

**Turning On and Turning Out:  
Assessing the Individual-Level Effects of Ballot Measures**

Todd Donovan  
Western Washington University  
donovan@cc.wvu.edu

Daniel A. Smith  
University of Florida  
dasmith@polisci.ufl.edu

**Abstract:**

Studies have demonstrated that state ballot initiatives are associated with higher voter turnout, however existing research has not examined which voters are mobilized by initiatives. We test whether, 1) initiatives mobilize people who do not fit the profile of regular voters, and 2) whether initiatives activate people who resemble regular voters. We use individual-level survey data from three states to test hypotheses related to these propositions. Partisan identifiers, strong partisans, ideologues, older voters, and the well educated were more likely to say that their turnout was motivated by a ballot measure. In contrast, we find no evidence that initiatives motivated young voters, independents, or ideological moderates to turnout. Our findings illustrate how initiatives may alter the composition of an electorate, and illustrate the potential effects of partisan efforts to shape the composition of a state's electorate.

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## **Turning On and Turning Out: Assessing the Individual-Level Effects of Ballot Measures**

### **Introduction**

Following the dramatic rise in the number of citizen initiatives appearing on statewide ballots in the 1990s, scholars began to assess the possible “educative effects” of citizen lawmaking (Smith and Tolbert 2004). Indeed, a number of recent studies show that there might be some merit to the idea that the process of direct democracy itself has indirect behavioral and attitudinal effects that increase the likelihood of citizens becoming more engaged with politics (Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000; Bowler and Donovan 2002).

On the behavioral side, comparisons of citizens living in states that use initiatives frequently and those that do not demonstrate that initiatives are associated with increased voter turnout, particularly in off-year elections. Smith (2001) and Tolbert, Grummel and Smith (2001) both use aggregate level data to establish that state ballot initiatives have a positive effect on voter turnout, controlling for a range of other factors. Merging National Election Studies (NES) survey data with state-level figures of the number of initiatives on the statewide ballot in a given election, Tolbert, McNeal and Smith (2003) further find that ballot initiatives are mildly effective in stimulating turnout in midterm elections and in non-competitive, low-interest presidential elections. The crudeness of the NES survey data, however, does not allow them to test hypotheses about what types of initiatives might mobilize which voters. As for attitudinal effects, the presence of highly visible initiatives on a state ballot is associated with higher levels of general knowledge about politics (Smith 2002; Tolbert, McNeal, and Smith 2003). Additional

research has found that citizens in states with frequent initiative use feel more competent when participating in politics, are more likely to think that they “have a say,” and are more likely to think that officials care about what they think (Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000; Bowler and Donovan 2002; Hero and Tolbert 2003; Benz and Stutzer 2004).

Given the modest substantive effects on turnout estimated by models using both aggregate and survey data, we do not expect to find that a majority of people are motivated to vote in an election due to the presence of ballot measures, even highly salient ones. These studies do suggest, though, that initiatives can increase turnout in an election by several percent. Unfortunately, at the micro-level, political scientists have yet to address the possible effects of ballot initiatives on an individual’s propensity to turn out to vote. Which citizens are mobilized by what types of initiatives? In this paper we seek to answer this question, as well as to establish if voters who are mobilized by initiatives tend to come to vote in support or opposition of the measures. Using data from recent surveys conducted in three high-use initiative states that were designed specifically to answer these questions, we offer a preliminary assessment of the effect of initiatives on voter turnout at the micro-level.

Answers to these questions have important political ramifications. With the soft money spigot closed for the national and some state parties, party officials are increasingly viewing initiative campaigns as a possible indirect means to increase the turnout for their candidates (Garrett 2004; Garrett and Smith 2003). For example, in Oklahoma in 2002, a successful ballot initiative that banned cockfighting mobilized rural citizens who were opposed the measure; those same voters simultaneously opposed the Republican gubernatorial candidate (which ran contrary to their conservative

inclinations) because he endorsed the cockfighting ban, calling cockfighting “a barbaric practice” (Cobb 2004). Similarly, in anticipation of the 2004 general election, the Democratic National Committee and several 527 political organizations and nonprofit organizations have started to subvent an effort in Florida by ACORN, a liberal nonprofit grassroots organization, to place a constitutional amendment initiative on the November ballot to increase the minimum wage. Their collective aim is twofold: to turn out less educated, working class, liberals, who are typically non-voters, in support of the minimum wage measure on its substantive merits, and to have these infrequent voters simultaneously cast ballots for Democratic candidates (Erickson 2003).

