

# Propositions & Consequences

## *Ballot Initiatives and Civic Engagement*



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## Roadmap

- **Part I: A Puzzle**
- **Part II: Background**
- **Part III: Participatory Democratic Theory**
- **Part IV: A New Theory and New Evidence**
- **Part V: Summary and Conclusion**

# Part I



**A PUZZLE**



## The puzzle

- Studies show turnout increases due to initiatives
- No evidence of effects of ballot initiatives on trust, efficacy, knowledge, interest, etc.

# Part II



## **BACKGROUND**

# Direct Democracy

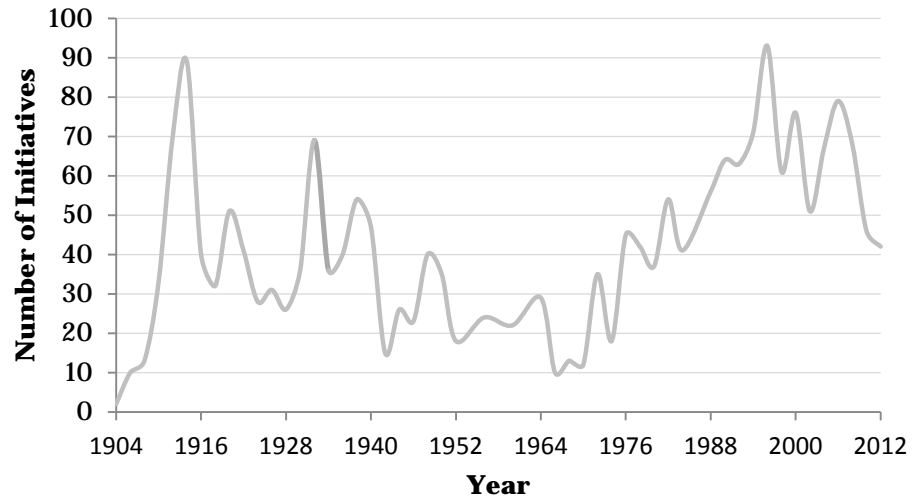
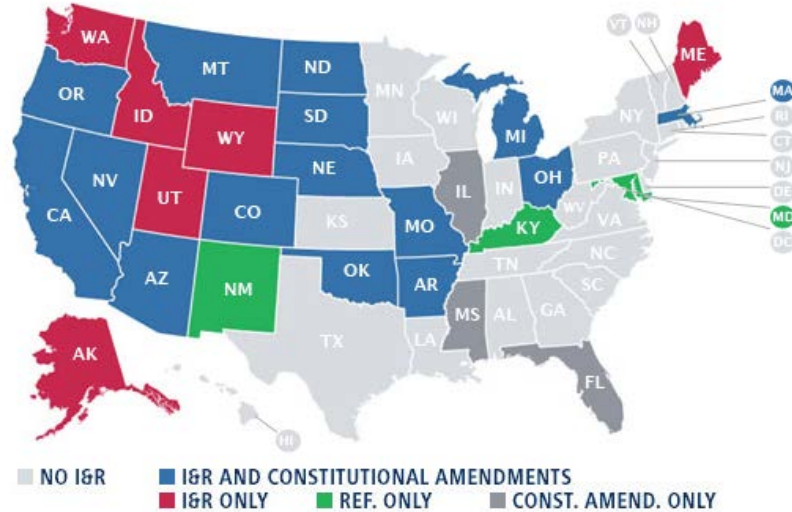
Historic Roots

Definitions

Usage

Policy Content

Contentious debates





## Roots and Reform

- **Progressive Era Foundations**
- **Understanding the purpose of Progressive Era Reforms**
  - Political Parties
  - Corruption
  - Juxtaposition of the ballot initiative with meritocracy and Strong Mayor systems
  - Hybrid Democracy
  - Direct Democracy
- **Reconciling with Representative Democracy**
  - Madison's tyranny of the majority



