

Educated by Initiative: Direct Democracy and Civic Engagement in the American States

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Direct democracy, as practiced in roughly half the American states, had been praised by proponents as an unadulterated form of “government of, by and for the people.”¹ The initiative process has left an indelible mark on the more than 135 million Americans living in the states where the process exists. During the 20th century, voters approved over 800 of the more than 2,000 initiatives placed on statewide ballots by citizens.² Controversial propositions – ranging from tax reform to gay rights to educational reform to affirmative action to abortion restrictions to environmental protection to legalization of marijuana – have shaped the policy contours of these states. This is especially the case concerning many governance issues that are politically intractable in state legislatures, such as legislative term limits, tax and expenditure limitations, tax increases, party primaries, campaign finance restrictions, and public financing of campaigns. Due to its apparent effectiveness, there are increasing calls by governors and other public officials to extend the initiative to every state, and even national jurisdiction.³

Most of the research conducted on direct democracy in the American states examines policy outcomes. Rather than assessing the substantive impact that ballot measures have on public policy in the American states, this research examines how ballot initiatives shape the broader democratic landscape. We are interested in how initiatives affect the attitudes and behaviors of individual, specifically civic engagement. While the policies adopted by voters via the initiative unquestionably have had a major impact on the public policies of the two-dozen states that permit citizen lawmaking, we argue that citizens are also influenced by the process itself. Our orientation, then, is on the “educative” byproducts of the initiative process.

Practitioners and scholars noted both the *instrumental* and *educative* purposes of direct democracy when the initiative, popular referendum, and recall were first adopted in the

American states during the early 20th century. Today, however, it is the instrumental goal of the initiative that is often highlighted. This instrumental purpose of the initiative is clearly stipulated in the constitutions of the states permitting the process, as the mechanism is intended to provide citizens with an institutional check on the system of representative governance. Instrumentally, the initiative is intended to function as a safety valve, preventing state legislatures from becoming unrepresentative. From this perspective, the initiative can empower citizens to initiate and approve substantive laws and constitutional amendments, circumventing state legislatures. In an unusually even-handed assessment of the mechanism during the Progressive Era, Harvard political scientist William Munro observed, “The first argument in favor of direct legislation rests, accordingly, upon the allegation that existing legislative methods and results are unsatisfactory to the majority of the electorate; that representatives do not properly represent.”⁴ Substantive issues either ignored or thwarted by elected representatives may be introduced by interested citizens or groups functioning outside the traditional legislative process. Although scholars continue to debate whether the primary function of the initiative – that it directly allows the popular will to check the power of state governments – is effective, the instrumental purpose of the initiative tells only half the story.⁵

The second rationale for the adoption of the initiative is a procedural byproduct of its instrumental function. In addition to any substantive changes it may bring to public policy, the initiative process is itself educational. Writing in 1912, Munro noted:

Emphasis is laid, for example, upon the educative value of direct legislation. By means of the initiative, a spirit of legislative enterprise is promoted among the voters; men are encouraged to formulate political ideas of their own and to press these upon public attention with the assurance that they shall have a fair hearing. If the welfare often suffers

from public apathy; if the mass of the voters manifest little interest in the contents of the statute-book, this is due in large measure, it is claimed, to the feeling of electoral helplessness which in some states amounts to a popular conviction.⁶

Thus progressive reformers understood the process of citizen lawmaking itself to be pedagogical. Progressives thought the plebiscitary process itself would help citizens become more politically engaged, thereby elevating the general state of civic affairs and public discourse.

At the apex of the Progressive Era, advocates of the process routinely touted the educative side of the initiative. In 1912, for instance, University of Wisconsin-Madison Professor Paul Reinsch stated with confident equanimity, “This institution [direct legislation] will assist the people, the body of the electorate, in the development of its political consciousness,” as “it will make the body of the electorate more familiar with legislative programs and more interested.”⁷ Irrespective of any substantive policy changes that might result from the mechanism, numerous progressives thought the initiative would stimulate an array of positive educative externalities. Questions placed on the ballot would increase political participation by bolstering turnout on Election Day. Progressives argued that ballot measures would also encourage civic engagement, help edify the electorate, and even increase citizens’ trust in their government.

Leaving to others any evaluation of the substantive outcomes that result from successful ballot initiatives, this research empirically examines the educative effects of citizen lawmaking. Despite the recognition of the secondary, procedural effects of the process during the Progressive Era, scholars have not systematically examined the educative effects of the initiative and their repercussions for democracy in the American states.

We inquire as to whether citizens living in initiative states are more civically involved than those living in non-initiative states. Are citizens more likely to vote when they are allowed to serve as Election Day lawmakers? Are citizens more knowledgeable about politics and civically engaged when they are able to vote on ballot initiatives? Do citizens in initiative states have a greater sense of political efficacy, namely confidence in government, because they are directly participating in the policymaking process? Our goal then is to examine the educative effects of the initiative along both behavioral and attitudinal lines, and appraising its broader impact on the democratic process. The research presented here is in condensed form, presenting some of the “highlights” from our recent book manuscript.⁸

With few exceptions, of course, the individuals and groups who sponsor ballot initiatives do not do so for the explicit intent of realizing the educative effects of the process. Rather, they desire to change public policies. Inspired by theories of new institutionalism, as well as the spate of recent historical and quantitative inquiries into the workings of direct democracy, we argue that the pedagogic externalities of the initiative process may be just as important, if not more so, than any substantive changes brought about by successful initiatives.⁹ After all, more than half of all initiatives placed on statewide ballots fail, and many of the measures that are approved by voters are eventually overturned by the courts.¹⁰ Notwithstanding the ultimate fate of ballot measures, we argue that the institutional rules permitting citizen lawmaking affect the behavior and attitudes of individuals, which shape the broader political context of the states. While public policies resulting from direct democracy come and go, it is the secondary effects of the initiative that may have the more enduring effects on a democratic body politic as well as on the institutions of representative government. By highlighting the procedural externalities of process, we are able to reassess whether the initiative threatens to undermine republican

government, as beltway journalist David Broder and other skeptics contend, or conversely, whether the educative aspects of citizen lawmaking paradoxically strengthen and compliment our system of representative democracy.

The Education of Citizens: Civic Engagement

At the turn of the twentieth century, civic engagement was one of the principal concerns voiced by advocates of direct legislation. Progressive Era reformers – including educators George Haynes, Charles Zueblin, and William Munro, and to a lesser degree, C.O. Gardner, Walter Weyl, and Herbert Croly – argued that direct forms of democracy would stimulate various types of political participation beyond voting.¹¹ Citizen lawmaking would energize otherwise enervated citizens with a sense of civic pride and duty. Furthermore, early proponents of direct legislation contended that ballot initiatives would help engender a more informed electorate. Senator Jonathan Bourne from Oregon, for instance, stated that citizen lawmaking (what he regularly referred to as “the system”) would invigorate and edify the electorate:

The system encourages every citizen, however humble his position, to study the problems of government, city and state, and to submit whatever solution he may evolve for the consideration and approval of others. The study of the measures and arguments printed in the publicity pamphlet is of immense educational value. The system not only encourages the development of each individual, but tends to elevate the entire electorate to the plane of those who are most advanced. How different from the system so generally in force, which tends to discourage and suppress the individual!¹²

Pedagogically, then, citizen lawmaking for reform-minded progressives would inevitably lead to higher levels of participation by citizens in myriad areas of civic life, as the process encouraged voters to become well-informed consumers of the political process.

