Propositions & Consequences
Ballot Initiatives and Civic Engagement

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• Part I: A Puzzle
• Part II: Background
• Part III: Participatory Democratic Theory
• Part IV: A New Theory and New Evidence
• Party V: Summary and Conclusion
• Studies show turnout increases due to initiatives

• No evidence of effects of ballot initiatives on trust, efficacy, knowledge, interest, etc.
Direct Democracy

Historic Roots
Definitions
Usage
Policy Content
Contentious debates
• 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
### Table 1. Initiative History and Usage, 1898-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year of Adoption</th>
<th>Legislative Domain</th>
<th>Total Initiatives 1898-2010</th>
<th>Average Biennial Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Statute Only</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<td>Florida</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Constitutional Only</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1908</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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<td>Both</td>
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<td>Montana³</td>
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<td>Both</td>
<td>77</td>
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<td>Washington</td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>Statute Only</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Mississippi passed it in 1914, but it was ruled unconstitutional in 1922
² Montana added the Constitutional Initiative in 1972
³ 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
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?
Participatory democratic theory as applied to ballot measures

- The current theory

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

- Participatory theory

- Ballot Measures
  - Knowledge
  - Engagement/Interest
  - Internal Political Efficacy

- Our own capabilities

- The capabilities of others

- Higher Levels of Participation

- The effectiveness of government
What the empirics support

- Participatory theory

Ballot Measures

- Increasing Views of Own Capabilities
- 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

- Ballot Measures
  - Our own capabilities
  - The capabilities of others
  - Higher Levels of Participation

- Political Trust
- External Political Efficacy

- The effectiveness of government
Trust

From Dyck (2010)

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

Confidence in State Government

Predicted Probability

None | Not Much | Fair Amount | Great Deal

Average # Initiatives=0   Average # Initiatives=4.5
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

- Ballot Measures
  - Our own capabilities
  - The capabilities of others
  - The effectiveness of government
  - Higher Levels of Participation

*Why?*
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 $\rightarrow$ more ad space $\rightarrow$ more efforts to influence and mobilize

- **Mass Behavior:**
  - Mobilization without interest $\rightarrow$ 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)

- 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)