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MEANINGFUL CHOICES? UNDERSTANDING AND PARTICIPATION IN DIRECT  
DEMOCRACY IN THE AMERICAN STATES

by

SHAUNA REILLY

Under the Direction of Richard N. Engstrom

ABSTRACT

What role does political knowledge play in campaigning for and participation in direct democracy? A foundational principle of democracy is citizen participation in decision-making. This foundation assumes that citizens are at least somewhat knowledgeable about government and able to make informed choices. This analysis examines the role that meaningful decisions play in direct democracy, because “for voters to make meaningful decisions, they must understand the options on which they are deciding” (Dalton 1988: 13). This analysis uses three different methodologies to investigate this relationship. First, through qualitative analysis and a mail survey of petitioners, this study explores how petitioners view and approach the public. This study finds that expectations of political knowledge affects how petitioners approach the public and how much time they spend educating the public about their initiative. Second, through statistical (multi-level regression) analysis, this study investigates the impact of the ballot

language on participation in individual ballot propositions. This study finds that ballot language is a significant barrier to participation. Third, through experimental analysis, this study connects measures of political knowledge and participation on ballot propositions written by petitioners across the country. This study finds that when confronted with more difficult ballot language voters are less likely to participate. However, when controlling for political knowledge this effect is truncated. The findings of this analysis argue the elite bias of direct democracy in ballot language, accessibility, and motives of petitioners. The study of participation in direct democracy and political knowledge across American states advances the theoretical understanding of democratic participation, and furthers our understanding of the role citizen political knowledge plays in policymaking.

INDEX WORDS: Direct democracy, Elections, Ballot language, Political knowledge, Readability, Voting, 'Voting correctly', Petitioners

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by

SHAUNA REILLY

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in the College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University

2009

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MEANINGFUL CHOICES? UNDERSTANDING AND PARTICIPATION IN DIRECT  
DEMOCRACY IN THE AMERICAN STATES

by

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HLM – Hierarchical Linear Model	MT - Montana
OLS – Ordinary Least Squares	NE - Nebraska
AL - Alabama	NV - Nevada
AK - Alaska	NH – New Hampshire
AZ - Arizona	NJ – New Jersey
AR - Arkansas	NM - New Mexico
CA - California	NY – New York
CO - Colorado	NC – North Carolina
CT - Connecticut	ND – North Dakota
FL - Florida	OH - Ohio
GA - Georgia	OK - Oklahoma
HI - Hawaii	OR - Oregon
ID - Idaho	PA - Pennsylvania
IL - Illinois	RI - Rhode Island
IN - Indiana	SC – South Carolina
IA - Iowa	SD – South Dakota
KS - Kansas	TN - Tennessee
KY - Kentucky	TX - Texas
LA - Louisiana	UT - Utah
ME - Maine	VT - Vermont
MD - Maryland	VA - Virginia
MA - Massachusetts	WA – Washington
MI - Michigan	WV – West Virginia
MN - Minnesota	WI - Wisconsin
MS - Mississippi	WY - Wyoming
MO - Missouri	

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO DIRECT DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

*The instability, injustice, and confusion introduced into the public councils, have, in truth, been the mortal diseases under which popular governments have everywhere perished; as they continue to be the favorite and fruitful topics from which the adversaries to liberty derive their most specious declamations. The valuable improvements made by the American constitutions on the popular models, both ancient and modern, cannot certainly be too much admired; but it would be an unwarrantable partiality, to contend that they have as effectually obviated the danger on this side, as was wished and expected.*

(Madison, Federalist 10)

Do higher political knowledge levels result in higher participation in direct democracy elections? What attention is paid to political knowledge when petitioning for initiatives? Are policy decisions made via direct democracy elections congruent with pre-existing policy preferences? What contributes to the differences in participation in direct democracy? A founding principle of democracy is citizen participation in decision-making. To that end, this foundation assumes that citizens are at least somewhat knowledgeable about government and able to make informed choices. Given that political knowledge is a fundamental component of being a democratic citizen and that many citizens are not engaged in their immediate social world, let alone are prepared to invest time and energy into becoming knowledgeable about their government, the quality of democracy in the United States, and elsewhere, is at risk (Putnam 2000, 1995; Bennett 1995). This study examines the role that political knowledge plays in direct democracy, because “for voters to make meaningful decisions, they must understand the options on which they are deciding” (Dalton 1988: 13). Direct democracy elections provide opportunities for citizens to directly influence the laws of their community, and implement their



policy preferences. Such opportunities beg important questions about what political knowledge might mean for direct democracy participation.

In direct democracy most of the research on the connection between knowledge and participation has been in one direction: the role that direct democracy plays in increasing citizens' political knowledge and sophistication (Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000; Smith 2002; Bowler and Donovan 2002; Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003; Smith and Tolbert 2004; Tolbert and Smith 2004; Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003; Smith and Tolbert 2007). The democratic implications that differing levels of pre-existing political knowledge have for participation in direct democracy has, as a result, been significantly under-researched. The objective of this study is to investigate the connection between political knowledge and participation in direct democracy in different settings. This study also demonstrates that petitioners utilize their perceptions of citizen political knowledge to determine their campaign and education activities, those who believe that voters are knowledgeable are more likely to provide information about their ballot measure while others will use direct democracy measures to take advantage of voters or just to bring attention to an issue. This study also examines participation in direct democracy, namely by looking at ballot language, and finds that the more complex the ballot language the less likely voters are to participate in the ballot measure. Finally this project looks at vote choice, and demonstrates that ballot language affects vote choice. When controlling for political knowledge, those with higher political knowledge participate in higher rates and have more correlation between their vote choice and policy preferences than those with lower political knowledge. Results will demonstrate that high levels of political knowledge lead to higher

participation in direct democracy elections and partially counteract the effects of ballot measure readability.<sup>1</sup>

This study provides original findings that counteract much of the research on direct democracy. First, this study indicates that ballot language is important to determining participation and lessens the effect of variables that have previously been found to be significant (for example the position is no longer significant). Second, this project contradicts research in the area of ballot propositions and vote choice, indicating that under different complexity there is a difference in vote choice and it is not always consistent with policy preferences. In fact, this research indicates the more complex the ballot language the less congruence between vote choice and policy preference. Third, this project demonstrates that even ‘easy’ issues as classified by Carimines and Stimson (1980) are affected by complex language in ballot propositions. There are also some confirmatory results that will be discussed throughout the project.

## **Background**

In its original form, Greek democracy required all citizens to be involved in the decision making and governing of the city-state. Democracy has evolved over time and the United States’ model of democracy is far from the ancient model of democracy devised by Greeks. Today, in a democracy as large as the United States, the original democratic system is virtually impossible; this has led to the use of representative institutions. Yet, as the American Republic moves forward, many states call upon the democratic model used in ancient times and in other countries to provide a means for citizens to participate more directly in democratic decision-making. The institutions of direct democracy allow citizens to have a more direct influence on government

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<sup>1</sup> By readability I refer to the ability of citizens to comprehend what they are reading and voting. This is important as it determines the level of comprehension needed and whether it is possible that citizens understand what their votes mean.

through initiatives and referenda. An underlying tension between citizen knowledge and citizen involvement in policymaking, through direct democracy, remains persistent in the American democratic system. While elites struggle with the concept of the relatively uninformed participating in policymaking, Populists<sup>2</sup> (the early advocates of direct democracy in the United States) endeavored to provide the citizenry more direct influence and participation in governing.

### **Democracy and Direct Democracy**

Direct democracy refers to elections that allow citizens to vote directly on constitutional amendments and policy choices. There are three types of direct democracy: initiatives, referenda, and recall elections. This analysis will examine the first two types because they are processes designed to determine policy rather than representatives. Initiatives, proposed by the people after the circulation of petitions, appear on the ballot for a popular vote. Legislative referenda are laws passed by the legislature and put before the voters to determine whether they are adopted. Depending on the state, these may be required on certain issues; for example, a constitutional change. Further, these referenda can be binding or nonbinding, meaning that the results of the public vote may or may not change laws depending on the requirements of the legislature. Popular referenda are another type of referenda that is less used, but still important to note. These are citizen-driven, but these have a lower threshold of signatures for petition and are used to repeal a specific legislative act.

Direct democracy, in its ideal, provides citizens the opportunity to voice their opinions and enables them to contribute to policy outcomes by circumventing the standard legislative

---

<sup>2</sup> There are some inconsistencies in the literature as to who was the founder of the direct democracy movement. Researchers provide evidence that the populists and the progressives had a role in the development of this phenomena (Braunstein 2004; Matsusaka 2004; Smith and Tolbert 2004; Ellis 2002; Cain and Miller 2001; Bowler and Donovan 1998; Cronin 1989; Schmidt 1989; Donovan and Karp 2006). However, after comprehensive research on the subject, it seems that this was a Populist ideal that was also adopted by the Progressives.

process. During the development of US style of direct democracy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the country went through rapid changes including urban growth, labor unrest, expansion and the industrial revolution. The expansion of voter power allowed for numerous new constitutional amendments, as the process of direct democracy allowed the citizenry a larger role in policymaking. In fact, in the face of turmoil and corruption, it was a way for citizens to exercise more power in government. It also made government more responsive to the public – giving them the opportunity to be heard in government and giving citizens higher levels of political efficacy because they could actually make a difference in policy and the governing of their state.

The crucial component of democracy is the participation of citizens who vote for elected officials in government. While many of the details of democracy have changed since its inception, one important feature remains and that is the importance of citizen involvement in government – be it exercised through their representatives or directly. Democracy gives a voice to the people, and this is more apparent in direct democracy. This was explored by Dahl, who looked at the sources of democracy particularly the classic Greek components. Dahl argued that in the original democracy model, there were some necessary characteristics - including homogeneous populations, harmony of interests, a small citizen body, and citizen involvement in the governing (Dahl 1989: 19). Nevertheless, there were limits on democracy in this model as well, citizenship was exclusive, there was no acknowledgement of human rights, and democracy was limited to smaller countries (Dahl 1989: 23). However, representative government was proffered as a compromise of the Greek model to expand it to larger democracies (Dahl 1989: 29); the problem associated with democracy in large countries is its distance from the people – direct democracy fills that void. To be part of the democratic process, participation must be

effective and citizens need to have “adequate and equal” opportunities for evaluating electoral options (Dahl 1989: 110). In addition, Dahl proposes that voters be given the opportunity to control the agenda – this means that voters must be given the opportunity to decide what issues are decided in the democratic process (Dahl 1989: 113). These components provide support for the desire to have direct democracy but it also demonstrates the problems associated with direct democracy, and the role of political knowledge.

The proliferation of direct democracy in the United States in the past two decades has led to increased attention to the impact of direct democracy on policy (Wagschal 1997; Gamble 1997; Bowler and Donovan 1998, 2004; Bowler, Donovan and Tolbert 1998; Camobreco 1998) and the benefits of direct democracy to the public (Smith 2002; Smith and Tolbert 2004).

Referenda are used globally to determine significant national decisions. Referenda have been used in a variety of ways – constitutional issues in Canada, Russia, New Zealand and Australia; on treaties and international agreements in Spain, France, Denmark, and European Union membership; on sovereignty, self-determination and devolution in Quebec, Ukraine, Scotland, Wales and Puerto Rico; and public policy issues in Sweden, Ireland, and Switzerland (LeDuc 2003). The use of direct democracy in these significant ways across the globe demonstrates the magnitude of this election phenomenon. Figure 1.1 demonstrates the rise of national referenda worldwide, showing more citizen involvement in governmental processes.

Direct democracy has become a significant force in changing policy and directing governments around the world (examples include the spread and survival of the European Union (Kaufmann and Waters 2004) or the potential break up of Canada (LeDuc 2003)). Direct democracy varies in importance – some measures are simply a rubber stamp and others require substantive choices. These types of direct democracy face compounding factors, such as

political environment and ballot languages. Some national questions are in easily understood language “Do you think that the United Kingdom should stay in the European Community (the Common Market)?” (Butler and Kitzing 1976) with clear outcomes. Others are complexly worded, like the 1995 separatist referenda in Quebec. For example: "Do you agree that Québec should become sovereign after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Québec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?"<sup>3</sup> (LeDuc 2003), leaving the close outcome and the meaning of a yes or no vote uncertain.

Direct democracy truly upholds the notion of government by and of the people by circumventing popularly elected representatives. Supporters of direct democracy indicate that it creates policy more in line with the peoples’ preferences, leads to greater citizen participation, generates a better-informed electorate (Smith 2002; Smith and Tolbert 2004; Smith and Tolbert 2007) and acts as a “safeguard against the concentration of political powers in the hands of the few” (Schmidt 1989: 29). Direct democracy has the potential to deliver significant democratic benefits, yet there have been noteworthy arguments against it.

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<sup>3</sup> The results of this second referendum on Quebec sovereignty had a very close result. The final election results 50.58 percent "No" to 49.42 percent "Yes". The results were, in part, attributed to the confusion about the ballot question. There was a previous attempt for a referendum on Quebec sovereignty in 1980. The question at the ballot in 1980 was different than the 1995 version - "The Government of Quebec has made public its proposal to negotiate a new agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations; this agreement would enable Quebec to acquire the exclusive power to make its laws, levy its taxes and establish relations abroad — in other words, sovereignty — and at the same time to maintain with Canada an economic association including a common currency; any change in political status resulting from these negotiations will only be implemented with popular approval through another referendum; on these terms, do you give the Government of Quebec the mandate to negotiate the proposed agreement between Quebec and Canada?" These two questions are worded substantially different yet they offer the same solution – separation – from Canada. The results of the election in 1980, were not close, 59.56 percent voted “No” and 40.44 percent voted “Yes”. While the political circumstances were different during these referenda, 15 years apart, the impact of the language wording is evident. The 1980 ballot question was far clearer than the 1995 version of the ballot question.

### *Arguments about the Use of Direct Democracy*

Throughout the literature there have been arguments about the use of direct democracy in our society – this contributes to the larger arguments about political knowledge and direct democracy. One of the significant problems that contribute to the discussion about participation in direct democracy is the different motivations behind direct democracy proposals. Scholars have argued about the role of interest groups in the direct democracy process. They suggest that third parties, namely interest groups, use initiatives and referenda to promote their agendas and that the initiative process is dominated by special interests (Schmidt 1989; Matsusaka 2004). These groups are frequently linked to financial contributions and influence (Schattsneider 1960). This has been disputed by different scholars who argue that direct democracy benefits more than these special interest groups (Matsusaka 2004) and that big spending on behalf of interest groups did not change policy, implying that interest groups do not have a big influence over policy (Gerber 1999). After all, even with interest group involvement, initiatives are primarily a citizen-driven process asking for citizen involvement in policy development in both the petition process and voting.

Assumed positive attributes of direct democracy include increased citizen efficacy and increased participation (Schmidt 1989). Study of direct shows little evidence of increased citizen participation in elections or reduced alienation from government (Magleby 1984). While there are notable educational effects (Smith 2002) from ballot propositions, citizens do not gain the all attributes anticipated by its advocates. In fact, there is more evidence to the contrary.

Research in this area, goes so far as to say that direct democracy represents the illusion of democratic values and is really ceremonial (Hofstadter 1955), self-interested (Kolko 1963), and elitist (Hays 1964). In fact, direct democracy is accused of decreasing the voting participation of

blacks, lower-class rural whites, recent immigrants, and the urban working class, by design (Greenberg 1985). While this may be overstated because of the number of direct democracy measures that actually target minority populations (Hajnal, Gerber and Louch 2002), it does raise questions about whether it is the masses or elites who control the processes.

Direct democracy has been used globally to varying ends (LeDuc 2003). Direct democracy was involved in the rise of the Third Reich in Germany and Austria, the end of the dictatorship of Italian parties, and the domination of the Swiss democratic model demonstrates the variety of uses that the direct democracy system has experienced (Frey 1994). In the Swiss model, direct democracy was used to break the “cartel of politicians” and involve citizens in the process (Frey 1994: 338). In the Canadian model of direct democracy, Canadians had a voice in constitutional evolution including rights of Aboriginals as well as self-determination for Quebec (Johnson 1996). Countries that are expanding their model of government to make it more representative and democratic have turned to direct democracy as a way of engaging the public (Barczak 2001; Frey 2003). In developing countries, direct democracy increases trust and the perception of honesty in government and improves social outcomes (Frey 2003), as well as filling the void left by a declining party system (Barczak 2001). The struggle for more opportunities to exercise direct control over political decision-making has been explored the world over and demonstrates the value of the process but also the implications for political systems (Scarrow 2001).

Another criticism leveled against direct democracy is that it “violates the norm of accountability” (Lupia 2001: 66). The lack of knowledge and yet, high stakes of ballot measures leads to claims that direct democracy voters are not knowledgeable enough to make decisions on ballot measures (Cain and Miller 2001). Only in an ideal world would voters research each



ballot proposition before the election, and as both Cain and Miller (2001) and Lupia (2001) point out – ours is not an ideal world. This is predicated on the assumption that citizens are knowledgeable about their elected candidates and hold their elected officials accountable (Cain and Miller 2001; Lau and Redlawsk 1997). One tangential point is that citizens are not fully knowledgeable even on the most salient election – many cannot tell you who the candidates for Vice President are in a Presidential election (Lupia 2001; Lau and Redlawsk 1997; Lau and Redlawsk 2006). The concerns about the requisite qualifications for making direct legislation are complicated by the notion that a voter is not necessarily qualified for even the most salient election.

Direct democracy is not only a national level phenomenon, as over forty countries also experience this process at lower levels of government (Center for Research on Direct Democracy 2009). The United States is one of these countries, and the states are using direct democracy in record numbers. Direct democracy has a long history in the United States and was especially popular in the early 20th Century, specifically in Western states. The growing use of this process led to more Populist policies spreading across the United States. Use of direct democracy declined from 1946-1968, followed by steady growth since the 1970s (Schmidt 1989). Scholars have explained the growth of direct democracy because of increased population, changes in the requisite number of signatures required for initiatives, and a growing distrust of politicians (Matsusaka 2004; Ellis 2002; Cain and Miller 2001; Schmidt 1989; Hofstadter 1956; Hicks 1931). The steady growth of direct democracy in the United States since the late 1960s is attributed specifically to a lack of trust in government developing post-Watergate and during the Vietnam War (Magleby 1984). Putnam has also offered explanations that account for the withdrawal of citizens from community life after the Vietnam War; however, he explains that

ballot initiatives are not a sign of widespread civic engagement, rather, they signify the further professionalization of initiative politics (Putnam 2000: 163). Figure 1.2 illustrates the number of state-level initiatives in the United States since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The variation in state use of direct democracy has already been researched in terms of obstacles and state insulation from the process across states (Bowler and Donovan 2004) (see Appendix A). Figure 1.3 reveals the variation in the amount of direct democracy across states. In this figure, we can see that there is variation across states as to the amount of direct democracy, and it can be inferred from Figure 1.2 (presented earlier) that this also varies by year.

This study includes a survey focusing on one state. Oregon is selected for intense study because of its long history of direct democracy, the high numbers of direct democracy elections since its inception and its reputation for integrating citizen politics into government decision making. Oregon stands as a critical case in this analysis because it provides an example of citizens involvement in the policymaking process that can be generalized (in lesser forms) to other states. Oregon provides substantial details on their petitioners and process and demonstrates the vast usage of the process across the state and across topics. Oregon's a crucial case because of its enduring and immense citizen involvement in the process. The number of citizens involved in the process provides an excellent resources for this study.

In its initial design, direct democracy was intended to "restore control of government to the people" (Schmidt 1989: 8). It provided citizens with the opportunity to correct problems in their government. Nonetheless, there have been significant changes to the process since its inception. Currently the direct democracy processes is more regulated, some states have instituted laws that insulate the legislature from the process and other states have even limited or removed the process from the state. The notion that direct democracy is a check on government

is no longer as prominent. Direct democracy elections have been taken over by small groups of petitioners and interest groups; this disadvantages average citizens. Direct democracy is a growing phenomenon, yet participation in these elections is at an all-time low and there are questions about the motivations of those who petition for direct democracy elections.

Participation in American elections once high at 60 percent was as low as 37 percent in 2006, this participation rates are further amplified when there are multiple races on the ballot. Ballot participation rates decrease on races that are lower down the ballot and direct democracy measure are typically at the bottom of the ballots. Therefore, there is substantial roll-off (voters who vote for the top race but do not vote on all the other races) when looking at ballot propositions. Table 1.1 provides a demonstration of roll-off levels by state. From this table, there is an average roll-off in direct democracy elections of 9.9 percent but there is a wide range both within and across states. For example, Wisconsin experiences, on average, 18.1 percent roll-off while Indiana experiences on average 37.4 percent roll-off.<sup>4</sup> While Colorado experiences ballot proposition roll-off ranging from -4.6 to 55.9 percent depending on the measures. Explanations for this variation are discussed in Chapter 6.

Throughout American history, direct democracy has waxed and waned in prominence, nonetheless the feature of this type of democracy is that it allows for citizens (through petitioning and voting) to participate in policy change. Likewise, in Table 1.2 the number of direct democracy measures and participation rates change by year. In 2000, a highly contested Presidential election year, there was roll-off of 12.7 percent. Further, in the mid-term election in 2004 we see an average roll-off of 14.6 percent. An important feature to note in these elections

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<sup>4</sup> Negative minimum participation means that there was higher participation in these elections than the top ballot race. This is most commonly found when there are ballot proposition elections only. Often voters arrive at the ballot and only vote on those measures that they were mobilized for or those that they are familiar with, thus causing some voters not to vote on the top ballot measure.

is that the off year elections (ex. 1997, 1999, and 2001) roll-off is lower because there are fewer races on the ballot and those who turnout are more likely to complete the ballot.

