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American Politics Research 2009; 37; 539 originally published online Apr 30, 2009;

DOI: 10.1177/1532673X08330635

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Initiated Distrust

Direct Democracy and Trust in Government

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An abundance of recent research has suggested that direct democracy institutions, such as the initiative and referendum, craft an environment ripe for encouraging better democratic citizenship. High and frequent exposure to ballot measures has been shown to increase the awareness, efficacy, political participation, and even the general level of happiness of citizens. In contrast to these studies, I develop and test a theory that the use of ballot initiatives undermines the ability of government to prove themselves trustworthy. Using data from two surveys, I demonstrate that ballot initiatives in the American states do indeed create an environment that encourages citizens to distrust their government. The findings have implications in assessing the positive externalities to direct legislation as well as in understanding policy choice made in these elections.

Keywords: *political trust; direct democracy; ballot initiatives and referendums; state politics; political participation*

The American progressive movement in favor of direct legislation was founded on prospects of good government and perceived failings of representative democracy at the state and local level. The belief was that the initiative, referendum, and recall would empower citizens in a manner that would make both the inputs and outputs of government fall more closely in

Author's Note: An earlier version of this article was prepared for presentation at the Midwest Political Science Association Conference, Chicago, April 20–23, 2006. I would like to thank Caroline Tolbert, Zoltan Hajnal, Gregg Johnson, Chuck Finocchiaro, and anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions on this article. I would also like to thank the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press and the Annenberg Public Policy Center for making their data available; neither institution bears any responsibility for the interpretations presented or conclusions reached based on analysis of the data. Please address correspondence to Joshua J. Dyck, Department of Political Science, University at Buffalo, SUNY, 520 Park Hall, Buffalo, NY 14260; phone: 716-645-8435; fax: 716-645-2166; e-mail: jdyck@buffalo.edu.

line with majority opinion.¹ At the time, reformers had good reason to be upset, given the tightly knit patronage system that had developed across the country. Direct legislation would be able to fill the gaps where legislatures failed to act, and offered recourse against shirking politicians. This would not only directly create better policy but also indirectly create more responsive public officials. But the promise of direct democracy would not end with better policy ends.

Direct democracy also offered the promise of a type of education not available in a book or a classroom—an education in democratic citizenship.² Ballot propositions and referendums would heighten the requisite bar of participation to an extent that would educate and empower citizens. Political science research, both theoretically and empirically, has been extraordinarily supportive of this notion that citizens get a lesson in good participatory civics through exposure to direct democracy (Barber, 1984; Bowler & Donovan, 2002; Frey & Stutzer, 2002; D. A. Smith & Tolbert, 2004; M. Smith, 2001, 2002). This essay examines the effect of living in a richly democratic environment on political trust. Little research has directly examined the effect of ballot initiatives on trust in a multivariate framework, and the extant research that does exist has found no link between direct democracy and trust. Although some ideas have been discussed, little theory has expressly linked direct democracy to distrust. In this article, I present a theoretic context from which to derive hypotheses about the effect of direct democracy on trust in government, and reasons to believe the effects of initiatives on trust might be different than for efficacy, participation, and knowledge. Empirically, I demonstrate that exposure to ballot initiatives leads to lower levels of trust among Americans. This finding contributes to both the literature on political trust and adds a caveat to the heretofore uniformly positive effects of direct democracy on democratic citizens.

Theoretic Perspectives

The main dependent variable in this study is political trust. So why does trust in government matter? According to Hetherington (2005), “That Americans have lost faith in the federal government to implement and administer public policy is the key change in American public opinion over the last 40 years” (p. 8). That is, although the liberalism/conservatism of public opinion has not changed markedly, the confidence that citizens once held in government to implement social programs no longer exists. An

electorate with similar ideological orientation and preferences on policies will be less likely to support government programs in practice aimed at eradicating social problems if they distrust the implementers (Hetherington, 2005). Furthermore, this distrust fuels volatility in the political system, making distrusters more likely to support nonincumbent candidates or vote for political outsiders.

Historically, the concept of political trust has been studied as an effect—something in decline that itself has some obvious implications. But studies that attempted to link political trust to declining participation have proven repeatedly unsuccessful; political trust is more commonly linked to current political events and evaluations of public officials (Citrin, 1974; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). If Hetherington (2005) is correct that distrust induces conservatism, there is a link to the literature on direct legislation in the American context, as the aggregate policy effects of initiatives during the last 30 years have been to decrease both taxation and spending in government (Matusaka, 2004). Given this, and the fact that direct democracy has been shown to generally improve the health of democracy, the relationship between direct institutions and trust may be important in understanding both primary (i.e., policy) effects and secondary (i.e., citizenship externalities) effects.

The theoretic mechanisms by which direct democratic institutions promote participation, efficacy, and knowledge are fairly clear. A ballot that explores unbundled policy issues, apart from parties and candidates, is more likely to strike a chord with a disaffected voter (Besley & Coate, n.d.; Bowler & Donovan, 1998). Hence, participation is likely to increase. Because voters get to choose positions on issues rather than candidates, there is also a more direct link between a vote and a policy outcome. Such a process might make a voter believe that his or her voice is being heard in the political process (i.e., make a voter express greater external efficacy). Finally, repeated trips to the ballot box where issues are under consideration are likely to make citizens more politically aware, as voting on issues requires a higher threshold of knowledge than voting for candidates that have easy cues such as party identification (Magleby, 1984; but see also Branton, 2003; D. A. Smith & Tolbert, 2001). Empirical studies have found support for these theoretical expectations, arguing that indeed, direct democracy voters are more informed (Mendelsohn & Cutler, 2000; D. A. Smith & Tolbert, 2004; M. Smith, 2002), participatory (D. A. Smith & Tolbert, 2004; M. Smith, 2001), and efficacious (Bowler & Donovan, 2002; Mendelsohn & Cutler, 2000; D. A. Smith & Tolbert, 2004; but see also Dyck & Lascher, *in press*; Schlozman & Yohai, 2008).

Regarding their findings on efficacy, D. A. Smith and Tolbert (2004) connect external efficacy to political trust: “[W]e focus exclusively on external efficacy because of its close relationship to political trust” (p. 81). Theory and empirics have led scholars to note that although trust in government and efficacy are often related, they are separate constructs. As Gamson (1968) describes it, both trust and efficacy are dimensions of political alienation: “The efficacy dimension . . . refers to people’s perception of their ability to influence; the trust dimension refers to their perception of the necessity for influence” (p. 42). Empirically, political scientists have demonstrated the multidimensionality of political alienation using both exploratory and confirmatory factor techniques. Craig, Niemi, and Silver (1990) report on four factors: (a) internal efficacy (self-confidence that a respondent is able to comprehend and participate in politics), (b) external efficacy (confidence that the democratic process works/that the voice of the people is heard), (c) incumbent-based trust (that current elected officials are trustworthy, honest, and efficient), and (d) regime-based trust (trust in political institutions or the political order). The results show clear dimensionality between internal efficacy, external efficacy, and trust in government, with more limited support for splitting the trust measure into pieces.