Nearly a century after the Progressive Era, the topic of civic engagement is again a primary concern among not only scholars and political commentators, but also politicians and community activists. Contemporary American politics is distinguished by declining voter turnout as well as diminishing levels of civic and political engagement. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam, in his best-selling book, *Bowling Alone*, argues that “political knowledge and interest in public affairs are critical preconditions for more active forms of involvement. If you don’t know the rules of the game and the players and don’t care about the outcome, you’re unlikely to try playing yourself.”¹³ Putnam’s lament over the decline in civic engagement is reflected by other scholarly studies. Public opinion surveys reveal that recent college graduates know little more about public affairs than did average high school graduates in the 1940s.¹⁴ Similarly, recent research based on a series of annual surveys shows that interest in politics among the electorate declined by one-fifth between 1975 and 1999. Daily newspaper readership among people under thirty-five dropped from two-thirds in 1965, to one-third in 1990s; at the same time, viewership of television news among respondents in this same age group fell from 52 percent to 41 percent.¹⁵ The decline in voting in America tracks closely the drop in the electorate’s interest in public affairs and political knowledge. Does participatory democracy, in the form of citizen lawmaking, offer hope of reversing these disturbing trends in declining civic engagement?

Contemporary advocates of some forms of direct democracy claim that use of institutions such as direct legislation can stimulate political interest and facilitate learning about politics.¹⁶ Democratic theorists, such as Carole Pateman, argue direct participation in policy making can play a *pedagogic* role, allowing voters to learn considerable information on issues from referenda campaigns.¹⁷ Similarly, constitutional scholar Bruce Ackerman argues that constitutional

referendums helps to engender civic participation, as “apathy will give way to concern, ignorance to information, selfishness to serious reflection on the country’s future.”¹⁸ For their part, political scientists have just begun to empirically test whether giving citizens a direct voice in law-making heightens their interest in politics, deliberation about political issues and knowledge.¹⁹

Despite the claims of some democratic theorists who have built on the arguments advanced by Progressive Era scholars, Putnam contends that ballot initiatives cannot be taken as a reliable sign of widespread civic engagement.²⁰ Rather than institutionalizing a means of returning “power to the people,” Putnam agrees with critics of the process that the popularity of direct democracy may merely reflect the professionalization initiative politics.²¹ The increased frequency of statewide ballot initiatives over the course of the 20th century, after all, is a mirror image of the decline in levels of civic engagement. As the number of initiatives that appeared on state ballots began to explode in the 1970s, citizen engagement in all forms of community and political life began its precipitous decline. As Putnam notes, “Although one might image that such ballot contests might spark widespread political discussion by ordinary citizens, studies show that most signers don’t read what they sign....the opportunity for direct participation does not seem to have galvanized large numbers of voters.”²² Putnam concludes, along the lines of journalist David Broder and other critics of the role money plays in ballot contests, that the rise of direct democracy is a better measure of the power of well-financed special interests than of civic engagement.²³

So, who is correct, Putnam or the array of Progressive Era reformers, democratic theorists, and journalists akin to Broder, in interpreting the effect of direct democracy on civic engagement? To answer this question, we examine the secondary, educative purposes of the

initiative process using recent survey data. Previous research has found that the likelihood of citizens turning out to vote increases with their exposure to initiatives on the ballots.²⁴ We continue this line of inquiry by unpacking the “black-box” linking direct democracy to increased political participation. Specifically, we assess the impact that citizen lawmaking has on civic engagement in the American states by testing hypotheses concerning the relationships between exposure to ballot initiatives and political knowledge, interest, and discussion, as well as political efficacy. There is an appreciable amount of research linking these aspects of civic engagement with the propensity to vote. If direct democracy increases the probability of voting, does it also lead to a more informed, engaged and politically interested electorate? Does more information about politics from ballot contests lead to increased civic engagement?

We explore whether ballot initiatives spark civic engagement by extending participation opportunities through the political process. We hypothesize that information provided in direct democracy campaigns may increase the probability of voting, political knowledge, interest, discussion and political efficacy – questions that to date have been largely unexplored in the literature.²⁵ We rely on American National Election Studies (NES) data from 1996-2000, which we merge with state level data on the number of initiative on state ballots, to empirically answer these questions. We also pool NES surveys from 1988-1998 to explore the impact of initiative use on political efficacy. We conclude with some brief comments about citizen lawmaking and its educative effects on civic engagement, broadly understood.

Why Direct Democracy may Enhance Voter Competence and Political Interest

The effect of exposure to initiative campaigns on civic engagement may be similar to the effect of media exposure. Watching television news has been found to be positively associated with political knowledge in a variety of political contexts. Media coverage of ballot measures

may increase information available to citizens about politics, potentially reducing the costs of being politically informed.²⁶ Like the media, political organizations, such as parties, may lower the costs born by citizens of gathering information. In representative democracies, an essential role of political parties is to reduce the complexity of voting in elections. Based on an ideological position, for instance, voters can choose between a few parties and need not be well informed about the whole range of policies the parties' pursue. In a similar vein, Skip Lupia, Shaun Bowler, and Todd Donovan have shown how citizens can make rational voting decisions on initiatives with simple cues from the media, elected officials, political parties and interest group endorsements.²⁷ With few exceptions, however, scholars have not explored how initiative campaigns may foster broader political knowledge among citizens.

The media have long played an important role in lowering political information costs to citizens. While many researchers attribute lower voter turnout to media coverage, citing negative campaign ads and horse-race journalism, others find that media use (television and newspapers) is instrumental in increasing political knowledge. The agenda setting literature reveals that citizens use the media to learn what issues are important. There is also evidence that voters use the media to acquire information with regard to candidate traits and candidate issue positions.²⁸

The relationship between political knowledge and media use is mediated by interest. A number of studies show that individuals with low political interest are more vulnerable to media messages. People with higher levels of interest are more likely to receive political information from a variety of sources that weakens the impact of any one source. These individuals are also more likely to seek out information from sources that provide more in depth political coverage

such as the print medium. These kinds of sources may in turn allow them to interpret, store, and utilize new political knowledge better than those who are less politically sophisticated.²⁹

Despite these positive media effects, a host of scholars have found that by most standards, Americans possess little interest in or knowledge about politics.³⁰ However, there is evidence that political learning is heavily influenced by the political environment.³¹ Robert Luskin, for example, argues that political sophistication is endogenous to three broad factors: a person's ability to assimilate and organize political information; his or her motive or the desire to follow political affairs; and his or her exposure to political information, that is, his or her information environment. Exposure to political information may be a function of the frequency with which such information is made available, communications technology, and media use.³² Initiative campaigns may create additional opportunities for learning about politics, thus increasing political knowledge, interest and sophistication.

Advocates of participatory democracy have argued for years that more 'self-governance' would increase citizens' competence and interest in communal life.³³ Contemporary initiative campaigns may create additional information "short-cuts" for voters. Initiative elections usually involve extensive media campaigns (television, newspaper, radio) to persuade voters to approve or reject a proposed policy change.³⁴ The more costly an initiative campaign, the more information is provided to voters, at a lower cost. As one campaign consultant noted, "most initiatives' campaigns really are processes of both one side and then the other side attempting to *educate* voters about different aspects of the measure. And as people get more information that tends to influence their attitudes about them [ballot measures]."³⁵ Salient ballot initiatives should provide additional information to citizen, increasing political knowledge and interest.

Recent research tends to support this claim. Mark Smith argues that initiatives and referenda are institutional arrangements that over time can encourage the development of skills that make for more informed citizens. Using the 1992 Senate Election Study that contain samples of approximately equal size from the fifty states, Smith finds that voters from states that frequent use initiatives show an increased capacity to correctly answer factual questions about politics. That is, there is a positive relationship between initiative use and political knowledge.³⁶ Similarly, two European scholars find that in Switzerland, citizens are better informed when they have more opportunities for political participation. Of the 26 Swiss cantons, some can be characterized as more “representative democratic,” whereas others are more “direct democratic.” Using an index that measures the degree of political participation in a canton on a scale of one to six, the authors find citizens are more politically informed and involved in political discussions in cantons with more extended direct democratic participation rights, after controlling for other factors.³⁷

Data and Methods

To avoid ecological fallacies which aggregate-level analyses are prone, we use NES data for three recent election years – 1996, 1998, and 2000 – to conduct individual-level tests of whether exposure to ballot initiatives leads to an informed and engaged electorate. The NES is a nationwide large-scale randomly conducted in-person and telephone surveys. We examine data from three election years to consider change over time and variation between midterm and presidential elections. We analyze the data separately for the three years (rather than pooling it) because of changes in NES survey questions and coding in 2000. We examine each dependent variable (voting, political knowledge, interest, and discussion) in separate models. We also pool

NES surveys from 1988-1998 to examine the impact of ballot initiatives on political efficacy, or confidence in government.

