proposed in 2011, but failed to pass through Congress. Payments to the counties have slowly declined since the passage of the 2008 plan. The 2008 payment plan expired in the fall of 2012, however, the Transportation Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-141) also provided for a one-time payment to counties. In April 2015, the Secure Rural Schools Act was reauthorized as a part of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015 (P.L. 114-10). Funding from this act is set to last until September of 2018. While this funding does help with some of the issues Josephine County faces, the monies that Josephine County collects from the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service today are significantly less than under previous funding structures.

**Federal Payments to Josephine County (2009-2016)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Forest Service Payments</b>	<b>BLM Payments</b>	<b>Total Federal Payments</b>
<b>2009</b>	\$2,282,403.21	\$12,621,590.90	\$14,903,994.11
<b>2010</b>	\$2,056,980.66	\$11,359,149.32	\$13,416,129.98
<b>2011</b>	\$1,522,023.20	\$10,237,512.65	\$11,759,535.85
<b>2012</b>	\$1,533,753.90	\$5,777,440.65	\$7,311,194.55
<b>2013</b>	\$1,509,033.02	\$5,227,953.30	\$6,736,986.32
<b>2014</b>	\$1,484,490.61	\$5,715,452.48	\$7,199,943.09
<b>2015</b>	\$1,309,040.99	\$5,623,215.92	\$6,932,256.91
<b>2016</b>	\$1,422,870.65	\$4,965,017.79	\$6,387,888.44

*Department of the Interior-Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service*

## JOSEPHINE COUNTY PROPERTY TAX REFERENDA

Rural Oregon counties faced this lack of funding in different ways, some increasing revenue through taxes, others merging and cutting funding for services. Josephine County looked to public opinion in order to solve this budget shortfall, asking for revenue through a series of referenda asking for an increase in property taxes. Historically, Josephine County has had one of the lowest property tax rates in Oregon, taxing only \$0.59 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Josephine County has the fourth lowest median property tax revenue per capita in the state, only collecting \$1,227 per person. Two of the Oregon counties that collect less property taxes per capita (Gilliam and Sherman) are able to fund services by collecting revenue from wind energy production. The effects of low rates have been amplified by the small percentage of land in the county that is taxable. Only 6.9% of the property in the county is taxable (Josephine County Assessor, 2016). Other lands in the county are owned by the federal government, state government, the county, or cities or are otherwise specially assessed to be exempt from property taxes.

The first property tax levy referenda occurred in May of 2012, in which the voters voted down an additional \$1.99 per \$1,000 of assessed value added to County property taxes that was to last for 4 years. Shortly after the failure of this levy, County Sheriff Gil Gilbertson was forced to lay off approximately two-thirds of his staff and release 90 inmates from the Josephine County jail due to lack of funding. In November, Grants Pass voters supported measures to combine the city sheriff's office with the city police department in an attempt to conserve city funds.

In 2013, Josephine County commissioners placed another tax levy on the ballot to raise funds for law enforcement. This levy would increase property taxes by \$1.48 per \$1,000 of assessed value. Voters again rejected this levy, but at a much closer margin than in 2012 (51%-

49%, as opposed to 57%-43% in 2012). In 2014, another referenda was placed on the ballot to raise money for the jail and juvenile services. Again, voters opposed this measure and voted out Gil Gilbertson in favor of Dave Daniel, showing frustration with the County Sheriff's Office. The fourth public safety levy was rejected in May of 2015, shortly after the announcement that a 2-year extension of the Secure Rural Schools and Self-Determination Act was authorized by Congress.

### **Josephine County Election Results**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Would Fund</b>	<b>Tax Increase</b>	<b>% For</b>	<b>% Against</b>
<b>2012</b>	17-43	Deputies, Dispatchers, Jail, Juvenile Facilities	\$1.99 per \$1,000	43	57
<b>2013</b>	17-49	Deputies, Dispatchers, Jail, Juvenile Facilities	\$1.48 per \$1000	49	51
<b>2014</b>	17-59	Jail and Juvenile Services	\$1.19 per \$1,000	47	53
<b>2015</b>	17-66	Deputies, Dispatchers, Jail, Juvenile Facilities	\$1.40 per \$1,000	46	54

## **METHODS**

This paper utilizes a least-likely critical case study to test the bounds of the Group Engagement Framework. This section of the paper will describe the least-likely critical case study method, explain why it was chosen, and explain why Josephine County works as a least-likely critical case. This information will be used to explain how the research questions are capable of testing some of the tenets of Group Engagement Theory. Furthermore, from these questions, I will describe the methods used to collect and analyze citizen opinions.

## **THE LEAST LIKELY CRUCIAL CASE**

### **WHY USE CRUCIAL CASE METHODOLOGY?**

Determining the validity of a theory is very challenging. Many methods exist to address this challenge, all of varying scales and complexities. In a crucial case study a theory is

challenged by looking at one or a few case studies to confirm or deny the validity of the theory. Looking at a small number or stand-alone case allows researchers to look at the case with significantly more depth than in a large study with many units to observe. While some critics would argue that the small n case studies cannot produce generalizable knowledge (Sekhon, 2004), some of these problems with generalizability can be addressed by the form of case study used, and through case study selection. In a crucial case, the case is selected based on likelihood that a case study will conform to the validity of the theory. If the goal is to test the bounds of a theory, a least-likely crucial case study method (otherwise known as a confirmatory case method) should be used to test if the theory applies in the most unlikely of circumstances. Using a least likely case minimizes the effects of other causal factors, and allows for greater inferences to be made (Gerring, 2007). While crucial case studies may be non-random and small in scale, it is the extent that inferences can be made from results that make crucial case studies powerful.