### **Theorizing about why Initiatives may Affect Turnout**

Who is likely to be mobilized to vote by the presence of state ballot initiatives? We expect that effects on turnout of having initiatives on a state’s ballot should depend on the individual, and on the ballot issue. We offer two, rival theoretical perspectives.

First, we might expect that initiatives generally mobilize people who are not regular voters. There are several reasons to expect this. First, the dealignment literature (e.g., Wattenberg 1996; Wattenberg 2002; Patterson 2002) suggests that over the last two decades a block of “floating” voters has emerged that lacks an attachment to the two major political parties. These independent-leaning voters are more likely to be mobilized episodically by “third” party candidacies (Bowler, Donovan, Karp and Lanoue 2004). Indeed, much of the decline in turnout in recent decades may be attributed to the failure of political parties to mobilize these citizens (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1998; Jackson, Brown, and Wright 1998), especially younger, less

educated ones. The same logic, perhaps, applies to ballot measures. It may be no coincidence that previous studies examining the impact of ballot initiatives on turnout in the 1960s and 1970s (Everson 1981; Magleby 1984) failed to find a positive relationship. At that time, the initiative was not used nearly as frequently as it is today (Tolbert 2003; Waters 2003; Tolbert, Lowenstein, and Donovan 1998), and a larger proportion of voters were engaged with parties, and thus, more regularly mobilized.

Related to the dealignment thesis, the literature on post-materialist values (Inglehart 1977; Dalton 2003) suggests that there may be a class of educated citizens who lack established partisan loyalties, and are less regularly mobilized by candidate elections. These voters' concerns about policy issues rather than candidates may lead them to vote more often when there are important issues on a state's ballot. This literature stresses that young, well-educated citizens are most likely to place a high value on direct participation in policy-making via direct democracy (Dalton, Buklin and Drummond 2001; but see Craig, Kreppel, and Kane 2002). While the information costs associated with voting on initiatives are likely higher for these potential voters than for those with stronger partisan attachments, recent studies suggest that the presence of easily available cues and information short-cuts allow minimally informed voters to initially become aware of ballot propositions (Magleby 1984; Bowler and Donovan 1994; Nicholson 2003), and then have the capacity to use cues to make reasonable decisions on measures that sometimes deal with complex policy choices (Magleby 1984; Lupia 1994; Gerber and Lupia 1995; Banducci 1998; Karp 1998; Bowler and Donovan 1998).

There is a second, rival perspective about who might likely be mobilized by ballot initiatives. The substance of many state ballot questions may reflect "hard" issue voting,

where it may be difficult for people to calculate the policy benefits of alternative choices (Downs 1957; Carmines and Stimson 1980). If we assume that voting on initiatives is analogous to hard issue voting, and that it requires a certain pre-existing level of political engagement, we might expect that initiatives tend to mobilize people who resemble regular voters (rather than activate citizens resembling episodic voters). Following the “Michigan model” of voting (e.g., Converse, et al. 1960; Flannigan and Zingale 2003; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002), partisan identifiers are expected to have more interest in political issues than people who fail to identify with parties. Well-educated people, and people who view politics through ideological perspectives, can be expected to vote more on the basis of their reasoning about issues (Sniderman, et al. 1991). Moreover, there is mounting evidence that political parties are becoming engaged in crafting initiatives not for their substantive merits, but because they expect the measures will touch a nerve with their supporters, or conversely, drive a wedge into the base of a rival political party (Smith and Tolbert 2001). Some parties work from the assumption that they can strategically utilize initiatives to shape an electorate to their advantage (Chavez 1998; Schrag 1998; Hasen 2000). Indeed, there is the possibility of considerable electoral payoff for parties when they become involved in ballot campaigns, as party identification is a major factor in a voter’s support or opposition of ballot measures (Donovan and Snipp 1994; Bowler and Donovan 1998; Smith and Tolbert 2001; Branton 2003). Finally, there is evidence that during initiative campaigns for measures targeting minorities, shifts in affect toward a targeted group is limited to voters who identify with the party that sponsors the initiative (Wenzel, Donovan and Bowler 1998).