# Adoption and Usage

**Table 1. Initiative History and Usage, 1898-2010**

State	Year of Adoption	Legislative Domain	Total Initiatives 1898-2010	Average Biennial Initiatives
Alaska	1956	Statute Only	47	1.7
Arizona	1911	Both	172	3.4
Arkansas	1910	Both	120	2.4
California	1911	Both	340	6.8
Colorado	1912	Both	215	4.3
Florida	1972	Constitutional Only	32	1.6
Idaho	1912	Statute Only	28	0.6
Illinois	1970	Constitutional Only	1	0.0
Maine	1908	Statute Only	52	1.0
Massachusetts	1918	Both	72	1.5
Michigan	1908	Both	72	1.4
Mississippi <sup>a</sup>	1992	Constitutional Only	2	0.2
Missouri	1908	Both	81	1.6
Montana <sup>b</sup>	1904	Both	77	1.4
Nebraska	1912	Both	46	0.9
Nevada	1905	Both	54	1.0
North Dakota	1914	Both	179	3.7
Ohio	1912	Both	77	1.6
Oklahoma	1907	Both	85	1.6
Oregon	1902	Both	355	6.5
South Dakota	1898	Both	64	1.1
Utah <sup>c</sup>	1917	Statute Only	20	0.4
Washington	1912	Statute Only	163	3.3
Wyoming	1968	Statute Only	6	0.3

<sup>a</sup> Mississippi passed it in 1914, but it was ruled unconstitutional in 1922

<sup>b</sup> Montana Added the Constitutional Initiative in 1972

<sup>c</sup> Utah voters approved of the ballot initiative in 1990, but the legislature balked at implementing the law until 1917





## Content and Conflict

California had 208 initiatives from 1970-2012; 76 of them were classified as “tax,” “bond,” or “budget” initiatives by NCSL





## Civic Engagement

- A measure of the connectedness of citizens and government/society
  - Voting/Turnout as civic duty
  - Political Interest
  - Political Awareness/Knowledge
  - Trust (Political and Social)
  - Efficacy (Internal and External)