For a theory to be properly tested by a least-likely crucial case, the theory must carry a certain level of risk. The more that a theory makes specific predictions that can be tested, the more risky the theory (Gerring, 2007). Group Engagement Theory lends itself to be tested in this manner by making predictions about the actions of individuals with certain justice perceptions. Group Engagement Theory states that identity judgements are the primary motivating factors for determining group engagement decisions. However, identity judgements themselves are informed by resource judgements, including perceptions of outcome favorability and distributive justice, and perceptions of procedural justice, including treatment within group processes and control over group decision-making.

Group Engagement Theory furthers these concepts by predicting that people will have a primary focus on the issues of the procedural justice within their groups rather than on their own

individual resource judgements. According to Tyler and Blader (2003), this is because procedural justice issues are more closely tied to conceptualizations of group identity. From this inference, it follows that citizen attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors will be more heavily shaped by procedural justice issues. This yields the testable prediction that citizen arguments for or against engagement will more commonly cite procedural justice arguments than resource judgement arguments.

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#### WHY IS JOSEPHINE COUNTY A CRUCIAL CASE?

In order to be considered a crucial case, the facts of the case must be central to the confirmation or disconfirmation of a theory (Gerring, 2007). To test this prediction offered by Group Engagement Theory, a crucial case in which citizen perceptions and engagement decisions can be measured is necessary. In order to truly test the theory, a unique enough case must be selected to see if the theory retains validity in the most difficult circumstances. The case of Josephine County provides an example of an instance where both citizen perceptions and engagement decisions can be measured in an atmosphere that would provide for a least likely case.

Also, as the literature review suggests, there are particular individual characteristics that can heavily influence citizen perceptions and engagement decisions. These differences vary by ability to measure public service value/tax burden (Ostrom & Ostrom, 1977), tax instruments used (Wenzel, 2002), perceived peer groups (Elkins, 2006), relationships with decision makers (Chingos, et al., 2012), locality of decision-making (Vetter, 2007), and political ideologies (Foster, 2012). Josephine County is unique in that a particular policy instrument, a property tax, was being used to provide funding for public safety at a local level. This took place in a county that was very unique in terms of political ideology and demographic statistics.

The situation in Josephine County is particularly unique because of the demographics of the population that resides in the county. Josephine County is a large, but sparsely populated county with a land area larger than Rhode Island but a population of only 83,021 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The population of Josephine County is much older than the rest of the state, with an average age of 47 (compared to 39 for the state of Oregon) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This number is inflated due to the higher number of retirees in the County, with 47.65% of households collecting some form of Social Security Income (compared with 31.58% for the entire state) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The higher number of retirees is likely, in part, a result of the lower cost of living and lower property tax rates in the county and the county's reputation as a good place to retire. Josephine County residents are also less well off than those in other parts of the state, with a median household income from 2010-2014 of \$31,890 (in 2006 dollars) compared to \$43,024 for the entire state. The end result of these statistics is that most Josephine County residents live on a fixed income, making an increase in property taxes undesirable for much of the population.

Josephine County is also unique because it is politically conservative in comparison to the rest of Oregon and to the rest of the country. There is a significant conservative, tea party, and libertarian movement within the county. This can be observed in the voting history of the county. The last time that non-Republican presidential candidate was able to secure the county's vote was in 1936 when Josephine County supported Franklin Roosevelt. In 2016, 41% of county voters were registered Republicans while only 27% were registered as Democrats (Oregon Secretary of State, 2016). This contrasts greatly with the rest of the state where only 29% of voters are registered Republicans, and 41% are registered Democrats (which also contrasts with a

27% Republican, 30% Democrat breakdown amongst registered voters nationwide)(Gallup, 2016).

This effect of ideology on Josephine County resident's decisions to support or oppose tax measures can be seen in the County's vote on state tax initiatives. Josephine County has a history of rejecting tax measures that would traditionally be deemed politically progressive. In 2010, the county voted against the rest of the state on Oregon Measures 66 and 67. Measure 66 sought to increase taxes on household income above \$250,000 while reducing income taxes on unemployment benefits. Oregon voters supported this measure, with 54% of voters voting in support; Josephine County residents opposed this measure with 55% of Josephine County residents voting in opposition. Measure 67 sought to increase corporate taxes. Again, Oregon voters supported this measure 53-47, but only 44% of Josephine County residents supported this tax measure. Similarly, a 2012 measure to phase out estate taxes was opposed by state voters but supported by county voters. Based on these results, ideology can be considered a determinant of tax measure support in the County.

What this implies for the county is that Josephine County voters will be more likely to view taxation and larger government as inherently unfair (Foster, 2012). Both the ideology of voters in Josephine County and the demographics of the population suggest that individuals will likely be opposed to the levy on the basis of the levies' perceived fairness. This will likely skew results towards distributive justice arguments. This would counter the prediction that most individuals make decisions based on procedural justice grounds. Because of these factors, Josephine County can be utilized as a crucial case to test the validity of Group Engagement Theory.

Research questions testing the Group Engagement Theory will look primarily at the prediction that procedural justice arguments are more often used to justify group engagement decisions than resource judgements. On those grounds, the first research question is as follows:

1. Do Josephine County residents more commonly utilize procedural justice arguments (decision control or procedural treatment) or resource judgement arguments (outcome favorability or distributive justice) when making decisions about county public safety property tax referenda?

This question seeks to observe the nature of citizen arguments to determine the validity of the prediction that procedural justice arguments will outweigh resource judgements as motives for citizen behaviors. This paper hypothesizes that the number of resource judgement arguments will be inflated due to additional distributive justice arguments because of citizen ideology.

However, procedural justice arguments will still outnumber resource judgements.

2. Do Josephine County Residents opposing the levy more commonly utilize procedural justice arguments or resource judgement arguments when making decisions about county public safety property tax referenda?

This question recognizes that there may be differences in motivations between supporters and opponents of the levy. Opponents of the levy are more likely to utilize distributive justice arguments against the levy on the basis of ideological opposition to property taxes and bigger government. Because of this, this paper hypothesizes that opponents of the levy will utilize resource judgement arguments, particularly distributive justice arguments to oppose the levy.