### *Alternative Hypotheses*

If the partisan activation thesis is correct, and initiatives largely mobilize citizens who resemble regular, partisan voters, then the independent effects of having more education and being more ideological should be positively associated with respondents saying that ballot measures were the main reason they turned out to vote. In contrast, if the dealignment/post-materialism thesis is correct, and initiatives largely mobilize episodic voters, respondents who are politically independent should be more likely than partisans to say they turned out to vote because of ballot initiatives. More precisely, younger, less-educated citizens who lack partisan ties should have a greater propensity to say they turned out because propositions were on the ballot.

### **Descriptive Data**

Of course, at the micro-level, scholars have not yet established that ballot initiatives actually motivate citizens to turn out to vote. Fortunately, in order to test the possible impact of ballot initiatives on voter turnout, we were able to obtain individual level survey data from three state-level surveys that were designed in part to answer this question.<sup>1</sup> We analyze post-election data from two surveys conducted immediately following the 2002 general election—one poll conducted in Colorado by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, and the other conducted in Oregon by Penn, Schoen & Berland and Associates. We also analyze data from a statewide survey conducted in Arizona in May 2003 by Lake Snell Perry and Associates. These three states—Arizona, Colorado, and

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<sup>1</sup> The three surveys were commissioned by the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center (BISC), a nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC. Smith assisted in conceiving and designing the relevant ballot initiative/motivation questions asked on the surveys. We thank Kristina Wilfore, Executive Director of BISC, for both providing and permitting us to analyze data from the three surveys.

Oregon—rank among the top five in terms of their historical use of the initiative since the Progressive Era (Tolbert, Lowenstein, and Donovan 1998; Waters 2003; Tolbert 2003). The Colorado and Oregon surveys were designed to ascertain whether voters' support or opposition to specific ballot measures "this election" motivated them to turn out. The Arizona survey was not conducted in sync with a state election, but instead asked respondents to think retrospectively whether there had ever been a proposition on the ballot that was so important that, "it alone got you out to the polls."

The electoral context of each state presents citizens with a different mix of ballot issues and different campaign dynamics. In Colorado in 2002, there was a hotly contested US Senate race as well as 10 questions on the general election ballot (five initiatives and five referendums). The ballot questions included a high-profile anti-bilingual education initiative sponsored by an out-of-state millionaire, four additional initiatives related to the conduct of elections, and five arcane obscure legislative referrals.<sup>2</sup>

In Oregon in November 2002, voters reelected Republican US Senator Gordon Smith, elected Democrat Ted Kulongoski to the governor's mansion, and voted on a dozen statewide ballot measures. The twelve questions included five legislative

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<sup>2</sup> The anti-bilingual education measure (Amendment 31) was by far the highest profile and the most expensive campaign. The author of the proposed constitutional amendment, California businessman Ron Unz, self-financed the measure with loans and contributions exceeding half a million dollars. In their successful efforts to defeat the initiative, opponents spent more than \$3.3 million (\$3.1 of which came from the contributions of a single individual, heiress Pat Stryker) to defeat the initiative. Another millionaire, Coloradoan Jared Polis, single-handedly financed Amendment 30, an unsuccessful initiative calling for election-day registration. Featuring ads of Colorado Broncos' star running back, Terrell Davis, Polis spent over \$1 million to advance his measure; opponents spent less than a tenth that amount to help defeat the measure. Geophysicist Rutt Bridges, yet another local millionaire, contributed more than 99% of the \$1.5 million raised to promote Amendments 28 (vote by mail) and 29 (eliminate the party caucus system). Opponents spent less than \$100,000 to defeat the two measures. Interestingly, the amount spent and the attendant media attention that focused on Colorado Common Cause's campaign finance initiative (Amendment 27)—the only initiative of the five to pass—was significantly less than the other four initiatives; proponents spent roughly \$200,000, about 10 times more than their opponents spent (Smith 2003; FCPA 2002).