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 demonstrate the variation and change in participation on these lower levels of elections – in comparison to top of the ballot races. Citizens have an important role in direct democracy, and this electoral role is at least analogous, if perhaps not more important, than the voting in representative elections. Certainly, electing an official may guide governmental policy but representatives have other pressures (party, interest groups, donors and potential donors) guiding their votes. Voting on constitutional amendments or propositions is the only way citizens can determine policy. Being uninformed in a ballot proposition is more problematic as there are fewer cues than during a representative election making basic knowledge far more necessary to vote for these ballot propositions.

### *Petitioners and the Direct Democracy Process*

The direct democracy process is complex. It begins when petitioners (a citizen, group, or part of government) suggest an issue to be considered by the people. Governmental petitioners have two ways of suggesting referenda to the public. One way is to pass legislation on the issue before presenting it to the public for final approval as a referendum (usually the yea/nay vote of the legislature is provided on the ballot). Alternatively, governmental petitioners can refer a bill to the public rather than vote on it themselves. Nongovernmental petitioners must follow the initiative process, which requires that they gather a large number of signatures from registered voters prior to getting their proposition on the ballot.<sup>5</sup> While the number of signatures varies by

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<sup>5</sup> These specifications and other requirements are needed to qualify for the ballot are measured by Bowler and Donovan (2004) to create a qualification index. A chart of this index is included in the Appendix A. The higher the qualification index score indicates more difficulty. The higher the legislative insulation score means that that legislature has more authority over voter measures and is more insulated from proposition effects. Qualification

state and election, it is a percentage (usually four to eight percent) either of the state's population, or of votes cast in the prior election for Governor (or other top ballot race).

The next step for these petitioners is to come up with the exact text that will appear on the ballot. Frequently there are accompanying limitations such as a single topic rule, or length requirements provided by the state (both are policies in place in Washington State, for example).<sup>6</sup> In some states, such as Oregon, there is government and group sponsored councils that assist the citizen in devising the text that will appear on the ballot. There is then some formal procedure, which varies by state, involving the Secretary of State, judiciary or other councils to approve formally the ballot and proposition text.<sup>7</sup>

Petitioners of initiatives are important in the direct democracy process. These citizens write and campaign for direct legislation during elections. Petitioners have different agendas when designing these initiatives – be it to avoid the legislature and represent the interests of the citizenry or to pursue propositions not in the majority of citizens' interest. Throughout this process, there are significant obstacles to participation. Petitioners, particularly citizen and groups, must be aware of deadlines and must understand the process and petitioning

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difficulty index is comprised of "1) only statutes or only constitutional measures are allowed, 2) the length of the qualifying period is limited, 3) geographic distribution of signatures is required, 4) the proportion of voters' signatures required for qualification is between 7.0 percent and 10.0 percent; 5) the proportion of voters' signatures required for qualification exceeds 10.0 percent, and 6) there are substantive limits on the subject matter of initiatives". Legislative insulation index "1) the state has a single-subject rule, 2) there are limits on the substance of an initiative, 3) there are restrictions on fiscal initiatives, 4) the legislature can amend or repeal a statutory initiative, 5) the legislature can repeal initiative statutes without a waiting period, 6) if the legislature can repeal a statutory initiative without a supermajority, 7) the state allows no constitutional amendment initiatives, 8) the state allows direct and indirect initiatives, and 9) the state allows indirect initiatives only." These indexes were created by Bowler and Donovan from research they included by Magleby (1984), Gerber (1999), and National Conference of State Legislatures.

<sup>6</sup> Despite the state regulations required for single topic and length, there is no discernable evidence from the data that these are consistently applied in the state.

<sup>7</sup> Formal procedures of the state in terms of approving the ballot proposition can require specific proposition lengths, titles, or single topic rules. Each state has a different procedure where the Secretary of State approves the measure for the ballot, either individually, through a Court review of the measure for constitutionality or a state mandated council that reviews each proposition and formally approves it for the ballot. These procedures vary significantly by state and contribute to why there are different numbers of measures across states – the Bowler and Donovan (2004) insulation and qualification indexes deal with this variation. A key feature of all states is some mechanism for state approval to prevent widespread abuse of the system by frivolous or too complex petitions.

requirements. In addition, nongovernmental petitioners must expend resources (time and money) to collect signatures and campaign. Petitioners must take into account the public's ability to understand issues because they select the topic and, often, write the measure that appears on the ballot. Americans have lower levels of political knowledge than citizens of other countries (Baker et al 1994, Dominick and Popkin 1995); yet, there is increased use of initiatives and referendums for complex policy issues. Over the last ten years, there have been approximately 128 statewide ballot propositions across the country annually, up from approximately fifteen a year in the 1950s and 1960s. This increase is on track to continue, and leads to higher levels of knowledge because of the increasing number of races and the increased petitioning of this procedure in the states. Yet we have little understanding of how direct democracy interacts with the political knowledge of the citizenry.

### **Political Knowledge and Direct Democracy**

Political knowledge can best be defined as “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory” (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996: 10), and it has many components. It can include respondents knowing a range of things such as their representative or the ideology of political parties (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993, 1996). This is not to be confused with formal education as they are distinctly different. Political knowledge or sophistication has been prominent in political science research since cognitive research of the 1960s (Campbell et al 1960; Converse 1964; Zaller 1992).

Knowledge has an important role to play in a democracy not only because it is an expected component of the citizenry but also because it contributes to the health of democracy. The more knowledgeable about government citizens are the more willing citizens are to

meaningfully participate in and petition for direct democracy measures. The petitioning process is completely driven by the individual; the state provides guidelines but does not publicize the process. Rather, petitioners need to understand the process exists in order to change policy this way. Further, these elections are usually of low salience once they do get to the ballot, so voters will be less aware of these elections and must rely on previous knowledge (of campaigns or politics in general) to vote on propositions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Why study direct democracy elections? These elections are citizens' foremost opportunity to form policies that directly affect them, as it provides direct participation in the policymaking process. Further, voting behavior in these elections has been minimally studied,<sup>8</sup> and while there is substantial literature on the development of votes in partisan/candidate elections (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Campbell et al 1960). This study expands our understanding of voting and advances voting behavior in this context (Magleby 1984). Research in regards to petitioners has previously been studied in terms of financial contributions and spending, and interest group activity. However, it has yet to be conducted through direct interviews with petitioners - to determine what their intentions are when it comes to petitioning for direct democracy, their understanding of citizen sophistication, and the influence of ballot language. The lack of research in this area is not because it is not a plausible area of research, just that this is a growing area of research in political science and the usage of ballot propositions is developing. Additionally, the data and ballots are more available now than they have been in the past, allowing researchers to answer questions and address assumptions about direct

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<sup>8</sup> There is a growing literature on direct democracy participation but as the use of these measures continues to grow, as it certainly has in the past decade.

democracy. This study includes the component of political knowledge and analyzes the role that it plays in the motivations of petitioners, and votes cast by citizens. As discussed below, there is an escalating use of direct democracy across states and it is important to study voting behavior on these measures, and whether votes on these propositions are consistent with voters' policy preferences.

Several famous ballot measures have informed research on citizens and policymaking, one in particular is Proposition 13 in California. Proposition 13, changed the tax laws in California. This measure protected older homeowners from being taxed out of their homes and still provided tax revenues; property is only assessed for tax value at the time of sale. The exact text included “SECTION 1. (a) The maximum amount of any ad valorem tax on real property shall not exceed One percent (1%) of the full cash value of such property. The one percent (1%) tax to be collected by the counties and apportioned according to law to the districts within the counties.” (State of California 1978). There had been two earlier iterations that had failed and in 1978, and Proposition 13 was expected to fail. There was an extensive campaign on Proposition 13, detailing the pitfalls of decreasing tax revenue. The voters in California approved the proposition with a majority vote of 65% (Moore 1998). Yet, there have been costs associated with the Proposition, first, homeowners keep their homes longer, meaning that there is less turnover of housing, because of this there are low amounts of moderately priced housing and an increased property tax liability after sale. There have been attempts to modify Proposition 13, a recent attempt in 2000 failed to get the 2/3 supermajority required to amend the measure. Voters were focused on the promise of lower taxes rather than looking at the impact of the law or its results. According to Lipset and Rabb (1978) voters wanted to get their money's worth for their taxes, voters clearly had no understanding of the repercussions of the vote and the fiscal crisis in



California makes this clear. However, voters continue to support this measure at the same rate as they did in 1978, according to public opinion polls (Fox). While the ballot language and has not necessarily affected voters; political knowledge, ballot measure complexity, and the problem of taking issues to the voters is clear. Ballot measures that restricts the legislature and prevents them from operating (in a wide variety of areas because of their financial impacts) demonstrates the danger of direct democracy and how increased political knowledge and easier ballot language may provide ballot propositions that are more available to the public. However, there may be reason to limit aspects of direct democracy to ensure that decisions that are made do not detrimentally affect the state's financial future in the long run.

Another example of using different ballot language for the same issue is the Maine 2003 ballot measures that provided three options. These options included an initiative measure, an alternative referendum from the Legislature, and a rejection of both options. Below is the wording of these three options.

Voters are asked to choose among the following alternatives: (1A) to adopt a proposed law initiated by petition, (1B) to adopt a competing measure approved by the Legislature for submittal to the voters, or (1C) to reject both. A voter may vote for only one of these three options.

Question 1A, an initiated bill, requires the State to provide at least 55% of the total state and local cost of kindergarten to grade 12 public education, including 100% state support for special education services mandated by state or federal law. Two percent of the annual state appropriation for education required by this initiated bill is dedicated to the Fund for the Efficient Delivery of Educational Services, which is dedicated to providing incentive-based resources to those school administrative units or municipalities that would effect certain system changes that provide significant and sustainable cost savings in the delivery of educational services. The Fund for the Efficient Delivery of Local and Regional Services is established within the Local

Government Fund, which is the fund from which state-municipal revenue sharing is distributed. This fund is capitalized by setting aside 2% of the sales and income tax revenue that would otherwise be distributed according to the revenue-sharing formula. This 2% is distributed to those municipalities that can demonstrate cost savings in the delivery of local and regional governmental services through collaboration with other local and regional governments and participating state agencies. This initiated bill directs the Legislature to develop the necessary implementing legislation to fully implement the Fund for the Efficient Delivery of Educational Services and the Fund for the Efficient Delivery of Local and Regional Services. This initiated bill also directs the Legislature to develop the necessary implementing legislation to provide for the necessary state revenue to meet the State's obligation to support public education without undermining existing municipal support systems such as municipal revenue sharing, the property tax homestead exemption and local road assistance, among others. Finally, this initiated bill directs the Legislature to develop a comprehensive plan as soon as possible but no later than March 1, 2004 that integrates the efforts of state, county and local government and schools to reduce unnecessary spending, identifies cost savings in the delivery of governmental services and otherwise addresses the issue of the overall tax burden in this State.

Question 1B, approved by the Legislature for submittal to the voters as a competing measure to the citizen initiative described previously, would increase the State's share of funding kindergarten to grade 12 public education from 50% to 55% over five years. It would establish the new essential programs and services model, adopted by the Legislature this spring, as the basis for calculating state and local shares of education funding. The Commissioner of Education would determine the maximum dollar amount of the local cost share expectation, as well as the local mill rate that is required to raise the total amount. This measure also would expand the Maine Residents Property Tax Program, commonly referred to as the "circuit breaker" program, by increasing the income eligibility limits over a 3-year period, as well as by increasing the amount of taxes that would be refundable as a percentage of household income. In addition, the measure would restore the Maine Homestead Property Tax Exemption for up to the just value of \$7,000 for all homesteads owned by permanent residents of the state. This exemption had been eliminated by budget legislation enacted this spring. The Department of Education and the Bureau of Revenue Services would be required by January 2, 2010 to analyze and report on the effectiveness of this resolution in lowering property taxes and in

meeting the goals of funding public education. The Legislature's taxation committee would report out new legislation, if necessary, by March 1, 2010, to accomplish those goals.

Voting in favor of Question 1C is a vote against both of the plans presented in Question 1A and Question 1B.

A vote for Option 1A is a vote to approve the citizen initiative.

A vote for Option 1B is a vote to approve the competing measure.

A vote for Option 1C is a vote to reject both the citizen initiative and the competing measure.

If either 1A or 1B receives more than 50 percent of the votes cast for Question 1, that option will be approved.

If neither 1A nor 1B receives a majority of the votes cast for Question 1, but one or both receives more than 33 percent of the vote, the one with the most votes will appear on the ballot by itself at the next statewide election.

If 1A and 1B each fails to receive more than 33 percent of the vote, then both options are rejected.

### **Maine Questions 1A, 1B, and 1C, 2003**

The ballot results were close (1A received 35.5% of the vote; 1B received 33.0% and 1C received 25.6%) demonstrating the complexity of the process.

The study of participation in direct democracy and political knowledge advances the theoretical understanding of democratic participation, and furthers our understanding of the role citizen political knowledge plays in policymaking. The relationship between political knowledge and participation frames the context of this study. The broad research question of this study is: Do levels of political knowledge affect participation in direct democracy elections? The generalized hypothesis is that higher levels of political knowledge increases the degree and quality of participation in direct democracy. This is because knowledgeable citizens have a greater desire for participation and are better able to translate their preferences into accurately cast ballots.

## **Democratic and Normative Implications**

The democratic implications of this study indicate that the quality of democracy is at risk. When states advocate the use of ballot propositions but do not safeguard the ability of citizens to participate or acknowledge the role of petitioners and their motivations the result is a fragmented and dangerous system. The purpose of direct democracy is to bring the public into the policymaking; however, obstacles can introduce biases in the system. The following chapters provide evidence that there are clear biases in the system, both in how the petitioner approaches the direct democracy process and in how voters participate in elections.

Normative implications of this research indicate that there may be specific categories of propositions that should not appear on the ballot because they are too complex for voters. Legislators are expected to have the time and expertise required to deal with more complicated questions and issues, or to consult with experts to determine a policy direction. Further, if these issues are presented to the public they should be written at a level that is accessible to the average citizen, or at least provide information that gives average voters the ability to educate themselves to be knowledgeable enough to vote.

Should the findings support the hypotheses about knowledge levels and direct democracy; they provide two very clear (and potentially opposing) guidelines for policy. First, if the intention is for citizens to have a say in the policy process, then this needs to be an open process that is accessible to all voters. Petitioners could be required to meet particular standards – easy ballot language, straightforward topics and campaigns focusing on educating the public about the proposition and vote choices. Second, these findings would also provide an argument for higher expectations about citizens themselves. There are low expectations of citizens in terms of their knowledge when voting – that is why there are significant cues at the ballot box.

Direct democracy requires more from citizens and this means that in states where direct democracy is present there needs to be more active and engaged citizens. In these instances, more is demanded from citizens and they could be informed that they need to take more initiative and educate themselves on the issues and ballot propositions.

While this study has clear expectations about outcomes, alternative scenarios are possible. If petitioners do not vary in their approach to the public, this creates a different set of findings – particularly if they do not address the issues of education and campaigning. Further, if petitioners all believe that voters are unsophisticated it brings into question the desire and purpose of direct democracy if even the petitioners do not feel its citizens are qualified to change policy. If ballot language has no effect on participation in direct democracy and voters choose not to vote for other reasons, then there does not need to be regulations about the petitioning system. Further, if ballot language does not interfere with voters' ability to vote consistently on propositions this indicates that ballot language do not need to be monitored and this argument is moot; however, if the language does prevent voters from voting their preferences there needs to be policy action. This either requires substantial regulation enforced on writing of these propositions, which many feel limits citizen roles in democracy. On the other hand, expecting citizens to write questions at a level available to the majority voluntarily or for voters to self-educate on these issues are expectations that citizens rarely live up to.

### **Outline of this Study**

It is important to study these elections separately from general elections, especially when looking at political knowledge because of the distinct nature of these elections. There are no visible cues for voters who are uninformed about the propositions prior to the election. The

literature on the more general impact of knowledge on elections is detailed in the literature review; however, the impact on these less salient elections is an important question.

Additionally, the information provided on the ballot can be convoluted, confusing and difficult to understand. Therefore, having some base knowledge can increase participation on these measures and lead to votes consistent with policy preferences on ballot propositions.

This study proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 provides a critical examination of the literature and basis of this study and demonstrates where the components of this dissertation fit into the larger argument. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical basis of this analysis. Chapter 4 details the methodology used in this dissertation. The first four chapters set up the framework for the rest of this study. In Chapter 5, I investigate initiative petitioners, their motives and strategies for influencing government. This analysis involves an in-depth study of Oregon, in conjunction with this larger study, which experiences the highest number of direct democracy measures in the United States (second highest in the past ten years) and its petitioners. While studying Oregon, this research explains differences in approaches and campaigning activities of petitioners. I posit that an important factor that accounts for differences in participation and campaign techniques for individual ballot propositions is the varying levels and expectations of political knowledge among citizens.<sup>9</sup>

Chapter 6 looks at ballot language and its impact on participation in these elections.

Imagine being confronted with the following ballot propositions:

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<sup>9</sup> There are no statewide levels of political knowledge; therefore, cannot be analyzed directly. I have utilized an experiment that asks accepted political knowledge questions and asked citizens during the survey their opinion about knowledge levels instead of using state measures. This is appropriate because I am looking at what citizens know and how they react in particular situations.

An Act to Extend from 4 to 6 Terms the Limits on Legislative Terms. Do you favor extending term limits for Legislators from 4 to 6 terms?

### **Maine 2007**

An amendment to Article X of the Constitution of the State of Colorado, establishing a homestead exemption for a specified percentage of a limited amount of the actual value of owner-occupied residential real property that is the primary residence of an owner-occupier who is sixty-five years of age or older and has resided in such property for ten years or longer, and, in connection therewith, allowing the general assembly by law to adjust the maximum amount of actual valued of such residential real property of which such specified percentage shall be exempt, requiring the aggregate statewide valuation for assessment that is attributable to residential real property to be calculated as if the full actual value of all owner-occupied primary residences that are partially exempt from taxation was subject to taxation for the purpose of determining the biennial adjustment to be made to the ratio of valuation for assessment for residential real property, requiring the General Assembly to compensate local governmental entities for the net amount of property tax revenues lost as a result of the homestead exemption, specifying that said compensation shall not be included in local government fiscal year spending, authorizing a permanent increase in state fiscal year spending to defray the cost to the state of said compensation, and specifying that said compensation shall not be subject to any statutory limitation on general fund appropriations.

### **Colorado Referendum A, 2000**

These two ballot propositions demonstrate the importance of ballot language in comprehending vote choice. These examples illustrate two extremes of the ballot propositions that are included in the statistical and experimental analysis of ballot language and participation. Finally, in Chapter 7, I investigate the individual level component of this study utilizing a controlled experiment, exploring individual responses to political knowledge questions and the correlation to participation in direct democracy elections to determine if more politically knowledgeable

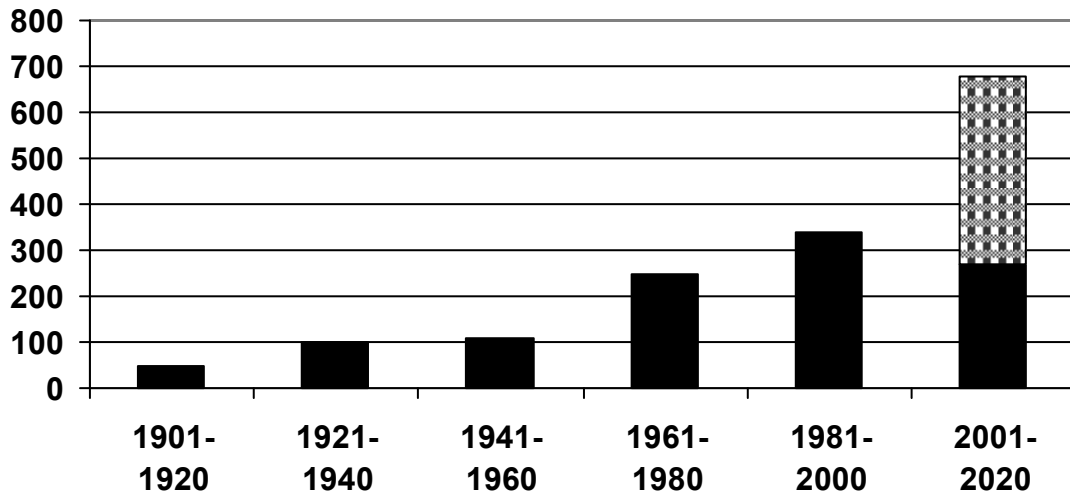
people are prone to participate in direct democracy elections. The individual level analysis will also address the ability to “vote correctly”<sup>10</sup> in different readability situations. The final chapter, Chapter 8, returns to the set of broader theoretical and normative questions that motivates the study and provides directions for further research.

This research looks at a variety of influences on participation and discovers that political knowledge is an important factor in determining how petitioners initiate direct democracy propositions, voter participation, as well as the ability to “vote correctly”. This expanded approach to research on participation in direct democracy elections is vital as it demonstrates the importance of political knowledge, which is an often-debated issue in the literature. Further, featured in this inquiry is focused research on one state that has been a leader both in the development of direct democracy and in its continued use. This sets up the methodology and comprehension of the process from an understudied point of view. Combining this research into this study develops a strong and solid contribution to understanding participation in direct democracy. The next section will critically analyze the literature and explain why this inquiry is important to providing a more complete relationship between political knowledge and direct democracy.

