

**Reconsidering Claims about the Secondary
Benefits of Direct Democracy**

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Some recent empirical studies have contended that direct democracy has positive secondary benefits unrelated to its impact on public policy. We reconsider such arguments, focusing on the claims that use of the ballot initiative promotes political efficacy and enhances happiness. We find that the logic supporting these claims is tenuous. We also subject the claims to further empirical testing, combining General Social Survey data and information about use of direct democracy in the American states. The results fail to support those claims. While more study is needed, there is cause for skepticism about the secondary benefits of direct democracy.

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Introduction

On balance, is the presence of direct democracy mechanisms beneficial? This is a question that has long interested political scientists and some other scholars, though systematic empirical research relevant to answering this question is only relatively recent. However, in the past two decades there has been a boom in such studies. Much of the extant research has focused on the ballot initiative process in the United States, taking advantage of the sharp variation in usage across the states to draw inferences about the effects of direct democracy; some work also compares access to direct democracy across local governments in the U.S. or sub-national jurisdictions in other countries, such as Switzerland. Where once empirically-oriented academic journals ignored the ballot initiative, it is now common to find one or more article about this topic in a single volume.

Much of the recent empirical work has examined topics directly related to the types of public policy choices encouraged by direct democracy. Studies have considered whether the ballot initiative process affects the congruence between policy and underlying public opinion, the impact of ballot measures on minority groups, the evidence regarding citizen competence in making ballot decisions, and other specific issues. Consistent conclusions in each of these areas are not the norm. Some scholars have offered findings suggesting that direct democracy leads to policies that are closer to what the public wants (see for example Matsusaka 2004), that the ballot initiative process avoids disproportionate harm to minority group interests (e.g., Hajnal, Gerber, and Louch 2002), and that information

cues allow people to make well reasoned choices in the absence of “encyclopedic” knowledge about ballot measures (e.g., Bowler and Donovan 1998; Lupia 1994; for an article summarizing much of the positive evidence in all three of the above areas see Matsusaka 2005). Quite to the contrary, others have presented arguments and evidence suggesting that the presence of direct democracy does not lead to outcomes more in accord with public opinion (e.g., Lascher, Hagen, and Rochlin 1996), that minority groups such as gays and lesbians are likely to be disproportionate losers in ballot contests¹ and that voters often use very limited information in making choices on ballot measures (e.g., Magleby 1984).

In the last several years, a new line of debate has commenced about the merits of direct democracy unrelated to effects on specific public policies. Scholars have begun examining whether the ballot initiative process has beneficial secondary consequences in areas such as civic engagement. In their book length study of such consequences, Smith and Tolbert (2004) emphasize that one of the major original rationales for establishing the ballot initiative process in the American states was the belief that it would have educative effects on the citizenry, aside from any instrumental benefits for public policy. Accordingly, Smith, Tolbert, and others have turned their attention to assessing such claims through new sets of comparison across the states. Many of these studies have found a positive impact (although there have been some dissenting voices; see for example Citrin 1996). Thus evidence has been presented indicating that greater use of direct democracy leads to higher voter turnout (Smith and Tolbert 2004, ch. 2), greater knowledge about political matters (Smith 2002, Smith and Tolbert 2004, ch. 3), enhanced

¹ See especially Haider-Markel, Querze, and Lindaman (2007) for a useful review of the entire literature in the area of direct democracy and minority interests as well as further evidence of a negative impact; on the logic underlying concerns about protections of rights under direct democracy, see also Ellis (2002, ch. 5),

sense of political efficacy (Bowler and Donovan 2002; Hero and Tolbert 2004; Smith and Tolbert 2004, ch. 4), and even greater happiness or life satisfaction (Frey and Stutzer 2000A, 2000B). Even given continued controversy about policy impact, such arguments could provide a solid rationale for supporting direct democracy.

However, in the present article we argue that there is strong reason for skepticism, at least with respect to the claims about the positive impact of direct democracy on political efficacy and individual happiness. Doubt is justified, in part, because the logic underlying the assumed connection is less compelling than has been suggested in the extant literature, especially when considering that many conclusions are derived from survey data. Additionally, our own empirical tests of such claims with new data do not support them.

In the remainder of this paper we offer evidence that the case for direct democracy is weaker than appears from some recent literature on direct democracy's secondary effects. We begin with a critique of the logic underlying the hypothesized connection between the ballot initiative process and political efficacy/individual happiness. We then outline our own empirical approach for examining this issue, drawing on General Social Survey (GSS) data which have not been used in prior research in this area. The GSS, one of the foremost sources of information about attitudes of the American public, has consistently included questions about happiness and from time to time has included queries about political efficacy. Next we present our findings, emphasizing the lack of connection between the test and dependent variables. We end with consideration of the status of claims about the impact of direct democracy

A Critique of the Logic Supporting the Positive Secondary Effects of Direct Democracy

Political Efficacy

Existing empirical literature on the impact of state-based direct democracy on political efficacy is generally based upon cross-sectional survey data combined with information about the number of initiatives appearing on statewide ballots. The source of survey data is often the American National Election Studies (ANES). The ANES has sometimes included questions on “internal efficacy” (the extent to which people believe they have the resources and skills to influence the government) and “external efficacy” (the extent to which people believe government is responsive to them). Questions addressing internal efficacy include queries about whether government is too complicated to understand and whether respondents feel qualified to participate in politics. Questions addressing external efficacy include queries about whether respondents have any say in what government does and whether government cares about what average people think.