referendums and seven initiatives, which ranged in subject matter from a judicial accountability act to easing the regulation of denturists. Most of the initiatives and referendums had minimal campaign spending activity, with the big money concentrated on three initiatives: establishing a universal health care system (Measure 23), raising the minimum wage in the state (Measure 25), and requiring labels on genetically modified (GMO) foods (Measure 27). In all three campaigns, the opponents spent considerably more than the proponents of the measures.<sup>3</sup>

With respect to the Arizona retrospective survey, the immediate electoral context was not as relevant to the survey, as it was conducted in May 2003. When asked an open-ended question about ballot measures they could recall that were “extremely important,” few respondents could offer a specific proposition number, and a plurality could not recall a specific policy issue. Topics from the most recent Arizona general election (November 2002) conducted prior to the survey were the most frequently cited, including gaming (18%) and education, broadly defined (11%). A few respondents recalled older matters such as medical marijuana (4%), the Cardinals football stadium issue (3%), and an English-only initiative (1%). Less than 3% of Arizona respondents mentioned anything having to do with “taxes” in their retrospective evaluations of initiatives that in the past had mobilized them to vote.

[Table 1 about here]

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<sup>3</sup> In the minimum wage campaign, which narrowly passed, the backers of the measure were outspent 2-1 by a coalition of grocery chains, restaurants, and yard care industries that spent more than \$546,000 against the proposal. Agribusinesses (Cargill, ADM, and especially Monsanto), grocery chains, and the bio-tech industry spent more than \$5.5 million to defeat the GMO proposal, swamping the proponent’s \$92,000. And on the universal healthcare measure, which also went down to a resounding defeat, proponents and opponents spent more than \$1.4 million combined (BISC 2002; Orr 2004).

Results in Table 1 demonstrate that in each state, a sizable proportion of voters indicated that their reason to vote (or for having voted in the past) was very or even exclusively motivated by the presence of ballot measures on their state's ballot. Over a quarter (28.4%) of Arizona respondents indicated a ballot measure was the singular reason they had voted in a past election. A similar proportion of Colorado respondents (24.9%) indicated measures on the 2002 ballot were "extremely" or "very" motivating that they alone got them to vote. In Oregon, slightly under a third of the respondents said that measures on the 2002 ballot were "very" motivating, providing them with enough incentive to vote in the November election.

### ***Do Initiatives Mobilize Opponents or Supporters?***

In Table 2 we separate the samples of the three surveys into two subgroups: respondents who reported that initiatives mobilized them to turn out to vote; and respondents who reported that they were not motivated to vote by ballot initiatives. This division allows us to determine whether specific initiatives (in Colorado and Oregon) and initiatives in the abstract (in Arizona) mobilize supporters or opponents of propositions. If initiatives generally mobilize those who support the measures, groups attempting to use initiatives to shape strategically an electorate may face little risk. If, however, ballot initiatives are likely to mobilize those who are opposed to the measures, there are substantial risks for the proponents (and the parties and candidates who support them) if their (indirect) purpose is to custom tailor the electorate.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 illustrates that propositions on the ballot may at times help shape the composition of a state's electorate by mobilizing voters who are sympathetic to the issues. In Colorado, for instance, respondents who claimed that ballot initiatives in 2002 brought them to the polls were more likely to vote for the measures, compared to voters who said they were not mobilized to turn out by initiatives. Overall, among Colorado respondents who said they were mobilized by initiatives, there is considerable net support for the three initiatives included in the survey (campaign finance, anti-bilingual education, and same-day registration). Notably, the net margin of support across the three issues is greater among those respondents who said they were extremely or very mobilized to vote by the measure, than those respondents who said they were not impelled to turn out because of the initiatives. These findings suggest that in this election, the particular mix of initiatives motivated a sizeable proportion of citizens to turn out and cast ballots because they were sympathetic to these issues.

However, we also find some general evidence that ballot measure may actually mobilize citizens to vote who are hostile to the goals of initiative proponents. In Arizona, respondents were asked to recall a recent ballot measure they "felt was extremely important." While all Arizona respondents (those who said they were mobilized to vote because of an initiative on the ballot and those who said they were not mobilized) were more likely to say they supported than opposed the measure, those who claimed to be mobilized by an initiative were much less likely than other Arizonans to say they voted in favor of the measure.