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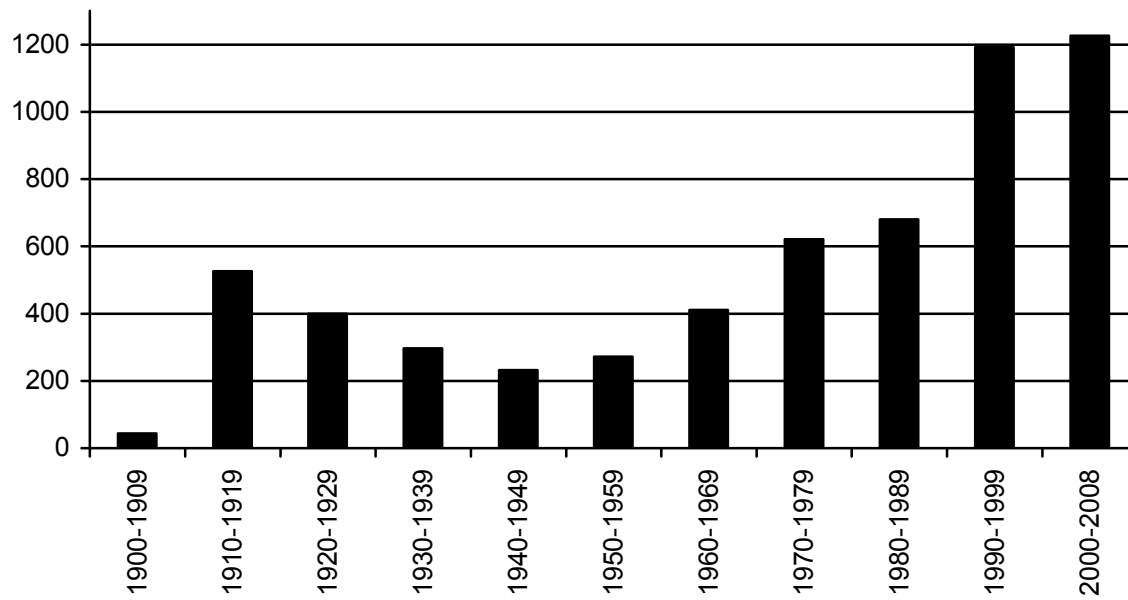
<sup>10</sup> Voting correctly is a normative term used by Law and Redlawsk (1997) to indicate whether citizens cast votes consistent with their policy preferences.





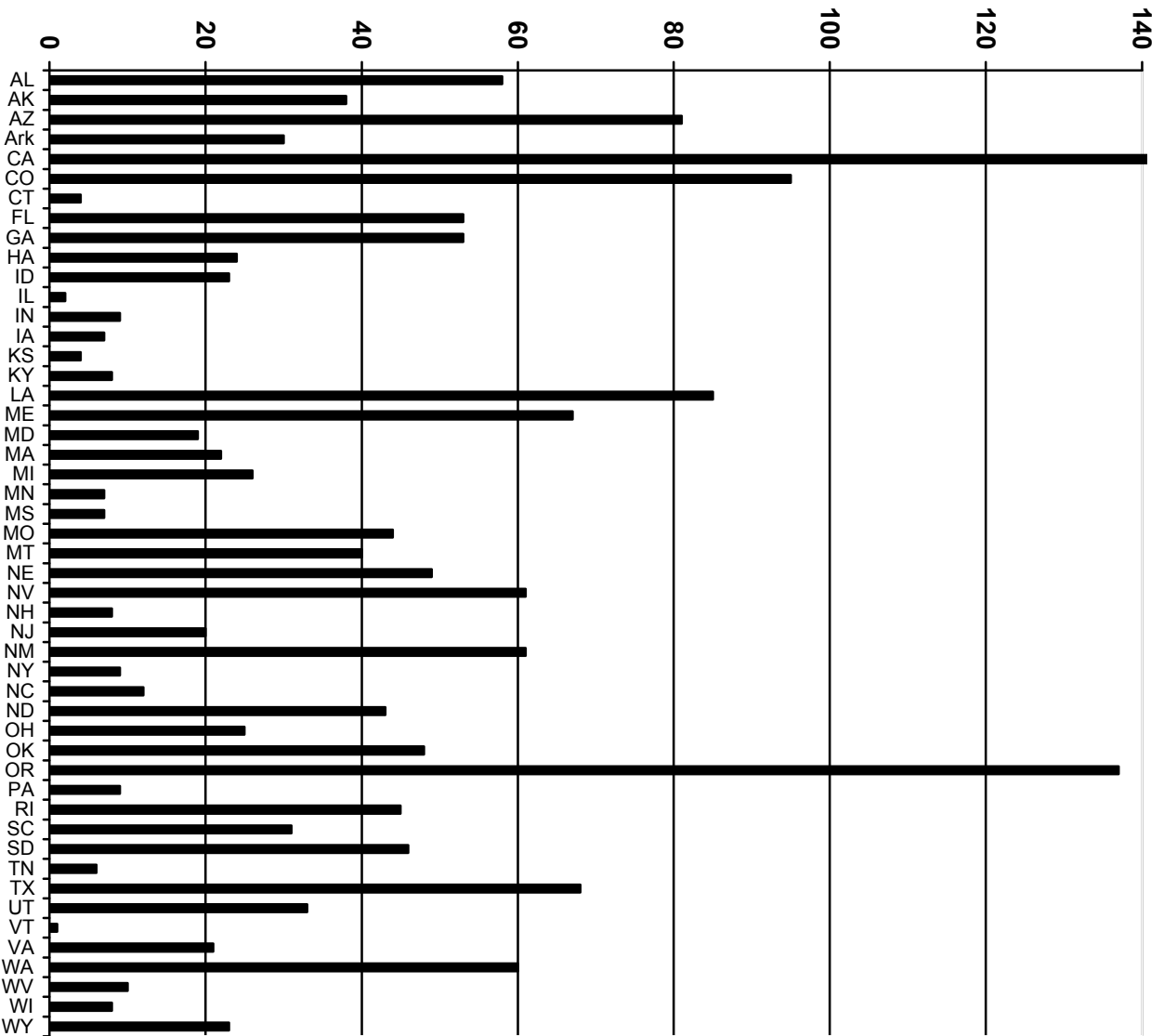
**Figure 1.1: Number of Referenda World Wide**

*Source:* LeDuc 2003 (National Referenda Only). Updated and predicted to 2020 by looking at national referenda reported by the Center for Research on Direct Democracy (2009). This Center collects data from the 201 countries that have national referenda. The 83 of the 271 worldwide referenda from 2001-2008 are from Switzerland – the pioneer of direct democracy. However, the spread and use of this phenomenon across 200 other countries at the national level, and more at the state level, indicates how important this phenomenon is to the spread and use of democracy worldwide. It is difficult to determine the exact number of referenda in the final twenty-year category presented in this graph based only on a portion of the first half of this period. There are contributing factors that could affect a difference in measures over the next twenty years.



**Figure 1.2: United States' Initiatives by Decade**

*Source:* National Council of State Legislators.



**Figure 1.3: Number of Initiatives and Referenda per State 1997-2008**

**Table 1.1: Average Roll-off by State**

	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Alabama	32	.319	.141	-.001	.478
Alaska	30	.042	.077	-.013	.425
Arizona	69	.082	.094	.009	.669
California	105	.104	.120	-.045	.496
Colorado	59	.076	.101	-.046	.599
Connecticut	1	.403		.403	.403
Florida	40	.106	.142	.041	.961
Georgia	33	.091	.041	.023	.193
Hawaii	10	.169	.232	.062	.825
Idaho	16	.083	.065	-.014	.171
Indiana	6	.374	.308	.203	.994
Iowa	3	.228	.061	.174	.295
Kansas	3	.112	.098	0	.180
Kentucky	7	.215	.080	.087	.299
Louisiana	56	.233	.211	-.004	.640
Maine	66	.054	.246	-1.061	.768
Maryland	11	.235	.085	.103	.369
Massachusetts	14	.079	.025	.047	.119
Michigan	15	.060	.022	.028	.104
Mississippi	2	.017	.024	0	.034
Missouri	27	.087	.131	-.027	.510
Montana	29	.039	.024	.002	.099
Nebraska	29	.103	.055	.023	.199
Nevada	36	.050	.028	.004	.102
New Hampshire	8	-.076	.693	-1.221	.434
New Jersey	20	.303	.147	.085	.549
New Mexico	14	.164	.146	0	.629
New York	8	.419	.466	-.075	.927
North Carolina	1	.162		.162	.162
North Dakota	13	.130	.173	-.041	.497
Ohio	19	.211	.251	-.021	.741
Oklahoma	38	.088	.106	0	.537
Oregon	94	.042	.226	-1.905	.605
Pennsylvania	6	.229	.050	.171	.295
Rhode Island	35	.135	.057	.008	.248
South Carolina	19	.114	.063	.026	.230
South Dakota	36	.029	.026	-.010	.100
Tennessee	6	.137	.081	.039	.215
Texas	84	.007	.046	-.092	.323
Utah	6	.061	.039	0	.101
Vermont	1	.250		.250	.250
Virginia	3	.056	.033	.018	.077
Washington	55	.031	.081	-.064	.566
Wisconsin	3	.181	.277	.016	.501
Wyoming	12	.072	.024	.037	.101
Total	1180	.099	.169	-1.905	.994

**Table 1.2: Average Roll-off by Year**

	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
2007	38	.039	.167	-.044	.927
2006	212	.068	.094	-.014	.669
2005	43	.118	.209	-.093	.828
2004	160	.117	.118	-.027	.756
2003	62	.097	.142	-.062	.768
2002	191	.146	.177	-.045	.649
2001	37	.035	.144	-.041	.835
2000	204	.127	.132	.001	.961
1999	44	.100	.159	-.026	.549
1998	165	.069	.277	-1.905	.994
1997	24	-.006	.030	-.075	.030

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE LITERATURE OF CITIZEN**

#### **COMPREHENSION AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY**

This chapter provides a critical evaluation of the existing literature in the field of direct democracy and citizen comprehension. Individually there is substantial literature on each of these issues but a void remains where the two intersect. This chapter focuses on the state of the art research in the field and demonstrates how and why it needs further development. The chapter proceeds as follows: first, it evaluates the literature on voting in direct democracy; second, it analyzes the literature on the role of knowledge in participation; and third, it evaluates the literature on the ability of citizens to vote their policy preferences under different electoral circumstances. Finally, this chapter concludes by demonstrating the theoretical void left in the literature in this area.

#### **Voting in Direct Democracy Elections**

When discussing participation in direct democracy it is important to frame it in terms of participation in other elections. Direct democracy elections are a subset of elections that are subject to the same limitations as other elections (such as information, salience, and turnout, etcetera); they also provide an additional dilemma to the electoral agenda, as the repercussions of these elections can be substantial and their salience low. In terms of participation there has been a general withdrawal of citizens from elections as well as other collective activities (Putnam 2000); this decreased civic engagement means that there has been a decrease in citizen participation in their society. Another important change is the importance of issue voting (Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979). Issue voting has led to voters focused on specific issues rather than

relying on partisanship. This suggests that issues can provide motivation for voting or set the agenda for other elections (Nicholson 2003, 2005).

### *Ballot Effects on Voting*

Scholars have claimed multiple, conflicting repercussions from ballot propositions on voting. The two primary arguments are first, that ballot propositions bring attention to the ballot and can increase turnout, and second, that ballot propositions lengthen and confuse the ballot. These two arguments have been developed using various methodologies but still emphasize the importance of these elections and their results.

One of the most important recent works on ballot propositions and elections is Smith and Tolbert's work on educative effects. They use multivariate regression to assess the impact of initiatives on voter turnout and collect data on participation from 50 states over 32 years (1970-2002) (Smith and Tolbert 2004). They find that states with more frequent use of the initiative process have a higher overall turnout (2004). Smith and Tolbert look at NES data to determine whether ballot initiatives encourage voter turnout and find that citizens in states with frequent ballot initiatives are more likely to vote in Presidential and midterm elections (2004). In the model, Smith and Tolbert do not account for vote selection or if there is a change because of the educative effect of ballot propositions.

Ballot measures do not exist in a vacuum, rather they affect elections around them (Nicholson 2005, 2003). Nicholson's research on the effects of ballot propositions on other races on the ballot looks at how "priming effects influence multiple voting decisions" (2005: 13). Using the NES Senate Studies, Nicholson establishes the agenda setting ability of ballot measures (2005), particularly the greater awareness of ballot measures on moral issues

(Nicholson 2003). This shows the educational and informational effects of direct democracy in society. Ballot measures can increase turnout and influence vote choice in these other elections. These measures can affect the issue environment and change the agenda of the election. For example, in 2004 several states included a gay marriage proposition on the ballot, which increased electoral turnout and the election of republican incumbents (Taylor 2009, Jackman 2004; Lewis 2005; Donovan et al 2005). The use of these measures can indeed influence representative elections and change the tenor of the campaign. These analyses demonstrate ballot measures effects on turnout and participation, but fail to incorporate citizen levels of knowledge on these issues and how they contribute/detract from the effect of gay marriage propositions.

Further, the topic of the ballot measure can contribute to awareness and knowledge about elections. Nicholson (2003) states that the electoral cycle (Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003), media coverage, campaign spending, voter fatigue, the number of days before an election, and the topic of the ballot measure (e.g. morality, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights) contribute to increased consciousness and comprehension. These content issues are explored in Chapters 6 and 7; I expect that these issues, combined with readability, will affect participation in direct democracy.

Direct democracy has been accused of complicating the ballot; this further supports the idea that citizens are not knowledgeable about direct democracy proposals (Schmidt 1989, Magleby 1984; Lipow 1973; Pillsbury 1931). Studies have attempted to connect citizen lack of education with participation on complex and technical issues (Magleby 1984) demonstrating that only some opinions are represented through direct democracy. Magleby was one of the first to attempt to answer the question about participation in direct democracy. He finds that the main



problem with studying participation in direct democracy is the difficulty in getting solid data, both in participation rates and question resources (1984). Magleby did a nationwide search and assembled as much of the data as possible for 1977-78 and 1982-83 ballot propositions (1984). He used public opinion polls to establish trends in voting behavior in four states (California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Washington) to examine who participates, and to what extent voters understand propositions.

Magleby's study *Direct Legislation: Voting on Ballot Propositions in the United States* focuses on the development of issue politics and the decrease of political parties, and it has contributed to a larger argument for direct democracy (1984). Magleby was able to collect data on individual questions, the number of words in the question, average number of words per sentence and readability indexes for two years. He concludes that higher levels of education result in better understanding and participation consistent with research of traditional electoral behavior. Magleby's research is important for the analysis as it establishes two fundamental components that are utilized later on in this research – first, that readability has an effect on participation, and second, that traditional explanations for voting (race, income, education) can be applied to direct democracy elections (1984). This is further supported by aggregate research by Branton (2003).

Magleby's research has led many to argue that unknowledgeable citizens do not vote and would not vote if the questions were easier. On the other hand, the argument that ballot propositions should be simple has been dismissed by arguing that the legislature's laws are just as complicated (Schmidt 1989). According to this notion, one would expect that legislators are familiar with legalistic language and can read and write legislation – but there is no such qualification for becoming a legislator. This is not typically expected of ordinary citizens either,

but direct democracy seemingly requires this level of sophistication from the citizenry. Schmidt further studies the processes and obstacles of direct democracy by looking at its development from 1898 to 1986. Looking at individual measures, Schmidt builds a theory that petitioners have individual goals in mind when looking at different propositions but one universal component is that petitioners are always advocating for reform (1989).

Another component to the role of citizen knowledge in their participation in direct democracy measures involves informational costs. Voters are calculating and will not participate when it is not in their interest (Downs 1957); therefore, voters must see some benefit to participating in direct democracy in order to do so. There is a significant cost-benefit relationship when addressing participation in direct democracy measures (Downs 1957; Tullock 1967). Without prior knowledge going into the voting booth – the only cue for voting is the information provided on the ballot. Certainly, there is a higher cost to collecting information about direct democracy measures and without collecting this information and understanding the issues and consequences, it is difficult for citizens to determine the benefits of participating in and petitioning for initiatives. The cost-benefit analysis for citizens may lead to decreased participation. Yet, there is a trend towards increased petitions and use of referenda, which leads to questions about who is participating.

Different electoral situations result in different levels of participation across elections. This is especially true for different electoral timing (primary, midterm and general elections) as well as elections on the same ballot. There are differences in national and state elections (Kelley, Ayres, and Bowen 1967; Kim, Petrocik and Enokson 1975; Milbrath and Goel 1977; Ranney 1968, 1972; Salisbury and Black 1963; Verba and Nie 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1978, 1980). National elections have more salience and it is expected that these different levels of

turnout affect participation on statewide propositions (with low salience in relation to elections higher up the ballot); when coupled with complex and technical issues of direct democracy and none of the traditional cues of regular elections (Magleby 1984), such as political party cues (Lee 1960; Hawley 1973; Schaffer, Streb and Wright 2001).<sup>11</sup> Further, there is evidence that voters experience fatigue even in the presence of heuristics to cue the public about voting preferences when there are long ballots (Kimball and Kropf 2006; Brockington 2003; Nichols and Strizek 1995; Nichols 1998; Darcy and Schneider 1989; Magleby 1984; Taebel 1975; Walker 1966). Ballot fatigue from a lengthy ballot (Kimball and Kropf 2006; Brockington 2003; Nichols and Strizek 1995; Bowler, Donovan and Happ 1992; Darcy and Schneider 1989; Magleby 1984; Taebel 1975; Walker 1966) and complexly worded questions (Magleby 1984) decrease turnout. In fact, Magleby's research goes beyond that previously discussed to focus on voter fatigue – demonstrating the roll-off from the top of the ballot to lower races on the ballot in California, and predicts that lengthy ballots are a plausible explanation for decreased participation (1984).

While most of these studies focus on judicial elections because of the traditional low placement of judicial elections on the ballot (Dubois 1979; Taebel 1975), this can be applied to ballot propositions because these elections are also typically at the bottom of the ballot. Other explanations such as information environment (Nicholson 2003, 2005), topic (Nicholson 2005), media coverage (Bowler and Donovan 1994), race (Magleby 1985; Darcy and Schneider 1989; Vanderleeuw and Engstrom 1987), length of ballot (Walker 1966; Taebel 1975; Brockington 2003), and characteristics of the election (such as electronic counting machines (Nichols and Strizek 1998; Nichols 1998)) have been explored as reasons for ballot roll-off. This analysis

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<sup>11</sup> While there are arguments that partisanship can be attached to some questions (Branton 2003), this information is not provided on the ballot and only affects those who have prior knowledge about the ballot proposition.

adds to these explanations by developing a model focusing on readability of the measure on the ballot, while controlling for many of the above factors.<sup>12</sup>

The more people know about ballot propositions and elections the more likely they are to participate in those elections. Bowler and Donovan's seminal piece (1994) on information and opinion change concerning ballot propositions supports this study's theory. Bowler and Donovan suggest that the increase in mobilization of opinions on ballot propositions is directly related to the increase in knowledge about the propositions. The mobilization of opinions comes from education on the topic. Bowler and Donovan look at opinions early in the campaign compared to later in the campaign. They find a distinct decrease in those who have no opinion as well as an increase in those who have opinions on ballot propositions (1994). Their results lead directly to the connection between knowledge and ballot roll-off explored in this analysis. At the ballot box, voters who have no opinion may not vote for that proposition; however, if they are unable to comprehend the question this will substantially decrease any participation. The high percentage of voters who have no opinion, are potential roll-off votes, and a decrease in ballot roll-off comes from being more educated through campaign exposure. The obvious solution to ballot roll-off is to create more awareness of these propositions or to make the ballot propositions easier to understand. This is where political knowledge and ballot propositions are linked.

While one could argue that there is no evidence that people fully understand the consequences of voting for any electoral office, direct democracy elections require that citizens understand policy and are able to discern not only what they are voting on but the meaning of the

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<sup>12</sup> Many of these studies focus on one state and a short time period. Information environment and media coverage of ballots cannot be controlled for in a national study over this period of time. Further, because this study focuses on statewide ballots and voting machines are used on a county by county bases, the type of voting machine is not controlled for in this analysis.

vote as well. However, there are significant normative implications to the argument that citizens are unable to understand direct democracy propositions. If the creation of ballot questions beyond citizen comprehension is a purposeful activity, it not only develops strong arguments about creating obstacles to voting and participation but it also targets specific segments of the population. As previous studies state, and this analysis confirms, education and race are important considerations in who participates in direct democracy elections (Branton 2003; Vanderleeuw and Engstrom 1987). Therefore, the power of the people, which is sought in these elections, is indeed limited by them.

### *Language Studies*

Language studies are not new to political science research as many language studies have focused on the impact of language on public opinion polls or survey questions and how they have resulted in answer changes (Rasinski 1989; Kalton, Collins and Brook 1978; Bishop, Tuchfarber and Oldendick 1978; Gallup 1941). This is particularly true when respondents do not have clear opinions on the issue (Gallup 1941) and means that ballot language is of the utmost importance. Misunderstanding ballot questions can lead to different responses than those consistent with policy preferences or lack of participation, and is also evident in that the way the question is presented can provide different responses (Rasinski 1989; Kalton, Collins and Brook 1978; Bishop, Tuchfarber and Oldendick 1978; Gallup 1941). Thus, the way the question is designed can affect participation rates and this is something that requires significant attention.