While the recent literature on the positive secondary consequences of direct democracy makes explicit and helpful links to democratic theory, it provides minimal attention to relevant political psychology findings generally, or findings regarding political efficacy specifically. Given what is known about people’s inattention to political constructs such as ideology, it is doubtful that many survey respondents have given much prior thought to political efficacy per se. Rather as Zaller (1992, 62) indicates in his influential work on mass public opinion, “people answer survey questions on the basis of ideas that are most salient to them at the moment of response.” Accordingly, when answering efficacy questions in the ANES and elsewhere people could be expected to act like “cognitive misers” and tap a few important considerations that are accessible in memory (see for example Krosnick 1988; see also Hetherington

2005, ch. 2). The recent direct democracy literature offers neither logic nor direct or indirect evidence to support the notion that the extent of direct democracy in a respondent's state would be included in such considerations. Perhaps scholars believe that survey respondents will recall the experience of voting directly on major policy issues. Yet it appears at least as likely that respondents will draw upon such factors as perceived governmental performance or the extent to which politics is dominated by powerful lobbying groups (on the critical importance of perceptions of special interest dominance, see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 2002).

Furthermore, the ANES political efficacy questions do not distinguish between state and national governments, asking simply about "government." Yet it is reasonable to think that while direct democracy occurs only at the state and local levels in the United States, personal opinions about national government may dominate the formulation of answers to these political efficacy questions. In support of this contention, existing empirical work commonly finds that while state government is in theory closer to the people, knowledge of national government is higher because of much greater media attention (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Songer 1984).

If we accept the highly questionable assumption that survey respondents would tap knowledge about their ability to vote on state level ballot measures in answering political efficacy queries, the question remains whether it is sensible to think that simply making more decisions at the ballot box gives people a stronger sense of political efficacy. The empirical research bearing most directly on political efficacy in the United States measures the impact of direct democracy by the average number of ballot measures on a statewide ballot over a particular time period (Bowler and Donovan 2002;

Hero and Tolbert 2004; Smith and Tolbert 2004). The hypothesis examined in this line of research is that, holding all other factors constant, each increase in the average number leads to a greater sense of efficacy. Yet longitudinal studies of political efficacy suggest that, if anything, there is only a modest and contingent causal impact of political activity on efficacy, with political activity more likely to affect the external form than the internal (Finkel 1985). Based on an ANES panel study of pre-election and post-election efficacy, Clarke and Acock (1989, 561, emphasis in original) conclude: “One of the best known hypotheses in democratic theory *per se* enhances political efficacy. Analyses indicate that neither voting nor campaign activity in the most recent American national elections had such an effect.” It is notable that Clarke and Acock found that voting for victorious candidates had a positive effect on efficacy. However, none of the recent direct democracy literature measures whether respondents feel more efficacious if the results of ballot initiatives turn out the way such respondents want; such work simply examines the connection between the raw number of ballot measures in a state and individual political efficacy.

Moreover, some recent work on public opinion and American political institutions suggests that people are more satisfied if they make fewer political decisions, provided they perceive that those making the decisions are not acting in their own self interest. Based on an extensive analysis of both national survey and focus group data, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002 and 1995) conclude that Americans prefer a type of “stealth democracy” whereby democratic institutions and decision making are visible only when people perceive there to be a problem to which they need to attend. In support of this conclusion, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse provide evidence that, for example, people are

more satisfied with institutions such as the U.S. Supreme Court and Federal Reserve Board that offer minimal opportunities for public input than with institutions such as Congress that offer more public accountability. Interestingly, Smith and Tolbert (2004, ch. 4) draw from Hibbing and Theiss-Morse in support of the notion that voters believe that the current nation political process is too dominated by elected officials. This implies that people are more satisfied with the political system if direct democracy is used more frequently. But the "stealth democracy" argument could be more easily interpreted as implying that voters would be more satisfied if decisions were made more often by "objective," non-elected officials such as judges.