So although trust in government and efficacy are related, the theoretic distinctions make it possible to imagine a person who simultaneously distrusts government and has a high level of external efficacy. For instance, a voter may distrust public officials but feel empowered by frequent elections where shirking politicians can be removed from office. Gamson (1968) calls high efficacy and low governmental trust “the optimum combination for mobilization” (p. 48). Craig, Kreppel, and Kane (2001) find no evidence of the Gamson hypothesis of high external efficacy/low trust leading to greater stated support for direct democracy. However, the more telling evidence of the Gamson hypothesis would be if initiative exposure simultaneously leads to higher levels of efficacy and turnout and lower levels of trust. As noted, extant research demonstrates higher levels of turnout (D. A. Smith & Tolbert, 2004; M. Smith, 2001, 2002) and external efficacy (Bowler & Donovan, 2002; D. A. Smith & Tolbert, 2004) in direct democratic contexts. Our focus here, then, turns to trust.

Ballot Initiatives and Distrust

Although few studies have directly linked ballot initiatives to political trust, there have been some notable contributions. Citrin (1996) offers

clear competing expectations for why trust might be both increased and decreased by exposure to direct democracy. On one hand, the initiative undermines the authority of elected officials, as they are constantly being questioned and circumvented. This should lead to decreased trust in government. On the other hand, initiatives might compel government officials to be more responsive to public opinion; thus, generating a greater trust through greater policy responsiveness. In the end, however, Citrin notes that the average levels of trust in government (using a national trust measure from the American National Election Study) are no different when comparing initiative to noninitiative states, leading him to conclude that initiatives and trust in government are not related. Although the competing expectations laid out by Citrin beg a rigorous empirical test, the theoretic roots of the relationship between direct legislation and trust remain underexplored.

There are, more so than for other attitudes such as participation and knowledge, good reasons to expect that direct democracy has the potential to erode trust in government. The primary perspective supporting this notion comes from opinions about process and specifically the work of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002). One of the central findings from this research is that citizens have seemingly contradictory sets of preferences about democratic institutions. Although there exists widespread evidence that government is responsive to the policy opinions of the electorate (Erikson, Wright, & McIver, 1993; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002, p. 28), citizens believe that government decision making should be balanced and that the system is far too elite controlled. Interestingly, those who support more direct involvement of citizens in decision making also are more likely to support less democratic forms of decision making by experts and appointed officials. This perspective is reconciled by understanding citizens' desire for a "stealth democracy," that is, a democracy which is governed by "empathetic, non self-interested decisions makers" who are incorruptible, fair-minded, prescient, and efficient. The problem, however, lies in government officials, inability to live up to expectations; citizens become frustrated by corruption, scandal, and gridlock, even in the absence of significant frustrations with the policy choices made by government.

Notable findings from the recent direct democracy literature are especially relevant here. The first regards the source of ballot measures. Although it is not clear that money has a pervasive influence in determining the outcomes of ballot measure elections, the source of ballot measures is interest groups and elites, creating what D. A. Smith (1998) has called "faux populism" (see also Ellis, 2002; Lupia, 1992, 1994). Therefore, citizens do

not determine, apart from participation in signature-gathering campaigns, how many or which measures qualify for the ballot. Variation in usage by state is related to the rules that govern the cost of ballot access³ (Bowler & Donovan, 2004). Furthermore, the majority of qualified measures fail, which Boehmke and Patty (2007) regard as evidence that citizens are generally agreeable to the policy set produced by state legislatures. Yet as noted, policy satisfaction and process satisfaction are divergent concepts. What has not been considered is the psychological impact that repeated participation in ballot measure elections has on citizens, when policy ambivalence may be a normal expectation. If citizens are being pushed to consider multiple measures on repeated trips to the ballot box, but citizens actually see the system more as a necessary evil than a good, then participation in ballot measure elections reminds them of the shortcomings of government by simply expanding the amount of conflict in the political environment.

Thinking more seriously about the psychological foundations of the development of trust, a considerable amount of work has been done in the field of organizational behavior that buttresses this perspective. Trust is commonly thought of as “the willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about another’s intentions or behaviors” (McEvily, Perrone, & Zaheer, 2003). In this sense, trust acts as a heuristic; when trust is present, actors feel as though their expectations about the behavior of other actors will be met, allowing them to economize the time they spend watching over others (Uzzi, 1997). Although trust frequently has to do with functional competence, it also has to do with assessments of integrity, reliability, and honesty (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Note that these ideas overlap considerably with the underlying sources of trust as developed in the political science literature (see Hetherington, 2005, chapter 2, for a review).

However, much of the political science research on trust in government has linked the concept directly to an evaluation of current incumbents (Citrin, 1974; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). What has been discussed less is the role that political institutions have in shaping trust. This is where the organizational behavior research goes a step further. Some research has suggested legalistic remedies or formal structures designed to ensure trust are poor substitutes for the real thing (Granovetter, 1985; Malhotra & Murnighan, 2002; Sitkin & Roth, 1993). In order for trust to exist, there has to be an opportunity for one of the members in the trust relationship to successfully fulfill or violate that trust. Successfully fulfilling these obligations is how trust develops. If automatic mechanisms are put in place to ensure that trust is not violated, an actor who must decide to trust or not

relies on the information provided by the mechanism. The mere existence and usage of the mechanism is a cue that the actor is to be distrusted.

Relating this to direct democracy, ballot initiatives and referendums do not supplant representative government; instead, we get what has been referred to as “hybrid democracy” (Garrett, 2005). Therefore, over time, governmental actors in states both with and without direct democracy have ample opportunities to prove their trustworthiness. However, as citizens are exposed to direct institutions created to check government, the scope of political conflict is widened, and hence we should expect trust in government to wane. This effect should be especially prevalent among those with lower levels of political awareness, who may simply have fewer considerations to average across when forming opinions regarding confidence in government (Zaller & Feldman, 1992). In particular, these citizens are also more likely to exhibit ambivalence about policy, leaving them fewer cues in assessing government.