Of all the secondary effects that might possibly be derived from citizen lawmaking, Progressive Era reformers most often singled out how the process could directly boost electoral participation. The dependent variable in the first model is voting, measured with a dummy variable where one indicates that the respondent reported voting in the previous election and zero if otherwise. We expect the number of initiatives appearing on state ballots to be positively related to our dependent variable, voting. To test the impact of initiative exposure on the probability of voting, we also use data from the 1992 Senate Election Study, which unlike the NES surveys, contains samples of approximately equal size from each state.

The dependent variable in the second model is political knowledge measured by the number of six general political knowledge questions correctly answered. While questions varied for the three elections, the 1998 questions, for example, were: “What position does Al Gore hold?” “What position does William Rehnquist hold?” “What position does Boris Yeltsin hold?” “What position does Newt Gingrich hold?” “Which party had a majority in the House before the election?” and “Which party had a majority in the Senate before the election?” While we agree that the answers to these questions per se are rather unimportant, we argue that they serve as good proxy measures for the political information levels of citizens.

Closely related to an informed electorate is political interest. Those who are interested in politics will seek out political information and become more knowledgeable. The dependent variable, or outcome to be explained, in the third model is political interest measured by a Likert scale ranging from “very much interested” in the campaign to “not much interested.” Because family and friends can be an important venue for political information and attitudes toward

politics, the dependent variable in third and final model is political discussion measured by a dummy variable where one indicates that the individual regularly engages in political discussion and zero otherwise.

By merging the NES survey data with state-level data, we are able to test our hypotheses about the effect of direct democracy on citizen's behavior and attitudes. The NES data do not have the advantages of the 1992 Senate Election Study data used by Mark Smith with equal samples for all fifty states, but they do include large samples of respondents from over 40 of the 50 states. The key independent variable we use to test these hypotheses is the actual number of initiatives appearing on the statewide ballot in each year.³⁸ We expect this variable to be positively related to each of our dependent variables.

A final hypothesis is that experience with direct democracy will improve attitudes about government responsiveness. If actual exposure to direct democracy affects political attitudes, we would expect the frequency of initiative use in a state to explain some of the variation in individual level attitudes about political efficacy. To answer this question, we pool data from six American national post-election surveys (NES) from 1988-1998. We measure the average number of initiatives appearing on state election ballots³⁹ rather than using a dummy variable coding for states with and without the initiative process as has been done in other studies. This measurement captures variation in use of the process over time.

We focus exclusively on external efficacy because of its close relationship to political trust, rather than altering one's confidence in their ability to participate in politics. The dependent variable measures external efficacy or government responsiveness. The NES surveys include two questions that asked respondents (1) "if people like [them] have any say in what government does," and (2) if they "think that government officials care about what people like [them] think."

The variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale and indicate increased external efficacy as the scale increases. The scores from these two questions were added to obtain an overall measure of external efficacy.⁴⁰

In the five empirical models explained above we use a variety of other independent variables to control for individual-level attitudinal and demographic factors, as well as state contextual factors that may also influence civic engagement. Not all control variables discussed below are included in all the empirical models; our choice of which control variables to use is based on the previous literature.

To control for the effect of income, we include a 24-point Likert scale measuring total family income. We control for the effects of education with a seven-point scale as well as sex with a dummy variable coded 1 for females. To control for race and ethnicity, African Americans, Asian Americans and Latinos are coded one, with non-Hispanic whites as the reference group coded zero. Age is measured in years. A series of dummy variables are used to account for partisanship, including strong Democrat, strong Republican, and pure independents, with moderate partisans as the reference groups.⁴¹

In the voting models, we also include a dummy variable coded one if the respondent had Internet access and zero otherwise, as the Internet has become increasingly important in providing political news. Because Internet access was not included in the 1992 Senate Election Study, we use an ordinal measure of political interest measured by a Likert scale ranging from “very much interested” in the campaign to “not much interested.”

Higher state racial diversity is associated with increased barriers to voter participation and lower turnout. We measure state racial context in our voting models with a racial and ethnic

index created by for the fifty states using 1996 data on Latino, black, Asian-American, and non-Hispanic white population percentages from Current Population Surveys (CPS).⁴²

We also control for media consumption (television, newspaper, and Internet) and political efficacy, all of which are understood to be important influences on political sophistication and interest in the civic engagement models. We control for general media consumption, with variables indicating the number of days the previous week that the respondent reportedly read the newspaper and watched the national evening news. We also include a dummy variable if the respondent viewed online election news, reflecting the Internet's increasing importance as a source of political information.⁴³ We control also control for political efficacy (discussed above).

Because numerous studies find that perceptions of the economy influence attitudes about government responsiveness,⁴⁴ an attitudinal factor related to the economy was included. Perceptions of the national economy were measured by variables in which higher scores reflect worse economic evaluations. In modeling political efficacy, we also control for the degree of divided government in the state for the period 1988-1998, because split party control of state government may affect citizen perceptions of government responsiveness.

Findings

1) Voting

Since the dependent variable is binary (voted = one, did not vote = zero), logistic regression coefficients are estimated. As shown in Tables 1A and 1B, after controlling for other factors, respondents living in states with frequent exposure to ballot initiatives were more likely to vote in the 1992 and 1996 presidential and 1998 midterm elections, but not in the 2000 presidential elections. This findings supports previous research based on fifty state data,⁴⁵ and

suggests that ballot initiatives may be particularly effective in stimulating political interest in midterm elections when issue campaigns do not compete with presidential races, and in non-competitive, low-turnout presidential elections, such as in 1996. Simulated probabilities suggest that each additional initiative on the state ballot increases the probability of a person voting by one percent, holding all other factors in the model constant.⁴⁶ Thus, an individual residing in a state with four initiatives on the ballot is estimated to have a four percentage point higher probability of voting than if the same individual resided in a state with no initiatives on the ballot, all else equal.

WHO VOTES?

Only statistically significant differences are reported below (See Tables 1A and 1B).

1992 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (competitive)

Exposed to Ballot Initiatives, Lower State Racial Diversity, Strong Partisans (Democrat or Republican), Older, Educated, Affluent, Politically Interested, Non-Hispanic

1996 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (non-competitive)

Exposed to Ballot Initiatives, Lower State Racial Diversity, Older, Affluent, Internet Access

1998 MIDTERM ELECTION

Exposed to Ballot Initiatives, Lower State Racial Diversity, Strong Partisans (Democrat or Republican), Older, Educated, Internet Access

2000 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (competitive)

Lower State Racial Diversity, Strong Partisans (Democrat or Republican), Partisans (Democrat or Republican), Older, Educated, Affluent, Internet Access

Also confirming previous aggregate-level research, individuals residing in states with higher racial diversity were significantly less likely to vote, controlling for other factors. The coefficients for the individual demographic variables in these models are in the expected direction and relatively consistent over time. In each year older people were more likely to vote in elections than younger ones. Consistent with previous research, strong partisans (Republicans and Democrats) and people with more education and income were more likely to vote in two of

the three elections. Internet access also had a positive and statistically significant impact on voting in the two most recent presidential elections, suggesting that increased exposure to the Internet may enhance voter information about candidates and issues, and thereby stimulate voting.⁴⁷

A limitation of the NES surveys is that they do not sample by state. The surveys include respondents from over forty states, but there are not equal numbers of respondents from each state. We use a unique survey, the 1992 Senate Election Study, which contains samples of approximately equal size from each state, to estimate the relationship between initiative use and the probability of voting. Use of these data also expands our time frame to include the 1992 election. Consistent with the previous analysis, we find citizens residing in states with more initiatives on the ballot are more likely to vote, after controlling for the usual demographic and political variables. This is strong evidence that direct democracy fosters increased political participation in the American states.