## **Effects talked about by scholars**

- **Primary**
- **Secondary**



## Effects

- **Primary**
- **Secondary**

# Part III



## **PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRATIC THEORY**



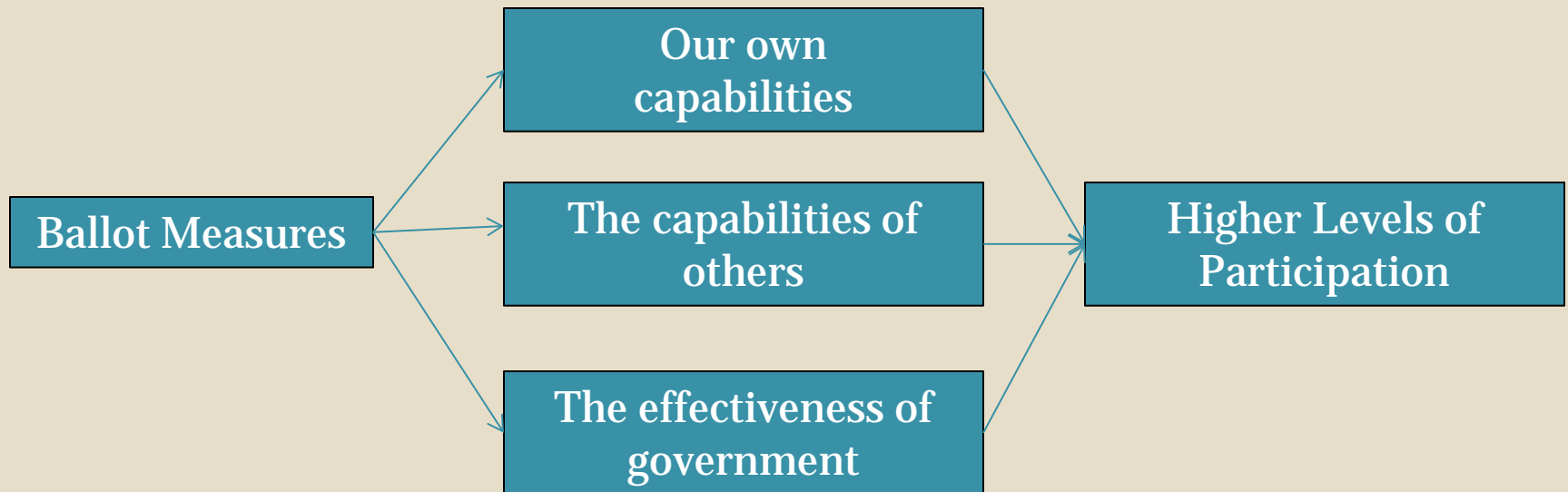
## Spillover Effects

- The direct democracy experience is different
- How is it different?
  - The act of voting is different
  - The issues we consider are different
  - The cost of voting is different
  - The perceived benefits of voting or not voting are different
  - The expectations for voters are different
- *Question: does direct democracy increase civic engagement?*

# The current theory



## Participatory democratic theory as applied to ballot measures



- Direct legislation engages citizens through involvement in their democracy; **empowerment** is key to this theory

# What the empirics support



- Participatory theory

**Our own capabilities**

Ballot Measures

The capabilities of others

Higher Levels of Participation

The effectiveness of government

- Knowledge
- Engagement/Interest
- Internal Political Efficacy



# What the empirics support



- Participatory theory

Increasing Views of  
Own Capabilities

Ballot Measures

**The capabilities of  
others**

Higher Levels of  
Participation

- **Generalized Social Trust**
- **Political Discussion**
- **Cross-cutting political discussion**

The effectiveness of  
government

# What the empirics support



- Participatory theory

Our own capabilities

Ballot Measures

The capabilities of others

Higher Levels of Participation

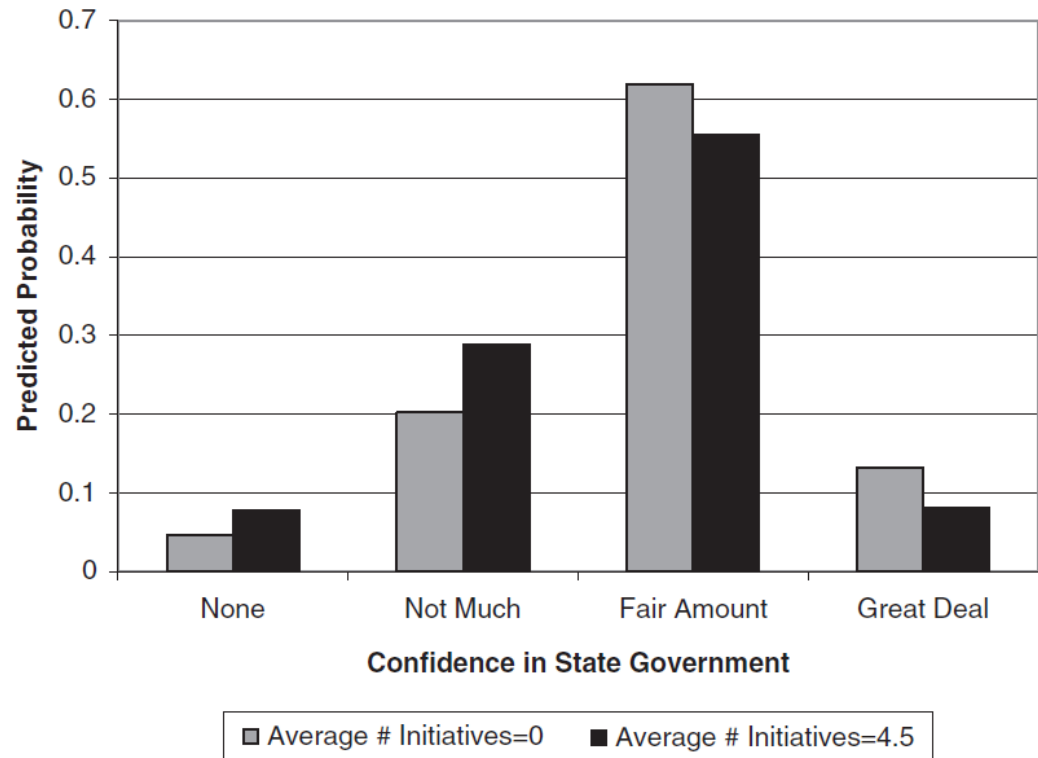
**The effectiveness of government**

- Political Trust
- External Political Efficacy

# Trust

From Dyck (2010)