An additional complementary perspective also predicts that trust would be eroded in the presence of direct legislation. Although direct legislation allows voters to pass policy, they lack oversight power in implementation. This affords discretion to agents of the public: legislators, who in many cases must fund an initiative for it to become policy; bureaucrats, who make implementation decisions; and courts, who can determine the constitutionality of a measure. Without oversight, we ought to expect shirking when an agent’s preferences differ from a principal’s preferences, and the agent has no direct oversight. Hence, it is often argued that initiatives are “stolen” at the implementation stage of the policy process (Gerber, Lupia, McCubbins, & Kiewiet, 2001). Consider, for example, that voters have resoundingly supported term-limit measures in initiative states as well as fundamental alterations of the partisan primary process. These types of measures have been met with significant resistance by government at all levels. In both cases, where major primary reforms were passed altering the primary system (California and Washington), elites at the legislative and judicial level of government undid the provisions passed in the initiatives. The stealing process that goes on, where initiatives are passed and then altered or invalidated by government, to the extent that citizens are aware of this behavior, would certainly erode the trust relationship between citizens and government. Because initiatives are not stolen in noninitiative states (because they do not exist), we ought to expect exposure to initiative policymaking to erode trust in government. Furthermore, this effect should be more apparent among politically informed voters, suggesting nonmonotonicity in the way knowledge interacts with direct legislation.

To be sure, there are other plausible arguments which would suggest that direct democracy might increase trust in government. First, other work by Gerber (1996, 1999) and Matsusaka (1995, 2004) argues that direct legislation makes governments more responsive (but see Lascher, Hagen, & Rochlin, 1996; Matsusaka, 2001). Gerber (1996) demonstrates that on parental consent laws, initiatives have brought policy closer in line with the median voter's views on abortion. Matsusaka (2004) demonstrates that, in the modern era (1970 to 2000), the presence of the initiative has led to decreases in spending and taxation; this is interpreted as being indicative of public preferences for decreasing the size of government. From this perspective, direct democracy moves policy closer to the median voter's ideal point, which enhances the quality of representation and ultimately should lead to reputational gains for the government, thereby increasing trust.

However, it is also possible to argue the opposite effect when we consider the organizational theory argument. If initiatives create more responsiveness, then citizens become more aware that without their input, elected representatives shirk. Consider the perspective of the median voter regarding the passage of parental consent laws in the work of Gerber (1996). This person has seen a policy improvement, but the process used to pass the policy circumvented traditional legislative avenues, suggesting that government was either incapable or unwilling to improve policy without the initiative. Therefore, policy responsiveness created by direct legislation might potentially be the cause of distrust in government. Distrust can also be fueled in cases where initiatives fail, as it has become common for governors to attempt to pass policies through direct legislation when there is an impasse with the legislature. In 2005, California's Arnold Schwarzenegger called a special election to attempt to push forward policy proposals which had been ignored by the Democrats in the California legislature. His four-measure package failed in spectacular fashion, and public disdain for the conduct of the election was directed at government indiscriminately as both the governor and legislature's approval ratings dipped considerably (Baldassare & Katz, 2007). Indeed, voters who derived their desired outcome ("no" votes) directed their ire at government generally.

In short, the participatory democratic theory argument proffered by previous research as it regards voting, knowledge, and the proliferation of interest groups seems less likely to be activated as it regards political trust. The theoretic perspectives presented favor the expectation that "citizens exposed to direct legislation will be less likely to trust government than those never exposed." Additionally, we ought to expect some contingent effects. If citizens respond negatively to implementation problems, then

the relationship between direct legislation and trust should be stronger among those with higher levels of political awareness. If voters are cued to distrust by the simple existence of the system, then we would expect low-information voters to be most affected by direct democracy, suggesting a potential nonmonotonicity in the contingent knowledge effect of moderating the relationship between direct democracy and trust in government. Finally, in accord with the preconditions of the Gamson (1968) hypothesis, a citizen who is frequently exposed to ballot measures and is externally efficacious should be less likely to espouse trust in government. I proceed with a test of the central hypothesis using two separate surveys to demonstrate the robustness of the apparent result: Exposure to direct legislation does seem to initiate distrust in government. The findings also point to some support for both of the informational hypotheses, suggesting a nonmonotonic interactive effect.

Research Design

Data and Model

Many of the previous studies that have examined the externalities of the initiative and referendum process have leveraged large national-level data sets (cf. D. A. Smith & Tolbert, 2004). Until recently, testing the influence of direct legislation on trust has proven more difficult, given that when national surveys such as the American National Election Study ask about trust in government, they specify trust in the federal government. The variation in initiative usage, however, occurs at the state level, and therefore we should expect the effect to be most strongly linked to trust in state government. In this study, I make use of the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES), which asked a state trust in government question of more than 3,500 respondents, as well as a 1997 PEW study of about 800 respondents. Analysis of both surveys produces a consistent set of results—the frequent use of the direct initiative appears to decrease trust in state government.

The measure of state trust used in the Annenberg study comes from the question, “how much confidence do you have in state elected officials?” Respondents answered in a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *none* to *a great deal*, with higher values coded to be the more trusting response. The measure for the PEW study is also a 4-point Likert-type response to the question, “how much trust and confidence do you have in your state government when it comes to handling state problems?” Responses range

from *none at all* to *a great deal* with higher values coded to indicate the more trusting response.⁴

The measurement of initiative context, the chief independent variable of interest, has been subject to debate, and a variety of specifications have been used within the literature (Bowler & Donovan, 2004; Gerber, 1996, 1999; Matsusaka, 2004; D. A. Smith & Tolbert, 2004; M. Smith, 2002). Some have argued that direct legislation experiences differ and that the key difference is usage, whereas others have argued that effects are either learned over time or indirect, and hence a simple indicator (0,1) variable is more appropriate to capture initiative context. The theory presented would suggest that usage should ultimately affect trust, as repeated interactions matter. However, following Boehmke and Bowen (2008), I include both the dummy indicator and a usage indicator⁵ to differentiate effects. Even these two measures correlate at .64, introducing multicollinearity into the model. I address this in the results presentation.

Additionally, I consider a series of other variables, both at the individual level and contextual level, that are theoretically associated with trust:

Demographics. Female is coded as a dummy variable (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*). Given that the gender gap has to do with women's views about social economic policies (Kaufmann & Petrocik, 1999), and trust has been shown to be requisite attitude for those policy views (Hetherington, 2005), women should be more likely than men to trust government. Education is measured on a 9-point scale of highest degree attained in the Annenberg data and a 7-point scale in the PEW data. Educational achievement might improve trust on one hand by giving people greater knowledge about government, but also might retard trust because educated citizens become more aware of the failings of government. Controls for age (coded in years) and income are included as well.

Race/Ethnicity. Dummy variables are included for both Black identifiers and Hispanic/Latino identifiers. Minority groups are less likely to be trusting of government and to view government as responsive (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993).

Party identification and ideology. Dummy variables are included for strong Republicans, strong Democrats, pure independents, conservatives, and liberals.⁶ Partisans will be more likely to trust the government, whereas liberals will be more likely than moderates to trust the government, but conservatives should be less likely to trust the government.