There is also evidence that the mobilizing effects of ballot initiatives may be contingent on the content of the issue, as well as on the campaign publicity that it

generates. In Oregon, the proponents of three progressive measures on the November ballot (increasing the minimum wage, regulating GMO foods, and guaranteeing universal health care) had little money to advertise their campaign messages. In contrast, their opponents on the three initiatives spent heavily on broadcast ads and direct mail and were able to defeat the GMO and health care measures. Correspondingly, citizens in Oregon who claimed they were very motivated to vote because of initiatives on the ballot were more likely to say they voted against each of the three initiatives than were those who said they were not mobilized to turn out by measures on the ballot. Indeed, all three initiatives garnered negative net support from those respondents who said they were strongly impelled to vote by the measures. The initiative to increase the minimum wage was the only measure to receive marginal net support—but it was only from respondents who said they were *not* mobilized to vote because of measures on the ballot. The slight net support the measure received from non-episodic voters was likely due to the fact that the state Democratic party took a very public stance in favor of the measure, sending a strong signal to the base voters who were already likely to turn out.<sup>4</sup>

### **Specification of the Models**

We test our hypotheses with logistic regression models that estimate if people reported that ballot measures played a major role in their decision to participate in a state election. Responses to the survey items we use to measure this are in Table 1. Models were estimated separately for each state given differences in question wording and response categories across our three state samples. For Arizona, respondents were coded

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<sup>4</sup> The measure was officially sponsored by two Democratic state representatives, Diane Rosenbaum and Dan Gardner. The chairman of the group opposing the measure was the communications director of Republican House leader, Karen Minnis (Orr 2004: 8).

1 if they replied that ballot measures alone ever “got you out to vote”, and were code 0 for other responses. For Colorado, respondents were coded 1 if they replied that support or opposition to ballot measure were “extremely” or “very” motivating in getting them to vote, and were coded as 0 for other responses. For Oregon, respondents were coded 1 if they replied that ballot measure were “very” motivating, with other replies coded as 0.

We hypothesize that episodic voters, specifically those with weak attachments to parties, might be mobilized by initiatives (the dealignment / post-materialism thesis). We also offered rival hypotheses based on the theory that initiatives activate partisan voters. We test these several ways.

Age and education (both categorical measures) are used to test if younger voters and less educated voters were more likely to report being mobilized by initiatives. Finding that the young are more likely to report turning out due to initiatives would be consistent with the idea that initiatives mobilize dealigned, floating voters. Expectations about education are less clear. Education is often used as a surrogate for post-materialist voters not anchored to established parties. A positive effect of education could thus reflect support for the idea that initiatives mobilize such voters. More realistically, education is also a marker for people who are more efficacious and participate fairly regularly. Thus, we assume that a positive effect for education would reflect the activation of regular voters, rather than the mobilization of new ones.

We also include measures of weak attachments to parties. One dichotomous measure (independent) represents whether the respondent failed to identify him or herself as a Democrat or Republican when asked the 3 category party identification question. In two of our state samples (Arizona and Colorado), respondents were given a follow-up

question asking strength of partisanship. For those states, our models also include a dichotomous variable distinguishing strong partisans from other respondents.

Expectations about these variables are fairly straight forward. The dealignment / mobilization thesis would be supported by a positive effect for the independent variable, and a negative effect for the strong party identifier variable. Conversely, the activation thesis would be supported by a positive effect for strong party identifier variable and a negative effect for the independent variable.

Given this use of dichotomous variables, we are only able to include a measure representing identifiers of one political party. We thus use a dummy variable where Democrats are coded as 1, and all other respondents were coded as 0. Regardless of which partisans are placed in the reference category, we assume that a positive effect for party identifiers supports the activation thesis. (It is worth noting here that our substantive findings remained the same when Republicans were represented by a dummy variable that placed Democrats with others in the reference category.) We also include a dummy variable that distinguishes relatively ideological voters from others. Coding of these varied by state and depended on response categories offered in each survey. In Colorado “very liberal” and “very conservative” respondents were distinguished from “somewhat liberal,” “moderate,” and “somewhat conservative” respondents. In Arizona, “liberal” and “conservative” respondents were distinguished from “moderate liberal,” “moderate,” and “moderate conservative” respondents. In Oregon, self-identified “liberals” and “conservatives” were distinguished from “moderates.”