3. Do Josephine County Residents opposing the levy more commonly utilize procedural justice arguments or resource judgement arguments when making decisions about county public safety property tax referenda?



This question continues the search for differences in motivations and perceptions between levy supporters and opponents. This paper expects levy supporters to be less ideologically opposed to larger government and additional taxes due as evidenced by their support for the tax levy. Fewer supporters will use distributive justice arguments as motivations for their behaviors. Thus, this paper hypothesizes that levy supporters will utilize procedural justice arguments rather than resource judgment arguments to inform their voting behavior.

## METHODOLOGY

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### DATA SOURCE

Josephine County has a select number of outlets for public opinion. The paper of record for the County is the local newspaper, *The Grants Pass Daily Courier*. The *Courier* contains articles, editorials, and letters to the editor that have information and opinions on the issues affecting residents of the County. The letters to the editor are particularly enlightening, as they are written by members of the public, and are limited in length (250 words or less). The brevity and direct connection to the public makes letters to the editor an attractive source of data (Cooper, et al., 2008). Because of these characteristics, these letters to the editor were selected as the unit of analysis for this paper. Letters from January 2012 to November 2015 were selected to identify public opinion of the 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 levies. Letters were selected based on a series of keywords (listed in Appendix A) related to the public safety levy referenda. For this paper, over 700 (771, in total) letters to the editor were identified as potential data from *The Grants Pass Daily Courier* database.

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### ANALYSIS

This study went through several rounds of coding in order to narrow the focus of the research. First, from the 771 letters collected, letters were strictly chosen based on their

connection to the Josephine County public safety property tax levy referenda from 2012-2015. Other referenda had taken place concerning different issues, including library taxes and animal shelter property taxes, different tax mechanisms, including both sales and property taxes, and at different levels of government, including City and County governments. However, in order to preserve reliability in responses, this study narrowed its focus solely to Josephine County public safety tax referenda. While the different Josephine County public safety property tax referenda across the years had slightly different tax rates for slightly different services, the differences between these referenda was negligible. Narrowing this focus decreased the total number of letters to the editor analyzed from 771 to 458.

Once letters had been narrowed down by subject matter, a latent content analysis was done to determine arguments within each letter. A latent content analysis looks for underlying themes of each letter, rather than key words (Babbie, 1995). Since letter writers often phrase their arguments in a variety of ways much too wide to narrow down through key words and phrases, a latent content analysis was chosen to better grasp the underlying themes of each letter. This was first used to code letters based on whether or not they supported a given levy. Coding by letter argument involved multiple steps. First, axial coding was used to identify patterns within concepts and to tie themes together within the Group Engagement Theory framework. Letters to the editor could be coded multiple times, as authors would make multiple arguments within a single letter. Once these arguments had been identified, the codes from the Group Engagement Theory framework were then quantified for further analysis. Thematic coding was then used to identify arguments within each theoretical category. The full coding process is outlined in Appendix A.

This section discusses the initial results of the analysis of letters to the editor to the *Grants Pass Daily Courier*. While results in this section do not strictly answer the research questions of this study, this section utilizes the analyzed data to both discover the generalizability of the findings and to add further depth to the analysis. This section both presents the raw findings of totals in each of the coded categories, and discusses arguments used by supporters and opponents within each of those codes. Full results can be seen in Appendix B, and examples of actual quotes coded into each category can be seen in Appendix C.

#### TOTALS

This study analyzed 458 letters to the editor to the *Grants Pass Daily Courier*. Of the 458 letters analyzed, 219 expressed support for the public safety tax levy, while 239 were opposed to the levy. This equates to approximately 47.8% supporting the levy, and 52.2% being opposed to the levy. Given that the 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 were voted down 57-43, 51-49, 52-48, and 54-46 respectively, these results match up relatively well with the opinions of the Josephine County voting public.

#### RESOURCE JUDGEMENTS

Overall, resource judgements were the most common arguments made regarding the public safety levy. Of the 458 letters to the editor analyzed, 352 made resource judgement arguments. That totals to approximately 76.8% of the letters utilizing resource judgement arguments. This section details the number and types of resource judgements utilized by both supporters and opponents to the public safety levies, separating arguments by support/opposition and whether the argument utilized outcome favorability or distributive justice.

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#### OUTCOME FAVORABILITY

With 116 of the 219 supporters of the levy mentioning outcome favorability, this category was the most popular reason amongst supporters to back property tax levies. Supporters of the property tax levy expressed their perceptions that the current level of public goods provided was insufficient, and that the property tax levy would be a step towards ensuring enough public goods were supplied. What was meant by “a sufficient level of public goods” varied from letter to letter. Definitions varied by type of public good described and the beneficiaries of public goods. Many individuals were concerned with individual safety, feeling as if they would be more secure if the level of funding for law enforcement increased. Other individuals voiced concern at a community level, believing the security and stability of the County was in jeopardy if public services were not provided sufficiently through increases in law enforcement personnel and jail space.

Other supporters voiced economic concerns as their reason to support the public safety levy. Some individuals had family members who were members of law enforcement, or were themselves County employees, and had personal economic stake in providing funding for public safety services. Alternatively, many individuals concerns were much more community focused. Many citizens feared that losing funding for law enforcement would result in job losses for the County. These fears were confirmed after cuts in federal funding forced the County to lay off law enforcement personnel in 2012. Many individuals believed that providing funding for law enforcement would give the County some much needed jobs. Additionally, supporters of the levy believed that the taxation/expenditure system set up by the levy would enhance the stability and security of the provision of public safety services within the County.

Opponents also cited economic arguments in their decision regarding the levy, though, not as regularly as supporters. Of 239 letters written in opposition, only 26 mentioned quality of

outcomes as a reason to oppose the levy. Rather, fairness of outcomes was a much more common complaint. Tax burden arguments were common amongst levy opponents. Many individuals felt that their current tax load was already constraining, and further taxes would place undue stress on them financially. Some individuals cited the fact that they had initially moved to the County because of the lower taxes, and felt that raising taxes would be burdensome. Others worried about the effect that raising taxes would have on the local economy, fearing that additional property taxes would drive out individuals and jobs.