Incumbent evaluations. Because trust is most often linked to evaluations of incumbent legislators (Citrin, 1974), controls for presidential approval and current economic evaluations are included. Those who evaluate incumbents and the economy more negatively should be less likely to trust government. Although presidential approval has some distance from state government, there is clear evidence of bandwagon effects in state voting (Campbell, 1986) and hence it stands to reason that negative views of the president could trickle down to lower levels of government.

Political information. In the Annenberg data, this is coded with the interviewer-identified level of information among respondents on a 5-point Likert-type scale. In the PEW data, the variable is a 4-point summary measure of three factual political information questions ranging from 0 to 3.

Political efficacy. As noted, efficacy and trust represent parts of alienation that are often related but theoretically and empirically distinct. The models presented control for external efficacy and test the interactive hypothesis that high efficacy and initiative exposure interact to produce lower levels of trust.

State-level characteristics. The presence of divided government at the state level should make citizens less likely to trust government as presumably divided government creates more conflict between the executive and legislative branches.⁷ One important argument to address is that if initiatives are, in fact, associated with greater levels of distrust, does the mechanism appear to be causal, or are frequency of initiatives tied to inherently distrusting political cultures? Although there are good reasons to doubt this argument (Nardulli, 1990; D. A. Smith & Fridkin, 2008), I opt for inclusion of Sharkansky's (1969) operationalization of Elazar's cultural groupings, consistent with Bowler and Donovan's (2002) models of efficacy. Finally, an important control in the model is legislative professionalism. Without it, the model assumes that initiatives undercut a legislature's ability to perform uniformly across states, without acknowledging that some states have greater legislative capabilities than others. Here, I include Squire's (2007) most recent update of 2003 legislative professionalism scores in the 2004 Annenberg data and the 1996 scores in the 1997 PEW data set. The expectations here are a bit mixed given that although capacity might increase capability and responsiveness, thereby increasing trust, capacity also might extend the scope of conflict, which I have hypothesized leads to distrust.

Results Using the 2004 NAES

The data come from Annenberg's 2004 rolling cross-section survey. Between October 7, 2003, and December 8, 2003, the cross-section asked a split sample of respondents in every survey, "Please tell me how much confidence you have in elected officials in your state—do you have a *great deal*, a *fair amount*, *not too much*, or *none at all*?" The resultant 4-point Likert-type scale forms the main dependent variable of interest.

Ordered logit models regressing state confidence in government on initiative frequency variables with standard errors clustered by state are presented in Table 1. Six alternative specifications of the models are presented to demonstrate the robustness of the effect, and to deal with some statistical problems introduced by the control variables. Overall, the results do confirm the hypothesis that exposure to a more vibrant direct democracy context, measured as the more frequent use of the direct initiative, produces lower levels of trust in government.

Model 1 is the base model that does not include some of the control variables that complicate the data by cutting the sample size or introducing problematic multicollinearity. Only the initiative average variable is used and it is negatively related to trust in state government. The substantive magnitude of the effect is presented in Figure 1. Varying average # of initiatives per year from its minimum (0) to maximum value (4.45) generates probability changes of about 5 percentage to 6 percentage points per outcome category. Because two of the outcome categories capture less trusting responses, the cumulative marginal effect is about 11 percentage points; citizens exposed to the highest frequency of initiative usage are about 11 percentage more likely than those with no exposure to initiatives to choose the "no confidence" or "not very much confidence" outcomes. The effect is similar in magnitude to the effects of presidential approval and the respondent's evaluation of the economy.

Turning our attention to the control variables, most effects conformed to expectations. Most prominently, trust in government is strongly tied to incumbent evaluations; the controls for presidential approval and negative retrospective economic evaluations are significant and exert the largest substantive effects. Strong partisans are more likely to trust state government than leaners and weak partisans, with pure independents being the least trusting group. Conservatism also predicts less trust, controlling for other factors. Among the demographic controls, only the dummy variables for women and Hispanics are significant, with both groups being more trusting of government. Divided government appears to produce more trust, although the effect is just barely significant; culture exerts no effect.

Table 1
Direct Legislation and Confidence in State Government, 2004 National Annenberg Election Study

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Average # of initiatives												
72-03	-0.126**	0.023	—	—	-0.112**	0.029	-0.075†	0.039	-0.100**	0.031	-0.087‡	0.047
Initiative state (0,1)	—	—	-0.237**	0.109	-0.071	0.137	-0.109	0.136	—	—	—	—
Legislative professionalism	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.511*	0.246	-0.436+	0.230	-0.527	0.384
Divided government	0.152+	0.091	0.200+	0.112	0.136	0.098	0.123	0.098	0.147	0.092	0.071	0.107
State political culture	-0.020	0.018	-0.003	0.020	-0.020	0.018	-0.029	0.018	-0.027	0.018	-0.029	0.024
Presidential approval	0.187**	0.046	0.189**	0.045	0.186**	0.046	0.186**	0.046	0.186**	0.046	0.152*	0.073
National economy worse	-0.251**	0.068	-0.247**	0.070	-0.250**	0.068	-0.251**	0.068	-0.252**	0.068	-0.291**	0.096
Political awareness	0.024	0.031	0.025	0.030	0.024	0.031	0.022	0.030	0.022	0.031	-0.083	0.050
Strong Democrat	0.302**	0.103	0.306**	0.101	0.302**	0.103	0.307**	0.103	0.306**	0.103	0.214	0.148
Strong Republican	0.281**	0.094	0.275**	0.094	0.280**	0.093	0.275**	0.092	0.276**	0.092	0.010	0.141
Pure Independent	-0.326*	0.134	-0.305*	0.137	-0.321*	0.133	-0.328*	0.133	-0.333*	0.134	-0.326	0.226
Liberal	0.030	0.076	0.031	0.076	0.031	0.077	0.037	0.077	0.035	0.077	-0.103	0.084
Conservative	-0.229**	0.079	-0.224**	0.078	-0.228**	0.078	-0.222**	0.077	-0.226**	0.078	-0.142	0.107
Female	0.259**	0.072	0.252**	0.071	0.258**	0.072	0.257**	0.072	0.258**	0.072	0.276**	0.101
Age	0.003	0.002	0.003	0.002	0.003	0.002	0.003	0.002	0.003	0.002	0.007	0.004