2) Political Knowledge

Since the dependent variable political knowledge is ordinal, measuring the number of six factual questions correctly answered, we use ordered logit to estimate the models' coefficients. The coefficients reported in Table 2 suggest that after controlling for partisanship, media consumption, demographic and socioeconomic factors, citizens living in states with more exposure to ballot initiatives had greater political knowledge in 1996 than those who lived in states without the initiative. In this year only, exposure to ballot measures has a strong, positive, and statistically significant independent impact on political knowledge. The finding is consistent with research conducted by Smith using 1992 data from the United States, Matthias Benz and Alois Stutzer analyzing citizen competence in Swiss cantons, and Mendelsohn and Cutler,

analyzing citizen competence in Canada, increasing our confidence in the finding.⁴⁸ As expected from previous research, people with higher incomes, political interest and efficacy, media consumption, and education also have greater political knowledge, while independents have less political knowledge than respondents with a partisan orientation. Thus, our research suggests that exposure to ballot initiatives not only increases political participation, but it also leads to a more politically informed citizenry.

WHO IS MORE INFORMED ABOUT POLITICS?

Only statistically significant differences are reported below (See Table 2).

1996 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Exposed to Ballot Initiatives, Watches Television News, Reads Daily Newspaper, Partisan (Democrat and Republican), Older, Male, White, Educated, Affluent, Politically Efficacious, Interested in Politics

This political information effect of direct democracy, however, was only found in 1996 and not the other elections (1998 and 2000) analyzed. A closer look at the context of the 1996 presidential elections provides a potential explanation – the overlap of state ballot measures and the party platforms of the presidential candidates of the two major parties, Republican Bob Dole and Democrat Bill Clinton. Research has found that major party organizations become involved in initiative contests for many reasons.⁴⁹ When state issue campaigns and federal election campaigns are intertwined, state ballot contests can have important implications for state and national politics.

In 1996, California voters adopted a controversial ballot initiative, Proposition 209, ending state affirmative action in college admissions and government employment and contracts. Both presidential candidates took strong positions on the issue of affirmative action in 1996 in an attempt to split the electoral base of the opposing party.⁵⁰ Dole supported Proposition 209 in his

campaign speeches, promising to end affirmative action at the national level, while Clinton proposed to “mend, rather than end” affirmative action and opposed (albeit meekly) the controversial California ballot measure. In addition, the California Republican Party and the Republican National Committee promoted Proposition 209 and funded its sponsors in an effort to split Democratic support for Clinton.⁵¹ The effects of ballot initiatives on political knowledge appears to vary with election context; in the 2000 election, for instance, ballot initiatives were not central in the presidential contest between George Bush and Al Gore.⁵² When initiatives are closely interrelated with the campaign issues of state and national elections, however, the process can increase the general political knowledge of the electorate.

3) Political Interest

Because political interest is also measured on an ordinal scale, ordered logistic regression coefficients are reported in Table 3. Opportunity for direct participation in policy making has an important effect on political interest, as it did for political knowledge. Citizens residing in states with frequent exposure to ballot initiatives report higher levels of interest in both the 1996 and 1998 elections after controlling for media consumption, efficacy, partisanship and socioeconomic factors. The data suggests initiatives may enhance interest in politics by providing additional sources of political information. Again, the finding is consistent with research conducted by Mendelsohn and Cutler on the positive effects of a Canadian referendum on citizen politicalization.⁵³ As we found concerning political knowledge, exposure to ballot initiatives was not associated with an individual’s political interest in the 2000 elections.

WHO IS MORE INTERESTED IN POLITICS?

Only statistically significant differences are reported below (See Table 3).

1996 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Exposed to Ballot Initiatives, Partisan (Democrat or Republican), Watches Television News, Reads Daily Newspaper, Educated, Politically Efficacious, African American, Male

1998 MIDTERM ELECTION

Exposed to Ballot Initiatives, Watches Television News, Reads Daily Newspaper, Reads Online Election News, Affluent, Politically Efficacious, African American

As expected, many of the control variables are also related to interest in politics and are consistent across time. The affluent and those with more education are generally more interested in politics. Media consumption is important, as individuals who watch more television or read a daily newspaper reported increased interest. In 1998, viewing online election news stimulated interest in the midterm election, but we did not find this effect in the 1996 presidential election, which possibly reflects the expanding number of people who had Internet access. Individuals with more political efficacy—who believe government is responsive to their needs—express more interest in politics, as do African Americans compared to whites. In the 1996 presidential election only, we find that only partisanship matters, as Democrats and Republicans are more interested in politics than those with weak partisan identification. In general, the data show that citizens are more interested in politics when given opportunities to vote directly on policy questions, *ceteris paribus*.

4) Discussing Politics

Closely related to an interest in politics, is discussing politics with friends or family. In fact political discussion may be understood as a precursor to an interest in government and policy. The dependent variable in Table 4 is coded so that higher scores are associated with increased likelihood of discussing politics. Since the dependent variable is ordinal (the question

asks how often a respondent discusses politics), Poisson regression coefficients are reported. Again, we find that exposure to ballot initiatives increases the frequency of political discussion, after controlling for traditional media consumption and individual level factors, including socioeconomic status. Stated another way, citizens are more likely to discuss politics when given more opportunities to vote directly on policy issues but only in the 1996 election, not in 1998 or 2000. Similar to the models estimating political knowledge and interest, we find that the impact of initiative use on discussing politics varies with electoral context, and is not consistent across election years.

WHO IS MORE LIKELY TO DISCUSS POLITICS?

Only statistically significant differences are reported below (See Table 4).

1996 MIDTERM ELECTION

Exposed to Ballot Initiatives, Watches Television News, Partisan (Democrat or Republican), Non-Hispanic, White, Educated

We do find, however, that media consumption and partisanship are consistently important in predicting the likelihood of discussing politics. Similarly, the affluent and educated are more likely to discuss politics, as are non-Hispanics and whites. Ironically, African Americans were more likely to report an interest in politics, but are less likely to discuss politics with friends and family.

5) Political Efficacy

Does direct democracy also effect political efficacy, or confidence in government? The dependent variable is coded so that higher scores are associated with a more efficacious response. Since external efficacy is an ordinal variable, ordered logistic regression coefficients are reported in Table 5. We find strong evidence that citizens living in states with frequent exposure to direct democracy are more likely to claim that government is responsive to their

needs, after controlling for other factors. This is consistent with earlier research, which drew on survey data from only one year.⁵⁴ The coefficient for frequency of initiative use is positive and statistically significant over the ten-year time period. Citizens given more opportunities to directly make policy decisions are more likely to perceive that “people like me have a say about what the government does,” and are more likely to claim that “public officials care about what people like me think.” Given the extended time frame, large sample size, and extensive control variables this is strong evidence that direct legislation may improve citizen attitudes about government responsiveness.

WHO HAS MORE EXTERNAL EFFICACY—CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT RESPONSIVENESS? 1988-1998 ELECTIONS

Only statistically significant differences are reported below (See Table 5).

Exposed to Ballot Initiatives, Partisan (Democrats and Republicans), Perceive Improved Economy, Younger, Educated, White

At the same time, the data indicates that regardless of state institutional context, African Americans have lower political efficacy than whites, after controlling for other factors. Similarly, Asian Americans report lower levels of external efficacy than do whites. In contrast, Latinos report similar levels of confidence in government responsiveness than do white non-Hispanics. This finding is consistent with survey data examining Latino political behavior.⁵⁵

Among the other individual level variables, there is a significant, negative relationship between economic attitudes and external efficacy. Individuals that believe the national economy is strong report higher political efficacy, all else equal. Strong Republican partisans were generally more efficacious than independents or those with only weak partisanship, consistent with previous research. Also, higher education is consistently associated with better perceptions of government responsiveness. After controlling for other factors, there is no difference in

political efficacy between men and women. There is an inverse relationship between age and external efficacy, which may be explained by the fact that the elderly tend to be more attentive to politics and affected by negative portrayals of government in the media. Divided government in the state also does not appear to affect attitudes regarding government responsiveness.

Overall, the findings suggest initiative campaigns promote voting, political interest, knowledge and interpersonal communication (discussion), and political efficacy by providing supplementary political information in relatively low information (non-competitive presidential or midterm) electoral contexts.