There are additional components to participation and responses seen in surveys. Ballot length has a significant impact on behavior in the voting booth (Walker 1966; Taebel 1975; Brockington 2003; Klein and Baum 2001; Hall 1999; Dubois 1979) and there is a similar pattern

among survey questions. While question length can provide more specific answers in a public opinion survey (Laurent 1972; Herzog and Bachman 1981), one must question the impact that this has in an uncontrolled setting such as a voting booth where there is only a “yes” or “no” voting option on ballot questions so a more specific answer is not necessarily the goal. The behavioral impact of surveys can provide insight into participation in direct democracy; in fact, studies of voting behavior and changes over time attribute much of the change to differences in question wording (Bishop, Tuchfarber and Oldendick 1978, Bishop, Oldendick and Tuchfarber 1978). Therefore, because of the research on survey language one can interpret how important the question being asked on the ballot really is to participation.

The impact of survey length (which can be approximated to the length of ballots) on participation has had contradictory findings in the literature, the majority of which indicates that the length of surveys does affect participation. However, scholars have found that clarity (Subar et al 2001) and topic (Groves, Presser and Dipko 2004) can counteract the impact of lengthy questionnaires or ballots. Similarly, there are issues that are more important to some voters, and these issues get their attention (Key 1964), perhaps to the detriment of others. This demonstrates that while there may be roll-off because of long ballots, this can be circumvented by focusing on clarity (readability) and topics important to the public.<sup>13</sup>

### **Direct Democracy Effects on Society**

Direct democracy is celebrated for its several effects on society; the most notable are the educational and civic engagement effects. The effect of direct democracy measures

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<sup>13</sup> While there may be concerns that these two electoral issues (ballot length and readability) have an interactive effect, the correlation between these two effects is minimal, showing they have a separate effect rather than an interactive effect.

demonstrates the positive influences of direct democracy, namely increased political and societal knowledge as well as increased engagement with society.

### *Educational Effects*

Smith and Tolbert look at the puzzle of direct democracy participation from several different vantage points (2004). First, they look at the education of citizens as a result of direct democracy; and then they look at civic engagement, confidence in government and the role of interest groups and political parties. They address the issue of knowledge in their book by merging NES survey data with state-level data to test the effects of direct democracy on citizen attitudes and behavior. Their key independent variable is the number of initiatives appearing on the statewide ballot each year. Using multiple regression analysis and controlling for race, gender, income, partisanship, media consumption, and political efficacy they find that citizens living in states with more exposure to ballot initiatives have greater political knowledge.

Smith and Tolbert look at the education of citizens because of direct democracy by using multivariate regression and participation data from 50 states over 32 years (1970-2002) (2004). They find the initiative process educates citizens as well as groups (2004). Similarly, Smith (2002) measures the salience of different direct democracy measures by looking at newspaper coverage of the ballot the day following the election (1972-1996). He finds that the presence of more salient ballot measures increases turnout in midterm years but not presidential (2002). He cites media coverage of state issues and state races is higher when there is not a national race as an explanation for saliency (2002).

Direct democracy has the same educational effects in other systems. In the Swiss system, where citizens who decide policy issues (through direct democracy) have demonstrated the

incentives to participate in information gathering on these measures (Feld and Kirchgässner 2000). As a result, citizens feel more engaged and are more willing to contribute to the financial health of their community. The literature on civic engagement is further evaluated in the next section.

### *Civic Engagement*

Direct democracy enhances knowledge in the public because of two important and connected factors. First, campaigns around instances of direct democracy focus on educating the public and ensuring that they participate in these elections (Smith and Tolbert 2004). This ability to change policy directly also increases civic engagement and, in certain electoral contexts, political knowledge (Smith and Tolbert 2004; Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003). Engagement and knowledge comes from repeated exposure to information about measures available through the media and direct campaigns. By getting citizens involved and engaged in these elections it increases the importance of direct democracy and contributes to the notion of citizen influence on government policy.

### **Knowledge and Participation**

Political knowledge is essential to a functioning democracy (Dalton 1988); the more knowledgeable people are about political systems, the more they want to participate (Milner 2002; Lupia 2001; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Junn 1991; Schmidt 1989; Dalton 1988); however, others argue that ‘too much’ participation by the uninformed can be destabilizing (Kuklinski, Metlay and May 1982; Cronin 1989; Lupia 1992; Popkin 1991). While this is contradictory it demonstrates that political knowledge is a significant concern when addressing



direct democracy because of the importance of the activity. This is an opportunity for citizens to by-pass their elected representatives to make decisions directly on policy.

### *Development of Knowledge Measures*

There have been several definitions of political knowledge and what levels of knowledge are needed in a democracy. Political knowledge is comprised of long-term political information, not just current events, and is relatively stable over time (Jennings 1996). This is important to understanding our institutions of government as well as understanding of the citizenry and their competence. Delli Carpini and Keeter articulate the contribution of political knowledge to society:

A broadly and equitably informed citizenry assures that the public will is determined fairly and that government action is viewed as legitimate. If more knowledgeable citizens are better equipped to articulate their interests and better able to reward and punish political leaders for their actions, then when interests clash, less informed citizens are at a decided disadvantage. (1996: 219)

This quote illustrates the importance of an informed citizenry to a democracy, and while a politically knowledgeable citizenry is the ideal, many American citizens fall short of this ideal.

Political knowledge has been widely investigated by a significant number of scholars in political science (namely Luskin (1987); Lupia (1994a and 1994b) and Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993, 1996)). Political knowledge is a cornerstone of political behavior, and yet it remains an elusive concept with multiple measurements and nuances. There has been research on the psychological aspects of understanding our political world as a function of our beliefs, the long-term association, or the inability to comprehend information that is inconsistent with these

beliefs (Campbell et al 1960). Likewise, the literature has provided insight into political knowledge and attainment by citizens in terms of costs (Downs 1957). Political knowledge measures must include easily accessible factual information that citizens remember over the long term. However, it is also important to note that political knowledge does not exist in a vacuum and there are several contributing components to political knowledge – environment, time period, and socioeconomic factors, as emphasized in Luskin’s research (1987). He indicates that interest and intelligence (representing motivation and ability) affect the ability of citizens to understand and remember information that makes them more politically sophisticated (1987).

Previous studies of political knowledge find that Americans are familiar with party leaders but are less aware of other members of government (Almond and Verba 1989). If citizens are unfamiliar with government members making decisions it seems reasonable that they would be unfamiliar with the processes of circumventing these legislators. Almond and Verba’s findings show the importance of discussing political knowledge and participation in direct democracy because if voters are less aware of government leaders then there is a reciprocal effect on knowledge of lesser importance, such as ballot measures. This is consistent with the premise this work tests: that when people are generally unknowledgeable about their government and politics, there will be decreased citizen involvement in government – which is not always negative.<sup>14</sup>

The most commonly used and accepted measure of political knowledge is by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993, 1996). These scholars have created a five-point index that measures various components of American political knowledge. Delli Carpini and Keeter look at several

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<sup>14</sup> Certainly, there are countries that have high political knowledge and still have lower turnout (Switzerland). I do not presume that political knowledge is the only reason for decreased turnout; rather that it has a marginal impact and there are other factors contributing to low turnout. Likewise, there are countries that have very high turnout (Australia and Austria) that is a result of other factors not solely political knowledge. This study focuses on the impact of political knowledge on participation in direct democracy elections.

decades of public opinion research as well as a mail survey of American political scientists. The survey asked political scientists which topics/facts citizens should know. They find that citizens tend to know general ideas rather than specific facts about government. Through a vast study, Delli Carpini and Keeter evaluate different methodologies for creating measures of political knowledge (this includes item-total correlation, stepwise multiple regression, item difficulty, sample invariance, and item characteristic curve, among others). They develop a list of thirty-nine items, which were tested in the 1989 Survey of Political Knowledge. They develop this list for multiple reasons – to evaluate specific questions as well as different question formats and topics. The item analysis of the thirty-nine items indicates that a “short scale covering a modest range of topics can constitute a reliable measure of general political knowledge” (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996: 301).

The scale derived by Delli Carpini and Keeter of five questions explains over three-quarters of the variation in the original thirty-nine variable measure (1996). They test their measure in the 1990-91 NES pilot survey (which contained a large range of knowledge questions) and find that the five-question scale had a good correlation with other knowledge questions. They tested many questions to include in the index but found that these five questions (listed in Appendix B) provide the best measure of political knowledge in the United States (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). They find by using their five-point scale that political knowledge remains a stable public attribute. The Delli Carpini and Keeter measures are readily available and used in this study to measure political knowledge.

The study of political knowledge is not only investigated in the United States; rather there has been a comparative approach to the study as well. An Australian study uses a seven-point scale to determine political knowledge of Australian voters; their study indicates that political

knowledge increases positive views of the government but influences voting behavior (McAllister 1998). A problem with this study is that their political knowledge scale has not been as widely tested and investigated as the Delli Carpini and Keeter scale and participation has been significantly linked to political knowledge (Kimmo and Milner 2006; Dalton 2000; Johnson 1996; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Campbell et al 1960; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996); thus, these results are suspect. This demonstrates the importance of comparable measurement.

### *Why is Knowledge Important?*

Political knowledge and civic literacy (i.e., knowledge and the capacity of citizens to understand their government and its institutions) is a fundamental component of a democratic society (Milner 2002; Dalton 1988). Civic literacy allows the citizenry to participate more fully in their society not only because they are more knowledgeable, but also because literacy contributes to higher social capital (Milner 2002; Putnam 1995, 2000). Furthermore, civic literacy is an important development in any society. While post-industrial societies have trended towards less participation and knowledge (Putnam 2000), they are also experiencing increased use of direct democracy in governing. This is contradictory, that turnout is down and direct democracy use is up – scholars who have studied this issue indicate that this is a result of public dissatisfaction with the current system of representative democracy and citizens looking for unconventional forms of participation – shifting towards a more participatory government (Dalton, Burklin, and Drummond 2001). Nevertheless, with participatory government comes an expectation of knowledge – particularly in direct democracy.

In order to participate, voters must not only understand the electoral system, but they must understand the importance and contributions of direct democracy before they are willing to

participate (Dalton 1988). If people are unaware of issues and the actors involved, they are less likely to participate and utilize opportunities available to form public policy. Political knowledge is required to petition for ballot measures because it requires citizens to formulate questions and ideas; and sign and circulate petitions. Thus, because of the knowledge and participation that direct democracy requires, it provides an excellent area to investigate citizens' political knowledge and its impact on democracy. Further, the expectation of political knowledge is higher for these direct democracy elections because citizens are bypassing their elected representatives to make policy directly. Political knowledge is fundamental to this participation in direct democracy not only because of the turnout issue but also because of the consequences (policy change). Knowledge is a crucial component of elections, but citizens often cite not knowing election information (the election date, polling location, and who is running) as reasons for non-participation. Thus, direct democracy, which capitalizes on citizen knowledge and participation, paradoxically exacerbates these problems.

Another important component to look at in terms of political knowledge and participation in direct democracy is mobilization, as political knowledge increases mobilization (Junn 1991; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Milner 2002). This has been trumpeted as one of the positive attributes of direct democracy elections. As noted previously, there are benefits to participation in direct democracy, namely that direct democracy promotes civic engagement and mobilizes voters to participate in other elections on the ballot (Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003) and increases political knowledge (Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000; Smith 2002; Bowler and Donovan 2002; Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003; Smith and Tolbert 2004).

*Implications of Political Knowledge*

There are two important implications for political knowledge – first, it affects the salience of cues and second, it provides citizens with the ability to distinguish differences between electoral choices (Elkin and Soltan 1999; Andersen, Tilley and Heath 2005). Scholars discern that competence comes from political knowledge, vote consistency, and use of political heuristics (Kuklinski and Quirk 2001). Political heuristics are low on ballot propositions and often only exist in campaigns; therefore, to measure citizen understanding of their voting we must rely on political knowledge and vote consistency to indicate citizen competence on ballot propositions. On individual ballot measures, limited knowledge is predictable because of their low salience; voters who have more access to information are more likely to have higher levels of political knowledge, higher efficacy and larger participation (Kenski and Stroud 2006). The more knowledgeable people are about government the more they are going to participate and become more familiar with ballot measures. This will lead to more consistency between vote and policy preferences.

While there is substantial research that indicates that citizens are uninformed, Elkin and Soltan (1999) find that there is some evidence that citizens are more informed than expected. This indicates that different measures of knowledge can lead to different findings. In dealing with citizen knowledge, there are substantial concerns about the impact on votes in direct democracy elections. One important concern is that the public may not be informed enough to make appropriate decisions about these questions (Smith 2002). Nevertheless, in most democratic nations there is no literacy test required to participate in elections. This discussion about the impact of political knowledge on participation leads to another rich area of research, the ability of citizens to vote consistently with their policy preferences.

## **Voting Correctly**

Political knowledge is also discussed in terms of voter competence. Scholars have created measures of voter competence as having “valid information about political issues and processes, and the ability to use information in the analysis of issues and the devising of influence strategies” (Almond and Verba 1989: 57). The ability of citizens to combine policy preferences and votes is an essential component of direct democracy, as citizens vote on what policy preferences they want - being able to articulate their voting preference is crucial.

Lau and Redlawsk (1997) analyze vote choice under the condition of perfect information and find that citizens vote incorrectly 25 percent of the time in presidential elections between 1972 and 1988. They determine this “correctness” by looking at the values and beliefs of the voter compared to their candidate choices. By surveying data from 293 subjects, they measure citizen attitudes, preferences, and knowledge. They then measure for whom the subjects voted in the primary election of 1994. Based on the information the subjects provided, Lau and Redlawsk were able to determine who voted “correctly”. They determine that if there are fewer candidates in the race, it is easier for voters to make correct decisions (1997).

Is this true in direct democracy? The potential link between pre-existing political knowledge and participation in direct democracy has been significantly under-researched. This is an important gap in the literature; direct democracy, in particular, is predicated on the idea that citizens are knowledgeable enough on issues to make reasoned choices or malleable enough to respond to populist appeals despite issue complexity. Levels of political knowledge on the part of citizens provide insights into the democratic process of direct democracy. What are the democratic implications if policy preferences do not match ballot measure votes on a consistent basis? Bowler and Donovan (1998) found that citizens vote their preferences and are not

‘fooled’ at the ballot box. Bowler and Donovan use survey data to determine what cues are used to make competent choices on ballot propositions. They look for the influences of heuristics and cognition on different aspects of ballot choices. They expect and find that voters respond to ballot propositions in the same way that they do candidate elections, finding shortcuts to make decisions even when voters were still undecided prior to the election. From this research, they ascertain that the public is competent and can use information to vote on ballot measures. However, this study does not look at the implications of the language used in ballot questions and how this contributes to confusion among voters, thus, it is not just general heuristics that are important but concrete political knowledge in the formulation of ballot proposition votes.

Scholars have focused on the development of votes in direct referenda and initiatives (Bowler and Donovan 1994, 1998; Nicholson 2003, 2005). This is a crucial component to the “democratic-ness” of direct democracy and leads to the development of this research. If voters are uninformed, does this affect their vote choice? Bowler and Donovan (1998) find that despite limited information, citizens are making “thoughtful responses” to referenda questions, even using limited cues (Lupia 1994). Despite the belief that citizens are ignorant, they do have some knowledge about government and are able to make reasonable (“correct”) decisions about complex questions. This demonstrates that knowledge does influence participation, even minimally. The impact of prior political knowledge requires more exploration to determine if a variation in situation (ex. readability or content) affects the consistency of participation. As a society, we expect that the use of more direct influence on public policy develops out of some underlying preferences among political decisions.

Lupia investigates consistent voting further in two studies that involve voting in direct democracy elections. First, through survey analysis, Lupia (1994a) finds that uninformed



citizens when exposed to widely available information will use shortcuts to make decisions on complex ballot propositions. Further, using an experimental design, Lupia (1994b) investigates the differences in information on direct democracy voting. He finds that voters with incomplete information vote the same way as voters with complete information, indicating that some knowledge provides cues to vote as they would with complete information. However, when voters are badly informed (or the ballot is too complex) they are not able to vote for their preferred outcomes in direct democracy elections.

Lupia defines voter competence as being able to determine which of the binary options given in a direct democracy election is the best alternative (2001). Lupia argues that if citizens can make a choice on these ballot questions, consistent with their preferences when they have perfect information, then that choice is perfectly valid (2001). Lupia goes as far as to argue that voters in direct democracy elections are far more competent than commonly perceived.

However, there still remains debate about citizen competence in regards to voting on ballot propositions because there are obstacles (such as ballot language that can misconstrue the meaning of ballot questions) and these obstacles affect those who have less perfect information more than those who are better informed. This results in two effects on voters: first, there will be a decrease in efficacy because citizens do not understand what they are voting on; and second, there will be a decrease in participation because of a lack of comprehension. This is consistent with the voting literature and demonstrates that decreased efficacy and lack of understanding lead to decreased participation (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Miller and Shanks 1996; Putnam 2000, 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

Why does this study expect political knowledge to influence participation in and use of direct democracy? Scholars have discussed political knowledge and the citizenry for decades.

The tension between the expectations placed on citizens' competence and the reality of today's society leads to further discussion and research on direct democracy. While we expect that citizens are knowledgeable to make other electoral decisions, there are heuristics like incumbency, name recognition, and party identification (Campbell et al 1960; Cover 1977; Cover and Mayhew 1977; Cox and Morgenstern 1993) in traditional elections to activate knowledge, but these are absent, or limited (Lupia 1994), in direct democracy elections. Direct democracy requires citizen involvement and attention to news coverage and campaign material in order to make electoral decisions.

Direct democracy is becoming a significant force in shaping policy in many states – ranging in issues from taxes to term limits, and from land use to civil liberties. This analysis looks at whether there is variation in the usage of measures of direct democracy depending on the amount of political knowledge on the part of citizens. The main question this research will answer, providing a contribution to the literature, is: what impact does political knowledge have on participation in, and petitioning for, direct democracy measures?

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research investigates the impact of political knowledge on participation in direct democracy. A critical evaluation of the literature shows that there has been little research in this area and this study will build upon the issues raised in the literature and move the discussion forward demonstrating the influence of political knowledge on direct democracy campaigns, language, and participation. What has been researched with regard to the relationship of direct democracy and political knowledge has mainly been researched in one direction – the role of direct democracy in increasing citizens' political knowledge and sophistication (Mendelsohn and

Cutler 2000; Smith 2002; Bowler and Donovan 2002; Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003; Smith and Tolbert 2004). However, there is significant research on both the impact of direct democracy on society and its impact on other electoral races. In particular, there is an outgrowth of literature capitalizing on the impact of direct democracy on political knowledge in the immediate environment (Smith 2002; Smith and Tolbert 2004; Smith and Tolbert 2007). There is also significant literature on what contributes to citizens' votes on direct democracy measures (Kimball and Kropf 2006; Branton 2003; Lupia 1994a and 1994b; Vanderleeuw and Engstrom 1987). Something that remains unknown is how pre-existing levels of political knowledge affect participation in direct democracy elections. This is unknown in terms of overarching participation in the initiative process, electoral participation, and language complexity, what contributes to complexity, and finally, the impact of complexity on vote choice. It is important to investigate this new area and to build a theory to explain the connection of these factors to provide a clearer picture of the electoral behavior and the participation of citizens in direct democracy elections.

The next chapter builds on previous research to connect these interrelated issues and to develop a more overarching theory about how political knowledge impacts participation in direct democracy elections. This theory will look at the role political knowledge (or perception thereof) plays for petitioner activities, and the role of political knowledge on participation and vote choice.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF A THEORY OF POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE IN DIRECT DEMOCRACY ELECTIONS**

Voting in direct democracy elections is a vast area for further research. The growth in available data and the increased use of ballot measures provides an excellent background for this study, and future research. This study addresses several important issues related to how citizens participate when choosing policy, as opposed to selecting candidates. In this chapter, I establish the theoretical framework for explaining the relationship between political knowledge and direct democracy. This chapter proceeds as follows: first, I present a comprehensive model of the influence of political knowledge on different stages of the direct democracy process. The second section explains the motivation and activities of petitioners by examining what happens prior to the ballot box in the direct democracy process. The third section explains citizen participation in direct democracy measures and its connection to political knowledge and ballot language. Finally, the fourth section explains the importance of how political knowledge for voters to ensure that they are voting consistently with their policy preferences. Following the overall depiction of the process, hypotheses are derived by analyzing the process and the research in the previous chapter, while demonstrating the importance of these hypotheses to expand our understanding of direct democracy and citizen cognition.

#### **Overarching Model**

The direct democracy process is a complex process and has multiple steps. Political knowledge is required to know how to petition for direct democracy, and if it is even possible to change policy through placing a measure on the ballot. Unless an individual or a group is

knowledgeable and aware of the procedures available to them, and the associated rules and regulations, they will not be able to place measures on the ballot. This pre-existing knowledge is required to implement direct democracy ballot initiatives. However, petitioners also have expectations about citizen knowledge that influence their activities. Petitioners have responsibility when it comes to direct democracy – not only through petitioning, but also as part of the campaign process. Petitioners both propose and campaign for propositions. This process requires them to assess and acknowledge citizen knowledge levels, and either work to increase them or capitalize on their ignorance. How petitioners acknowledge citizen sophistication affects their activities. Petitioners, who believe citizens are sophisticated enough to make policy, will make the effort to inform voters about their issues on election day. However, if petitioners were trying to take advantage of voters' ignorance, or were trying to send signals to the legislature rather than win a majority of citizens' votes, they would not make an effort to educate voters. These activities of petitioners guide voters when they get to the ballot box.