Opposition arguments ranged beyond economic. Some opponents to the public safety levy viewed the increase in law enforcement protection as unnecessary, and believed an increase in law enforcement funding would be waste of taxpayer money. Some individuals felt secure with the current level of law enforcement funding. For some, this was because they lived in Grants Pass and believed that coverage from the city police would be sufficient in ensuring their personal safety. Others cited local, state, and national sources that pointed to a drop in crime rates over time as reason why the current level of law enforcement protection would be sufficient for maintaining order. Others believed that they were capable of providing for their own personal safety, or viewed law enforcement as incapable of preventing or stopping crime, and so increases in taxes and services would be wasteful.

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#### DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Supporters also utilized distributive justice arguments to promote the public safety levy, though not quite to the same extent as they mentioned quality of outcomes. 99 letters of support (out of 219) were written discussing fairness of public good/cost distribution. Supporters of the levy believed that past systems of funding for public safety services were unjust in how the tax burden was distributed. Some levy supporters emphasized their distaste with funding coming

from federal sources. Some individuals believed that forcing out-of-County taxpayers to pay for County services was innately unfair, others balked at taking money from the federal government because of their preference for local governance.

While distribution of the tax burden was commonly discussed, so was distribution of public goods. While some individuals felt that they had been properly serviced and provided sufficient levels of public safety, they would note that certain classes of individuals in the community (often the elderly, those on limited income, individuals living in rural areas) were underserved by law enforcement. Often, news stories in which an area resident had been harmed were cited as cases in which increased levels of law enforcement would have protected that person.

Curiously, few to no arguments were made in support of the tax instrument used by the levy. Given that this was a primary component of the policy change, one would expect some arguments would come out in favor in of this particular instrument. However, very few to no arguments were made supporting tax progressivity, or the taxation of property owners.

In contrast, the unfairness of the tax instrument was one of the primary arguments used by opponents of the levy to argue against the levy. 154 opposition letters made mention of the unfairness of the tax levy as a reason to oppose it. Some individuals stood in opposition to the idea of a property tax, viewing it as unfairly targeting property owners. Other individuals viewed the tax levy as unfair to city residents, as they would have to help provide for both city and County police coverage. Ideological opposition to progressive tax systems was very common. Many individuals preferred the idea of a flat tax in which all tax payers were taxed at an equal rate. Alternatively, some individuals that viewed the increase in public services as unnecessary suggested that a voluntary tax should be put in place in which individuals who

preferred a higher level of law enforcement service could pay taxes while others who preferred a lower level of service could choose not to pay.

Some opponents also balked at the idea of raising taxes at all, given the distribution of other resources in the County. Since the federal government had ownership rights on much of the land in the County, these individuals felt that the responsibility rested on the federal government to pay for County services. Similarly, since the federal government had control over much of the timber in the County, individuals felt that forcing the County to pay for many of its services was unjust.

Along those lines, many opponents of the levy believed that additional taxes were unnecessary and would only contribute to the problem of what they perceived as a wasteful government. Often, individual government policies or purchases by local law enforcement would be cited as examples of government waste. These individuals often suggested that a restructuring of government services would be preferable to taxation. Instead of increased taxes, these opponents suggested the possibility of merging city and County services, or increasing the reliance on volunteers to fill in gaps in law enforcement provision.

#### PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Procedural justice arguments were also used by both sides to justify support or opposition to the public safety levies. Of the 458 letters to the editor analyzed, 216 made procedural justice arguments. That totals to approximately 47% of the letters utilizing procedural justice arguments. This section details the number and types of procedural justice arguments utilized by both supporters and opponents to the public safety levies, separating arguments by support/opposition and whether the argument utilized governmental treatment or decision control points.

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## TREATMENT

Individual supporters display attitudes suggesting that they have been treated well by the process and by the actors within the process. Treatment by government officials was the top procedural justice reason for supporting the levy, with 53 letters (of 78 using procedural justice arguments) discussing fair treatment in County processes. This is especially apparent in the discussion regarding police-citizen relationships. Most individuals that discuss police-citizen reactions, regardless of levy support, hold the police in very high esteem. Supporters of the levy also mention their trust in local government officials, including the County commissioners. Ideology, including religious and political beliefs, are mentioned as motivations for trusting authorities in the County.

Treatment by government and government processes was also the most common procedural justice response by opponents. 98 opposition letters argued against the levy due to mistreatment within government processes. Many opponents believe that the County government is corrupt and untrustworthy. Some individuals cited the County's multiple attempts of raising taxes through referenda after County residents had voted against the levy as a sign that the County did not listen to citizen voices and was untrustworthy. Opponents also were likely to cite negative experiences with government, including state and federal governments, as reasons to oppose the public safety levy.

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## DECISION CONTROL

Favoring the levy because of feelings of control (or lack thereof) over decision-making processes was an argument used by both supporters and opponents. 33 letters expressed support using decision control arguments. Many supporters of the levy were likely to feel connected to the process of raising funds for public safety, and expressed their belief in and appreciation for



the referenda process. However, some supporters did not support the levy because they agreed with it or the process, but instead out of fear of loss of control over the process if the levy failed. Many supporters believed that levy failure would result in state or federal takeover of County public safety services, and might result in higher taxes than those proposed in the levy. These individuals saw the levy as a “lesser evil” than if the levy failed.