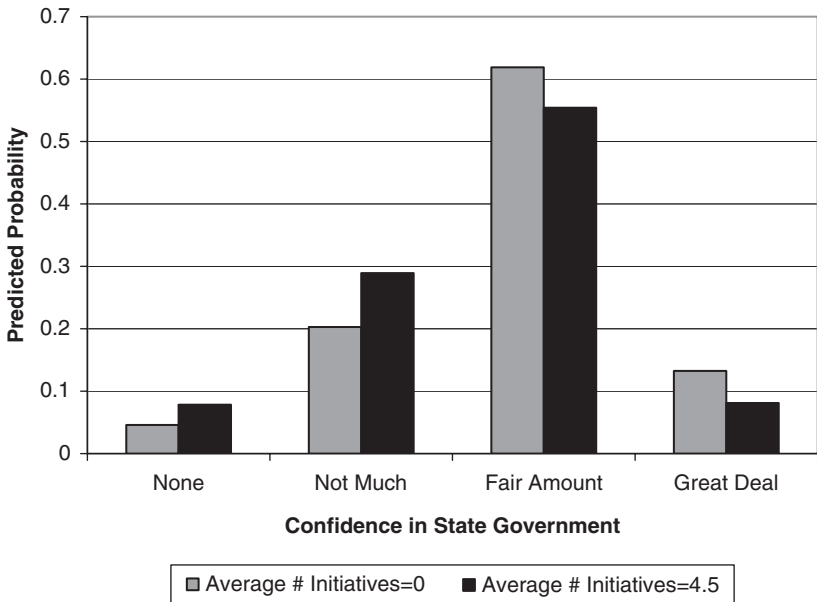
(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Education	-0.005	0.016	-0.007	0.016	-0.005	0.016	-0.005	0.016	-0.004	0.016	0.014+	0.026
Income	-0.013	0.022	-0.017	0.022	-0.014	0.022	-0.013	0.022	-0.012	0.022	-0.019	0.033
Hispanic	0.402+	0.220	0.307	0.249	0.394+	0.223	0.414+	0.228	0.423+	0.227	0.665+	0.393
Black	-0.115	0.159	-0.119	0.160	-0.121	0.158	-0.106	0.159	-0.101	0.161	-0.046	0.225
External efficacy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.270**	0.055
Cut 1	-2.826	0.318	-2.719	0.358	-2.861	0.324	-3.030	0.323	-2.955	0.320	-2.654	0.590
Cut 2	-0.890	0.314	-0.788	0.346	-0.925	0.317	-1.093	0.315	-1.018	0.316	-0.719	0.563
Cut 3	2.095	0.302	2.192	0.317	2.061	0.299	1.895	0.293	1.968	0.302	2.304	0.536
<i>N</i>	3210		3210		3210		3210		3210		1615	
Wald chi-square	472.49**		290.32**		472.49**		426.97**		389.27**		223.47**	
Log pseudo-likelihood	-3406.71		-3411.90		-3406.43		-3404.96		-3405.59		-1705.31	

Note: Models are computed using ordered logit maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors, clustered by state. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. + $p < .10$. † $p = .055$. ‡ $p = .064$. Two-tailed tests.

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



Note: From Table 1, Model 1. Predicted probabilities are computed for 47 year-old white women who are moderately informed weak partisans that live in states with divided government and somewhat approve of the President, have somewhat negative retrospective views of the economy and have mean income and education levels. Differences for “None” and “Fair Amount” are statistically significant at $p < .10$, 2-tailed; differences for “Not Much” and “Great Deal” are statistically significant at $p < .05$, 2-tailed.

In Model 2, the only alteration is to replace the initiative average context variable with a dummy variable indicator for the existence of the initiative process. The variable achieves statistical significance, although the model does not perform nearly as well. To demonstrate this, I computed a likelihood ratio test comparing Model 3, where both the initiative dummy and initiative average variables are included. The p value on the test of the difference between Models 1 and 3 is .48, suggesting that the addition of the dummy variable to Model 1 does not statistically improve the model. Contrarily, the p value on the test of the difference between Models 2 and 3 is .001, suggesting that the exclusion of the average number of initiatives variables decreases model fit.

Additionally, when both variables are included alongside legislative professionalism, as in Model 4, variation inflation factor scores indicate problematic multicollinearity between all three measures. This is assuaged by the exclusion of the initiative dummy variable in Model 5. Note that through all the models presented, the initiative context variable consistently predicts distrust. Interestingly, citizens in states with professional legislatures are more, not less, distrusting of government. This is supported by the notion that citizens have a distaste for politics and tend to negatively evaluate legislatures when they do the types of things that they are institutionally designed to do (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1996).

The final addition to the model is to control for external efficacy; this is presented in Model 6. The overlap of efficacy and state trust cuts the resultant sample from 3,210 usable cases to 1,615. Not surprisingly, efficacy is strongly related to political trust, but the initiative context variable retains its predictive power. Interestingly, the character of the model is changed by the inclusion of efficacy for many of the controls, as common correlates of efficacy such as party identification and ideology are no longer significant once external efficacy is accounted for; incumbent and economic evaluations as well as the trust gender gap persist in this specification. I take up testing interactive effects in Table 2.

In addition to the general prediction that direct legislation decreases trust in government, the theory presented also developed several subsample hypotheses in an attempt to clarify the apparent empirical result. The first regards the interactive effect of direct democracy and external efficacy on trust, which is modeled in Table 2, Model 1. Models 2 through 4 test variant examples of the informational hypothesis that individuals with both the highest and lowest levels of political awareness will have their confidence in government stirred by exposure to direct institutions.

The efficacy interaction tested in the first model of Table 1 fails to demonstrate any evidence of the proposed contingent effects. This may be in part because of the fact that including the efficacy control variable leads to the exclusion of approximately 1,600 cases from the model. Both ends of the information interaction, however, do find some support in the data. Modeled linearly, as in Model 2, there appears to be no interactive effect with direct democracy usage and political awareness on trust in government. However, Models 3 and 4 tease out the intricacies as dummy variables and interactions are included for the "high-information" and "low-information" groups on the 5-point scale, with the middle categories excluded. For the middling group, there remains a statistically significant and negative sign on the direct democracy use variable, suggesting that the frequency of direct legislation still leads to more distrust for this group.