Once at the ballot box, voters face two choices: first, whether to vote in ballot races; and second, how to vote in each race. In the first step, voters have to decide whether they vote on each ballot race – this includes candidate races and ballot propositions. Voters with high levels of political knowledge are more aware of electoral races, and vote further down the ballot (and on more races) because of their awareness of the consequences that elections entail. Those with higher levels of political knowledge are also able to struggle through more complex worded ballot propositions because of their familiarity with the issues in the community. This knowledge and familiarity cause them to vote on more ballot propositions.

When voting, citizens are confronted with different situations. In candidate elections of higher salience, there are more cues. Those voters with higher political knowledge are more

familiar with the vote choices, and are more susceptible to voting cues. As voters move down the ballot to the ballot propositions, there are few cues and thus, voters are required to rely on previous knowledge and/or the information on the ballot. When the ballot language is complex, there is going to be a stronger reliance on political knowledge and previous campaign information. Those with higher levels of political knowledge are able to struggle through the question, and rely on previous knowledge in conjunction with reading the ballot language. Further, voters experience a higher congruence between their vote choices and policy preferences. This means that those with more political knowledge exhibit votes that are “correct” or consistent with their policy choices than those with lower levels of political knowledge. This relationship between political knowledge and direct democracy is graphically depicted in Figures 3.1 and 3.2.

### **Petitioners and the Direct Democracy Process**

The role of the petitioner is important in the direct democracy process, as they are the driving force and the foundation of the process. While there is little research directly involving petitioners, there remains much discussion in the literature about the motivations of petitioners in this process – be it as self-interested parties, pawns of interest groups or legislators themselves (Matsusaka 2004; Gerber 1999; Schmidt 1989; Schattsneider 1960). This research stimulates this discussion by delving into the motives of petitioners, proposing reasons for their actions, and developing a causal linkage between ballot petitioning, campaigns, and participation.

Petitioners for direct democracy spend the time and effort to propose different measures for the public to vote on. They have to place a high importance on this process and citizen participation. In order to expend the time and effort that this process requires, petitioners must

value the input of the citizen in policymaking processes. Petitioners who endeavor to create these propositions spend the time to petition for initiatives and want to continue to open the process up to make sure that there is continued citizen involvement in government. Moreover, they must believe that these propositions are effective in changing policy in order to pursue this line of action. This leads to the first hypothesis about citizen participation in government.

**Hypothesis 1:** If petitioners believe direct democracy is effective in changing policy, they will want more opportunities to vote in elections.

Those petitioners who strive to change policy through direct democracy believe that there should be more citizen involvement in government. This activity contributes to the desire for more elections as direct democracy provides more opportunities for the citizen to participate. Frequently, these petitioners are also those who participate in every election. It would seem that these petitioners are the most active members of the community, since not only do they vote but also they are willing to work on measures outside of the government to change policy. Petitioners, regardless of their motives work to change policy – this is not a simple process. As outlined in the introduction, it is a process that requires several steps, it is also a time consuming and lengthy process. Therefore, the dedication to the process indicates petitioners' belief that their propositions must be effective in changing policy – otherwise, why would they be as active in the process? The more petitioners strive to increase the role of the citizen to participate in policymaking – through direct democracy – the more elections they want. This is mainly due to their desire to have more opportunities to influence government through direct democracy or candidate races. Where these petitioners diverge is in their opinions over citizen knowledge and the role of campaigns. This is addressed in the next two hypotheses.

There is an expectation that petitioners have different motives when they petition for measures, be they self interested in their propositions or if they are trying to make a more

altruistic policy change. One can assume that most petitioners have a stake in their petition; otherwise, they would be unmotivated to change policy. However, the difference in motives can also affect strategies, and activities of petitioners during the campaign. This is explored in the second hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2:** If petitioners think citizens are unqualified to make policy, they are less likely to educate.

Petitioners have two divergence beliefs over the qualification of citizens and this is initially puzzling; however, if petitioners believe citizens are qualified to make policy, they will provide them with the information and tools to do so. If petitioners do not believe that voters are qualified to make policy, the petitioner must have ulterior motives to petitioning for initiatives – are they trying to trick the public and capitalize on their ignorance? Or, are they trying to get the attention of the legislature and have no desire to engage the public. This divergence influences the way that ballot questions are presented, advertised, and campaigned. There have been significant civic education campaigns both in the United States and abroad, however, petitioners have different expectations and goals than the government or educators in this area. Petitioners are seeking to achieve an agenda, and their activities are informed by this agenda.

The divergence of petitioner activities can be narrowed down to the role of petitioners in how they approach the public. There is an expectation that there is some deceit or malfeasance on behalf of petitioners because of the controversy about the motives of petitioners to trick citizens or foster their own agendas. On the one hand, if petitioners believe that voters are unsophisticated, they may attempt to use this ignorance or unsophistication to manipulate the public and achieve their agenda – be it attention to an issue or passage of legislation. Those who have low expectations for citizen knowledge and qualification on policymaking are less likely to put forward the effort to educate because they do not believe that citizens can be qualified to



make policy. Petitioners take advantage of the citizenry or use the measure to gain attention to the issue. That is not to say that this education is neutral. Rather it could possibly be a method of hoodwinking the public but the petitioner's acknowledgement of some sort of information distribution during the campaign.

On the other hand, there are petitioners who believe in the positive aspects of direct democracy, and believe that citizens are qualified as they continue to opt for more opportunities for direct democracy. The divergence in attitudes leads to differences in how petitioners approach the public when campaigning for propositions. Those petitioners who have high expectations about citizen knowledge and capabilities are more likely to work with citizens, educate, and inform the public about their propositions. This contributes to a larger discussion about the point of campaigns. This argument about citizen qualifications and educative activities does seem counterintuitive to the objectives and motivations of direct democracy. Yet, it contributes to the larger argument that some petitioners have ulterior motives to their proposed measures.

In order to establish the role of petitioners, it is important to discuss how petitioners acknowledge citizen knowledge during initiative campaigns. If petitioners do not feel the citizenry is sophisticated they are not going to spend time on educating the public because they are trying to capitalize on their ignorance. Political knowledge is an attribute that is exacerbated during the direct legislation process, especially in the initiative process. There is an expectation that citizens are knowledgeable if they are circumventing the status quo of representative government through direct legislation. Why do we expect that petitioners consider (and perhaps exploit) citizen knowledge on initiative campaigns? There are two separate potential explanations for this expectation: first, to achieve appropriate policy consistent with the wants of

the citizenry; and second, to manipulate the population into supporting the agenda of a few. Those who believe there is an educational purpose to direct democracy campaigns put forward this effort. This builds on the first hypothesis that discusses divergent attitudes, if there are divergent attitudes that contribute to why petitioners petition and their activities. Petitioners who do not believe in educating the public may still run a campaign, this looks at the purpose of campaigns from the petitioners' perspective.

**Hypothesis 3:** If petitioners believe that campaigns are educational, then they spend more time on educating the public.

Hypothesis 3 continues with the educational effects of the campaign. Petitioners who acknowledge the educational effects of campaigns are more likely to spend time educating the citizens. This means that petitioners spend more time and value educating voters about what is in their ballot measure, and what it means for them. Unlike the previous discussion of political knowledge and educating efforts, this hypothesis looks at how petitioners are likely to educate the voters through the campaign and its effectiveness. Obviously, the value of a campaign is to bring attention to the issues of elections and the meaning of individual votes. Moreover, while this analysis does not propose to suggest that these are unbiased forms of educating the public, it suggests that campaigns are educational tools in an election, especially when looking at direct democracy measures. This contributes to the larger argument of political knowledge and petitioners because the petitioners who believe citizens are sophisticated in terms of policy are more likely to educate (as discussed in Hypothesis 2), and those petitioners who believe campaigns educate are far more likely to educate as a component of developing citizens and political knowledge.

It is not difficult to imagine a citizen hoping to enact particular policy outcome deciding to deceive the public through their writing and petitioning for different ballot propositions. While

citizens gain power from direct democracy, this power is increased when they are petitioning for questions in which the average citizen does not participate. The citizens who are knowledgeable and are able to (and want to) petition for initiatives or argue (for or against) referendums are responsible for ensuring that citizens clearly understand the components of the initiative – through campaigning.

### **Citizen Participation**

Within the discussion of elections and participation, it is important to establish what role knowledge has in a democracy before applying this to specific types of elections. Citizen involvement in elections affects the outcome of the elections and the resulting democratic representation. Citizen participation is the crux of democracy. However, participation is of utmost concern in direct democracy because of the function of these elections. Direct democracy is an attempt to make citizens part of the policymaking process, and give them a more direct voice in government. This voice is exercised through participation in these elections. Yet, as demonstrated previously, direct democracy has significantly lower participation rates than other elections. If only a small group of citizens are participating in elections, and even fewer are participating in direct democracy propositions this leads to concerns about whose voice is heard. If there is a distinct bias in the direct democracy process, this bleeds over into the importance and actions of direct democracy.

Participation in American elections is low, ranging on average in national elections from 35-50 percent. This low participation is a concern because it shows that a few American citizens are participating in these elections to select representatives to govern. We know from electoral research that the lower numbers of participants in the election are not representative of the

public. These are typical of voters - older, wealthier, and more educated than average citizens (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Yet, there is a substantial roll-off even from these small numbers for direct democracy propositions. Ballot propositions experience on average a ten percent roll-off<sup>15</sup> indicating that even fewer citizens are represented in these lower salience elections.

Once citizens get to the polls and to these lower level elections, there are fewer cues to direct their vote. According to the research of this analysis, ballot questions on average are the twelfth election on the ballot.<sup>16</sup> There are more salient elections than direct democracy ballots that have more cues (ex. incumbency, party identification, et cetera) as well as more media coverage. Citizens are less prepared and less knowledgeable about these ballot propositions, which limit participation as citizens are more likely to roll-off. Even if citizens do want to participate in these propositions, there are factors that contribute to how citizens vote on these propositions: the number of races on the ballot, the readability of the proposition, and the topic of the ballot proposition. These factors combine to make it difficult for citizens to vote on ballot propositions, and make it difficult for them to vote consistently with their policy preferences.

Citizen knowledge-levels have important implications for all elections. An expectation of direct democracy elections is that when directly influencing policy and circumventing popularly elected representatives, citizens who are participating understand the stakes of the election and what they are voting on. Understanding elections can only contribute to participation and enhance the quality of democracy (Morlino 2004; Collier and Levitsky 1997; Schmitter and Karl 1991; Dahl 1971). The importance of political knowledge is enhanced by important influences on participation in direct democracy elections such as the wording of these

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<sup>15</sup> This is the findings of my research in Chapter 5 and is the average for all available propositions from 1997-2007.

<sup>16</sup> This analysis includes data from 1997-2007, collected from Secretaries of States websites and publications.

propositions and the location of these measures on the ballot. The next two hypotheses deal with these issues.

**Hypothesis 4:** If ballot propositions are complexly worded, they will lead to higher ballot roll-off.

Hypothesis 4 looks at the wording of different ballot propositions and the wording's impact on citizen participation. This is an important area of research because it looks at the impact of the electoral mechanism on participation. Direct legislation propositions are often difficult to read. This wording is often written in terms of double negatives, legislative, and technical language that can affect participation. These propositions can also be quite lengthy. Below are three examples of ballot propositions that appeared on the ballot in different states in 2006.

Shall there be an amendment to the Colorado constitution concerning standards of conduct by persons who are professionally involved with governmental activities, and, in connection therewith, prohibiting a public officer, member of the general assembly, local government official, or government employee from soliciting or accepting certain monetary or in-kind gifts; prohibiting a professional lobbyist from giving anything of value to a public officer, member of the general assembly, local government official, government employee, or such person's immediate family member; prohibiting a statewide elected officeholder or member of the general assembly from personally representing another person or entity for compensation before any other such officeholder or member for a period of two years following departure from office; establishing penalties for a breach of public trust or inducement of such a breach; creating a five-member independent ethics commission to hear ethics complaints, to assess penalties, and to issue advisory opinions on ethics issues; and specifying that the measure shall not apply to home rule jurisdictions that have adopted laws concerning matters covered by the measure?

#### **Amendment 41 Colorado 2006**

**Ballot Title:** State Planning and Budget Process

**Ballot Summary:**

Proposing amendments to the State Constitution to limit the amount of nonrecurring general revenue which may be appropriated for recurring purposes in any fiscal year to 3 percent of the total general revenue funds

estimated to be available, unless otherwise approved by a threefifths vote of the Legislature; to establish a Joint Legislative Budget Commission, which shall issue long-range financial outlooks; to provide for limited adjustments in the state budget without the concurrence of the full Legislature, as provided by general law; to reduce the number of times trust funds are automatically terminated; to require the preparation and biennial revision of a long-range state planning document; and to establish a Government Efficiency Task Force and specify its duties.

### **Constitutional Amendment 1 Florida 2006**

Do you approve of a law summarized below, *on which no vote was taken by the Senate or House of Representatives before May 3, 2006?*

#### **Summary**

This proposed law would allow candidates for public office to be nominated by more than one political party or political designation, to have their names appear on the ballot once for each nomination, and to have their votes counted separately for each nomination but then added together to determine the winner of the election. The proposed law would repeal an existing requirement that in order to appear on the state primary ballot as a candidate for a political party's nomination for certain offices, a person cannot have been enrolled in any other party during the preceding year. The requirement applies to candidates for nomination for statewide office, representative in Congress, governor's councillor, member of the state Legislature, district attorney, clerk of court, register of probate, register of deeds, county commissioner, sheriff, and county treasurer. The proposed law would also allow any person to appear on the primary ballot as a candidate for a party's nomination for those offices if the party's state committee gave its written consent. The proposed law would also repeal the existing requirement that in order to be nominated to appear as an unenrolled candidate on the state election ballot, or on any city or town ballot following a primary, a person cannot have been enrolled in any political party during the 90 days before the deadline for filing nomination papers. The proposed law would provide that if a candidate were nominated by more than one party or political designation, instead of the candidate's name being printed on the ballot once, with the candidate allowed to choose the order in which the party or political designation names appear after the candidate's name, the candidate's name would appear multiple times, once for each nomination received. The candidate would decide the order in which the party or political designation nominations would appear, except that all parties would be listed before all political designations. The ballot would allow voters who vote for a candidate nominated by multiple parties or political designations to vote for that candidate under the party or political designation line of their choice. If a voter voted for the same candidate for the same office on multiple party or political designation lines, the ballot would remain valid but would be counted as a single vote for the candidate on a line without a party or political designation. If voting technology allowed, voting machines would be required to prevent a voter from voting more than the number of times permitted for any one

office. The proposed law would provide that if a candidate received votes under more than one party or political designation, the votes would be combined for purposes of determining whether the candidate had won the election. The total number of votes each candidate received under each party or political designation would be recorded. Election officials would announce and record both the aggregate totals and the total by party or political designation. The proposed law would allow a political party to obtain official recognition if its candidate had obtained at least 3% of the vote for any statewide office at either of the two most recent state elections, instead of at only the most recent state election as 56 under current law. The proposed law would allow a person nominated as a candidate for any state, city or town office to withdraw his name from nomination within six days after any party's primary election for that office, whether or not the person sought nomination or was nominated in that primary. Any candidate who withdrew from an election could not be listed on the ballot for that election, regardless of whether the candidate received multiple nominations. The proposed law states that if any of its parts were declared invalid, the other parts would stay in effect.

### **Question 2 Massachusetts 2006**

From these three examples, there is ample evidence of the problems and variation in direct democracy measures on the ballot. These examples are an indicator that shows how difficult it is for voters to read, understand, and vote on these propositions. The language of these ballot propositions makes participation more complicated for voters and requires a particular level of political knowledge to understand these propositions.

This language deters voters because they are not able to comprehend the question on which citizens are asked to vote. As part of this complex language, readability (grade level) is also an obstacle to voting. According to this research, direct legislation has on average a reading level of grade 17. This is higher than high school and a bachelor's degree, and double the average American reading level of 8<sup>th</sup> grade. We know from research on public opinion surveys that the readability of questions leads to different responses (Mondak 1994; Rasinski 1989; Kalton, Collins and Brook 1978; Bishop, Tuchfarber and Oldendick 1978; Gallup 1941). It is appropriate to suggest that if question-wording affects responses to public opinion surveys, then the readability of ballot propositions can influence participation as well as the vote outcome.

This does not imply that all the responsibility is on the part of the state to make sure that citizens can read the ballot proposition. Rather, it requires the citizen to actively engage and educate themselves on the issues in order to participate.

For citizens to make voting decisions consistent with their political attitudes, the question is expected to be in a clear and readable format. If ballot readability contributes to roll-off, then there is a significant problem not only with the way that direct democracy is presented but also what this means to the American public.

Citizen understandings of elections are paramount to participation in direct democracy. In fact, it is a significant component of why direct democracy elections are available – for the public to assert their policy desires. If citizens are unwilling or unable to understand the question, this can only lead to a more pronounced effect of this response bias and roll-off because citizens get discouraged and feel that they do not know the basis on what they are voting.

The language on individual questions can be an important feature in determining participation. However, the position of the proposition on the ballot may also contribute to the level of participation. The lower the measure is down the ballot, the more races the voter has to participate in, contributing to voter fatigue. Voter fatigue is the term used to describe what happens when voters get discouraged or tired of participating and cease to participate. Ballot propositions are often at the bottom of the ballot, below more salient elections, and are subjected to higher levels of voter fatigue. Ballots with more races on the ballot require more effort on behalf of the citizens. Moreover, when there are complex questions at the end of a lengthy ballot, it is likely and understandable that citizens do not complete the ballot. Therefore,



participation in direct democracy can be limited because of the length of the ballots and voter fatigue. This is addressed in Hypothesis 5.

**Hypothesis 5:** The lower the position of the ballot proposition on the ballot the lower the participation.

One could expect that a citizen who holds an array of opinions on political issues, and who knows the role his or her vote plays in deciding a policy outcome would fight through a potentially long ballot, and cast votes on issues ranging from immigration to environmental policy to the rules surrounding marriage. A citizen who rarely forms such opinions, and who is not aware of what a vote in a direct democracy election means, might well be expected to simply stop voting rather than express vaguely held opinions on questions that are of little concern to him or her. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, as uninformed voters are not casting ballots on questions on which they have no opinion or know nothing about. Imagine being a citizen in Florida, where 87.6 percent of residents have a high school diploma and 25.3 percent have a post-secondary degree. Yet, the findings of this research demonstrates that the average grade level for ballot questions in Florida is 16.8, meaning that citizens need almost 17 years of education in order to understand the average ballot question. This means that the majority of citizens cannot comprehend the ballot proposition, and it is reasonable to expect that participation under these conditions decreases.

Like the previous two propositions, participation is affected by the level of political knowledge that citizens possess. Hypothesis 6 deals with how levels of political knowledge influence participation in direct democracy elections. I posit that citizens with higher levels of political knowledge will battle through the ballot and participate in more elections.

**Hypothesis 6:** If voters have higher levels of political knowledge, they are more likely to participate.

Political knowledge is a foundational component of voting in general elections, and we can predict that this is even more necessary in a direct democracy election. First, the salience of these elections is lower. Therefore, political knowledge is important because not only do voters rely on it to participate in these elections but also because they need to know some prior information about these or at least be familiar with the issue to know their position, and cast their vote. The aforementioned hypotheses dealt with the ballot language effect and how that contributes to voting. However, the lack of prior information about the issues in the election means voters may not struggle through the ballot to vote on different ballot propositions, let alone the office races.

I posit that participation in elections, specifically direct democracy elections hinges on an important factor and that is political knowledge. This has already been proven in other elections (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), and I expect to find the same relationship, if not stronger for direct democracy elections. Democratic theory assumes that citizens are knowledgeable and capable of making choices, whether those decisions are through direct democracy or representative government. Knowledge is an essential component of citizenship as it is “a cause and an effect of political interest and participation” (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996: 220). Knowledge is a fundamental factor of being a democratic citizen because it allows citizens to make decisions that they understand, and which are consistent with their policy preferences. Many citizens fall short of the democratic ideal. In fact, many citizens are not engaged in their immediate social world, let alone prepared to invest time and energy into becoming knowledgeable about their government (Putnam 1995, 2000).

Like readability, other factors contribute to the participation on ballot initiatives. The topic of ballot propositions can affect participation for three reasons. First, topics can make ballot

propositions more of a gut response rather than a complex thought out process, (for example, the issue of abortion – people generally have set opinions on the issue). This gut response provides assistance in the participating in these measures – the voters are so clear in their response to the issue that they find it easy to participate. Second, familiarity with a topic can facilitate participation, for example, the gay marriage propositions which were salient in the 2004 elections. Third, different topics engage the public differently because of voters' interest (bond issues vs. environmental protections). These three attributes contribute to the reasons why ballot topic can be a factor to participation in direct democracy elections. This is tested in the experiment – using responses on direct democracy measures of a variety of topics, and how the topic can contribute to easier comprehension even under more complex readability. This is addressed in Hypothesis 8.

### **Voting Correctly**

Political knowledge is a valuable component of the citizenry, but often knowledge is limited to the situation. While prevention of voting because of a lack of knowledge is never justified, and literacy tests are outlawed in the United States for decades, ballot propositions at difficult reading levels contribute to not only a decreased participation, but also lack of clear vote selections. Ballot questions of different readability provide evidence that there are questions that are more difficult to participate in than other elections. Those voters that do struggle through the ballot, and get to these measures, and vote consistently with their policy preferences exhibit higher levels of political knowledge. Voters may not fully understand the consequences of their vote on these propositions. While one could argue that there is no evidence that people fully understand the consequences of voting for any electoral office (Lupia 2001; Lau and Redlawsk

1997), direct democracy elections, as previously discussed, are unique elections. These elections require that citizens comprehend their actions, and are able to discern not only what they are voting on but the meaning of the vote as well. These issues are addressed in the next three hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 7:** If there is a ballot language effect, it will be larger for individuals with lower levels of knowledge.