Conclusion

Summarizing the “historical legacy” of direct legislation, historian Thomas Goebel argues that the initiative “has not lived up to the expectations of its advocates one century ago.” On instrumental grounds alone, he professes that citizen lawmaking has not reined in corporate interests. Goebel maintains that in terms of substantive outcomes, citizen lawmaking “has only been yet another tool for business interests to achieve their goals.” Though he musters no empirical evidence to bolster his claims, Goebel adds a codicillary indictment on educative grounds. He contends that the initiative has not produced any positive secondary effects, as it has not “contribute[d] in any meaningful way to a revival of democracy in America.” According to Goebel, the initiative “has not empowered ordinary citizens, it has not increased political awareness or participation...and it has not reduced the power of special interests.” He concludes on a pessimistic note, that “the historical analysis of direct democracy since its inception a century ago makes abundantly clear that the initiative and referendum have never served, and probably never will serve, as the means to strengthen democracy in America, to truly build a government by the people.”⁵⁶

Our research brings into stark relief the veracity of some of these claims. We do not attempt to evaluate the substantive public policies that result from direct legislation, nor appraise how well citizen lawmaking approximates public opinion or keeps state legislatures in check. Shunning the standard instrumental perspective, which dominates most present-day studies, we have instead focused on the pedagogical impact of citizen lawmaking. What are the secondary, educative effects of citizen lawmaking?

Situating our inquiry into the process of direct democracy within the larger historical debate, we assess whether citizen lawmaking operates in accordance with the intentions of Progressive Era reformers. Above all, the Progressive reformers were educators. One of those reformers, Frederick C. Howe, a social reformer and Commissioner of Immigration at the Port of New York, touted the “educative influence of referendum elections on measures initiated by the people themselves.” Ballot initiatives, Howe told the learned audience at the annual meeting of the Academy of Political Science soon after the elections of 1912, “lead to constant discussion, to a deeper interest in government, and to a psychological conviction that a government is in effect the people themselves. And this is the greatest gain of all. It has been said that the jury is the training school of democracy.”⁵⁷ So have the optimistic assumptions about direct legislation by progressives like Howe been borne out? Are the contemporary educative effects of citizen lawmaking in keeping with the expectations that progressive reformers had about the process, or have they not lived up to their potential, as Goebel contends?

We find that with respect to voter turnout, civic engagement, and political efficacy, direct democracy does indeed have positive effects on citizens, consistent with democratic norms advanced in the Progressive Era. Based on national survey data, our research indicates that citizens living in states with frequent exposure to ballot initiatives are more motivated to vote,

more engaged and better informed about politics, and express more confidence in government responsiveness than citizens living in non-initiative states. Indeed, we even find that citizen lawmaking has a positive effect on political discussion. While we hesitate to equate this heightened political awareness that is linked to exposure to ballot initiatives with some Rousseauian notion of discursive deliberation, we find that the initiative process does have a significant effect on the attitudes and behaviors of citizens.

Our positive findings, however, vary with electoral context. Ballot initiatives appear to have the greatest impact in low-information elections, such as midterm or non-competitive presidential elections when issue campaigns are less likely to compete with media coverage of candidate races. We suggest that initiatives have these positive educative effects because they provide additional political information to voters. Consistent with the research by Lupia, as well as Bowler and Donovan, we agree that initiatives provide extensive voter information short-cuts, which increase the capacities of citizens to participate in the democratic process.⁵⁸ In addition, initiative campaigns can provide information via emotional media campaigns. The stark contrast of opponent and proponent campaign messages, particularly with high salience ballot measures, may be an ideal forum for learning about politics, and stimulating action.⁵⁹ Harold Lasswell argued in the 1930s that issues with a “triple appeal” – those appealing to an individual’s passions, rational reason, and morality – will likely lead to action.⁶⁰ It is not just the information, but the format in which it is often conveyed, such as direct democracy contests, that is important.

The beneficial effect that direct participation in governmental decision-making has on the democratic education of citizens is no mere coincidence. Our data, which are drawn from multiple sources and span numerous decades, reveal a consistent pattern. The educative effects of citizen lawmaking on broad levels of political participation, civic engagement, and confidence

in government may be as important for American democracy as the initiative's direct effect on public policy. Our analysis of the effects of the initiative on individuals bolsters the normative claims by theorists who advocate varying forms of participatory democracy, from intimate, face-to-face deliberation to technology-driven digital democracy.⁶¹

One of the major political debates in the coming decades will be about the relative merits of direct versus representative democracy. Our findings suggest that the indirect, educative byproducts of direct legislation may better reflect the goals of progressive reformers than some of the substantive outcomes of the process. While citizen lawmaking is certainly no panacea for all that ails civic participation and the democratic experience in America, the initiative does have some tangible institutional effects on the attitudes and behaviors of citizens. We find that the initiative process does have beneficial, educative value as Progressive Era reformers had envisioned, that measurably shape the contours of democratic life. American state institutions allowing for direct participation in policy decisions may educate the electorate, consistent with historical claims about the process.

This research has held up the historical record as a yardstick, measuring the Progressive Era wisdom against contemporary reality of the educative effects of citizen lawmaking. During that celebrated Age of Reform, scholars, reformers, legislators, and the general public vigorously discussed the expectations and limitations of citizen lawmaking. By examining empirically some of the normative claims advanced during the Progressive Era, we have tried to re-evaluate this enduring debate over the pedagogical implications of the initiative process. Direct democracy is certainly no palliative for America's democratic deficit. But if history be our guide, citizen lawmaking may provide some renewed excitement about the possibilities for democratic governance.

Table 1A: Impact of Ballot Initiatives on the Probability of Voting 1996, 1998, 2000

	1996		1998		2000	
Variables	β (se)	p-value	β (se)	p-value	β (se)	p-value
Number of Initiatives on Ballot	.023 (.014)	.099	.045 (.020)	.028	-.011 (.021)	.602
Minority Diversity Index	-.885 (.484)	.067	-1.112 (.468)	.017	-.871 (.480)	.070
Strong Democrat	.109 (.186)	.558	.911 (.189)	.000	.779 (.215)	.000
Strong GOP	-.072 (.205)	.723	1.632 (.268)	.000	1.055 (.297)	.000
Independent	-.235 (.233)	.313	.017 (.225)	.939	-.759 (.208)	.000
Age	.011 (.004)	.006	.053 (.004)	.000	.034 (.004)	.000
Female	.186 (.133)	.163	-.210 (.137)	.125	-.039 (.146)	.788
Hispanic	.303 (.254)	.232	.235 (.244)	.335	-.252 (.276)	.362
African Americans	.123 (.217)	.568	.116 (.221)	.600	.359 (.246)	.145
Education	.027 (.043)	.532	.400 (.046)	.000	.393 (.056)	.000
Income	.072 (.010)	.000	.001 (.009)	.904	.084 (.026)	.001
Internet Access	.591 (.175)	.001	.259 (.158)	.102	.829 (.171)	.000
Constant	.494(.359)	.169	-3.919(.389)	.000	-2.811(.405)	.000
Pseudo R-Square	.0630		.2100		.1941	
LR Chi-Square (df=12)	94.77	.000	348.46	.000	290.22	.000
N	1376		1202		1339	

Note: Unstandardized logistic regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.

Coefficients in **bold** are statistically different from zero at the .1 level using a two-tailed test.

Source: 1996, 1998, and 2000 NES Post-election Study, Inter-University Consortium for Social and Political Research, Ann Arbor, MI.

Table 1B: Impact of Ballot Initiatives on the Probability of Voting, 1992

	1992	
Variables	β (se)	p> z
Number of Initiatives on Ballot	.202(.070)	.004
Minority Diversity Index	-.751(.342)	.028
Strong Democrat	.778(.183)	.000
Strong GOP	.851(.219)	.000
Independent	-.289(.197)	.142
Age	.028(.004)	.000
Female	.090(.116)	.437
Hispanic	-.490(.273)	.073
African American	-.070(.222)	.752
Education	.231(.029)	.000
Income	.189(.033)	.000
Political Interest	.496(.044)	.000
Constant	-6.173(.519)	.000
Pseudo R-Square	.347	
LR Chi-Square (df=12)	610.933	.000
N	2371	

Note: Unstandardized logistic regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.
Coefficients in **bold** are statistically different from zero at the .1 level using a two-tailed test.
Source: 1992 Senate Election Study, Inter-University Consortium for Social and Political Research, Ann Arbor, MI.