Opponents felt as if the decisions made by the County were distant and out of their control. 67 opposition letters utilized decision control arguments in their letters. Since the need for tax levies began after cuts in federal funding, individuals expressed feelings that the process was being determined from outside the County. Distance from federal decision-making was often cited as a reason for opposition. Some individuals also pointed to other policy actors as having undue control over decisions in Josephine County. Environmentalists and the Environmental Protection Agency were blamed for putting restrictions on timber harvests, thus reducing funding to the County, resulting in the need for the tax levy. Decision-making processes outside the County were not the only processes from which individuals felt disconnected; many individuals felt like they had very little control over the decision-making done by the County itself. That the County continued to attempt to raise taxes through referenda after previous similar referenda had failed suggested that the County commissioners either were not listening to citizen opinion, or did not care to include citizen opinion in the process

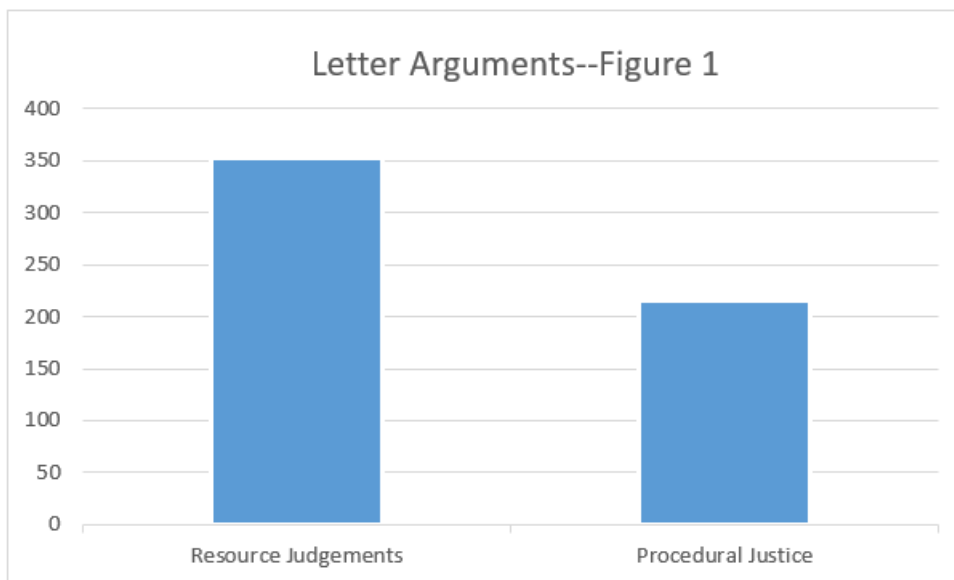
## DISCUSSION

In this section, I will discuss the implications of the results of the content analysis on my research questions. First I will discuss the results directly, looking at the basic quantitative data, seeing how it answers the research questions, and if the results correspond to this study’s

hypotheses. Further discussion will shed light on the implications of those results and what the results mean for the Group Engagement Theory.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 1

The first research question asked whether Josephine County residents more commonly utilize procedural justice arguments or resource judgement arguments when making decisions about county public safety property tax referenda. This question was meant to take an overall look at how closely the case study of Josephine County fit the GET prediction that procedural justice has a greater impact on individual identity and decision-making than individual resource judgements. This paper hypothesized that the theory would accurately predict overall motivations for behavior, and procedural justice arguments would be utilized more frequently within letters than resource judgement arguments. However, due to ideological concerns over the tax measures within the levy, this paper predicted that distributive justice arguments would be commonly used. Figure 1 displays the overall results:

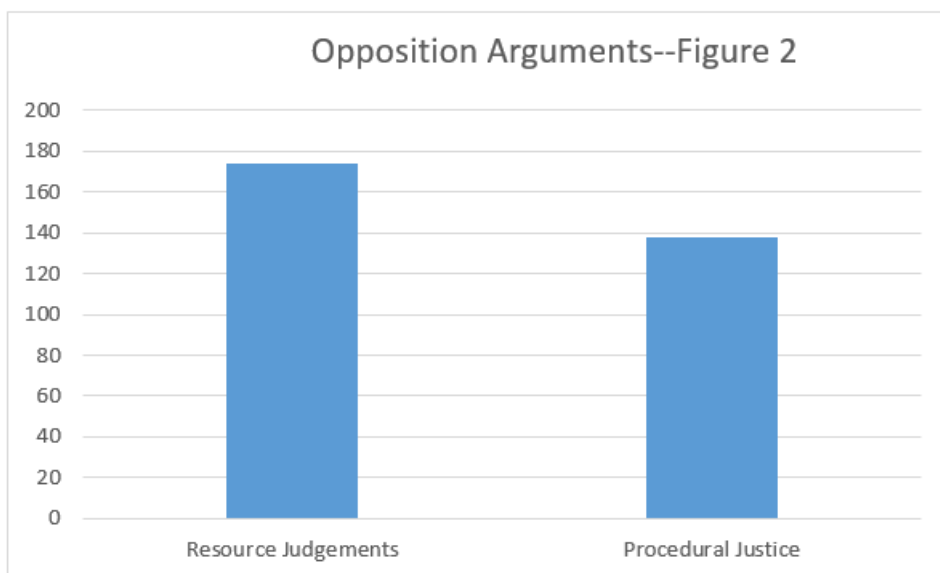


The hypothesis that there would be a greater number of letters with procedural justice arguments than resource judgements ended up being incorrect. Of the 458 letters analyzed,

76.8% (352) made resource judgement arguments while only 47.1% (216) made procedural justice arguments (since multiple arguments could be made within one letter, percentages will not add up to 100%). The other prediction, that distributive justice arguments would be inflated, seems to be correct. 253 of 352 resource judgement arguments (71.8%) discussed distributive justice concerns. 55.2% of total letter volume discussed distributive justice.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 2

The next research question asked whether levy opponents more commonly utilize procedural justice arguments or resource judgement arguments when making decisions about county public safety property tax referenda. This question sought to understand if there was an inherent difference between levy opponents and the Josephine County voting public as a whole. Given that these individuals oppose the levy, this paper predicted that distributive justice arguments would be used more frequently by opponents than by supporters. This implies that levy opponents would be more ideologically conservative and opposed to a property tax levy. On those grounds, this paper hypothesized that opponents would utilize resource judgements more commonly than they utilized procedural justice arguments. Figure 2 displays the arguments of opponents:

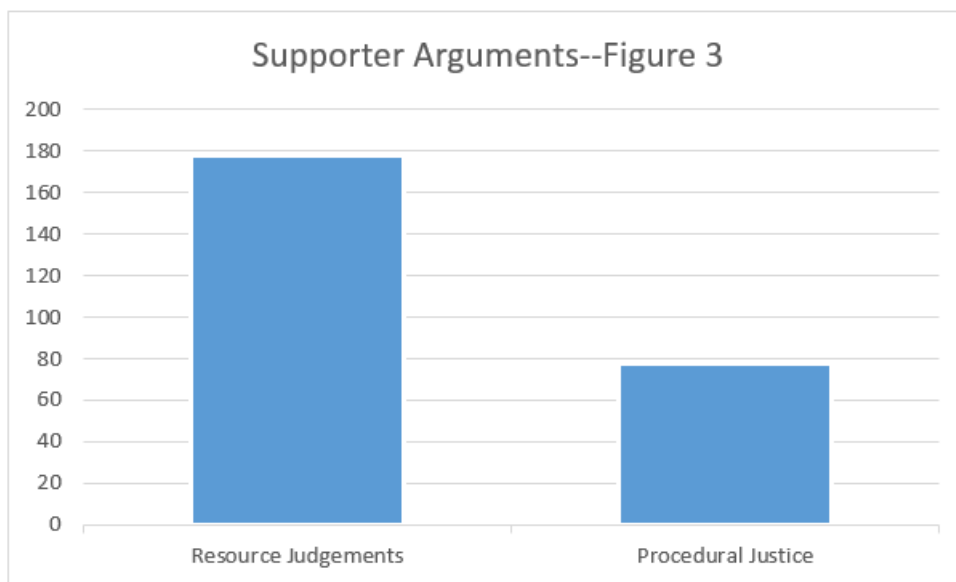


As pictured above, the results show that the hypothesis that resource judgements would be more commonly used than procedural justice arguments amongst opponents is correct. Of 239 opposition letters analyzed, 174 (72.8%) utilized resource judgement arguments while only 138 (57.7%) utilized procedural justice arguments. It should be noted that resource judgements are actually more common in the total population (76.8% for total, 72.8% for opponents) and procedural justice arguments are more common amongst opponents (47.1% for total, 57.7% for opponents). The other hypothesis that resource judgements would be more common amongst opponents than the total population also turned out to be true, with 154 opposition letters (64.4% of opposition letters) mentioning distributive justice concerns (compared to 55.2% of the total letters).

### RESEARCH QUESTION 3

The final research question asked whether levy supporters more commonly utilize procedural justice arguments or resource judgement arguments when making decisions about

county public safety property tax referenda. This question sought to further understand the differences between levy opponents, levy supporters, and the voting public as a whole. Since these letters were in support of the levy, this paper predicted that supporters would not have the same ideological concerns as opponents. This would result in a lower proportion of distributive justice arguments than opponents or the overall total. This, in turn would lead to a higher number of procedural justice arguments than resource judgements. Figure 3 displays the results:



The hypothesis that supporters would more commonly make procedural justice arguments rather than resource judgements was incorrect. Of the 219 letters written in support of the levy, 178 letters (81.2%) utilized resource judgement arguments while only 78 (35.6%) utilized procedural justice arguments. The prediction that distributive justice arguments would be used less often was correct, as only 99 of the 219 supporter letters analyzed (45.2%) utilized distributive justice arguments. This compares with 55.2% of the total population and 64.4% of opponents letters. Supporters were most likely to utilize outcome favorability arguments with 52.9% of supporter letters using such arguments. Additionally, supporters were less likely than

the rest of the writers to use procedural justice arguments (35.6% amongst supporters, 47.1% amongst total population).

#### FURTHER DISCUSSION

The hypotheses proposed by this paper had mixed success at predicting outcomes. The hypotheses were correct about the role of distributive justice amongst supporters and opponents. As predicted, opponents were much more likely to cite distributive justice reasons as motivations for opposing the levy. This was likely, in part, due to ideological opposition to the tax measures suggested. For supporters of the levy, the role of distributive justice in determining engagement decisions was diminished. However, rather than utilize procedural justice motives to support levy decisions, supporters were more likely to favor outcome favorability arguments (52.9% utilizing outcome favorability arguments, 35.6% utilizing procedural justice arguments).

However, hypotheses regarding whether letters to the editor would favor procedural justice arguments or resource judgement arguments failed to retain validity. The predictions that levy supporters and overall results would favor procedural justice arguments were completely inaccurate. The prediction that opponents would favor resource judgements over procedural justice arguments was correct, however, loses some validity as opponents were most likely to cite procedural justice as a reason for opposing the levy.

What these results could suggest is that there is another variable influencing citizen perceptions of public resources and public processes. While ideology likely plays a role for both opponents and supporters of the levy (as is suggested by the increase in distributive justice, and thus, resource judgement arguments), ideology is not the only factor influencing citizen perceptions, particularly on the opponent side. Treatment within processes is the second most common argument utilized by levy opponents (41% of opponents). Reading through the letters, this is likely a result of a lack of trust in governmental processes. Opponents of the levy are

much more likely to oppose the levy because they see government as wasteful or otherwise untrustworthy.

Beyond the implications for Josephine County, this study has implications for Group Engagement Theory. Group Engagement Theory predicts that procedural justice is the primary motivator in determining individual identity judgements, and thus determines engagement decisions. This study suggests that the opposite is the case, and in fact, resource judgements are more important than perceptions of procedural justice. This paper suggests two different reasons why this might be the case. As this paper predicted, opponents are likely to utilize distributive justice motivations to support their decisions because of ideological opposition to property taxes. Supporters, on the other hand are more likely to utilize outcome favorability arguments to support their decisions. This is likely due to the nature of the public safety issue. Public safety is an issue that is highly prescient in the mind of supporters. Compared with other public goods, failing to have a proper level of public safety seems to carry relatively dire consequences. For this reason, supporters likely utilize outcome favorability arguments rather than procedural justice arguments. What this implies for the theory is that the prediction that procedural justice is more impactful than resource judgements can be proven wrong in cases where there is significant ideological opposition to a policy, or in cases where the policy in question is highly prescient amongst actors, and carries a certain amount of risk.