Ballot language is an important component of ballot participation; however, levels of political knowledge can counteract the effects of question wording or contribute to the effect of ballot language. The more knowledgeable voters are, the more competent they are with ballot proposition regardless of ballot language. Alternatively, those who are less informed or knowledgeable struggle with ballot language and are more affected by the difficult ballot language. Higher levels of political knowledge lead to higher competence in the voting booth, which allows voters to counteract the effects of question wording. This competence leads to different effects in how voters participate in ballot propositions, as stated in the next two hypotheses about congruence with policy preferences.

**Hypothesis 8:** If voters have a gut response to some issues, this will enable them to overcome the ballot language barrier.

Ease of issue is an important concept for ballot propositions. If there are topics that are too intricate or not easy to understand, citizens pay less attention to these ballots. There are some topics that may be difficult or provide fewer cues to the public when citizens are voting, such as bond issues (Carmines and Stimson 1980; Alvarez and Brehm 2002). There are several issues where citizens have a pre-formed view, which facilitates their participation on these issues. For instance, some people have very distinct views on abortion or border control, which are likely to be easily translated into votes. Thus, the ease of an issue could facilitate higher participation.

Familiarity with the issue can provide a cue for participation in direct democracy elections. There are specific topics that contribute to greater participation. Ballot propositions, which deal with issues that concern morality, civil liberties and civil rights, contribute to ballot proposition awareness (Nicholson 2003, 2005) and thus, participation. In 2004, one of the prevalent themes in national politics was gay marriage, propositions on this topic appeared on state ballots across the nation, and while the motivations are arguable, this provided familiarity of the public with this issue (Jackman 2004; Lewis 2005; Donovan et al 2005; Smith, DeSantis and Kassel 2006; Taylor 2009). Furthermore, when gay marriage propositions appeared on 11 different states ballots in 2004, many citizens already knew their positions on the proposition, regardless of any other contributing factors, and were willing to struggle down the ballot to vote on these issues. Voters who are unfamiliar with the issue on the ballot need to spend longer figuring out the topic and deciding on their vote. This can lead to voter fatigue and roll-off. Interest in the topic can initiate greater participation. This means that topics involving a local issue benefiting from more media coverage (Nicholson 2003, 2005) can capture the attention of the public. Whereas, topics where the public is not interested, such as miniscule wording or technical changes, would receive less participation.

It is not difficult to envision a citizen who is less informed having to vote on questions dealing with complex issues to stop participating in the elections after having voted for their elected representatives who are expected to deal with these complex issues. Issues can be a cue, but they can also be a barrier to participation. If the topic is familiar or evokes a gut response citizens have an easier time participating – as demonstrated in the high participation in gay marriage propositions in 2004. One could imagine that citizens unfamiliar with the topic or viewing the question as difficult and multifaceted, would rather halt their participation than

express vaguely held opinions on questions that are of little concern to him or her. Frequently, in the United States direct democracy elections are combined with other races on the same ballot. Occasionally, there are ballot proposition elections that contain only measures not other races. Even on these ballot proposition elections, there is still ballot roll-off as voters do not vote on every measure; rather voters select some of these propositions to participate on and others to not participate. See Table 1.1 for more details. This may have a positive impact on the electoral outcomes, if voters are unfamiliar with the issues many have argued that they should not be voting on ballot propositions. This un-sophistication means that voters who choose not to educate themselves do not participate in elections – this proffers questions about the point of direct democracy.

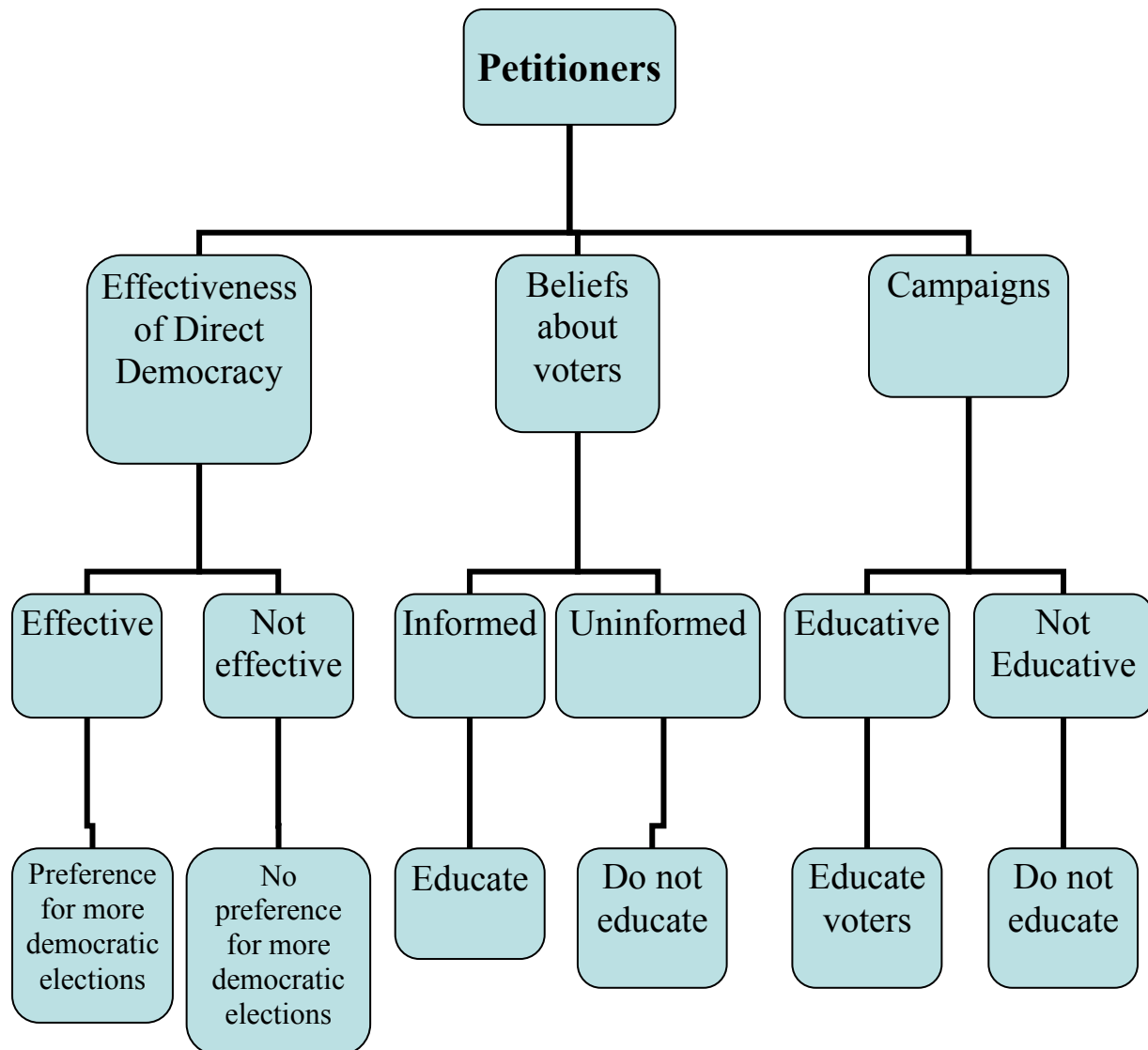
**Hypothesis 9:** If ballot propositions are complexly worded, votes on these propositions have lower congruence with the voter's policy preferences.

One component that comes up when discussing participation and direct democracy is the ability of citizens to vote their policy preferences in these elections. It is important to address the ability of citizens to vote consistent with their policy preferences. Research has demonstrated the difficulties that citizens face during elections, yet they find that most do vote consistent with their policy preferences (Lau and Redlawsk 1997; Lodge, McGraw and Stroh 1989; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991) even in direct democracy (Bowler and Donovan 1998). However, as earlier demonstrated in the literature review consistent voting in direct democracy needs to be further developed, using experimental design and analyzing ballot propositions from across the United States. This is important and something that continues to plague the process of direct democracy, especially when looking at the complexity and technicality of the ballot language.

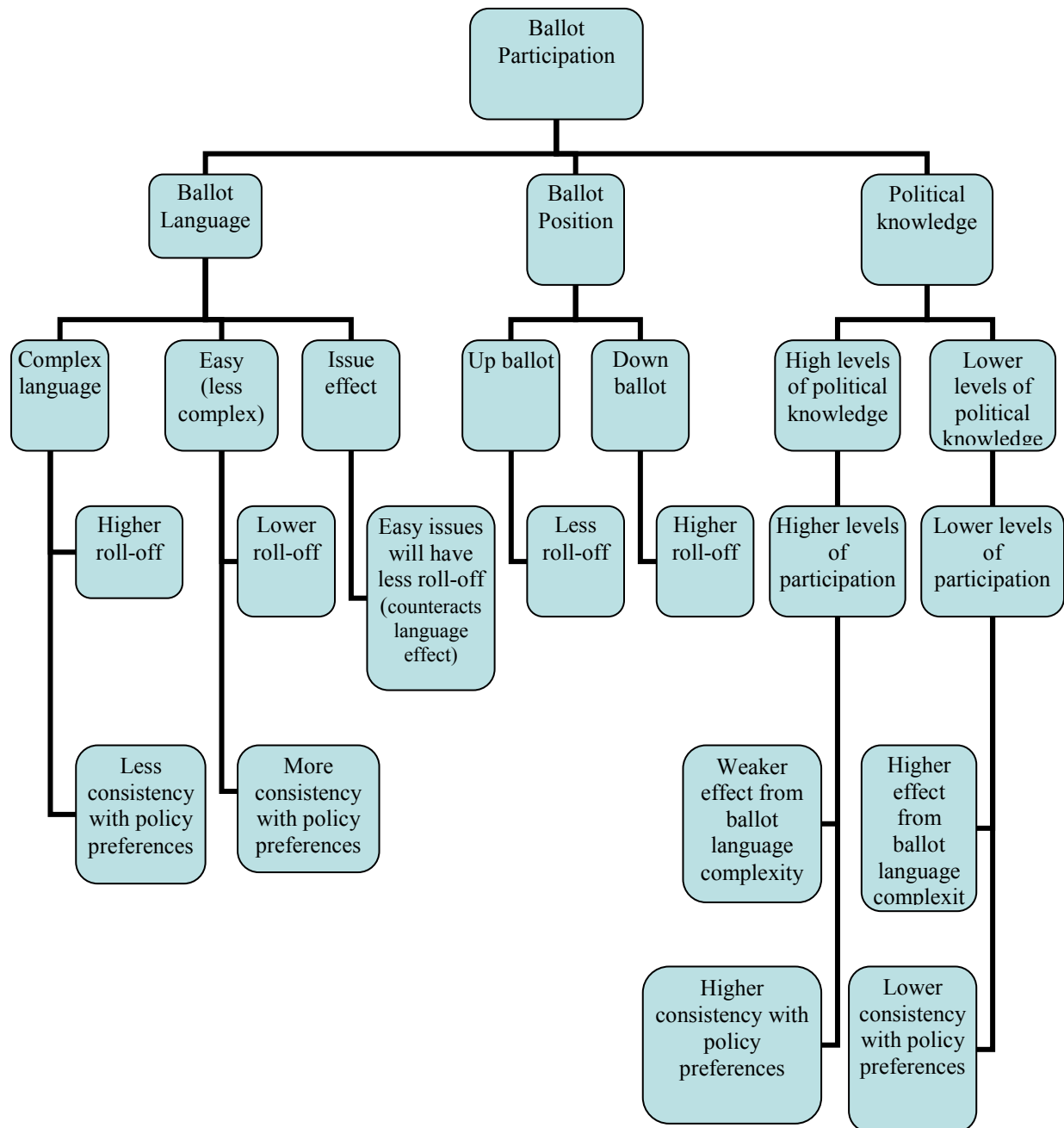
The optimistic view of direct democracy is supported by decades of research about why we want to put more policy decisions in the hands of the public, as noted in the previous chapter. Petitioners believe that if an informed citizenry participates in a policy election, then the right outcome is achieved. This view enables us to believe that policy decisions made at the ballot box are achieved by a more informed or more easily molded public than by politicians (with suspect motives). This is a positive component of direct legislation as it provides another check and balance to the democratic system. Some of the responsibility for informing the public falls to the petitioners. These petitioners (both citizen and state government driven) are responsible for ensuring there is adequate knowledge by the public to participate in these questions – from question wording to content to vote selection. Conversely, if citizens are not voting their policy preferences, or are not able to recognize policy options consistent with their views, then petitioners are capitalizing on an uninformed public. If petitioners are strategic and the more gullible citizenry participates, this changes the value of direct democracy as a tool of the people to become a feature of the few who manipulate the public to support their agenda rather than voting to increase citizen involvement in policymaking where the legislature fails to act. This pessimistic view means that petitioners are targeting uninformed populations in order to enact policy changes that would not be passed when sophisticated representatives are involved. I posit that if the lack of political knowledge, difficult question wording, and topics are barriers to participation, the petitioners are responsible for the placement/removal of these barriers. The way that the petitioners write the question and the way they approach the public during the campaign develops the belief of the elitist bias in direct legislation. Failure to educate citizens about these ballot propositions indicates that there may be an ulterior motive for direct democracy, in spite of the very purpose of direct democracy to seek citizen sanction of laws.

This study utilizes three different methodologies to test these interconnected relationships. The methodologies utilized include mail surveys, statistical analysis and experimental design. In the next chapter, I will expand and explain each methodology.





**Figure 3.1: Petitioner Role in Direct Democracy**



**Figure 3.2: Voters Role in Direct Democracy**

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO ADVANCING THE STUDY**

This dissertation tests hypothesized relationships between political knowledge and participation in direct democracy by utilizing three different methodologies. This research requires methods to test relationships both at the individual and aggregate levels. The analysis employs statistical analysis, experimental testing, and an in-depth survey of individual petitioners. These three methodologies develop not only a significant and substantive relationship, but also investigate this connection at a variety of different levels. First, this analysis involves questionnaires answered by individuals who endeavor to put propositions on the ballot, their motives and actions. Second, this dissertation looks at broad participation across states and analyzes the readability of ballot questions. Third, this study utilizes an experiment to confirm the findings of difficult ballot language and participation, investigating if grade level affects citizens' ability to "vote correctly" and the role that political knowledge has in mitigating the effects of grade level.

#### **General Hypothesis**

The relationship between knowledge and participation frames the context of this study. My broad research question is: Do high levels of political knowledge affect participation in direct democracy elections? My generalized hypothesis is that higher levels of political knowledge increase participation in direct democracy because citizens are more knowledgeable about government and have greater desire for participation. This is broken into nine separate hypotheses testing a variety of areas that contribute to participation investigated in each section.

## **Mail Survey Analysis**

The first section of this work utilizes qualitative research to investigate the hypotheses involving motivations, understanding, and campaign techniques of chief petitioners of initiative. The mail survey contributes to this research by developing an understanding of petitioners and their activities. Case studies provide an opportunity to identify and test new variables as well as deep engagement with the data (Lijpart 1971; Eckstein 1975). This study provides the opportunity to identify and test new hypotheses and variables dealing with the role of petitioners in both campaigns and the initiative process. This allows for research where there is not a well-defined or structured dataset and builds on previous discussion about the motives of petitioners (George and Bennett 2005).

In much of the literature, as already discussed, there is frequent classification of petitioners and interest groups and their influence on the process – yet no studies have endeavored to interview these individuals directly. There are concerns about business interests permeating the system of ballot propositions (Schattsneider 1960; Gerber 1999; Matsusaka 2004). The case study will focus on Oregon and its petitioners. The process in Oregon is substantially individually driven, requiring individuals, not groups, to identify themselves on the petitions; however, when contacting these petitioners, several are linked to larger interest groups and organizations.

## *Case Selection*

Oregon was selected for this case study for multiple reasons. First, despite Oregon's small population (3,700,758 or 1.2% of the United States population (US Census 2006 Estimate)), they had the largest number of ballot initiatives since 1900 (and second highest since

1997 see Figure 1.3 in Chapter 1). Second, a single case provides insight and allows for deeper exploration of the state and its processes as well as the beliefs of its citizen petitioners. Third, Oregon provides an excellent example of petitioners and their contact information. This information is not available for all states but the Secretary of State for Oregon provides detailed records on petitioners and their initiative activities. This is not just a convenient case. Much of the research on ballot propositions has focused on California but the lack of information on petitioners removes California from consideration in this study. These reasons indicate that Oregon and its large number of petitioners provide the best case to examine and test relationships between petitioners and their activities.

Oregon represents a crucial case (George and Bennett 2005; Eckstein 1975) in the research of motives of petitioners. With a large number of initiatives, the highest level of direct democracy in the United States, and a very open system to direct democracy measures Oregon is a central case because it has very few limitations on the petitioner. If the hypotheses are supported in this case, it provides a strong argument that can contribute to further testing and generalization until proven wrong by another important case (Eckstein 1975). Although, Oregon may be an extreme case because of its high usage of ballot propositions, the processes' low insulation from the legislature, and low qualification requirements for ballot propositions, the findings from this analysis will provide evidence that can be generalized. The results will demonstrate the motives of petitioners in Oregon, where they have more opportunities to influence policy – this provides the opportunity for generalizability to other states.

Bowler and Donovan (2004) create qualification measures to explain how easy it is for citizens to get a proposition on the ballot. They classify Oregon as having very low legislative insulation as well as low qualification requirements for ballot measures. Therefore, the petitioner

has substantial freedom to affect public policy in this state, making it a critical case. This is critical because it is an acute case of the role of direct democracy and this is an extreme opportunity for petitioners to achieve and follow their motivations. The finding of the motives of petitioners in this state may be extreme because of the use and freedom in the Oregonian process. Nevertheless, this case can be expanded and applied to other cases where the petitioners have similar motives but less freedom to operate. This research further develops both the literature on proposition campaigns to include petitioner activities that have not previously been studied. This case allows for generalization that can be applied to other states, even those with different political and state characteristics.

Oregon, one of the first initiative states, has had several successful experiences with direct democracy in changing of state laws, demonstrating the power of the people to change policy. Oregon has a reputation for its progressive program of direct democracy and it has frequently been dubbed the “Oregon System”. Oregon was able to change electoral laws to include women’s suffrage (in 1912), create a presidential preference primary (in 1910), and recall elections (in 1908) through this process (Oregon State Archives 2009). These actions and the hundred years since have made direct democracy one of the more fundamental features of Oregon government and have shaped the actions of the state government and legislature. The Oregon model demonstrates that benefits to the electoral system but also shows the pitfalls. In 1922, Oregon passed a law closing private and parochial schools, supported by the Ku Klux Klan, this measure demonstrated the power of individual groups in the petitioning process (Oregon State Archives 2009). The law was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court but its long term impact on the political process remains as it demonstrates that there are motives by petitioners (and the will of the people as well) that can change policy. The state has

implemented safeguards in the petitioning process, including qualification and insulation procedures (Bowler and Donovan 2004) to protect against abuses; however, the influence of individuals and groups in legislation through direct democracy is evident.

To gather the information on petitioners, a survey questionnaire was mailed to petitioners of initiatives the beginning of August 2008. This analysis involves survey interviews with chief petitioners of initiatives in Oregon. To collect this information, surveys were sent to 530 chief petitioners of ballot measures in Oregon from 1997-2007.<sup>17</sup> This information is available to the public and was collected from the Oregon Secretary of State. By studying petitioners, this analysis provides a unique perspective of the direct democracy process and enables comprehensive research on individual motives, activities and beliefs of the process.

Ideally, when studying petitioners I wanted a higher number of petitioners to complete the survey. However, because of the strength of beliefs (the number answering each response option) exhibited in the results, I am confident that this is fairly representative of the petitioners in Oregon. Additionally, in an ideal data set, I would have preferred to survey every petitioner of direct democracy across the United States, even though Oregon is a critical case, to provide a cross-sample comparison and to determine if the findings are simply a function of Oregon and their political system. Attempts to contact petitioners in other states (namely Florida and Washington) resulted in particularly low return rates and their survey responses/data had to be eliminated because of a lack of information and ability to generalize from these results. A confounding problem with contacting petitioners is that with proposition measures, as well as other elections, there is a permanent campaign or electoral system. There are filing deadlines, signature gathering, and campaigning activities all requiring attention of petitioners. This is even

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<sup>17</sup> In retrospect, utilizing chief petitioner names and addresses dating back to 1997 was circumspect. 170 of these surveys were returned with the wrong address as these petitioners had moved. It would seem that more recent and current addresses result in higher return rates when mailing out surveys.

more complex when sponsoring multiple propositions. While the comparison case would provide substantial evidence that the findings are not just a factor of Oregon or just by chance, this study combined with the research of other methodologies provides ample evidence to deter critics of a one case study.

A single case study is not necessarily problematic, particularly when combined with other methodology, because doing a single case study allows for in-depth and rich exploration of the state and more detailed understanding of the petitioners and their motives. With this single case, there is the opportunity to control for several external variables, such as legislative controls and insulation (Bowler and Donovan 2004). The use of one state allows for the inclusion of controls over what is required by petitioners to get on the ballot that might create some variation in motives and activities across states. Further, using one case allows for control of the political culture of direct democracy, the historical use of direct democracy, the openness of the democratic system and the uniqueness of this system. While Oregon is a little studied case, it is a rich area of direct policymaking. The use of direct democracy in Oregon spans decades and demonstrates the longevity of the process and the power of the people. The one state case provides a baseline of petitioner motives that can provide a comparison for future research.