Table 2
Direct Legislation and Confidence in State Government—Interactive Models, 2004 National Annenberg Election Study

Independent Variables	Model 1: Efficacy Interaction		Model 2: Awareness Interaction I		Model 3: Awareness Interaction II		Model 4: Awareness Interaction III	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Average # of initiatives 72–03	-0.083	0.087	-0.051	0.053	-0.066*	0.033	-0.059	0.051
Legislative professionalism	-0.525	0.393	-0.440+	0.230	-0.463*	0.228	-0.549	0.385
Divided government	0.071	0.107	0.148	0.092	0.152	0.093	0.074	0.107
State political culture	-0.029	0.024	-0.027	0.018	-0.026	0.019	-0.029	0.024
Presidential approval	0.152*	0.073	0.186**	0.046	0.183**	0.046	0.152*	0.074
National economy	-0.291**	0.096	-0.253**	0.068	-0.257**	0.067	-0.284**	0.096
Political awareness	-0.083	0.050	0.038	0.034	—	—	—	—
Low political awareness	—	—	—	—	-0.267*	0.119	-0.036	0.188
High political awareness	—	—	—	—	-0.002	0.092	-0.234+	0.134
Strong Democrat	0.214	0.147	0.307**	0.103	0.302**	0.103	0.206	0.146
Strong Republican	0.010	0.140	0.278**	0.091	0.270**	0.092	-0.009	0.141
Pure Independent	-0.326	0.226	-0.335*	0.134	-0.310*	0.133	-0.320	0.221
Liberal	-0.103	0.084	0.037	0.077	0.042	0.077	-0.111	0.081

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Independent Variables	Model 1: Efficacy Interaction		Model 2: Awareness Interaction I		Model 3: Awareness Interaction II		Model 4: Awareness Interaction III	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Conservative	-0.142	0.107	-0.226**	0.078	-0.211**	0.079	-0.127	0.106
Female	0.276**	0.101	0.256**	0.072	0.247**	0.073	0.276**	0.100
Age	0.007+	0.004	0.003	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.006+	0.004
Education	0.014	0.026	-0.004	0.016	-0.007	0.016	0.008	0.026
Income	-0.019	0.033	-0.012	0.022	-0.012	0.022	-0.021	0.033
Hispanic	0.665+	0.395	0.412+	0.237	0.435+	0.224	0.725*	0.355
Black	-0.046	0.225	-0.096	0.158	-0.093	0.163	-0.052	0.233
External efficacy	0.272**+	0.060	—	—	—	—	0.267**	0.057
Interactions								
Initiatives \times Efficacy	-0.002	0.024	—	—	—	—	—	—
Initiatives \times Awareness	—	—	-0.018	0.016	—	—	—	—
Initiatives \times Low Awareness	—	—	—	—	-0.063‡	0.044	-0.163**	0.063
Initiatives \times High Awareness	—	—	—	—	-0.081*	0.033	-0.013	0.042
Initiatives \times Age	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cut 1	-2.649	0.616	-2.930	0.337	-3.130	0.334	-2.602	0.539
Cut 2	-0.715	0.587	-0.993	0.334	-1.190	0.327	-0.664	0.515
Cut 3	2.308	0.559	1.994	0.313	1.802	0.303	2.366	0.483
N	1615		3210		3210		1615	
Wald chi-square	233.00**		394.72**		585.88**		264.82**	
Log pseudo-likelihood	-1705.31		-3405.28		-3400.59		-1702.59	

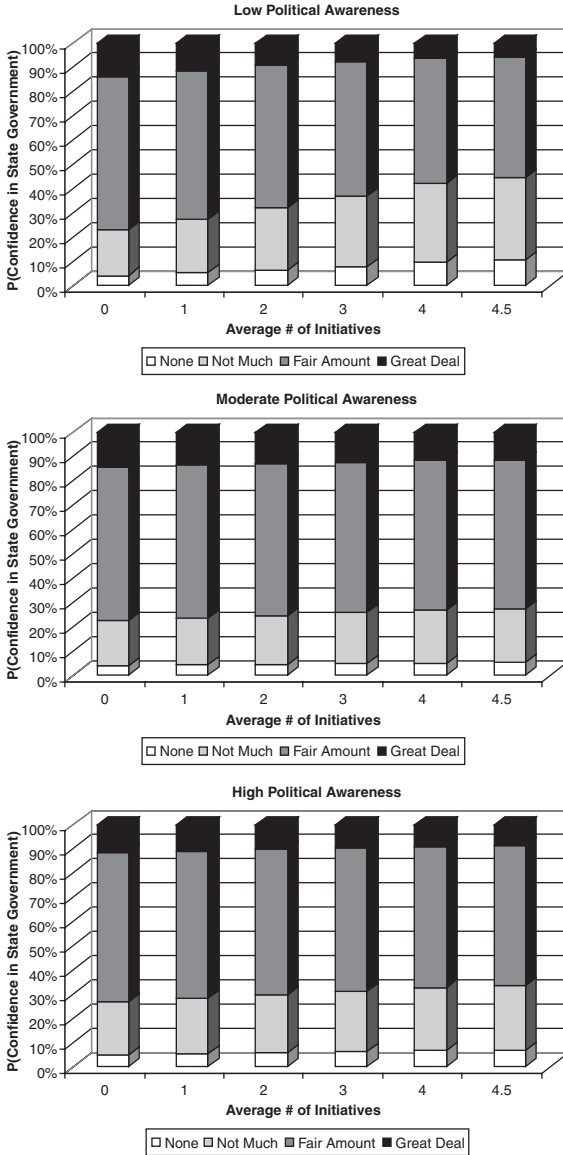
Note: Models are computed using ordered logit maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors, clustered by state. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. † $p < .10$. ‡ $p < .150$. Two-tailed tests.

However, the effects are significantly larger for the high-information group. For the low-information group, the sign and size of the coefficient suggest a similarly large effect; however, the coefficient just fails to reach standard levels of statistical significance. When the efficacy control is included, however, the high-information interactive effect disappears and the low-information effect becomes highly significant.

I am, somewhat cautiously, more inclined to believe the result from Model 4, as there are dramatic changes in the intercepts for highly and lowly aware individuals. Once external efficacy, which is associated with knowledge and trust, is controlled for, high-information voters are less likely to trust government in the first place and the model does not predict a decline in trust as exposure to ballot initiatives increases. The effect among low-information voters, however, when efficacy is controlled for, is apparent. The magnitude of the effects is presented in Figure 2. For low-information voters, a one-unit increase in the average number of initiatives per year leads to an average increase in the distrusting answers (none/not much confidence in government) of about 5 percentage points. The difference between the most vibrant initiative context and those without the initiative is about a 20 percentage increase in distrust. Among those with moderate information, there is no statistically significant change across the varying initiative contexts; the model predicts that about 25% of respondents with moderate awareness have not much or no confidence in state government. Although those with high political awareness do not see a significant increase in distrust as initiative exposure increases, they are, on average, about 10 percentage points more likely than those with moderate awareness to distrust government.

In short, the interaction effects are mixed, but appear to be most robust among low-information voters. This finding bolsters the perspective that citizens are primed to distrust government simply by being exposed to ballot measure elections, as the least politically aware will make greater use of the information that undermines the institution. There is some evidence, albeit less conclusive, that highly aware citizens also become less trusting of government. This suggests that they are either aware of the administrative stops that government often places on initiatives in the implementation stage or they become more aware that the policies passed through direct legislation would not have otherwise been considered. In general, however, the mixed interactions, which suggest a combination of reasons for why citizens become less trusting of government, should not overshadow the general result that citizens are more than 10 percentage points less likely to trust their state government when they are exposed to frequent ballot measure elections.