CONCLUSION

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given these results, Josephine County residents appear to want certain policies from their County government. Supporters would like to see proper funding for law enforcement, opponents would prefer that a property tax not be used to raise that funding, and opponents would also like a more trustworthy process for making a delivering policy. Josephine County should seek to accomplish all three of these items if it truly wants to pass legislation to fund public safety services. Many Josephine County residents oppose the levy proposed by the County, but that is not the problem that Josephine County faces. Some residents resent the decisions made by the County government because they feel disconnected from the process of policymaking and policy delivery and distrust the officials in charge of making policy decisions. If the County wants to resolve issues regarding citizen disenfranchisement from County processes, the County should seek to incorporate more citizen voices into the decision-making process. This paper recommends that Josephine County do this through using co-productive models of governance.

Coproduction can be defined as “the provision of public services through regular, long-term relationships between professionalized service providers and service users or members of the community, where all parties make substantial resource contributions” (Bovaird, 2007). Coproduction utilizes input from both civilian and professional sources in order to determine a level of service delivery that is desired by service providers, users, and funders. Because of this inherent use of citizen voices, coproduction is often seen as more democratic than traditional forms of public service provision.

Systems of coproduction can be viewed along a spectrum. Systems can range from citizens having very little input into planning, to having full citizen control over planning and service delivery. Systems of coproduction are judged along two axes of citizen participation:



involvement in service planning and involvement in service delivery. Traditional service provision minimizes citizen involvement in both of these areas, favoring professional control over most service delivery procedures. Within this model, citizens may have some control over the system by being able to elect decision makers, however, the ability of citizens to make direct decisions or help in the provision of services is limited.

The current system in Josephine County is very similar to the traditional model. Josephine County residents have some control over budgeting as it concerns to property tax issues, but for the most part, decisions are made by the County Commissioners. Since this system appears to be inadequate at ensuring procedural justice, Josephine County should seek to change its mechanisms of service provision to allow for more citizen voices. The results of this study would suggest one of the two following options. Option 1 would continue the traditional professional service delivery of public safety, but expand citizen involvement in service funding planning. One method under which this has been achieved is through participatory budgeting. Under participatory budgeting, citizens gather at set intervals (normally annually) to discuss issues facing the community and to prioritize government spending. Concerns voiced within these gatherings then have a direct impact on the decisions made by government officials. This system enhances citizen engagement by giving an outlet to public opinion. Since citizen voices were involved in the process of service planning, citizens are also more likely to view decisions as legitimate.

Under Option 2, Josephine County could expand citizen involvement in both service planning and in service delivery. This expansion would result in a system of full user-professional coproduction. Given that public safety is a public good that deals with more risk, professionals should be the primary providers of service. However, finding ways to incorporate

citizen involvement into service delivery could further display the legitimacy of the process of public safety provision.

These suggestions do come with some limitations. First and foremost, no matter how much citizen involvement is granted within the process, some individuals will not be satisfied with the results. This is particularly the case within Josephine County where citizen opinions are so varied. Furthermore, shifting responsibilities to the public may result in some resentment amongst formerly empowered service professionals. Also, if the results of decisions made by the public are perceived as undesirable, prescribing blame and holding decision makers accountable is much more difficult. While these difficulties may arise, coproducing policy rather than utilizing traditional service methods should allow for more democratic voice and thus increase perceptions of procedural justice within the Josephine County government.

#### LIMITATIONS

The usefulness of this study is limited primarily by the type of data utilized. Unlike survey research or interviews, a content analysis of letters to the editor does not allow the researcher to have much control over what data is revealed from respondents. While this can allow for a greater variety of original data, it also means that many research subjects will fail to give data that is needed to answer the research questions. This is particularly problematic in this study when identifying the concept of identity. Individuals are unlikely to identify their position within and relation to society in a letter to the editor. Because of this, identity judgements are assumed based on support or opposition to the public safety levy referenda. As per group engagement theory (Tyler and Blader, 2003), those who support the levy are assumed to have high levels of pride and respect, while opponents are assumed to have lower levels of pride and respect.

Additionally problematic is the generalizability of opinions within letters to the editor. While the letters to the editor section of *The Grants Pass Daily Courier* may be available for the public to use to voice their opinions, there is no reason to believe that opponents and supporters of the levy write in at proportional rates as they are represented in the County. *The Grants Pass Daily Courier* allows for the same individuals to write in multiple times to the paper, so individuals who write in often will be overrepresented in comparison to others. In addition, the opinions within letters to the editor may not be generalizable to the Josephine County population. Only a small percentage of individuals write letters to the editor, and often that portion of the population is the most passionate about a given issue. This may mean that the opinions analyzed in this study may not be representative of the Josephine County public as a whole.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH

This research provides a first take at documenting the views of the citizens of Josephine County and placing them within a framework to understand how County residents make decisions to engage with government. This was not meant to completely understand all of the opinions held by Josephine County residents, nor was the theoretical framework used the only way to look at citizen opinions. Research utilizing a completely different framework could result in different results. Further research should look to apply other theories of public opinion to the Josephine County case to further understand where citizen opinions come from and how these opinions inform behavior.

Additionally, future research should also seek to utilize other methods and sources to determine citizen opinions. While content analyses of letters to the editor do allow for a wide variation in responses, they are non-random, and only allow for a certain level of depth in responses. A study designed to find more depth in information could utilize the results of this

project to develop an interview protocol that would be used to gather in-depth data from policy actors. In contrast, results from this study could be used to develop a survey instrument to randomly survey Josephine County residents to have a better understanding of the opinions of residents and the socioeconomic characteristics of individuals who hold those opinions.