By using a mail survey to investigate the behavioral and societal influences of petitioners, it also allows investigation of these effects on campaign activities. This extensive research allows for a more thick descriptive research that provides support for the statistical and experimental methods used later in this analysis, further allowing for generalizability as well as comprehensive research (Freundreis 1983). The original mail questionnaire was sent to the chief petitioners (individuals and groups) of the ballot initiatives in Oregon from 1997 to 2008. These individuals were administered a survey (Appendix C) asking about their experience in petitioning for



initiatives, if they had tried other methods of influencing the policymaking process, how many measures they had sponsored, how knowledgeable they perceive the public to be on their issue, and the role citizen knowledge played in their campaign techniques. In this analysis, surveys were distributed to 530 chief petitioners of ballot measures in Oregon during the first week of August 2008.<sup>18</sup> In order to maximize response rates, these surveys provided two options for response – an online version of the survey that they could log on to and enter their individual identification number, or a paper copy (with return envelop and stamp) to fill out and return.<sup>19</sup> The original mailing yielded a low return rate of eighteen percent. Postcards including their pin code, the website address, and contact information for another printed copy or more information were sent to follow-up with petitioners who had not responded within 30 days. This increased the response rate to approximately twenty-two percent. These were followed by phone calls, providing respondents the opportunity to complete the survey over the phone or for us to send them another copy of the survey either printed or electronic. The final response rate was 31.4 percent with 96 respondents.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This survey instrument was not pre-tested, because mail surveys have extremely low response rates, utilizing petitioners to test the instrument would mean losing potential cases for the analysis. While I admit not testing the survey instrument can have adverse effects, completing this survey with petitioners both via mail and with follow-up phone calls, I am confident that the petitioners understood the questions they were asked and answered accordingly. The scale used to measure citizen competence on policy decision is an original scale that was used to determine how knowledgeable petitioners felt that voters are. Answers to this scale were clear in terms of the difference between the levels – excellent, good, fair, and bad but in different terms. This was done in consultation with colleagues and from conversations with petitioners - a reliable measure of citizen competence. The contact with these petitioners was not only one direction – multiple petitioners called and emailed to discuss this study. The response was very positive and many have requested copies of the final version of this study.

<sup>19</sup> This survey had Institutional Review Board approval from Georgia State University. In order to protect the petitioner's identity and provide anonymity in their responses, petitioners were only identified by a survey number. This number allowed us to follow up with petitioners to encourage them to complete the survey and to link them with their ballot propositions. The key linking petitioner information with survey pins was kept on a fire-wall and password protected computer that only the primary investigators had access.

<sup>20</sup> Of the 530 surveys sent out, 170 were returned because the respondents were no longer reachable at these addresses (a function of sending out surveys to addresses more than ten years old). These continued to be returned well into October and these were subtracted from the denominator when creating response rates.

This survey sheds light on what petitioners believe the public knows about their ballot issue and whether they intend to ‘trick’ the public<sup>21</sup> or whether they educate the public on the ballot propositions. The function of this survey is to learn about the people who petition for initiatives, their role in shaping policy in these states, and how they incorporate different levels of political knowledge into their electoral strategies. For example, do they cast issues in ways that are easier for the public to understand or do they take up complex issues and rely on educating the public? In addition, what do they consider when they determine the question wording on the ballot? This is complementary to the rest of the study because it provides context as well as hypothesis testing and seeks to look at who is developing initiatives and their approach to the public.

These surveys are coded to provide some bivariate analysis about the research. In order to understand these individual motives, it is important to investigate this topic additionally through qualitative analysis. Certainly, the data are aggregated but this provides a more comprehensive understanding of the ballot propositions from the petitioners’ perspective. Individual quotes and stories from petitioners are included for context.

To study the petitioner data, I use a bivariate analysis to determine the joint distribution of several variables, mostly two at a time. This method enables an analysis that compares attitudes of petitioners on more than one issue: ex. a correlation between how sophisticated citizens are in terms of policy and how much educating the petitioner did during the campaign. This methodology allows for comparison across petitioners and their actions.

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<sup>21</sup> This is un-testable directly because of response bias and the expectation that petitioners will not own up to ‘tricking’ the public. Further, an ideal way of measuring this would be to be in the room and record the actual discussions that go into devising ballot questions and campaign techniques to determine whether petitioners are sincere in their motives or if they have ulterior motives. Instead of asking these questions directly, I asked a battery of questions to determine what effort petitioners put into writing the propositions, how they approached the public, and what efforts they used to educate the public about their propositions to determine their intentions with their proposed measures.

### *Validity*

Frequently qualitative studies are criticized for their inability to be applied to a more complete picture. This study tries to prevent that criticism, first by combining it with other methodologies to provide insight into the direct democracy process and second, analyzing a state that has substantial experience both because of its rich history of use and large numbers of initiatives proposed each year. The responses from these states provide an indication of the motives of petitioners for initiatives and how these petitioners account for citizen knowledge.

### **Statistical Analysis**

This analysis looks at 49 states that have or have had referenda and initiatives between 1997 and 2007.<sup>22</sup> This incorporates 11 different election cycles, as well as primary and special elections. Within this period, there were 1402 different ballot measures, including 371 initiatives, 28 popular referenda, 980 legislative referenda, and 22 are classified by the National Council of State Legislatures as ‘Other’. While it is important to consider the impact of different types of measures, much of this analysis looks at ballot measures as a whole.

The analysis uses a dataset containing 1211 ballot questions (from 1997-2007 obtained from each state’s Secretary of State or Elections Board) and using Flesch-Kincaid grade level to provide scores for each question.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the readability scores, other independent variables are included as other explanations for ballot roll-off. These variables include ballot

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<sup>22</sup> The data from 2008 was unavailable at the time of this analysis – thus, the analysis includes a slightly different time period from the mail survey. Delaware is the only state with no ballot measures in this time period. They had a measure passed in 1922 that allowed for direct democracy; however, it has not been incorporated into the constitution. Therefore, direct democracy is not used in the state. Several previous scholars indicated that there are only 24 states with initiatives; however, every state has some type of direct access usually in the form of legislative referenda (Nicholson 2005; NCSL 2007; Schmidt 1989). A complete listing of states and number of ballot measures in this analysis is listed in the Appendix A.

<sup>23</sup> The formula for the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score is: “(.39 x ASL) + (11.8 x ASW) - 15.59” (Kincaid, Fishburne, Rogers, and Chissom 1975).

position as an indicator of ballot length (Taebel 1975; Brockington 2003; Walker 1966), and word count to account for the length of the question. Table 4.1 provides the descriptive statistics for these variables.

Ideally, being able to collect all the measures from each state would have provided a broader dataset. Additionally, the original intent of the study was to go back to 1990 to collect ballot questions from when the increase in use of direct democracy in the United States started (according to Figure 1.3). However, this data is not available. Much of it is inaccessible in state archives or not kept in detail by the Secretary of States' offices. Further, newspaper archives did not include the ballot wording this far back. While this was initially disappointing, the electoral results for ballot measures were also difficult to find even as early as 1997; thus, going back to 1990 proved even more challenging. Some states working to make this information more available; for example California now has a database that includes every ballot measure, along with their wording and voter pamphlet. These strides by states will eventually lead to a more comprehensive dataset that can be utilized by many researchers for a variety of purposes.

### *Dependent Variable*

The main dependent variable for this analysis is roll-off. This is calculated by using the percent of the difference from the number of votes for the top office on the ballot to the number of votes on individual ballot measures. Ballot roll-off indicates that citizens vote for a top office but do not complete the entire ballot. The roll-off variable is skewed away from a normal distribution. Tests for normality reject it at  $p > .000$  level. Then following standard procedures, it is imperative to use the natural log of roll-off in the models below (see Gelman and Hill 2007:

53), which is revealed as normal. This linear transformation has no substantive effect on the outcome, but is necessary when using linear regression models (Gelman and Hill 2007: 53).

### *Independent Variable*

The primary independent variable used in the analysis examines the readability of individual ballot propositions for 1211 state-level ballot questions<sup>24</sup> asked from 1997-2007. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade level indicates what grade level (level of education) is required to read the passage. This is the standard measure that linguists use to measure readability (Farr, Jenkins, and Paterson 1951). This is calculated using the average sentence length (ASL) and average number of syllables per word (ASW). This measures the ability of the public to read these questions when they appear on the ballot.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score measures sentences and passages on a United States' school grade level. This means that a score of 9 means that a ninth grader can read and understand the passage, likewise it means that if a passage has a grade level of 20, individuals need 20 years of education to comprehend the passage. The higher the score the more difficult the passage is to understand. The formula for the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score is:  $(.39 \times \text{ASL}) + (11.8 \times \text{ASW}) - 15.59$  (Kincaid et al 1975).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> There are 1404 different ballot propositions in this time period; however, not all questions or elections information are available. Several states do not keep data or distribute data on ballot questions and the according vote after a number of years. Newspapers, internet sources, and direct contact with the state were all utilized in an attempt to build a complete dataset. However, some data is not available..

<sup>25</sup> The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test is used today by multiple publications (Harvard Law Review; Time magazine; Reader's Digest, to name a few). Further, it is the standard measure used by the US Department of Defense and Institutional Review boards to measure readability of forms so that users understand what they are filling out and signing. While not used in much academic research in the past few decades, this standard is still applied to publications and forms. The last notable political science publication that uses this measure is Magleby (1984) that includes a measure of grade level as a way of explaining participation. Magleby uses this measure in conjunction of other measures of readability – they all have similar effects.

Table 4.2 demonstrates the grade level of ballot questions and how grade level varies across states. On average, the ballot questions used in this survey are at a grade level of 17, which means that citizens need 17 years of education in order to understand these questions. This is indeed problematic when only 84 percent of Americans reach high school graduation and only 25 percent receive a college degree. This means that the majority of Americans do not have the reading and comprehension level required to answer these ballot measures. The argument can be made that there are complex issues that cannot be reduced to lower levels of readability; however, asking citizens to vote on these issues requires that they be able to comprehend them. 17 years of education would be above college level and less than 25 percent of Americans would be able to understand the average proposition.

### *Control Variables*

Other characteristics of the ballot can affect roll-off. The first characteristic that is controlled for is the question's *position* on the ballot; this variable accounts for the position of the proposition on the ballot. The further down the ballot a proposition is, the more likely it is to suffer from roll-off due to voter fatigue, and in this analysis, this is controlled for by the ballot *position* (Taebel 1975; Brockington 2003). *Position* refers to the number of vote choices on the ballot prior to the individual ballot proposition on the same ballot. Long ballots can result in voter fatigue, which increases ballot roll-off (Walker 1966). There is research to support the notion that the length of ballot decreases the participation rates at the polls (Walker 1966; Darcy and Schneider 1989; Dubois 1979; Nichols and Strizek 1995; Kimball and Kropf 2006). Also, there can be several ballot propositions on a single ballot (in 2000 Oregon had 24 ballot propositions; in 2004 California had 14). The high number of measures on a ballot in addition to

candidate races leads to longer ballots, higher fatigue (Bowler, Donovan and Happ 1992), and higher roll-off potential. Another factor controlled for in this analysis is the *word count* for the question on the ballot. If questions are especially lengthy, the voters may skip these because of the time required to read the question. Tests reveal that *word count* is not collinear with the readability measure, *grade level*. *Word count* is simply measured by the count of the words in the ballot proposition.

Research on voting demonstrates that certain socioeconomic variables influence participation (Miller and Shanks 1996; Brady, Verba and Scholzman 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Fiorina 1981; Campbell et al 1960) and impact participation on an individual level in direct democracy (Branton 2003). This includes aggregate census measures for the states. To measure economic variability by state, I use the median household *Income* available from the Census for each state annually. This is standardized to 2006 by adjusting through inflation. State percentages of African Americans are incorporated in this analysis to account for racial composition in states because of the impact that race has on roll-off (Magleby 1985; Darcy and Schneider 1989; Vanderleeuw and Engstrom 1987). Education is another socioeconomic variable that is used to explain participation throughout voting research, and this analysis includes the percent of *college* graduates in each state as a proxy for educational impacts in answering ballot propositions.

In addition to socioeconomic variables, some year variables must be accounted for when looking at participation. At the level of electoral years, there are numerous factors, which may influence roll-off. Type of elections (Special, Primary and General elections held every calendar year) have differing amount of attention, interest and knowledge that the public has in these propositions (Sheppard 2005). Special election is included because many of the propositions

included in this data set occur during special elections when there are only ballot propositions on the ballot. During these elections, it is expected there will be lower roll-off. Additionally, these measures are divided into election cycles in Table 4.3.

Each type of election is coded dichotomously, with special elections being used as the base category in the regression models below. There are variations in *Turnout* during elections that may affect roll-off, which is measured as percentage of voting age population who voted. A *Presidential year* variable is used because Presidential elections have a higher roll-off as often voters will only vote for the top election on the ballot.

### *Statistical Methodology*

The main target of this analysis is to identify the influence of readability on roll-off, which is examined at the state-level. First, I follow previous research on roll-off and use an ordinary least squares (OLS) model. The specific model is available in Chapter 5. OLS models may be problematic with these data, which are clustered in states, and over different election years. The extensive dataset incorporates state and year-level variables as well as variables for each individual question. A Hierarchical Linear Model (HLM) is used in this analysis, as theoretically there is a significant potential for clustering because ballot propositions are done on a state level. Further, there are variations in the state qualification process (Bowler and Donovan 2004) that will necessarily lead to clustering. This is statistically justified as well, as I ran a likelihood ratio test and this was significant indicating there was clustering in the data.

HLM, sometimes called multilevel models, are becoming common (see Gelman and Hill (2007) for a detailed description). The basic idea of multilevel modeling is to reduce bias when



data are organized in a nested hierarchy of successively higher-level units (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). The most common example is that students are in classes, classes are in schools, schools are in school districts, school districts are in states. When data are in this nested structure it violates the independence assumption in linear models, and can induce a type of bias. Here, the idea is to control for the between- state and year variances as well as the between ballot variance (Woodbridge 2002, 6). Note that these are not cross-sectional time series data because the dependent variable is recorded once in an election, and not over time. The data are clustered in election years, which may have unique circumstances that influence who votes and, therefore, the level of roll-off. The OLS models do not account for either the clustering in states or election years.

### **Experimental Analysis**

The investigation of this set of hypotheses utilizes an additional type of analysis. While the previous two sections have focused on statistical analysis and surveys of petitioners, these hypotheses are investigated via an experiment. Hypothesis 4 is revisited in the experimental chapter as well as four additional hypotheses to analyze the relationship between complex ballot language and participation further.

### *Experimental Design*

Participants in this experiment included 366 college students in introductory classes.<sup>26</sup> Subjects were asked to answer five general political knowledge questions (see Appendix B for

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<sup>26</sup> Often experiments that use university students are criticized because they are using a group that may be predisposed to political information or that they do not represent the public as a whole. This study makes generalizations of the public based on how political knowledge impacts participation on an individual level. This is not compromised by using students. I would expect that the effects are not as severe as they would be in a regular

the exact wording), socioeconomic information, and to provide general policy positions and issue importance. This experiment uses two treatments to explain the impact of political knowledge on participation in direct democracy questions of different levels of complexity. There are two treatments of different ballot language to determine if there is higher participation among those with higher levels of knowledge and if there is variation in participation based on difficulty of questions.

The following are the two treatments and control in the types of questions provided:

- Treatment 1:** Participants were given direct democracy propositions of high complexity and then asked to rank on what topics they would participate in a direct democracy election.
- Treatment 2:** Participants were given direct democracy propositions of low complexity and then asked to rank on what topics they would participate in a direct democracy election.
- Control:** Participants are not subjected to any ballot proposition questions, only asked to rank on what topics they would participate in a direct democracy election.

In Treatments 1 and 2, I paired questions on the same topic with the most extreme differences in grade level complexity, to see the most dramatic changes in participant responses. I included some of the more frequently used topics such as state taxes, abortion, gay marriage, medical marijuana, term limits, among others. These questions were matched up with policy

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electoral cycle where those with high levels of political knowledge would be even more predisposed to the ballot propositions. By using Global Issues and American Government students, I attempt to prevent any bias in the results because these students are not currently studying the topics at hand and it is not an indication of class retention. The difference between these classes on the knowledge scale was .05 as indicated in Table 4.4. Further, students are an available resource and are frequently used in experiments to explain individual behavior and understanding (Druckman 2001).

preferences and strength of preferences as well as included in the rankings for the three experimental groups.

Participants were given the option to vote FOR, AGAINST or NO VOTE in their responses to each question in the two treatments. The policy preferences included in the pre-test of the experiment are correlated with results of participation and answers to ballot questions to determine correlations between policy preferences and ballot decisions on easy or difficult questions as a component of Hypothesis 7. Two independent coders were used to code each propositions for topic and policy position for each answer, to ensure there was no bias in the coding and to make sure that the coders correctly understood the question.

Using bivariate analysis, I test participation rates by different levels of political knowledge. Further, I use bivariate analysis and difference of means tests to determine if participation rates are lower for questions that are more complex. After determining participation rates, I analyze the ability to vote consistent with policy preferences using bivariate analysis. Finally, to complete the experimental results I examine whether participants ranked their participation in direct democracy elections consistent with their priorities established earlier in the experiment. This is to ensure that there are effects on participation because of the complexity of language.

These ballot propositions used in the experimental groups were selected from the ballot questions analyzed in complexity and language research (Reilly and Richey 2008). These were actual ballot propositions that appeared on ballots across the United States in the past ten years.<sup>27</sup> The average grade level of easy ballot questions in Treatment 1 was 9.3 and average grade level

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<sup>27</sup> In order to make this appropriate for the experiment I did change the questions who mentioned their home state to Georgia, where the experiment took place to ensure that the participants felt like they were participating on ballot propositions that might appear on the ballot in their home state (i.e. when the ballot question mentioned Colorado, it was replaced with Georgia). This manipulation did not affect the complexity or readability of the ballot proposition.

of difficult ballot questions in Treatment 2 was 46.8. This provides an excellent dichotomy of complexity between the two experimental groups.

### *Internal Validity*

Internal validity can be assumed because of randomization as well as the differentiation in results. Further, it can be accurately inferred that the independent variable (ballot complexity and knowledge) and dependent variables (participation) are causally related. There is no endogeneity between the dependent and key independent variables. In other words, participation will not cause the question complexity to change. Thus, the causal model is unidirectional. There may be some extraneous variables that affect participation; but due to the statistical study, we know that ballot language has a significant impact on roll-off. Ergo, this experiment is a replication of these results to support these findings.

### *External Validity*

In terms of external validity, a statistical analysis of participation on ballot propositions based on ballot language supports the findings of the experiment. This experiment also explores two other links that have not been addressed on the statistical level. First, it establishes the linkage of political knowledge to participation and second, it looks at the ability of citizens to translate their policy preferences to ballot questions under different readability situations. Ideally, a statistical analysis of state political knowledge and participation in direct democracy elections would be useful in confirming and replicating the results of this experiment. However, state levels of political knowledge are not available and have not been determined by scholars. There have been several attempts to develop these measures; but without surveys with larger

samples from each state, it is impossible to determine political knowledge levels. This is something that I would like to develop in future research. Nonetheless, this experiment contributes to the larger argument about citizen competence and participation in direct democracy under different circumstances of readability.

The political knowledge scale used in this experiment was derived through years of research (Luskin 1987; Lupia 1994; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993, 1996) to be the best measure of political knowledge; thus, there is construct validity. Using this political knowledge as an indication of participation provides another reason why ballot language is important. When political knowledge is a significant indicator of participation, this indicates that citizens are able to rely on their political knowledge when they may not understand the question exactly. For example, if the public knows basic structures of the government and is knowledgeable about politics they may be able to decipher and answer more difficult questions, with more ease because they are familiar with the issues. In terms of external validity, validity is achieved through randomization, so there are no characteristics of the group of students that creates results different from using a public sample. Additionally, it can be inferred that the findings of this analysis are weaker than the effect in the public in an actual election, where ballot fatigue and other influences may exacerbate the effects.

The ability of the public to address their public policy preferences in ballot questions is of utmost importance. This is because if citizens, regardless of language, are able to answer questions consistent with their ballot preferences, then how the question is written is irrelevant. However, if the question itself prevents citizens from voting correctly, this influences the entire system of direct democracy.