Table 2: Impact of Ballot Initiatives on Political Knowledge

	1996		1998		2000	
Variables	β (se)	p-value	β (se)	p-value	β (se)	p-value
Number of Initiatives on Ballot	.021 (.011)	.066	.006(.015)	.671	.023(.015)	.125
Network TV	.051 (.021)	.018	.072 (.020)	.000	.069 (.020)	.001
Newspaper	.071 (.020)	.000	.108 (.019)	.000	.093 (.019)	.000
Internet Exposure	-.009 (.209)	.963	1.165 (.188)	.000	.248 (.121)	.040
Strong Democrat	.332 (.145)	.023	-.091 (.145)	.531	.350 (.137)	.011
Strong GOP	.525 (.165)	.002	-.151 (.177)	.394	.475 (.158)	.003
Independent	-.354 (.204)	.083	-.387 (.176)	.028	-.724 (.183)	.000
Age	.005 (.003)	.098	-.004 (.003)	.156	.010 (.003)	.007
Female	-.684 (.109)	.000	-.086 (.105)	.415	-.953 (.105)	.000
Hispanic	-.049 (.206)	.810	-.161 (.186)	.389	-.856 (.222)	.000
African American	-1.277 (.184)	.000	-.267 (.170)	.117	-.714 (.185)	.000
Efficacy	.137 (.045)	.003	.016 (.026)	.527	.065 (.023)	.006
Interest	.414 (.084)	.000	.256 (.039)	.000	.299 (.041)	.000
Education	.458 (.037)	.000	-.005 (.032)	.861	.406 (.038)	.000
Income	-.081 (.035)	.022	-.013 (.029)	.635	.115 (.045)	.011
Income squared	.003 (.001)	.020	.003 (.001)	.009	-.003 (.002)	.095
Pseudo R-Square	.1121		.0674		.1479	
LR Chi-Square (df=17)	474.93	.000	292.47	.000	711.94	.000
N	1207		1184		1321	

Note: Unstandardized ordered logistic regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients in **bold** are statistically different from zero at the .1 level using a two-tailed test. Source: 1996, 1998, and 2000 NES Post-election Study, Inter-University Consortium for Social and Political Research, Ann Arbor, MI.

Table 3: Impact of Ballot Initiatives on Political Interest

	1996		1998		2000	
Variables	β (se)	p-value	β (se)	p-value	β (se)	p-value
Number of Initiatives on Ballot	.018(.011)	.100	.030(.016)	.064	.018(.016)	.277
Network TV	.205(.023)	.000	.154(.021)	.000	.193(.022)	.000
Newspaper	.075(.022)	.001	.149(.021)	.000	.045(.021)	.031
Internet Exposure	.232(.226)	.303	.474(.188)	.011	.677(.134)	.000
Strong Democrat	.945(.157)	.000	.056(.156)	.721	.623(.152)	.000
Strong GOP	1.327(.180)	.000	.134(.187)	.475	1.081(.186)	.000
Independent	-.572(.223)	.010	-.061(.191)	.750	-.445(.185)	.016
Age	.002(.004)	.545	.004(.003)	.210	.011(.004)	.003
Female	-.315(.116)	.007	.062(.114)	.587	-.158(.112)	.160
Hispanic	.139(.210)	.510	.223(.187)	.232	.421(.223)	.058
African American	.356(.196)	.068	.429(.186)	.022	.485(.192)	.011
Efficacy	.057(.029)	.048	.160(.028)	.000	-.076(.026)	.004
Education	.190(.039)	.000	.050(.034)	.143	.137(.041)	.001
Income	.001(.009)	.890	.017(.008)	.032	.031(.017)	.074
Pseudo R-Square	.1254		.0870		.1265	
LR Chi-Square (df=15)	318.70	.000	217.12	.000	340.77	.000
N	1216		1194		1333	

Note: Unstandardized ordered logistic regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.

Coefficients in **bold** are statistically different from zero at the .1 level using a two-tailed test.

Source: 1996, 1998, and 2000 NES Post-election Study, Inter-University Consortium for Social and Political Research, Ann Arbor, MI.

Table 4: Impact of Ballot Initiatives on Political Discussion

	1996		1998		2000	
Variables	β (se)	p-value	β (se)	p-value	β (se)	p-value
Number of Initiatives on Ballot	.009(.004)	.017	.007(.005)	.199	-.002(.004)	.590
Network TV	.037(.008)	.000	-.012(.007)	.089	.040(.005)	.000
Newspaper	.012(.008)	.129	.002(.007)	.737	.030(.005)	.000
Internet Exposure	-.042(.084)	.620	.007(.064)	.907	.221(.031)	.000
Strong Democrat	.237(.053)	.000	.019(.052)	.720	.131(.036)	.000
Strong GOP	.269(.054)	.000	-.124(.066)	.060	.187(.039)	.000
Independent	-.105(.102)	.305	-.146(.068)	.031	-.134(.052)	.010
Age	.001(.001)	.332	-.004(.001)	.720	-.003(.001)	.008
Female	-.058(.042)	.164	.107(.039)	.005	.009(.028)	.739
Hispanic	-.206(.091)	.023	-.233(.070)	.001	.037(.055)	.500
African American	-.171(.079)	.029	.055(.060)	.353	-.112(.051)	.028
Efficacy	-.006(.010)	.582	.008(.009)	.364	.009(.006)	.124
Education	.033(.014)	.018	.013(.012)	.257	.046(.010)	.000
Income	.000(.003)	.943	.010(.003)	.000	.019(.004)	.000
Pseudo R-Square	.0282		.0122		.0630	
LR Chi-Square (df=15)	119.37	.000	53.96	.000	442.41	.000
N	951		1194		1317	

Note: Unstandardized Poisson regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.

Coefficients in **bold** are statistically different from zero at the .1 level using a two-tailed test.

Source: 1996, 1998, and 2000 NES Post-election Study, Inter-University Consortium for Social and Political Research, Ann Arbor, MI.

Table 5: Impact of Ballot Initiatives on Attitudes about Government Responsiveness, 1988-1998

Variables	External Efficacy Index	
	β (se)	p-value
Average Number of Initiatives on Ballot	.061(.032)	.05
Divided Government	-.033(.060)	.58
Racial and Ethnic Diversity	-.082(.152)	.59
California Resident	-.152(.147)	.30
Strong Democrat	.073(.052)	.16
Strong Republican	.325(.059)	.00
Pure Independent	-.251(.065)	.00
National Economy Worse	-.114(.014)	.00
Age	-.007(.001)	.00
Female	.028(.038)	.46
African American	-.183(.062)	.00
Asian American	-.292(.169)	.08
Latino	.176(.105)	.47
Education	.252(.012)	.00
1990	-.577(.062)	.00
1992	.326(.074)	.00
1994	-.823(.063)	.00
1996	-.557(.065)	.00
1998	-.443(.069)	.00
Pseudo R-Square	.11	
LR Chi-Square (df=19)	1072.074	.00
N	8783	

Note: Unstandardized ordered logistic regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients in **bold** are statistically different from zero at the .1 level using a two-tailed test. Source: Pooled NES Post-election study, Inter-University Consortium for Social and Political Research, Ann Arbor for 1988-1998.

Endnotes

¹ Direct democracy includes the plebiscitary devices of initiative, referendum, and recall. All three mechanisms permit citizens to participate directly in the making of public policy by petitioning a prescribed number of valid signatures to force a popular vote on a ballot measure. With the initiative (which we refer alternatively as “direct legislation” and “citizen lawmaking”), citizens collect a specified number of signatures to place either a statutory measure or a constitutional amendment on the ballot for fellow voters to adopt or reject. With the referendum (sometimes known as the “popular referendum”), citizens collect signatures to place a disputed legislative bill (or its section) on the ballot for the voters to reconsider. With the recall, citizens collect signatures to force a retention vote of an elected official.