Figure 2
Predicted Probability of Trust by Levels of Political Awareness



Note: From Table 2, Model 4; probabilities computed for the average respondent.

Checking Validity and Robustness—PEW Data

As an additional check on the confirmation of the central hypothesis of this article, that direct legislation undermines trust in government, I demonstrate the portability of the finding with another data set at another point in time using the 1997 PEW Trust in Government Study. Coding and question differences are presented in the appendix; the PEW models are presented in Table 3.

Two versions of the model are presented, demonstrating again that the inclusion of the initiative state indicator variable does not add explanatory power to the model, when we use the average number of initiatives from 1972 until the year before the survey year as the independent variable of interest.⁸ In both models, with appropriate controls included, the usage of the ballot initiative predicts lower levels of trust in state government. Controls for current evaluations of the state of the country and external efficacy continue to be the most robust. Curiously, the gender gap that was present in the Annenberg models is not present in the PEW data.

Additionally, the magnitude of the effect in this data is remarkably similar to that in the Annenberg data; this is presented in Figure 3. The cumulative effect of choosing the more trusting responses is a loss of about 12 percentage points as we vary the initiative context from its minimum to maximum value. Indeed, across multiple surveys, the effect is apparent: Exposure to direct legislation makes citizens less trusting of their government.⁹

Conclusion

The results presented here are some of the first of their kind to bring into question the extant literature on the effect of living in richly democratic ballot initiative environments, and the positive effects that this has on democratic citizenship. In fact, citizens in these environments are less trusting of the government. Exposure to direct democratic institutions has fostered particular democratic citizenship characteristics—citizens that are more knowledgeable, more involved, more likely to vote, and even potentially more efficacious. But direct democratic institutions put citizens in an adversarial relationship with their governments. This leads citizens to alter their view of the political process, namely, to question if public officials are trustworthy.

There remain important questions here in assessing the normative implications of both declining trust as a concept, and trust vis-à-vis increased levels of efficacy, participation, and knowledge. Is declining trust an acceptable institutional by-product? Is it inevitable under certain institutional arrangements? Is

Table 3
Direct Legislation and Trust in State Government,
1997 PEW Trust in Government Study

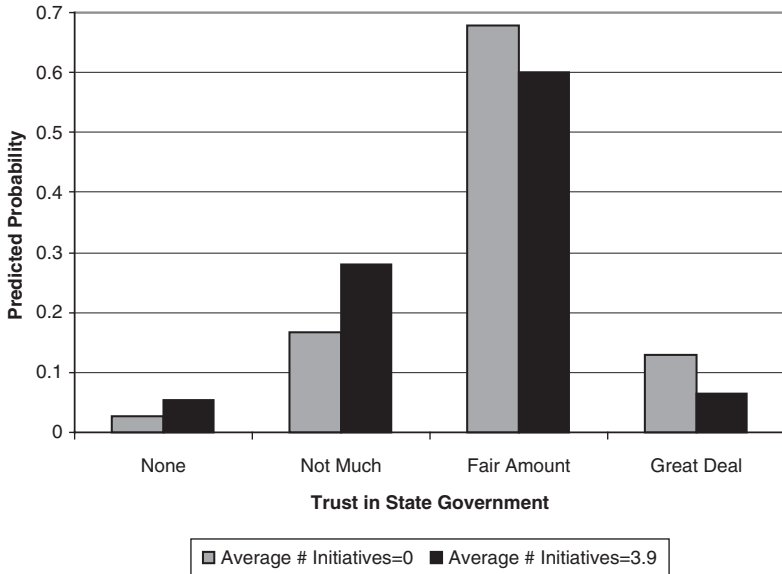
Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	SE	β	SE
Average # of initiatives 72–96	-0.203*	0.092	-0.191**	0.072
Initiative state (0,1)	0.039	0.265	—	—
Legislative professionalism	-0.192	0.667	-0.208	0.649
Divided government	-0.048	0.259	-0.057	0.225
State political culture	-0.016	0.044	-0.017	0.044
Country is worse off	-0.108**	0.035	-0.108**	0.035
Political awareness	-0.074	0.069	-0.075	0.070
External efficacy	0.456**	0.071	0.457	0.072
Democrat	-0.159	0.161	-0.159**	0.161
Republican	0.483*	0.200	0.482*	0.201
Pure Independent	0.203	0.261	0.202	0.259
Female	-0.137	0.137	-0.139	0.136
Age	-0.004	0.004	-0.005	0.004
Education	-0.039	0.052	-0.039	0.051
Income	-0.024	0.051	-0.024	0.051
Hispanic	-0.102	0.588	-0.105	0.592
Black	-0.487*	0.232	-0.485*	0.230
Cut 1	-4.100	0.699	-4.122	0.665
Cut 2	-1.917	0.624	-1.939	0.613
Cut 3	1.428	0.600	1.405	0.591
<i>N</i>	773		773	
Wald chi-square	138.47**		133.03**	
Log pseudo-likelihood	-717.74		-717.76	

Notes: Models are computed using ordered logit maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors, clustered by state.

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .10$. Two-tailed tests.

distrust, coupled with efficacy, indeed the optimum combination for mobilization and therefore highly desirable (Gamson, 1968)? On the normative aspects of these questions, I remain ambivalent. Because governmental trust, however, has been discussed to such a great extent in the more general political science literature, it is clear that these findings are of significant import. Particularly in the realm of policy, where Hetherington (2005) has argued that distrust produces more conservative social policy, these findings are intriguing, given the conservative shift in direct democracy policymaking during the last 30 years (Matsusaka, 2004). Is distrust one of the culprits? Future research should

Figure 3
Marginal Effect of Initiative Usage on Trust, 1997 PEW



Note: From Table 3, Model 2. Predicted probabilities are computed for 47 year-old white women who are moderately informed weak partisans that live in states with divided government and have median evaluations of the country and have mean income and education levels. Differences for "Fair Amount" and "Great Deal" are significant at $p < .05$, 2-tailed; differences for "Not Much" and "None" are significant at $p < .10$, 2-tailed.

attempt to address this and other questions. The evidence here is strongly supportive of the notion that distrust is an institutional by-product of direct democratic institutions. This should motivate researchers to take more seriously the next step in the causal chain: What effect does distrust have on policymaking in direct democratic environments?

Finally, and more generally, this piece contributes to our continuing understanding of how political institutions and institutional design interact with the formation of public opinion. Americans are not randomly distributed. The federal nature of our system of government presents different institutional arrangements for different citizens. I find support here that these institutional choices made 100 years ago can have significant behavioral implications.