Even the relatively small literature pertaining to opinions about direct democracy as an institution suggests caution in believing that greater use of ballot initiatives lead to an enhanced sense of political efficacy among individuals. Through a variety of empirical studies it has been demonstrated that the existence of the ballot initiative measure is popular with voters (for a summary of several such studies see Bowler and Donovan 2002). Nevertheless, some of the same studies that indicate high overall satisfaction with direct democracy also find many concerned about the number of decisions they must make. The views of Californians are especially notable in this regard, since that state has for many years made the heaviest use of the ballot initiative. One study found that while Californians generally favor direct democracy, a significant minority (41%) also support limiting the number of initiatives that could be voted on during a particular election, while a majority supported requiring a two thirds vote (rather than the current simple majority) for approval of a ballot initiative (Hagen and Lascher 1998).

In summary, the literature on how people access memory to respond to survey questions, work on political efficacy, studies of support for political institutions, and even some work on direct democracy suggest cause for skepticism about the notion that a greater number of initiatives in the American states would produce enhanced political efficacy among citizens. Based on such literature, a reasonable working hypothesis would be to expect no relationship between the propensity to use direct democracy in a state (or number of ballot measures voted upon in a state) and the level of political efficacy among citizens residing in the state. The strongest argument for expecting a positive relationship is the empirical evidence presented in the studies by Smith and Tolbert (2004), et al. But would further empirical analysis using different data support that claim? It is to that question we turn to in our own empirical analysis.

Happiness

If democracies... contain within their systems the means of inflicting pain on their cheerless publics and benefiting therefrom, why do people not correct these faults by entering the political system and voting away the sources of pain? One reason, of course, is that the pains are often inherent in the democratic process. Another reason is that participating in politics is itself a pain.

Robert E. Lane, *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies* (2000, p. 230)

A promising line of research in trying to detect a connection between the presence of direct democracy and political efficacy is to use survey data containing information on individuals' assessment of their own happiness matched to the extent direct democracy is

used in the states in which respondents reside. Even if survey respondents may not have thought much about the responsiveness of the political system, we may anticipate that they will have strong views about their own happiness. Controlling for other factors expected to influence happiness, looking for an independent connection between personal happiness and the presence of direct democracy offers a new form of assessing the role, if any, of direct democracy.

Despite some earlier concern about measures of personal happiness, extensive research has documented the validity of measures of self-reported happiness found in major survey research data sets such as the GSS. Studies have found that self assessments of happiness, while noisy, correlate positively with heart rate measures as responses to stress, left prefrontal cortex activity which is associated with the processing of pleasure, reports on one's happiness made by friends, and length and frequency of "unfakeable smiles." Negative correlates with personal happiness include unemployment, divorce and suicide (Di Tella and MacCulloch 2006; Kahnemann and Krueger 2006; Konow and Earley 2006; Lane 2000, appendix). Confidence in the validity of self-assessments of happiness partly explains the recent boom in academic studies of happiness, especially among economists (for general overviews of key findings see Frey and Stutzer 2002; Layard 2005).

Additionally, while findings in this area are decidedly mixed, some empirical work has found a connection between democratic institutions and self assessment of happiness (for recent summaries of the literature in this area, see Lascher, Wassmer, and Kroll 2007; Wassmer, Lascher, and Kroll 2007). Most importantly, a major study by Frey and Stutzer (2000A/B) finds Swiss adults to be happier in cantons in which the

mechanisms of direct democracy were more well developed (in particular, where it is easier for citizens to use the popular initiative), controlling for a variety of demographic and economic variables. Frey and Stutzer reason that both “winners” and “losers” will be happier in places where direct democracy is better developed because everyone will tend to feel that their preferences are more fully considered. These findings have received favorable attention in some of the recent happiness literature. For example, one broad survey of this literature termed the results “remarkable” and indicated the results were highly relevant to the role of local democracy in promoting life satisfaction (Layard 2005, 70).

Nevertheless, there are reasons to doubt the connection between happiness and direct democracy as well. Some empirical studies have found little relationship between political factors and happiness, especially in developed, democratic countries that have generally avoided such problems as failure to abide by the rule of law (by contrast, studies have demonstrated that people are less happy in societies that regularly violate civil rights and do not protect political freedom). Scholars have attributed such findings to people’s perceptions of the remoteness of politics from the major influences on their lives (see Lane 2000, ch. 11). Maintaining strong family relationships, employment, good health, and other personal factors dominate self-assessments of happiness (see for example Layard 2005, ch. 5).

Consistent with the “stealth democracy” arguments made by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), there is also evidence to suggest that rather than being a source of pleasure, political participation can be a burden. Political participation exposes people to conflict and feelings of frustration when things do not turn out as they want. For

instance, detailed studies of the pleasurable use of time found that of activities people enjoyed doing, political activity ranked near last. Lane (2000, p. 243) summarizes the implications of these studies in blunt terms: “[P]olitical activity is not regarded as fun.” In light of such findings, it is questionable whether happiness is enhanced simply by making more decisions at the ballot box.