We include two additional variables, gender and race/ethnicity, as controls. Given the fact that some initiatives in these states have included such matters as Official

English, English Only language instruction, and have given national attention to affirmative action and immigration measures on state ballots, it is important to control for race/ethnicity (Tolbert and Hero 1996). We do this with a dichotomous variable that distinguishes whites from non whites (substantive results remained the same when a variable representing Latinos was included). As for gender, Branton (2003) notes that while men and women tend to vote similarly to one another on most economic and financial matters, and governance issues, they differ on many other social and moral issues. By extension, the mobilizing effects of ballot issues may thus differ across gender.

### **Results**

Overall, across the three states, we find that the post-materialist/dealignment thesis has little support. In contrast, we find that initiatives appear to mobilize party identifiers, ideologues, older voters, and the well educated to go to the polls more than other citizens.

[Table 3 about here]

As the logit models in Table 3 show, in two states a respondent's party identification has a clear effect on being mobilized by initiatives on the ballot. Democrats in Colorado and Arizona were more likely than Republicans to say they are mobilized to vote because of initiatives on the ballot.<sup>5</sup> In Colorado, but not in the other two states, strong partisans were also much more likely to be mobilized by ballot initiatives in 2002 than those weakly attached to the parties. On top of the party

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<sup>5</sup> In Colorado, the positive effect of Democrat is nearly identical to that in Arizona when race/ethnicity is removed from the model.

identification effect in Colorado, the strength of partisanship also predicts a respondent being mobilized by initiatives. Clearly, then, party identifiers were mobilized, or activated, more than other people. In contrast, we find no evidence that independents were more likely to say that initiatives brought them out to the polls.

There is also a subtle gender gap in two states, with women saying that they were much more likely than men to turn out to vote because of measures on the ballot. Although this could possibly reflect gender differences in survey responses, it could also reflect the substance of the measures on the ballot in Colorado and Arizona, or measures the respondents recalled being on the ballot in Arizona. In two states, women, controlling for other factors, were more easily mobilized to vote by ballot measures than men.<sup>6</sup>

Older voters in Colorado and Oregon were also more likely to say that ballot measures brought them out to the polls in 2002.<sup>7</sup> Despite the anti-bilingual education measure on the ballot in Colorado, states race/ethnicity (non-white) is not significant variable when it is limited to Hispanics. Race/ethnicity (non-white) is, however, a significant predictor of turnout in Arizona, perhaps reflecting minorities' memories of a recent English-only measure. The respondent's education level is significant only in Colorado, as is the effect of being very ideological, both in a positive direction.<sup>8</sup>

[Table 4 about here]

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<sup>6</sup> The estimates we report were generated with StataSE 8.0. When these same models are estimated using the same datasets with SPSS, all the effects reported here are identical, except the effect of gender in Colorado is not significant.

<sup>7</sup> When an interaction term (youth \* well-educated) is added to the model (not show here), age is again not a significant predictor.

<sup>8</sup> The measure for "very" ideological in Arizona and Oregon is not too precise, reflecting more accurately non-moderates.

When we add "surge voters" or "non-voters" dummies to the AZ model and OR, nothing happens. There is no vote history variable for CO.



Table 4 translates the estimated logit coefficients (from Table 3) into predicted probabilities. This gives us a sense of the substantive magnitude of the independent effect that each statistically significant independent variable has on the probability that a respondent will say she was motivated to turnout due to a state ballot initiative. The values in table 4 reflect the predicted effect of a shift from the lowest to highest value of an independent variable, with all other variables held at their median values. Our partisan, ideological, racial, and gender indicators are all dichotomous, making the interpretations of these probabilities straightforward. Thus, we find that Democrats in Arizona were 8% more likely to say an initiative motivated them to vote, compared to non-Democrats. The independent effects of party identification, strong party loyalties, and being very liberal or conservative in Colorado each translate to about a 10% increase in the likelihood that a respondents said they were motivated to vote by a particular ballot measure. The largest substantive effects we identified were race/ethnicity in Arizona, where non whites were 17% more likely than whites to say initiatives mobilized them, and age in Oregon. Older (over 50) Oregonians were 15% more likely to say initiatives motivated them to turnout. Conversely, the smallest effect we found is age in Colorado, where the oldest voters were only 4% more likely to say this than young voters.