More research should also be done to determine the viability of the policy recommendations made within this paper. Approaches to coproduction should be analyzed, weighed, and sorted by applicability to the Josephine County model of government. From there, further research could look into the amount of citizen engagement that Josephine County residents would be interested in possessing. This research should then point to possibilities of coproduction of policy within Josephine County.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

Given the results of this study, this paper comes to the following conclusions. The role of ideology appears to have an effect in Josephine County, particularly for opponents of the tax levy. Supporters, on the other hand, are more likely to focus on the dangers that may come from a lack of public safety services provided that the levy fails. However, if one focuses on the role of procedural justice in determining levy support, one will see that procedural justice issues only really take effect for the opposition. Opposition mistrust of government is a clear obstacle to ensuring citizen engagement with government. If Josephine County wishes to ensure the funding of County law enforcement, the County will have to overcome any barriers to citizen trust. This paper's recommendation is that the County should seek to gain trust through increased citizen involvement in policy planning and delivery through co-production policies.

In addition, this study has found certain limitations to Group Engagement Theory. When the underlying factors influencing perceptions of procedural justice and resource judgements are

pushed to extremes through citizen ideology or the prescience or riskiness of policy, the prediction that procedural justice will have the highest effect on individual identity judgements and decision-making is proven false. This study suggests that further review of this prediction and the relationship between procedural justice, resource judgements, individual identity judgements, and group engagement decisions is necessary.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A:

#### **Letter to the Editor Coding Process**

1. First, Letters to the Editor are selected based on relevance to the 2012-2015 tax levies using keywords listed below
  - a. Levy
  - b. Public Safety
  - c. Tax
  - d. Law Enforcement
  - e. Referenda
2. Letters are narrowed to only include letters with reference to the Josephine County public safety property tax levies.
3. Letters are divided into the following coding schemata

#### **Levy Support**

Clearly states support towards levy proposal

#### **Levy Opposition**

Clearly states opposition towards levy proposal

4. Axial coding is done to sort arguments into the following theory-driven categories:

#### **Resource Judgements, Outcome Favorability, Support**

Supports levy, based on perceptions of receiving more optimal outcomes from passage of levy

#### **Resource Judgements, Outcome Favorability, Oppose**

Opposes Levy, based on perceptions of receiving less optimal outcomes from passage of levy

#### **Resource Judgements, Distributive Justice, Support**

Supports levy, based on perceptions of fairness in the distribution of public goods/costs upon passage of levy

#### **Resource Judgements, Distributive Justice, Oppose**

Opposes Levy, based on perceptions of unfairness in the distribution of public goods/costs upon passage of levy

**Procedural Justice, Decision Control, Support**

Supports levy, based on perceptions of control over the process of group decision-making

**Procedural Justice, Decision Control, Oppose**

Opposes Levy, based on perceptions of lack of control over the process of group decision-making

**Procedural Justice, Treatment, Support**

Supports levy, based on perceptions of fair treatment (not decision control) within the decision-making process

**Procedural Justice, Treatment, Oppose**

Opposes Levy, based on perceptions of unfair treatment (not decision control) within the decision-making process

5. Thematic coding is done to identify common arguments within each category

APPENDIX B:

<b>Support/Oppose</b>	<b>Resource Judgement or Procedural Justice</b>	<b>Form of Procedural Justice/Resource Judgement</b>	<b>Number of letters</b>
Total	Total	Total	458
Support	Total	Total	219
Oppose	Total	Total	239
Total	Resource Judgement	Total	352
Total	Procedural Justice	Total	216
Support	Resource Judgement	Total	178
Support	Procedural Justice	Total	78
Oppose	Resource Judgement	Total	174
Oppose	Procedural Justice	Total	138
Total	Resource Judgement	Outcome Favorability	142
Total	Resource Judgement	Distributive Justice	253

Total	Procedural Justice	Decision Control	100
Total	Procedural Justice	Treatment	151
Support	Resource Judgement	Outcome Favorability	116
Support	Resource Judgement	Distributive Justice	99
Support	Procedural Justice	Decision Control	33
Support	Procedural Justice	Treatment	53
Oppose	Resource Judgement	Outcome Favorability	26
Oppose	Resource Judgement	Distributive Justice	154
Oppose	Procedural Justice	Decision Control	67
Oppose	Procedural Justice	Treatment	98

## APPENDIX C

Resource Judgements	Outcome Favorability	Support	"'We the people' will have no protection if the levy does not pass." My family and I have lived in fear for over a year now.
Resource Judgements	Outcome Favorability	Oppose	"My question is, who decided that the previous level of service did meet the needs of the community?"
Resource Judgements	Distributive Justice	Support	"I am disappointed at how selfish people can be. We have one of the lowest county taxes in the entire state, and people don't think catching up to the curve is OK?"
Resource Judgements	Distributive Justice	Oppose	"In these tough economic times, seniors and those on fixed incomes cannot afford another tax." "People are hurting, and they have a difficult time stretching their paychecks in this terrible economy. The last thing they need is to have their property tax increased."
Procedural Justice	Decision Control	Support	"Without [passing the levy], Josephine County will find itself being told what to do and what to pay by the state."
Procedural Justice	Decision Control	Oppose	"When will our elected officials realize the voters have said no to this failed plan many times?"
Procedural Justice	Treatment	Support	"One of the things that impresses me about the good stewardship of our city leaders and staff has been their care in not using expensive staff, such as highly trained, sworn law enforcement officers, to do jobs that can be done by others."
Procedural Justice	Treatment	Oppose	"I feel the politics of doom and gloom and scare tactics are wrong." "Government intrusion in your life I see as unconstitutional." "Civil liberties and the right to speak at county meetings have been cut back, as well as public telecasts."