Once again, based on the entirety of the happiness literature the null hypothesis offered in this research seems well justified: we expect no association between the number of ballot measures considered in a state in a given year and the life satisfaction of individuals residing in that state. The strongest rationale to think otherwise is the evidence from the single study of happiness in Swiss Cantons by Frey and Stutzer. The question we pose next is whether this finding holds up in a different context.

Data and Methods

To reexamine the possible connection between the initiative process and political efficacy/happiness, we draw upon the data contained in the General Social Survey which has been conducted annually or biannually since the mid-1970s by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The survey provides a national random sample of non-institutionalized American adults and is one of the few surveys continuing to collect data through in-person interviews. The typical sample sizes have been about 1,500 for annual surveys and 3,000 for biannual surveys. All GSS surveys include a battery of standard questions, as well as modules addressing timely topics specific to the year administered. According to the GSS Web site, as of August 2007 there had been over 14,000 documented uses of GSS data in articles, textbooks, dissertations, etc.²

² See [www.norc.org/projects/General+Social+Survey.htm](http://www.norc.uchicago.edu/projects/General+Social+Survey.htm), accessed August 4, 2007.

The general release version of the GSS does not include codes identifying either the state of residence or Primary Statistical Unit (PSU) for survey respondents. However, it is possible for researchers to purchase such codes by writing NORC and including a promise not to share the codes with others or include information identifying the state residence for particular respondents in reports or publications. As part of a larger research project examining differences in attitudes across states, we obtained the state and locality codes in this manner.

Political efficacy queries are not included in the standard battery of questions posed to GSS respondents. However, the 1985 and 1996 surveys incorporated modules focused on political efficacy (and labeled as such) and we focused on those years. The specific questions posed in 1985 and 1996 differed, with the exception of a query about whether an average person can influence politicians that was used in both years (in 1985 as a dichotomous variable and in 1996 as a five point Likert scale variable). Summary statistics for political efficacy questions and all other dependent and test variables are included in Table A.1.

In a GSS module (POLEFF1, et. Seq), the 1985 survey included 10 questions about political efficacy, most of them in the area of external efficacy. The number of responses to these questions (asked of only a subsample of GSS respondents) ranged from 548 to 636. In addition to the previously referenced question, we focus on questions labeled: “Public has little control over politicians,” “Not worth talking to politicians,” “People like me have much to say re government,” “Average person can influence government decisions,” and “Government is generally responsive to the public.” We chose not to focus on four questions that seemed unlikely to prompt

consideration of governmental responsiveness at the state level or had a tenuous connection to policy making (“The world is getting better,” “Average persons can influence local government,” “I am usually interested in local elections,” and “People can control world affairs”). All of the 1985 questions used in this analysis were of the dichotomous “agree-disagree” variety, with the higher value indicating disagreement. Prior to any analysis, questions were recoded as appropriate so that higher values indicated greater efficacy.

The 1996 survey included eight questions about political efficacy, well divided between the areas of internal and external efficacy. All these questions used a five point Likert scale. The number of responses to these questions ranged from 1,252 to 1,287. In addition to the previously mentioned query about an average person influencing politics, we focused on the external efficacy questions “Don’t have any say about what the government does,” “Even best politician can’t have much impact,” and “Elections a good way of making government pay attention.” We also considered two internal efficacy questions: “Have a pretty good understanding of the issues” and “Most people better informed about politics than I.” We did not focus on two questions that asked specifically about non-state level actors or seemingly only had a tenuous connection to state politics and policy making (“People elected to Congress try to keep promises,” and “Most government administrators can be trusted”). Here as well, questions were recoded as appropriate so that higher values indicated greater efficacy.

In addition to considering the efficacy questions individually in bivariate analysis of the connection between direct democracy and political efficacy, we also combined questions into indices. We created an external efficacy index for 1985 (when all the

relevant questions fell into that category) and both an internal and an external efficacy index for 1996. To create the indices, we first recoded any negatively phrased questions so that higher scores consistently indicated greater efficacy. We then summed responses across the different questions.

One possible objection to considering the 1985 survey results, rather than focusing only on the 1996 survey result, is that direct democracy was less widely practiced in the American states prior to the mid-1980s. Therefore, the 1985 survey might not capture the more recent sharp variance in usage of ballot initiatives across the states. Such an objection would be misplaced. While the ballot initiative process is more widely used today than in the 1980s and earlier, there has long been a sharp divergence in how many measures are submitted to the voters in different states, and this pattern has been remarkably consistent over time. Some states (e.g., California, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington) have long been heavy initiative users, while still others (e.g. Idaho and Utah) have been moderate users and many others (e.g., New York and Texas) have never adopted a ballot initiative process. Indeed, a regression of the number of ballot initiatives on state ballots from 1972 to 1994 on number of initiatives from 1972 to 1984 explains ninety percent of the variance in the dependent variable.