Appendix

2004 National Annenberg Election Survey Coding

Confidence/Trust in state government: “Please tell me how much confidence you have in elected officials in your state?” 1 (*None*), 2 (*Not much*), 3 (*A fair amount*), 4 (*A great deal*).

Average # of initiatives 72-03: The average number of initiatives by state from 1972 to 1996. Data compiled from Waters (2003) and <http://www.iandrinstitute.org/>.

Legislative professionalism: Index for 2003, taken from Squire (2007).

Divided government (0,1)—from Klarner (2004). Divided government is any partisan incongruence between the lower house, upper house, and governor’s mansion of a given state.

State political culture: Sharkansky’s (1969) operationalization of Elazar’s measure.

Presidential approval: Bush approval, coded 1 (*strongly disapprove*), 2 (*somewhat disapprove*), 3 (*somewhat approve*), 4 (*strongly approve*).

National economy worse: Respondent evaluation of “today’s economy:” 1 (*excellent*), 2 (*good*), 3 (*fair*), 4 (*poor*).

Political awareness: Interviewer’s evaluation of respondent’s political knowledge: 1 (*very poor*), 2 (*poor*), 3 (*average*), 4 (*good*), 5 (*excellent*).

Strong Democrat (0,1), Strong Republican (0,1) and Pure Independent (0,1): Seven-point party identification constructed from cMA01, cMA02, cMA03. Variables are dummy categories for the polar categories and the middle category. Weak partisans/leaning independents are the excluded category.

Liberal (0,1) and conservative (0,1): From 5-point ideology question; moderates are the excluded category.

Female (0,1): Coded (0) *male*, (1) *female*.

Age: In years, coded continuously.

Education: Nine-point scale of highest degree completed.

1. Grade 8 or lower
2. Some high school, no diploma
3. High school diploma or equivalent
4. Technical or vocational school after high school
5. Some college, no degree
6. Associate’s or 2-year college degree
7. Four-year college degree
8. Graduate or professional school, no degree
9. Graduate or professional degree

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Income: Household income coded

1. Less than \$10,000
2. \$10,000 to \$15,000
3. \$15,000 to \$25,000
4. \$25,000 to \$35,000
5. \$35,000 to \$50,000
6. \$50,000 to \$75,000
7. \$75,000 to \$100,000
8. \$100,000 to \$150,000
9. More than \$150,000

Hispanic: Coded 1 if respondent identified Hispanic ethnic origin; all else are 0.

Black: Coded 1 if respondent identified race as Black; all else are 0.

External efficacy: "People like me have no say in government." 1 (*strongly agree*), 2 (*somewhat agree*), 3 (*somewhat disagree*), 4 (*strongly disagree*).

1997 PEW Trust in Government Survey

State trust in government: How much trust and confidence do you have in your state and local government when it comes to handling state problems? 1 (*none at all*), 2 (*not very much*), 3 (*a fair amount*), 4 (*a great deal*).

Average number of initiatives 72 to 96: The average number of initiatives by state from 1972 to 1996. Data compiled from Waters (2003).

Legislative professionalism: Index for 1996, taken from Squire (2007).

Divided government (0,1)—from Klarner (2004). Divided government is any partisan incongruence between the lower house, upper house, and governor's mansion of a given state.

State political culture: Sharkansky's (1969) operationalization of Elazar's measure.

Country is worse off: Constructed as the inverse of the following question: Imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to 10 at the top. Suppose the top of the ladder represents the best possible situation for our country, and the bottom, the worst possible situation. Please tell me on which step of the ladder you think the United States is at the present time. You can name any number between zero and 10.

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Political awareness: Constructed from three factual knowledge questions: (a) Who is the speaker of the house? [Gingrich], (b) Is there more spending by the federal government on foreign aid or Medicare? [Medicare], and (c) Over the last 3 years, has the number of federal employees increased, decreased, or stayed the same? [decreased].

External efficacy: Constructed by agreeing/disagreeing with the following statement: "Public officials don't care about what people like me think." 1 (*completely agree*), 2 (*somewhat agree*), 3 (*somewhat disagree*), 4 (*completely disagree*).

Democrat (0,1) and Republican (0,1)—Dummy variables, constructed from the following question: In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent? (note—no branching question regarding strength of partisanship)

Pure Independent (0,1): A branching question was asked of all respondents who answered Independent/No preference/Other/Don't know/Refused to the previous question: Do you lean more toward the Democratic Party or the Republican Party? Pure Independents reported no lean.

Female (0,1): Coded (0) *male*, (1) *female*.

Age: What is your age? (coded as a continuous variable)

Education: Constructed from the following question: What is the last grade of class that you completed in school?

1. None, or Grade 1 to 8
2. High school incomplete (Grades 9 to 11)
3. High school graduate (Grade 12 or GED certificate)
4. Business, technical, or vocational school after high school
5. Some college, no 4-year degree
6. College graduate (BS, BA, or other 4-year degree)
7. Postgraduate training or professional schooling after college (e.g., toward a master's degree or PhD; law or medical school).

Income: Respondent's reported family income in 1996:

1. Less than \$10,000
2. \$10,000 to \$20,000
3. \$20,000 to \$30,000
4. \$30,000 to \$40,000
5. \$40,000 to \$50,000
6. \$50,000 to \$75,000
7. \$75,000 to \$100,000
8. More than \$100,000

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Hispanic (0,1): Dummy coding, constructed from the following question: Are you, yourself, of Hispanic origin or descent, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or some other Spanish background?

Black (0,1): Dummy coding, constructed from the following question: What is your race? Are you White, Black, Asian, or some other race?

Notes

1. For a detailed review, see Cronin (1989).
2. For a review of this literature and thorough empirical analysis of the effects of direct democracy on participation, civic engagement, and efficacy, see Smith and Tolbert (2004, pp. 1-30).
3. The historical passage rate of ballot initiatives in the United States hovers around 40%.
4. Full coding details for all variables are available in the appendix.
5. My preferred usage indicator is the average number of initiatives, by state, from 1972 until the survey year, as it captures the modern context, which Matsusaka (2004) has argued is distinct. To be sure, this measure correlates extremely highly with other indicators, including the cumulative over time measure used in other studies as well as a current initiative context count. It turns out that past initiative usage is a great indicator of current initiative usage.
6. Ideology measures are unavailable in the PEW data, and party is coded slightly differently based on available data. These differences are detailed in the appendix.
7. Data were taken from Klarner (2004) data set, available from the *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* online data resource: <http://www.ku.edu/pri/SPPQ/research.shtml>.
8. The likelihood ratio test produces a p value on the difference between the models at .85.
9. Unfortunately, the smaller sample size does not offer enough leverage to adequately test the interactive hypotheses tested in Table 2.

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