² M. Dane Waters, “Trends in State Initiative and Referenda,” *The Book of States*, volume 34 (Lexington: KY, The Council of State Governments, 2002), 239-242.

The Battle Over Citizen Lawmaking. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2001.

³ For example, New York governor George Pataki called for the adoption of the initiative in his 2002 State of the State address. That year, a national conference, *The Democracy Symposium*, led by a former US Senator from Alaska, Mike Gravel, was convened to promote the spread of the initiative at all levels of American government. See also, Donald Wolfensberger, *Congress and the People: Deliberative Democracy on Trial* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2000).

⁴ William Munro, ed., *The Initiative, Referendum, and Recall* (New York: Appleton and Co., 1912), 20.

⁵ Elisabeth Gerber, “Legislative Response to the Threat of Popular Initiatives,” *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1996): 99-128; Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan, and Caroline Tolbert, eds., *Citizens as Legislators: Direct Democracy in the United States* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998); Edward Lascher, Michael Hagen, and Steven Rochlin, “Gun Behind the Door? Ballot Initiatives, State Policies and Public Opinion,” *The Journal of Politics* 58 (1996): 760-75. John Camobreco, “Preferences, Fiscal Policies, and the Initiative Process,” *Journal of Politics* 60 (1998): 819-29; Daniel A. Smith, “Homeward Bound? Micro-Level Legislative Responsiveness to Ballot Initiatives,” *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 1 (2001): 50-61; Daniel A. Smith, “Overturning Term Limits: The Legislature’s Own Private Idaho?” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 36 (2003).

⁶ Munro, *The Initiative, Referendum, and Recall* 1912: 20-21.

⁷ Paul Reinsch, “The Initiative and Referendum,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* 3 (1912): 155-61, 158.

⁸ Daniel Smith and Caroline Tolbert, *Educated by Initiative: The Effects of Direct Democracy on Citizens and Political Organizations in the American States* (under review). The book also examines the indirect effects of citizen lawmaking on interest groups and political parties.

⁹ See, for example, James March and Johan Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989); Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen, and Frank Longstreth, eds., *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); John Allswang, *The Initiative and Referendum in California, 1898-1998* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Kenneth Miller, “Constraining Populism: The Real Challenge of Initiative Reform,” *Santa Clara Law Review*, 41 (2001): 1037-1084; Anne Campbell, “In the Eye of the Beholder: The

Single Subject Rule for Ballot Initiatives,” in M. Dane Waters, ed., *The Battle Over Citizen Lawmaking*.

¹¹ George Haynes, “‘People’s Rule’ in Oregon, 1910,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 26 (1911): 32-62; Charles Zueblin, “The Training of the Citizen,” *Chautauquan* (1903): 161-68; William Munro, ed., *The Initiative, Referendum and Recall* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1912); C. O. Gardner, “Problems of Percentages in Direct Government,” *American Political Science Review* 10 (1916): 500-514; Walter Weyl, *The New Democracy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912); Herbert Croly, *Progressive Democracy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914).

¹² Jonathan Bourne, Jr., “A Defence of Direct Legislation,” in William Munro, ed., *The Initiative, Referendum and Recall* (New York: Appleton and Co., 1912), 203.

¹³ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 35.

¹⁴ Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1995); Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, “Measuring Political Knowledge: Putting First Things First” *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (1993): 1179-1206.

¹⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 36; Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*.

¹⁶ Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); David Butler and Austin Ranney, eds., *Referendums Around the World: The Growing Use of Direct Democracy* (Washington DC: AEI Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1970). See also James Wenzel, Todd Donovan and Shaun Bowler, “Direct Democracy and Minorities: Changing Attitudes about Minorities Targeted by Initiatives,” in Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan and Caroline Tolbert, eds., *Citizens as Legislators: Direct Democracy in the United States*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 228-248.

¹⁸ Bruce Ackerman, *We the People: Foundations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 287. But see Simone Chamber’s persuasive rebuttal of this line of argumentation. Simone Chambers, “Constitutional Referendums and Democratic Deliberation,” in Matthew Mendelsohn and Andrew Parkin, eds., *Referendum Democracy* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

¹⁹ See, *inter alia*, John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, “Process Preferences and American Politics: What the People Want Government to Be,” *American Political Science Review* 95 (2001): 145-53; Mark Smith, “Ballot Initiatives and the Democratic Citizen,” *Journal of Politics* 64: (2002) 892-903; Matthew Mendelsohn and Fred Cutler, “The Effect of Referenda on Democratic Citizens: Information, Politicization, Efficacy and Tolerance,” *British Journal of Political Science* 30 (2000): 669-698; Matthias Benz and Alois Stutzer, “Are Voters Better Informed When They Have a Larger Say in Politics?” *Public Choice* (2003) (forthcoming).

²⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 163.

²¹ Daniel Smith, *Tax Crusaders and the Politics of Direct Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1998); David Magleby and Kelly Patterson, “Consultants and Direct Democracy,” *PS* 31 (1998): 160-169; see also Steven Craig, Amie Kreppel, and James Kane, “Public Opinion and Direct Democracy: A Case Study,” in Matthew Mendelsohn and Andrew Parkin, eds., *Referendum*

Democracy: Citizens, Elites, and Deliberation in Referendum Campaigns (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

²² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 164. Again, Chambers offers for an insightful theoretical discussion of how direct democracy may actually “undermine meaningful participation.” Chambers, “Constitutional Referendums and Democratic Deliberation.”

²³ David Broder, *Democracy Derailed: Initiative Campaigns and the Power of Money* (New York: Harcourt, 2000); Peter Schrag, *Paradise Lost: California’s Experience, America’s Future* (New York: New Press, 1998) Smith, *Tax Crusaders and the Politics of Direct Democracy*; Richard Ellis, *Democratic Delusions: The Initiative Process in America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

²⁴ Mark Smith, “The Contingent Effects of Ballot Initiatives and Candidate Races on Turnout,” *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (2001): 700-706 and Caroline Tolbert, John Grummel and Daniel Smith, “The Effects of Ballot Initiatives on Voter Turnout in the American States,” *American Politics Research* 29 (6): 625-648.

²⁵ See Smith, “Ballot Initiatives and the Democratic Citizen”, Mendelsohn and Cutler, “The Effect of Referenda on Democratic Citizens,” and Benz and Stutzer, “Are Voters Better Informed When They Have a Larger Say in Politics?” for exceptions.

²⁶ Glenn Leshner and Michael McKean, “Using TV News for Political Information During an Off-Year Election: Effects on Political Knowledge and Cynicism” *Journal of Mass Communications Quarterly* 74 (1997): 69-83; D. H. Weaver, “What Voters Learn from Media.” *Annual of the AAPSS*, July (1996): 34-47; D. H. Weaver and D. Drew, “Voter Learning in the 1990 Off-Year Election: Did the Media Matter?” *Journalism Quarterly* 70 (1993): 356-368; S. Chaffee and J. McLeon, “Individual vs. Social Predictors of Information-Seeking,” *Journalism Quarterly* 50 (1973): 95-120; S. Chaffee and S. F. Kanihan, “Learning About Politics from the Media,” *Political Communication* 14 (1997): 421-430.

²⁷ Arthur Lupia, “Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections,” *American Political Science Review* 88 (1994): 63-76; Shaun Bowler and Todd Donovan, *Demanding Choices: Opinion, Voting and Direct Democracy* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

²⁸ On the negative effects of the media on political knowledge, see R. W. McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999); J. Fallows, *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy* (New York: Pantheon, 1996); but see J. McLeod, and D. McDonald, “Beyond Simple Exposure: Media Orientations and Their Impact on the Political Process,” *Communication Research* 12 (1985): 3-34. On agenda setting and positive media effects, see M. E. McComb and D. L. Shaw, “The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36(1972): 176-187; S. Iyengar and D. R. Kinder, *News That Matters: Agenda-Setting and Priming in a Television Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); D. H. Weaver, D. A. Graber, M. E. McCombs, and C. H. Eyal, *Media Agenda-Setting in a Presidential Election: Issues, Images and Interest* (New York: Praeger, 1981).