For the political efficacy dependent variables, we used and present ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis with the efficacy indices since these dependent variables were in the form of a Likert scale. As a check on the OLS results with the indices, we also estimated effects for each of the individual efficacy questions using binary or multinomial logistic regression, as appropriate. The substantive conclusions were identical to those drawn using the indices.

As with many other happiness studies, the basis for the dependent variable for the happiness and direct democracy analysis is the following question, which has been asked of GSS since 1972: “Taken altogether, how would you say things are these days – would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?” The dependent variable was crafted from the responses to this question by coding happiness equal to three if “very happy,” two if “pretty happy,” and one if “not too happy.” For this second dependent variable, we initially estimated the relationships using OLS because such results are easier to interpret. Given this categorical coding, an ordinal form of regression may again be the most appropriate, prompting us to again try multinomial logistic regression as a check on the results. The different form of estimation did not change any findings.

With respect to survey years for the happiness analysis, we focused on the 1998 and 2002 results. This decision was made prior to any empirical analysis, and was prompted by the fact that in a separate, prior study we were able to add additional information on the location of survey participants within 100 Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) in the United States for those years; such information was not gathered in the same manner for earlier years of the GSS (a PSU consists of a single county, group of counties, or the various configurations of a metropolitan statistical area as defined by the United States Census). Inclusion of this information allowed for especially strong assurance that the findings of the happiness analysis reflected local variables associated with the test and dependent variable that might be influencing the results. Indeed, as a group, the set of PSU dummy variables exerted a statistically significant influence on happiness in each year. The 1998 wave of the GSS contained interview results for 2,832

individuals; while the 2002 wave sampled 2,765 individuals. After dropping missing observations contained in the desired variables, the data sample used for the full regression consisted of 3,093 observations.

For both the study of political efficacy and happiness, the key test variable was the extent to which states made use of direct democracy. It is possible to measure that variable as a simple dichotomy, with states allowing for any statewide initiatives differentiated from states with no such process. One prior study of the impact of direct democracy on political attitudes did exactly that, finding no influence from the presence of direct democracy (Citrin 1996). Such an approach might be appropriate if it was the mere opportunity to use direct democracy that was critical to efficacy or happiness, rather than the amount of usage. However, more recent research has been critical of this approach, arguing that initiative use should be treated as a continuous variable given the vast differences across states in initiative use and sharp divergence in state laws with respect to placing restrictions on the initiative process. Notably, studies inferring a positive relationship between direct democracy and political efficacy measured direct democracy as a continuous variable (Bowler and Donovan 2002; Hero and Tolbert 2004; Smith and Tolbert 2004, ch. 4). Rather than stipulating a priori that one approach was preferable, we used both continuous and dichotomous measures in our analysis.

More specifically, we combined the individual level GSS data with information about the number of initiatives used in the respondent's state for the period 1972 to the general election prior to the survey year, using data from the Initiative Research Institute at the University of Southern California, which has collected initiative use data beginning in 1972. For example, analysis of the 1985 survey data included the following two

versions of the test variable: a) the average number of initiatives per year in the respondent's state from 1972 to 1984, and b) a dummy variable for whether or not the respondent's state had any initiatives during that period. The approach to specifying the test variables was similar for later survey years (e.g., analysis of the 2002 data included the average number of initiatives in the respondent's state from 1972-2000 and a dummy variable for whether or not the state had any initiatives). It is noteworthy that some states (e.g., California, Maine, and Ohio) allow initiatives during odd-numbered years, so it is appropriate to consider every year in computing an average. Our strategy in combining survey and aggregate data was quite similar to the approach used in other recent studies.

With respect to appropriate control variables, as far as possible we included those used in other recent studies. In the analysis of political efficacy these individual level controls included age, gender, racial identity, education (measured in terms of highest degree obtained), and dummy variables representing the strength and direction of party identification (consistent with prior research, weak partisans and independents were expected to have less efficacy). We did not include an aggregate measure of divided government which some have speculated might influence efficacy because prior research had used such a control variable and consistently found it not to have a significant impact.

With respect to the analysis of happiness, the set of control variables used was more extensive, consistent with prior studies of the impact of life satisfaction. These include measures from the "big five" sets of variables found to be important in prior happiness studies using the GSS: family relationships, financial situation, work (especially unemployment status), community and friends, and health (Layard 2005, ch.

5). Additional demographic variables are included because they sometimes have been shown to affect life satisfaction.³ Control variables also included the metropolitan specific dummy variables referred to previously, with Los Angeles as the excluded category (this choice was arbitrary).

Findings

As a preliminary means of assessing the relationship between direct democracy and political efficacy, we calculated the bivariate correlations between each political efficacy measure from the 1985 and 1996 GSS surveys and the average number of initiatives in the respondent's state, as well as the presence or absence of any initiatives during the period prior to the survey. The results set forth in Table 1 are strikingly consistent with our null hypothesis. The correlations are uniformly low across both survey years and using either measure of direct democracy; the highest absolute value of any correlation is .07. None of the correlations are statistically significant and many of the correlations are negative. In short, this first cut at the analysis suggests direct democracy and political efficacy are unrelated.