**Figure 1**  
**Marginal Effect of Initiative Usage on Trust,**  
**2004 National Annenberg Election Survey**

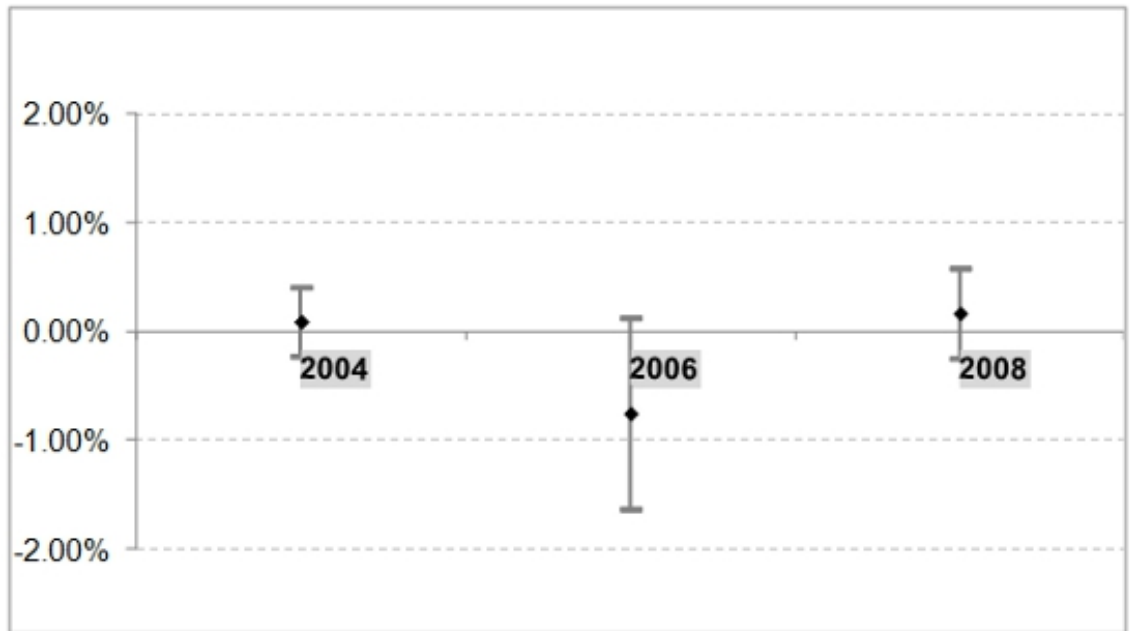




## Political Awareness

(from Seabrook, Dyck and Lascher 2015)