On how voters acquire information with regard to candidate traits and issue positions see Weaver et al, *Media Agenda-Setting in a Presidential Election*; Chaffee and McLeon, “Individual vs. Social Predictors of Information-Seeking”; Weaver and Drew, “Voter Learning in the 1990 Off-Year Election: Did the Media Matter?”

²⁹ On the effects of the media on those with low political knowledge, see P. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes," in A. Campbell, ed., *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: Wiley 1966); G. Comstock, "The Impact of Television on American Institutions," *Journal of Communication* 18 (1978): 12-28. On the media effects of those with higher political knowledge, see C. K. Atkin, "Instrumental Utilities and Information Seeking," in P. Clark ed., *New Models for Mass Communication Research* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage 1973); F. Chew, "The Relationship of Information Needs to Issue Relevance and Media Use," *Journalism Quarterly* 71 (1994): 676-688; J. A. Krosnick and L.A. Brannon, "The Impact of the Gulf War on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluation Effects of Political Involvement," *American Political Science Review* 87 (1998): 963-975.

³⁰ Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller and Donald Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley, 1960); Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, "Measuring Political Knowledge: Putting First Things First"; John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²⁰ Norma Nie and Kristi Andersen, "Mass Belief System Revisited: Political Change and Attitude Structure," *Journal of Politics* 36 (1974): 541-91; Norma Nie, Sidney Verba and John Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

³² Robert Luskin, "Explaining Political Sophistication," *Political Behavior* 12 (1990): 331-61.

³³ Jane Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983); Barber, *Strong Democracy*; Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*.

³⁴ David McCuan, Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan and Ken Fernandez, "California's Political Warriors: Campaign Professionals and the Initiative Process," in Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan and Caroline Tolbert (eds.), *Citizens as Legislators: Direct Democracy in the United States*. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1998). See also Todd Donovan, Shaun Bowler, David McCuan and Ken Fernandez, "Contending Players and Strategies: Opposition Advantages in Initiative Elections," in Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan and Caroline Tolbert (eds.), *Citizens as Legislators: Direct Democracy in the United States* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1998).

³⁵ Quoted in McCuan, Bowler, Donovan and Bowler, "California's Political Warriors," 67. See also the rich discussion of information cues in Elizabeth Gerber, *The Populist Paradox: Interest Group Influence and the Promise of Direct Legislation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Lupia, "Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias," and Bowler and Donovan, *Demanding Choices*.

³⁶ Smith, "Ballot Initiatives and the Democratic Citizen."

³⁷ Benz and Stutzer, "Are Voters Better Informed When They Have a Larger Say in Politics?"

³⁸ In addition to measuring the number of initiatives on the ballot in the current election, we also estimated our models with the average annual number of initiatives appearing on state election ballots from 1970-92 (Caroline Tolbert, Daniel Lowenstein, Todd Donovan, "Election Law and Rules for Using Initiatives," in Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan, and Caroline Tolbert, eds., *Citizens as Legislators: Direct Democracy in the United States* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1998) as a broader measure of the historical use of the initiative process. The statistical significance and substantive interpretations of empirical models were the same as those reported in the appendix. The correlation between the number of initiatives on ballot in 1996, 1998, and 2000 and the average annual variable is extremely high (Pearson $r = .90$ to $.96$).

³⁹ Caroline Tolbert, Daniel Lowenstein, and Todd Donovan, "Election Law and Rules for Using Initiatives," in Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan and Caroline Tolbert (eds.), *Citizens as Legislators: Direct Democracy in the United States*, Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1998.

⁴⁰ See Shaun Bowler and Todd Donovan, "Democracy, Institutions and Attitudes about Citizen Influence on Government," *British Journal of Political Science* 32 (2002): 371-390 for similar measurement of the dependent variable.

⁴¹ See Shaun Bowler and Todd Donovan, "Democracy, Institutions and Attitudes about Citizen Influence on Government," *British Journal of Political Science* 32 (2002): 371-390 for a similar measurement of partisanship. When partisanship is measured by the seven point ordinal index rather than a series of dummy variables, the substantive findings of the analysis are unchanged.

⁴² Hero and Tolbert, "A Racial/Ethnic Diversity Interpretation of Politics and Policy in the States of the U.S."

⁴³ Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Karen Mossberger, Caroline Tolbert and Mary Stansbury, *Virtual Inequality: Beyond the Digital Divide* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003); Caroline Tolbert and Ramona McNeal, "Unraveling the Effects of the Internet on Political Participation," *Political Research Quarterly*, forthcoming spring (2003); Bruce Bimber, "Information and Political Engagement in America: The Search for Effects of Information Technology at the Individual Level," *Political Research Quarterly* 54(2001): 53-67.

⁴⁴ M. Lewis-Beck and T. Rice, *Forecasting Elections*. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1992.

⁴⁵ Smith, "The Contingent Effects of Ballot Initiatives and Candidate Races on Turnout," and Tolbert, Grummel and Smith, "The Effects of Ballot Initiatives on Voter Turnout in the American States."

⁴⁶ King, Tomz, and Wittenberg, "Making the Most of Statistical Analysis: Improving Interpretation and Presentation."

⁴⁷ Caroline Tolbert and Ramona McNeal, "Unraveling the Effects of the Internet on Political Participation," *Political Research Quarterly*, forthcoming (2003): xx-xx.

⁴⁸ Smith, "Ballot Initiatives and the Democratic Citizen;" Mendelsohn and Cutler, "The Effect of Referenda on Democratic Citizens;" Benz and Stutzer, "Are Voters Better Informed When They Have a Larger Say in Politics?"

⁴⁹ For an earlier treatment, see Daniel Smith and Caroline Tolbert, "The Initiative to Party: Partisanship and Ballot Initiatives in California," *Party Politics* 7(2001): 739-757.

⁵⁰ Lydia Chavez, *The Color Bind: California's Battle to End Affirmative Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁵¹ See Daniel Smith, "Special Interests and Direct Democracy: An Historical Glance," in M. Dane Waters, ed., *The Battle Over Citizen Lawmaking* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2001).

⁵² It bears noting that the number of initiatives was down considerably in 2000 from 1996. In 2000, there were 69 statewide initiatives on the ballots in 18 states; in 2000, there were 93 initiatives on the ballots of 20 states in 1996. Data from Initiative and Referendum Institute, "I and R Usage," at <www.iandrinstitute.org>, January 4, 2002.

⁵³ Mendelsohn and Cutler, "The Effect of Referenda on Democratic Citizens."

⁵⁴ Bowler and Donovan, "Democracy, Institutions and Attitudes about Citizen Influence on Government."

⁵⁵ R. O. de la Garza, L. DeSipio, F. C. Garcia, J. Garcia and A. Falcon, *Latino Voices: Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban Perspectives on American Politics*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1992; Baldassare, *California in the New Millennium*.

⁵⁶ Thomas Goebel, *A Government by the People: Direct Democracy in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 198-199.

⁵⁷ Frederic C. Howe, "The Constitution and Public Opinion," in Henry Mussey, ed., *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York*, 5 (1915): 7-19, 18.

⁵⁸ Arthur Lupia, "Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections," *American Political Science Review* 88 (1994): 63-76; Shaun Bowler and Todd Donovan, *Demanding Choices: Opinion, Voting and Direct Democracy* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998). See also Herbert Simon, "A Behavioral Model of Rational Choice," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 69 (1955): 99-118

⁵⁹ Mark Smith, "Ballot Initiatives and the Democratic Citizen," *Journal of Politics* 64 (2002): 892-903.

⁶⁰ Harold Lasswell, "The Triple-Appeal Principle: A Contribution of Psychoanalysis to Political and Social Science," *American Journal of Sociology* 37 (1932): 523-538.

⁶¹ James Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); James Fishkin, *The Voice of the People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).