Table 1 about here

Table 2 presents the results from a more rigorous analysis of the relationship between direct democracy and the indices of political efficacy, adding the control variables used by others who have conducted similar research. Again, we find no empirical evidence of a connection use of direct democracy and the respondent's sense of political efficacy. Regardless of whether we measure initiative use as a continuous or dichotomous variable, none of the coefficients for the direct democracy variable approach

³ For example, some studies have shown that African Americans are less satisfied than whites, controlling for other variables including socio-economic status; see Hughes and Thomas (1998).

statistical significance. Meantime, the control variables, especially education level, tend to have the expected significant relationship with the dependent variable.

Table 2 about here

Nor did changes in the specification or estimation procedure change the substantive results. Prior work that considered California an outlier in terms of initiative use and the nature of initiative campaigns added a dummy variable for that state. The theoretical justification for adding a dummy variable for California alone is not clear. Nevertheless, adding this control did not alter the substantive conclusions; the direct democracy variable still did not approach statistical significance in any equation. Similarly, our use of ordinal rather than least squares regression made no difference. Instead, we could not reject the null hypothesis across many different ways of looking at the statistical relationship between direct democracy and efficacy.

The results are similar with respect to direct democracy and happiness. Consider first the bivariate correlations between the initiative use measures and general happiness: all are very low and not always positive. For the 1998 data, the correlation between average initiative use in the respondent's state and general happiness is less than .01, while the correlation between use of any initiatives and happiness is about .02. For the 2002 data the correlations are -.02 and .01, respectively. None of these correlations approach statistical significance, and nothing in the preliminary correlation analysis suggests the variables are related.

Using a more rigorous multivariate analysis with a wide array of control measures, the general conclusion is unchanged. Table 3 presents the result of ordinary least squares regression with the recoded GSS three category measure of happiness ("not

too happy”= 1, “pretty happy”=2, and “very happy” = 3) as the dependent variable. In none of the regression analyses does the direct democracy coefficient approach statistical significance; in three of four cases the sign of coefficient is in fact negative. Again, use of multinomial logistic regression rather than least squares regression does not affect the substantive interpretation of the impact of the direct democracy variable. Nor did the findings change substantively if a squared term was used for the initiative variable, on the rationale that the effect of direct democracy might be non-linear. Happiness and use of the initiative process are simply unrelated for the random sample of Americans participating in the GSSs of 1998 and 2002.

Table 3 about here

By contrast, the control variables had their expected relationships to happiness. Other factors equal, married people were significantly happier than single people. In at least some specifications, African Americans were less happy than whites. Respondents in self-described good health were more satisfied with life than respondents in poor health. Family income was positively associated with happiness, although the estimated influence was not large. Religious service attendance was positively associated with life satisfaction. The consistency of such findings with prior research reinforces confidence in the inferences drawn from the present study.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examines only two of the claims about the secondary benefits of direct democracy and finds no empirical support for them. Yet it is quite possible that although use of state ballot initiatives does not make Americans happier or enhance their sense of political efficacy, it has other positive secondary consequences such as enhancing

turnout. For example, significant media attention to prominent ballot measures on controversial topics such as tax reform, affirmative action, and gun control may increase awareness of upcoming elections and encourage people to go to the polls. Nothing in the present study necessarily challenges the findings of Smith and Tolbert (2004) with respect to the connection between direct the democracy and voting.

It may also be the case that direct democracy has more subtle secondary effects on population sub-groups not assessed in the present study. In this regard, it is worth noting such provocative findings as those of Di Tella and MacCulloch (2005) which suggest that political views may mediate the relationship between objective economic conditions and happiness. They find that the happiness of those with a leftward political leaning is influenced negatively by the degree of unemployment, while the happiness of those on the political right is negatively influenced by the rate of inflation. Similarly, it may be that direct democracy affects happiness for particular social groups if not for society as a whole. Such influence might not be positive. Given what is known about people's sensitivity to political losses, it might be expected that heavy use of direct democracy would have a significant adverse affect on the happiness of a group whose members had suffered a string of defeats at the ballot box. We consider this a fruitful line of research that should be pursued in the future.

Nevertheless, the present study underscores the need to question claims about how the mere presence of the ballot initiative process, or the number of ballot measures, influences the political efficacy and happiness of citizens. The logic supporting this connection is more tenuous than sometimes suggested. Furthermore, our correlation and regression results from analysis of GSS data do not support earlier claims of positive

secondary effects. Given the discrepancy between our findings and those of some others, more empirical work is appropriate. It is possible that such work will suggest different conclusions. In the meantime, skepticism is in order.