### **Discussion**

Recent advances in social science have established that electoral institutions structure aggregate levels of voter turnout (e.g., Blais and Carty 1990). When electoral institutions are changed, the size of the participating electorate can change. Indeed, the effects of relatively modest changes in electoral rules may alter the size of the electorate

and the composition who participates. Voting by mail, as opposed to at precinct locations, may increase turnout while also changing the mix of who participates (Southwell and Burchett 2000; Karp and Banducci 2000). Modifications of how votes are cast in at-large local elections can change how candidates contact voters, and increase participation in local elections (Bowler, Donovan, and Brockington 2003). Subtle changes in how electoral district lines are drawn can also increase or decrease turnout of specific voters. For example, the probability that a Latino will vote increases with the number of majority Latino districts (congressional, state assembly, state senate) in which a Latino voter lives (Barretto, Segura, and Woods 2004).

Little is known, however, about how such changes in electoral context play out at the level of the individual citizen, and researchers are only beginning to answer questions about who, exactly, is mobilized to vote when institutions change. It seems clear, however, that effects of changes in electoral rules that affect turnout are not always neutral. Different groups of people may be mobilized (or demobilized) when new rules alter the electoral context.

Previous studies have established that more initiatives on the ballot leads to higher turnout, but we know little about the composition of the higher turnout electorate. We suggest that the mix of initiatives on a state's ballot is a contextual effect that is analogous to electoral institution. When electoral institutions such as voting procedures, electoral formula, or district boundaries are altered, the change in electoral context is stable and enduring, so the mix of the electorate may be permanently altered. This makes it relatively easy for us to reach conclusions about how the composition of the electorate may be affected by such changes. However, the mix of initiatives is quite unique in each

state at any point in time. When the mix of initiatives changes, the electoral context changes. By extension, we should expect to see a change in which voters are more or less likely to turnout and vote. That being said, the change in the electoral context associated with the mix of initiatives is fluid, rather than institutionalized, so it is quite difficult to reach generalizable conclusions about how initiatives alter the mix of the electorate.

Nevertheless, the findings in this study to bring us closer to understanding how shifts in the dynamic mix of initiatives might shape the composition of a state's electorate across time. Our results suggest that these initiatives activated people who resemble regular voters. Partisan identifiers (Democrats in Arizona and Colorado; strong partisans of both parties in Colorado), those with self-identified ideological predispositions (in Colorado), older (in Oregon and Colorado), and better educated (in Colorado) respondents were most likely to say that initiatives figured heavily in their decisions to participate in an election. In some years, these people might not turnout because they are not turned on by regular election choices, or because they are not worried enough about anything on the ballot that year. When an initiative turns them on, or conversely, aggravates them, their likelihood of voting increases. In contrast, we find little evidence that initiatives mobilize people who resemble hard-core non-voters or independents who might be dealigned from partisan politics.

**Table 1**  
**Micro-level Evidence that Ballot Initiatives Increase Turnout**

**Arizona:** Has there ever been a proposition on the ballot so important that it alone got you to go out to the polls and vote?

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	155	28
<b>No</b>	356	65
<b>Don't know</b>	34	6

**N=545**

**Colorado:** How much did your support or opposition to ballot measures in this election motivate you to vote?

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Extremely motivating</b>	64	11
<b>Very motivating</b>	86	14
<b>Somewhat motivating</b>	189	32
<b>Only a little motivating</b>	151	25
<b>Not at all motivating</b>	101	17
<b>Don't know</b>	4	1

**N=600**

**Oregon:** How much did your support or opposition to the Oregon ballot measures motivate you to vote on Tuesday?

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Very motivating</b>	96	31
<b>Somewhat motivating</b>	96	31
<b>Not very motivating</b>	27	9
<b>Not at all motivating</b>	66	21
<b>Don't know/Refuse</b>	25	8

**N=310**

*Sources:* Colorado and Arizona polling conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates in November 2002 and May 2003, respectively. Oregon polling conducted by Penn Shoen Associates in November 2002. All three surveys commissioned by the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center (BISC).