**% Effect of 1 additional initiative per year, on average, on political knowledge**





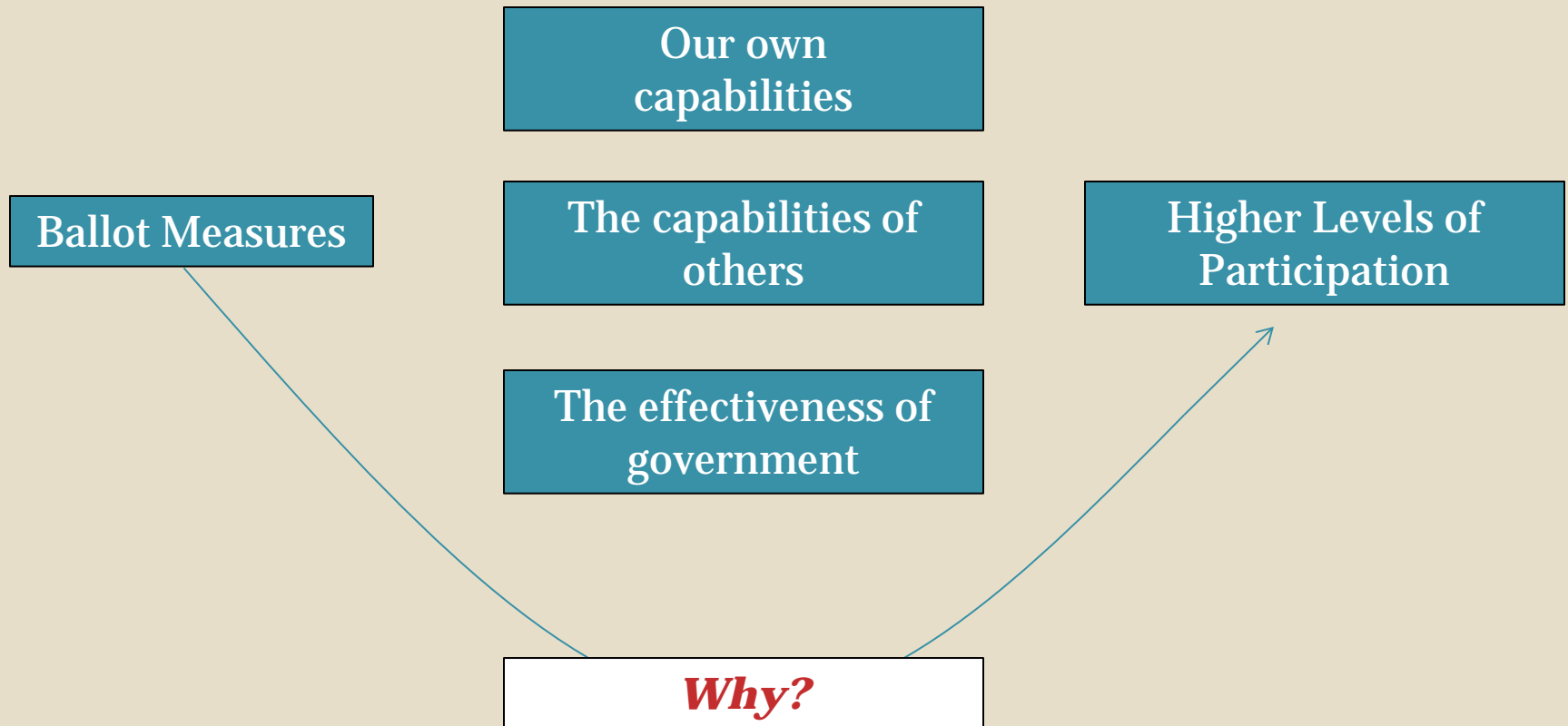
## **Null Effects are the norm**

- **Political Efficacy**
  - Some evidence that ballot measures decrease internal efficacy among long-resource voters
- **Political Interest**
  - Inconsistent evidence

# What the empirics support



- Participatory theory



# Part IV



**A NEW THEORY  
(AND SOME NEW EVIDENCE)**



## Why does turnout increase?

- Participatory theory argument falls apart
  - Was never really logically coherent (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993)
- How do we increase turnout?
  - Decrease the costs
  - Increase the benefit
  - Increase the expressive benefit of voting – Civic Duty
  - Create Social Pressure through campaigns






# An alternative theory

## Propositions

- **Conflict-centered process**
  - Schattschneider on conflict
  - Dahl on the mobilization of conflict
- **Elite Behavior:**
  - The incentive structure for ballot initiatives encourages extremism
  - Ballot initiatives completely change the way we understand agenda setting
  - Ballot initiatives increase the number of interest groups
  - More money → more ad space → more efforts to influence and mobilize
- **Mass Behavior:**
  - Mobilization without interest → campaign mobilization
  - Voters will trust the government at lower rates ; like direct democracy in the abstract, but dislike it in practice
  - Issue space will be more developed and therefore more partisan
- *Despite the hopes of reformers, most of this conflict reinforces and intensifies partisan divides*



**Some evidence  
that already  
exists...**

- **Partisan bias in mobilization**
  - Tested in one state by Dyck and Seabrook (2010)
- **Ballot initiatives will increase policy-specific knowledge, but not general knowledge**
  - Seabrook, Dyck and Lascher (2015)
  - Nicholson (2003)
- **The most conflictual and competitive initiatives will lead to the biggest turnout increases**
  - Childers and Binder (2011)
  - Biggers (2015)
- **Ballot initiatives decrease trust in government**
  - Dyck (2010)