Appendix

Table A.1 about here

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Table 1: Direct Democracy and Political Efficacy Measure Correlations

GSS LABEL	MEAN NUMBER OF INITIATIVES (1972-Prior General General Election).	INITIATIVE USE DUMMY VARIABLE (0=no initiatives, 1972-Prior General Election)
<u>1985 Survey (all questions pertaining to external efficacy)</u>		
“Public has little control over politicians”	.07	.05
“Not worth talking to politicians”	-.02	-.01
“Average person can influence politicians”	-.03	.03
“People like me have much to say re government”	.06	.01
“Average person can influence government decisions”	-.01	.03
“Government is generally responsive to the public”	.01	-.02
Index measure combining above questions	.03	.04
<u>1996 Survey</u>		
<i>External Efficacy Questions</i>		
“Average person can influence politicians”	-.02	.01
“Don’t have any say about what the government does”	.03	.03
“Even best politician can’t have much impact”	.03	.03
“Elections a good way of making government pay attention”	-.03	-.01
External efficacy index measure	.01	.02
<i>Internal Efficacy Questions</i>		
“Have a pretty good understanding of the issues”	-.03	-.02
“Most people better informed about politics than I”	.02	.05
Internal efficacy index measure	-.00	.02

Notes: 1) positively phrased questions were recoded so that higher scores indicated greater efficacy; and 2) none of the correlations are statistically significant.

Table 2: Results of OLS Regressions of Political Efficacy Measures on Direct Democracy and Control Variables

Measuring Direct Democracy Usage with Average Number of Initiatives

	External Efficacy Index, 1985	External Efficacy Index, 1996	Internal Efficacy Index, 1996
<i>Direct Democracy Use</i>	.07 (.10)	.06 (.06)	-.01 (.03)
Age	-.00 (.00)	.01* (.005)	.01 (.00)
Female	.03 (.20)	-.01 (.16)	-.54** (.09)
African American	.53 (.40)	.53 (.40)	-.02 (.14)
Education	.33** (.09)	.38** (.07)	.43** (.04)
Strong Democrat	.58 (.30)	.34 (.25)	.40** (.13)
Strong Republican	.56 (.31)	1.13** (.28)	.74** (.15)
Pure Independent	-.50 (.34)	-.24 (.23)	-.24 (.12)
<i>N</i>	484	1204	1237
<i>R</i> ²	.06	.05	.16

Measuring Direct Democracy Usage with Initiative Process Dummy Variable

	External Efficacy Index, 1985	External Efficacy Index, 1996	Internal Efficacy Index, 1996
<i>Direct Democracy Use</i>	.18 (.20)	.23 (.16)	.06 (.09)
Age	-.00 (.01)	.01* (.005)	.01 (.00)
Female	.04 (.21)	.00 (.16)	-.53** (.09)
African American	.53 (.40)	.51* (.26)	-.00 (.14)
Education	.33** (.09)	.38** (.07)	.43** (.04)
Strong Democrat	.58 (.31)	.34 (.25)	.40** (.13)
Strong Republican	.55 (.31)	1.14** (.25)	.74** (.15)
Pure Independent	-.50 (.34)	-.24 (.23)	-.24 (.12)
<i>N</i>	484	1204	1237
<i>R</i> ²	.06	.05	.16

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3: Results of OLS Regressions of Happiness on Direct Democracy Measures and Control Variables

	Happiness, 1998	Happiness, 1998	Happiness, 2002	Happiness, 2002
<i>Average Initiatives in Respondent's State</i>	-.050 (.204)	---	-.719 (.709)	---
<i>Any Initiatives in Respondents State (Dummy Variable)</i>	---	.018 (.124)	---	-.137 (.238)
Age	.002* (.001)	.002 (.001)	.004** (.002)	.004** (.002)
Female	.010 (.025)	.009 (.026)	-.053 (.046)	-.053 (.046)
African American	-.098* (.042)	-.098* (.042)	-.146 (.079)	-.150 (.079)
Asian American	-.050 (.096)	-.050 (.096)	-.093 (.181)	-.092 (.181)
Native American	.203 (.184)	.203 (.184)	.054 (.376)	.057 (.376)
Mixed Race	-.022 (.066)	-.022 (.066)	-.090 (.104)	-.089 (.105)
Married	.279** (.041)	.279** (.041)	.174* (.072)	.179* (.072)
Widowed	.029 (.063)	.029 (.063)	-.265** (.111)	-.260** (.110)
Divorced	.029 (.046)	.029 (.046)	-.236** (.081)	-.228** (.080)
Separated	-.116 (.074)	-.116 (.074)	-.099 (.128)	-.093 (.128)
No Children	.044 (.035)	.043 (.035)	.058 (.059)	.059 (.059)
Years of Education	-.003 (.005)	-.003 (.005)	.002 (.008)	.002 (.008)
Household Income	.000** .000	.000** .000	.000** .000	.000** .000
Unemployed	-.408** (.083)	-.408 (.083)	-.141 (.111)	-.125 (.109)
Religious Service Attendance	.020** (.005)	.020** (.005)	.013 (.009)	.013 (.009)
Health	.184** (.017)	.184** (.017)	.146 (.028)	.146 (.028)
<i>N</i>	2324	2324	818	818
<i>R</i> ²	.20	.20	.30	.30

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Notes: 1) results for metropolitan area (PSU) dummy variables are not shown but these variables were included in the regression analyses; and 2) excluded categories for race and marital status variables were "white" and "single, never married," respectively.