**Table 2**  
**Are Voters Mobilized by their Support or Opposition to Ballot Initiatives?**

	<b>those mobilized by ballot measures</b>			<b>those not mobilized by ballot measures</b>		
	<b>Vote</b>		<b>Net</b>	<b>Vote</b>		<b>Net</b>
	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>AZ, retrospective</b>	49%	33%	+16	58%	31%	+27
<b>CO, campaign finance</b>	73%	21%	+52	54%	32%	+22
<b>CO, anti-bilingual ed.</b>	60%	38%	+22	52%	36%	+16
<b>CO, same-day registration</b>	55%	39%	+16	49%	35%	+14
<b>OR, increase min. wage</b>	43%	47%	-4	50%	42%	+8
<b>OR, label GMO foods</b>	25%	66%	-41	25%	63%	-38
<b>OR, universal health care</b>	25%	64%	-39	24%	61%	-37

*Note:* Samples were divided in terms of those claiming proposition “alone led them to vote” (AZ), or that support or opposition to a ballot measure was “extremely motivating” or “very motivating” (CO), or “very motivating” (OR). Voters only.

*Sources:* Colorado and Arizona polling conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates in November 2002 and May 2003, respectively. Oregon polling conducted by Penn Shoen Associates in November 2002. All three surveys commissioned by the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center (BISC).

**Table 3**  
**Logit Models of Likelihood that Respondent said**  
**Ballot Measures Motivated Him/Her to Turnout**

	Arizona		Colorado		Oregon	
	B	s.e	B	s.e	B	s.e
<b>Male</b>	-0.56	0.21 **	-0.36	0.20 *	-0.18	0.24
<b>Age</b>	-0.05	0.09	0.02	0.01 *	-0.13	0.08 ^
<b>Education</b>	0.08	0.07	0.13	0.07 *	-0.14	0.10
<b>Independent</b>	0.23	0.31	0.43	0.32	-0.27	0.34
<b>Democrat</b>	0.39	0.25 ^	0.48	0.22 *	-0.03	0.27
<b>Strong Partisan</b>	0.30	0.27	0.72	0.25 **		
<b>Very Ideological</b>	-0.04	0.22	0.53	0.22 *	0.13	0.25
<b>Non white</b>	0.77	0.29 **	0.34	0.33	0.23	0.50
<b>Constant</b>	-1.25	0.58 *	-2.36	0.40 **	-0.14	0.56
<b>N=</b>	510		593		292	
<b>model chi-sq.</b>	23.5 (p < .003)		36.1 (p < .000)		7.1	
<b>Pseudo R<sup>2</sup></b>	.06		.06		.02	

\*\*\* = significant at  $p < .01$ ; \*\* at  $p < .05$ , ^ at  $p < .10$ .

*Note:* Logistic regression coefficients estimated with StataSE 8.0. Dependent variables constructed from responses to questions reported in Table 1. For Arizona, 1 = ballot measures alone ever “got you out to vote”, 0 = other. For Colorado, 1 = ballot measure “extremely” or “very” motivating, 0 = other. For Oregon, 1 = ballot measure “very” motivating, 0 = other.

*Sources:* Colorado and Arizona polling conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates in November 2002 and May 2003, respectively. Oregon polling conducted by Penn Shoen Associates in November 2002. All three surveys commissioned by the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center (BISC).

**Table 4**  
**Substantive Effects of Estimates in Table 3:**  
**Predicted Probability of Respondent saying**  
**that Ballot Measure Motivated Him/Her to Turnout**

	<b>Arizona</b>	<b>Colorado</b>	<b>Oregon</b>
<b>Democrat</b>	.33	.30	
<b>not Democrat</b>	.25	.21	
<b>Strong partisan</b>		.31	
<b>Not strong partisan</b>		.19	
<b>Very ideological</b>		.31	
<b>Not very ideological</b>		.21	
<b>High education</b>		.29	
<b>Low education</b>		.18	
<b>Oldest</b>		.27	.46
<b>Youngest</b>		.23	.31
<b>Female</b>	.33	.27	
<b>Male</b>	.22	.21	
<b>White</b>	.25		
<b>non White</b>	.42		

*Source:* predicted from estimates in Table 4.

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