Table A.1. GSS [or Authors'] Name and Year, GSS Labels, and Univariate Statistics for Test and Dependent Variables Used in Empirical Analysis

GSS Name	GSS Label	Statistics
<i>Test (Independent) Variables</i>		
[AVG. # INITIATIVES/YEAR IN RESPONDENT'S STATE, 1972-1984] (1985)	--	Range: 0-3.15; Mean: .651; Standard Deviation: 1.03
[DUMMY VAR. FOR ANY INITIATIVES IN RESPONDENT'S STATE, 1972-1984] (1985)	--	Range: 0-1; Mean: .437; Standard Deviation: .496
[AVG. # INITIATIVES/YEAR IN RESPONDENT'S STATE, 1972-1994] (1996)	--	Range: 0-4.22; Mean: .819; Standard Deviation: 1.30
[DUMMY VAR. FOR ANY INITIATIVES IN RESPONDENT'S STATE, 1972-1994] (1996)	--	Range: 0-1; Mean: .460; Standard Deviation: .498
[AVG. # INITIATIVES/YEAR IN RESPONDENT'S STATE, 1972-1996] (1998)	--	Range: 0-4.04; Mean: .702; Standard Deviation: 1.18
[DUMMY VAR. FOR ANY INITIATIVES IN RESPONDENT'S STATE, 1972-1996] (1998)	--	Range: 0-1; Mean: .454; Standard Deviation: .498
[AVG. # INITIATIVES/YEAR IN RESPONDENT'S STATE, 1972-2000] (2002)	--	Range: 0-4.04; Mean: .699; Standard Deviation: 1.17
[DUMMY VAR. FOR ANY INITIATIVES IN RESPONDENT'S STATE, 1972-2000] (2002)	--	Range: 0-1; Mean: .449; Standard Deviation: .497
<i>Dependent Variables</i>		
POLEFF1 (1985)	"Public has little control over politicians"	Range: 1-2; Mean 1.39; Standard Deviation: .487
POLEFF2 (1985)	"Not worth talking to politicians"	Range: 1-2; Mean 1.55; Standard Deviation: .498
POLEFF3 (1985)	"Average person can influence politicians"*	Range: 1-2; Mean: 1.67; Standard Deviation: .470
POLEFF5 (1985)	"People like me have much to say re government"*	Range: 1-2; Mean 1.58; Standard Deviation: .494
POLEFF6 (1985)	"Average person can influence govt decisions"*	Range: 1-2; Mean 1.79; Standard Deviation: .408
POLEFF7 (1985)	"Government is generally responsive to public"*	Range: 1-2; Mean 1.49; Standard Deviation: .500
[EXTERNAL EFFICACY INDEX 1985]	--	Range: 7-14; Mean 9.82; Standard Deviation: 2.23
POLEFF3 (1996)	"Average person can influence politicians"*	Range: 1-5; Mean: 3.23; Standard Deviation: 1.10
POLEFF11 (1996)	"Don't have any say about what the government does"	Range: 1-5; Mean: 2.82; Standard Deviation: 1.26
POLEFF12 (1996)	"Even best politician cannot have much impact"	Range: 1-5; Mean: 2.78; Standard Deviation: 1.10
POLEFF13 (1996)	"Have a pretty good"	Range: 1-5; Mean: 2.61; Standard

	understanding of the issues”*	Deviation: .983
POLEFF14 (1996)	“Elections a good way of making government pay attention”*	Range: 1-5; Mean: 2.18; Standard Deviation: .945
POLEFF15 (1996)	“Most people better informed about politics than I”	Range: 1-5; Mean: 3.07; Standard Deviation: 1.07
[EXTERNAL EFFICACY INDEX 1996]	--	Range: 4-20; Mean: 12.2; Standard Deviation: 2.88
[INTERNAL EFFICACY INDEX 1996]	--	Range: 2-10; Mean: 6.48; Standard Deviation: 1.66
HAPPY (1998)	General happiness**	Range: 1-3; Mean: 1.80; Standard Deviation: .633
HAPPY (2002)	General happiness**	Range: 1-3; Mean: 1.82; Standard Deviation: .629

*Recoded prior to analysis to make higher values indicate greater efficacy

**Recoded prior to analysis to make higher values indicate greater happiness