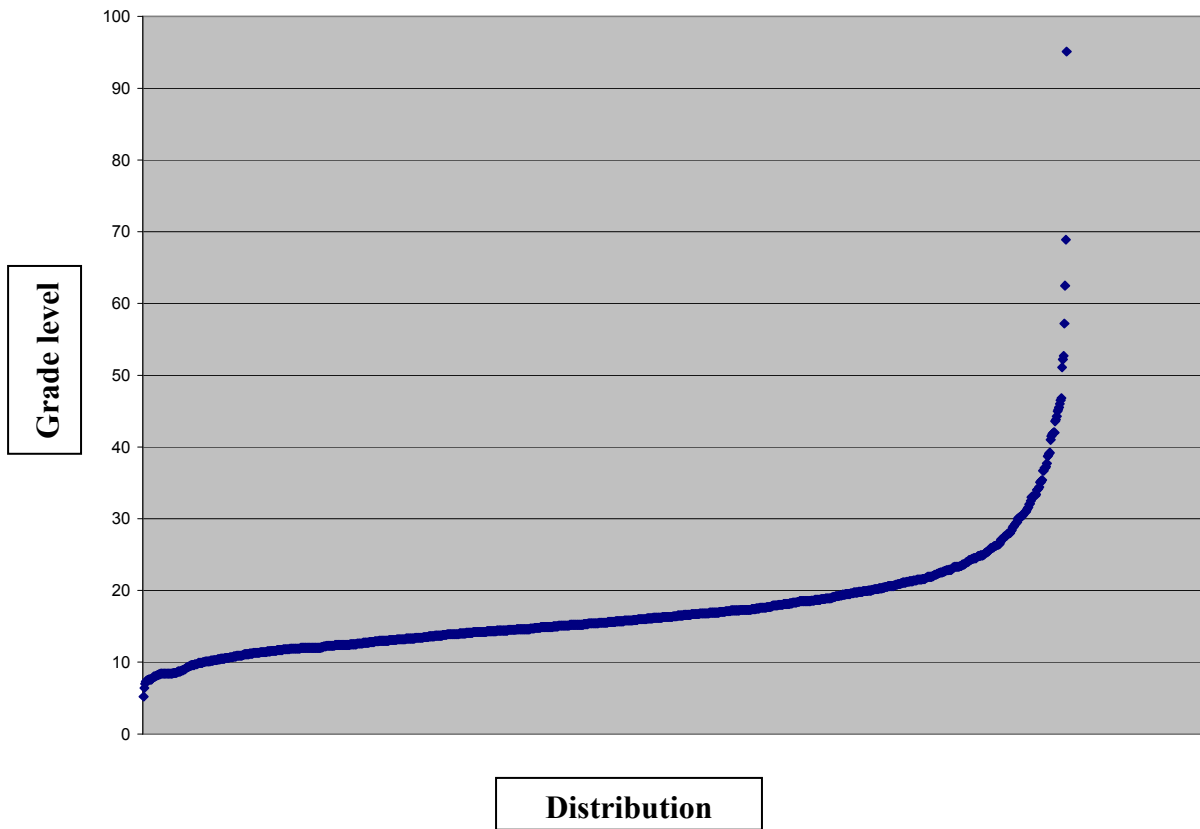
The theory of Chapter 3 is tested using these methodologies in the next three chapters. Chapter 5 starts this development by looking at petitioners, their motives and approaching of the public through campaigning. This chapter utilizes the mail survey to measure and develop the hypotheses about petitioners.

**Table 4.1: Summary Statistics for Question Wording**

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Roll-Off	1359	0.11	0.17	-1.91	0.99
Log of Roll-off	1222	-2.64	1.19	-9.76	-0.01
Grade Level	1211	17.08	7.22	2.20	95.10
Log of Grade Level	1211	2.77	0.35	1.65	4.56
Position	1368	12.70	7.07	1	36.00
Word Count	1225	118.00	107.19	5	1075.00 <sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For examples of the shortest and longest ballot questions see Appendix D.



**Figure 4.1: Distribution of Ballot Grade Level**

*Note:* This distribution is obviously not normal and requires using the natural log of the variable.



**Table 4.2: Grade Level by State**

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Alabama	32	18.2	6.4	12.2	35.3
Alaska	30	12.8	5.3	7.5	30.4
Arizona	70	16.5	3.1	10.8	26.3
California	105	13.3	1.8	8.7	18.1
Colorado	62	25.6	15.2	5.2	95.1
Connecticut	1	10.7		10.7	10.7
Florida	40	16.8	5.0	7.6	37.7
Georgia	33	21.8	10.4	9.9	57.2
Hawaii	10	21.9	10.9	9.9	43.6
Idaho	16	13.6	2.3	11.8	19.5
Indiana	6	17.0	3.5	13.1	23.3
Iowa	5	13.9	4.0	10.5	20.6
Kansas	4	17.9	1.7	16.0	19.9
Kentucky	7	22.1	6.1	13.9	30.3
Louisiana	61	17.3	6.8	8.0	44.3
Maine	66	18.4	6.6	7.6	37.3
Maryland	11	19.9	4.1	13.4	26.4
Massachusetts	18	14.3	2.1	10.2	19.0
Michigan	18	14.3	3.1	9.4	21.4
Minnesota	1	26.4		26.4	26.4
Mississippi	3	13.7	5.0	8.4	18.3
Missouri	27	19.4	8.2	8.0	43.8
Montana	29	16.1	7.4	11.2	52.2
Nebraska	37	17.9	3.4	11.1	25.2
Nevada	36	19.0	6.4	10.9	42.0
New Hampshire	8	16.3	5.0	9.9	27.1
New Jersey	20	23.0	6.6	13.0	34.0
New Mexico	14	27.5	9.3	12.0	38.8
New York	8	18.8	8.3	7.6	35.4
North Carolina	1	10.7		10.7	10.7
North Dakota	13	12.6	2.8	8.5	18.4
Ohio	19	16.9	4.9	9.4	30.2
Oklahoma	38	9.2	1.1	7.3	11.6
Oregon	94	14.1	1.7	10.8	18.3
Pennsylvania	6	23.8	5.4	17.0	33.1
Rhode Island	35	13.5	6.1	6.4	33.0
South Carolina	19	25.4	10.8	16.0	62.5
South Dakota	36	12.3	2.1	7.0	17.2
Tennessee	6	16.6	5.8	10.0	24.8
Texas	84	19.9	5.1	12.0	45.0
Utah	6	15.6	5.3	10.1	23.9
Vermont	1	16.5		16.5	16.5
Virginia	3	23.6	3.2	18.5	24.9
Washington	57	15.4	2.8	9.6	23.4
Wisconsin	3	19.6	3.5	16.6	23.4
Wyoming	12	17.5	3.6	12.0	24.9

**Table 4.3: Proposition Division from Election Year**

Year	Primary	General	Special	Total
1997	0	22	4	26
1998	16	239	2	257
1999	10	43	18	71
2000	30	204	0	234
2001	2	33	4	39
2002	19	201	2	222
2003	0	22	45	67
2004	10	161	1	172
2005	0	40	4	44
2006	20	206	0	226
2007	4	37	3	44
Total	111	1208	83	1403

**Table 4.4: Comparison in Political Knowledge Among Classes**

	Difference between Global Issues and American Government Classes			
	Global Issues		American Government	
	5 point	7 point	5 point	7 point
<u>Knowledge</u>	3.51 (1.40)	4.14 (1.81)	3.55 (1.29)	4.63 (1.92)

*Notes:*

Means presented with standard deviations in brackets

Global N=270

American N=88

Total N=358

\*\*\*5 point scale is the Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) measure, the 7 point scale includes two additional questions besides the Delli Carpini and Keeter measures which includes naming the Speaker of the House and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **MOTIVES AND ACTIVITIES OF PETITIONERS: A MAIL SURVEY**

Do petitioners believe that citizens should have more influence on policy in government? Do petitioners believe direct democracy is effective in changing policy? Do petitioners believe the citizenry is sophisticated in terms of policy? Do these petitioners focus on educating the public to support their initiatives or are they manipulating the citizenry? This chapter presents and interprets findings from a survey of initiative petitioners in Oregon, their motives and beliefs about citizens and the direct democracy process.

By looking at surveys of petitioners in Oregon, this analysis engages petitioners and allows for significantly more in-depth research for a thorough examination of the phenomena. This type of research allows the researcher to take a snapshot of petitioners from the last ten years (Wiarda 2007) and evaluate whether petitioners utilize different strategies, accounting for political knowledge when campaigning for initiatives and the beliefs of petitioners about how sophisticated citizens are in terms of policy decisions.

There are several advantages in using the case study method besides becoming far more familiar with Oregon, its initiative processes and petitioners. First, it allows investigation of initiative petitioning, motivations and activities. Second, this method provides an opportunity to account for whether petitioners acknowledge use of citizen political knowledge in the petitioning and election processes. Third, petitioner data are not available from all states, a statistical analysis is impossible – however, studying this state in conjunction with other methods provides deeper insight and a stronger causal link. The statistical analysis addressed in Chapter 6 includes all the ballot propositions from this state in the period under analysis, in conjunction with other states.

Oregon's development of vibrant direct democracy usage has been a driving force of policy in the state. There are several key players<sup>29</sup> in the direct democracy movement in Oregon, however, this process is and remains a tool of the people and is available to anyone in the public. Nevertheless, petitioning is not without consequences and requirements. Several petitioners have been involved in multiple initiatives, which require significant resources – time and financial, and many of these individuals have been sued by the state or other organizations because of their initiative. This repeated use by individuals indicates that this is rarely a one-issue endeavor but rather a systemic way to influence policy across the board and is used as a way of circumventing the legislature rather than developing one specific issue that was being ignored. One feature advocated in the development of direct democracy was for the people to serve as a check on the government.

### **Case Selection**

Oregon is an ideal case for this study not only because of its large number of ballot initiatives but also because of the long standing tradition of citizen involvement in government and the numerous and significant changes that have been made to the state because of direct democracy. Oregon has had the largest number of ballot initiatives since 1900, with 825 ballot propositions in this period (349 initiatives, 413 legislative referenda, 61 popular referenda). With this large number of ballot propositions, it is important to discuss the overall composition of the state. Oregon has a relatively small population (3,700,758 or 1.2% of the United States population (US Census 2006 Estimate)). As a result of Oregon's small size, the petitioning and

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<sup>29</sup> These individuals, as part of larger groups, sponsor a number of direct democracy measures. These individuals have faced personal court challenges and legal troubles associated with these measures; but continue to be part of the direct democracy process.

campaigning activities permeate statewide.<sup>30</sup> This demonstrates that the petitioners, who are involved, are an important component of government as they are proposing and changing state laws. In terms of politics, Oregon is not a homogeneous state; rather it is a politically divided state, having only marginally voted Democrat in Presidential elections in the last two decades (see Table 5.1). Much of the state lives in Portland, with a secondary center in Eugene, which is considered the liberal center. Outside of these centers, the rest of the state tends to be far more conservative. Thus, direct democracy's use in the state indicates that it is not a tool for one ideological preference but a way of influencing government across political spectrums.

Another unique feature of Oregon is its use of mail ballots, sent to registered voters' homes, rather than the traditional electoral means. Oregon already had higher turnout than the rest of the country, but with the advent of this new system, mail ballots increased the turnout in elections by ten percent (Richey 2004). This is exceptional, not only because of the change in elections but also because of the change in turnout as a result of this change. It should also be pointed out that the change in the election system was a result of a ballot initiative, demonstrating the commitment to the process by both the government and the people (Oregon State Archives 2009).<sup>31</sup>

Oregon's first direct democracy measure dates back to 1904, one of the first instances of direct democracy in the United States (League of Women Voters 2001). Since 1904, they have had the largest number of statewide initiatives, with a record 27 in 1912. Issues tackled by these initiatives have included election reform and taxes, and have shaped much of today's society in

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<sup>30</sup> The addresses associated with the petitioners, filed with the Secretary of State's office in Oregon are listed statewide, but there is some clustering in the more populous areas.

<sup>31</sup> State measure no. 60, a 1998 initiative was approved by the 70 percent of Oregon voters. The initiative allowed voters to vote on their own time, educate themselves, prevent problems on election day breakdowns or hassles. An advantage to the state is that it saves money for the state as they do not have to provide election booths and polling locations, rather just mailing out ballots and counting them on election day.

Oregon (Oregon State Archives 2009; Schmidt 1989). Historically, there are strong populist roots that have engaged citizens in government and led to the largest direct democracy movement in the country. Oregon was strongly influenced by the Progressive and Populist movements of the early 1900s and as part of this influence adopted the practices of direct democracy. This process has permeated the state and significantly influenced their political system. Oregon has embraced a form of conservative populism, endorsing the rights of the people over the intrusiveness of the government (Dover 2004; Oregon State Archives 2009). This demonstrates the value that the state as a whole places on the direct democracy process and its contributions both politically and to policy.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, this chapter provides an outline of the petitioner process in Oregon. Second, the chapter provides explanations for how petitioners acquire the text for their proposition. Third, the chapter provides a description of the personal characteristics of the petitioners and their beliefs about the processes and citizens. Fourth, I present a correlation of these beliefs and activities, indicating how these beliefs correspond to petitioner activities.

### **Oregon Petitioning Process**

In Oregon, individuals or groups can draft petitions. The text is completely the responsibility of the sponsor (League of Women Voters of Oregon 2001). The Attorney General writes a 15-word or less title for the initiative and this appears in conjunction with the text on the ballot – petitioners provide a draft to the Secretary of State and the petitioner. Notice of the draft is announced statewide, and comments are collected and recorded by the Secretary of State. The petitioner has the opportunity to appeal the title - however, there are several rules that apply,

such as a limit of one topic (Oregon Secretary of State 2008). The text of the ballot is written by the petitioners, and is limited to 175 words.<sup>32</sup> Further, two statements of 25 words are included on the ballot to explain a yes or no vote. Throughout the rules for state and local ballots, the terms “clear and impartial” and “simple and understandable” appear quite frequently. Yet in Oregon, the average ballot proposition has a readability of 14.1 (with a minimum of 10.8 and maximum of 18.4) and while these are not the easiest nor the most difficult ballot questions across the country it does raise questions about citizen understanding because 87.6 percent of Oregonians have completed high school and 27.5 percent have completed college.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to the ballot statements, the phrase “This measure may be passed only at an election with at least a 50 percent voter turnout” must be included on the ballot (Oregon Secretary of State 2008).<sup>34</sup> Likewise, if the measure involves expenditures the Secretary of State, State Treasurer, the Director of Oregon Department of Administrative Services and the Director of the Department of Revenue estimate the amount of direct expenditures, reduced expenditures, interest or impact on state revenues. The estimates are included on the ballot to indicate to the voters how much the prospective measure will cost or benefit them and the state. This is included in some states but is not a standard component of ballot measures across states.

When the Legislative Assembly proposes legislative referenda, the legislature writes and files the ballot title with the Secretary of State (Oregon Secretary of State 2008; Constitution of Oregon). The legislative referenda do not require signed petitions to place something on the

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<sup>32</sup> While these are limited to 175 words, this is not always enforced. Ballot propositions in Oregon vary from a minimum of 103 to a maximum of 453, with the ballot propositions having a mean of 203 (in this study’s eleven-year sample). While not as lengthy as measures in other states, they still have complexity in ballot language – on average Oregon measures have a readability of 14.1, and range from 10.8 to 18.3.

<sup>33</sup> While this is higher than the national average of high school (80.4%) and college (24.4%) graduates, having ballot measures at an average of 14.1 means that they are above the reading level of the majority of citizens.

<sup>34</sup> In the last forty years, only four elections have not met the 50% threshold. The 50% rule is just a protection to ensure that the majority of the state has the ability to vote on ballot measures under consideration. As these are factors of the ballot and similar across ballot questions, they are not included in the readability – rather it is the distinct language for each question that is included in the readability measures.



ballot; rather it is an act of the state legislature. Another important difference between legislative referenda and other types of direct democracy in Oregon is that citizen measures have to go through more thorough procedures and checks before appearing on the ballot. The legislature refers pieces of legislation for citizen approval, usually to ensure that the legislature is consistent with the citizenry. This is often used on a piece of major legislation or when it is a particularly complex or controversial issue. In Oregon, the public and petitioners can appeal the title on the ballot for legislative referenda after it has been circulated but they must indicate why the measure does not comply with Secretary of State's regulations.

Once a proposition is submitted to the Secretary of State's office for review and it is approved, it can be circulated for signatures. To qualify for the ballot, petitioners are required to collect eight percent of votes cast for the gubernatorial candidates in the previous general election (League of Women Voters of Oregon 2001). The Secretary of State, using random samples, verifies these signatures. If in the first 1,000-signature sample the petition does not qualify, then a larger sample is chosen (Oregon Secretary of State 2008). Starting in January 2008, the state required that all circulators take part in a training program and register before circulating a petition for signatures. There are distinct limits on the collection of signatures and strict punishments (\$125,000 fine and five years in prison for knowingly collecting false signatures, interference and signatures bought or unqualified to sign the petition) (Oregon Secretary of State 2008). Once the petition meets the signature requirements and a title is approved, the measure is assigned a number (in order of filing) and then the campaigning begins.

The election for ballot propositions is important, not only because of the stakes in passing legislation but because of the threshold of turnout needed to have the ballot measure stand (even with a yes majority). The campaigns for ballot propositions are extensive in Oregon

– garnering significant media and citizen attention.<sup>35</sup> There is also a significant financial expenditure on these ballot campaigns. In Oregon in the 1990s, average spending on an initiative campaign was \$1,704,482 (League of Women Voters of Oregon 2001). Many of these ballot initiatives or popular referenda can take several years from petition to the ballot – therefore, there must be significant dedication to the issue for petitioners to continue to advocate it through this process.

### **Survey Methodology**

The mail survey of Oregon petitioners allows this analysis to focus on understanding what is going on in this particular setting. Oregon has the highest level of initiative, resulting in a high number of available petitioners to survey. Surveying these citizens enables this researcher to investigate the important issues and effects of ballot initiatives in this state. Studying Oregon as a case study is important because it will allow not only for the description of activities (Kidder 1982), but allows for the generation (Gersick 1988, Harris and Sutton 1986) and testing of theory (Pinfield 1986; Anderson 1983). Case studies are considered a respected and reliable source of political analysis; there have been several examples that have contributed to the development of larger theory (Lijphart 1971, example: Putnam 1995). While there are concerns about the generalizability of case studies, Oregon is a significant case that will provide insight into the process.

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<sup>35</sup> Interest groups are very active in the Oregon ballot measure system. While they cannot support and petition for propositions directly, many interest groups put out position papers and information about measures to persuade voters. Active interest groups are able to garner significant media coverage as well as citizen attention. A survey of internet sources for ballot measures links several interest groups to not only one but many propositions. These interest groups vary from environmental groups, religious groups and unions. These groups may have opposing views but actively put forth arguments about different ballot measures (both citizen and governmentally sponsored).

Mail questionnaires were sent to all of the chief petitioners of the ballot initiatives in this state from 1997 to 2007. The questionnaire is attached in the Appendix C. In this analysis, surveys were sent to 530 chief petitioners of ballot measures in Oregon the first week of August 2008. These surveys provided two options for response – an online version of the survey that they could log on to and enter their individual identification number, or a paper copy to fill out and return. Postcards were sent as follow-ups to petitioners who had not responded within 30 days. These were then followed with reminder phone calls two weeks later, with an opportunity to have another copy of the survey sent to them or to complete the survey over the phone.

Of the 530 petitioners, 130 were duplicates that included petitioners with multiple addresses for the most recent year of petitioning. By only including one petitioner for each name in the final count of petitioners meaning that out of the 130, there were 59 original names. Of the remaining 471, 170 were returned with inaccurate or former addresses. This means that only 306 surveys reached petitioners, and 96 were completed, resulting in a participation rate of 31.4%. Ten petitioners did not answer a sufficient number of questions to be included in this analysis. Therefore, there are 86 usable surveys of petitioners (28.1% of the total surveys).<sup>36</sup> This is an accepted response rate as getting a response rate this high, with no incentives for response, on mail surveys is rare and difficult (de Leeuw, Mellenbergh and Hox 1996; Dillman 2000). This data provides the opportunity to explore petitioner responses and compare within a single case (Miles and Huberman 1984; Putnam 1995).

The results of these surveys are then analyzed by utilizing bivariate regressions. This type of analysis is used to provide evidence about relationships between particular beliefs and positions on issues. This type of analysis assists in providing evidence in the qualitative

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<sup>36</sup> While this is not ideally representative of the population, the response rate is exceptional and provides a nice sample of petitioners to survey. As research has not been conducted on petitioners, this provides significant numbers to survey.

analysis. The bivariate analysis used in this analysis benefits from the controls of a case study – first these petitioners are a mainly homogeneous group; second, there are cultural factors that are controlled for by looking at one particular state; third, this analysis demonstrates the connection between beliefs and actions providing evidence for petitioner motives.

## **Hypotheses**

There are three hypotheses that this chapter tests. The first hypothesis looks at how petitioners view the direct democracy process and elections. This hypothesis develops the notion that if petitioners feel that direct democracy is valuable in changing policy, they will want more opportunities to explore this policymaking process and use it to change policy. Building on the theory of this work, this hypothesis expects to demonstrate that the purpose of direct democracy is to change policy and there should be more opportunities to do so in the electoral system.

**Hypothesis 1:** If petitioners believe direct democracy is effective in changing policy, they will want more opportunities to vote in elections.

The second hypothesis deals with the petitioners' thoughts about citizen competence and what role they play in the campaigning/education process. Petitioners who feel that citizens are unqualified are less willing to make the effort to educate the citizenry about their ballot propositions. This looks towards the activities of petitioners, and builds the argument that the dichotomy between petitioner activities is built upon the beliefs of petitioners.

**Hypothesis 2:** If petitioners think citizens are unqualified to make policy, they are less likely to educate.

Hypothesis 3 deals with petitioners who feel that there is an educational value of campaigns. This hypothesis looks at the value petitioners put on the campaign and how much time they are then willing to spend educating (through campaigns) citizens. This continues to

link the beliefs of petitioners to their activities to provide evidence about their motives in seeking direct democracy measures.

**Hypothesis 3:** If petitioners believe that campaigns are educational spend, then they more time on educating the public.

These three hypotheses are tested by using a qualitative study and bivariate correlations of responses from the mail surveys that were distributed to petitioners in Oregon.

### **Questionnaires**

Surveys were used to gather information about petitioners of initiatives; their role in shaping policy in this state; and how they incorporate different levels of political knowledge into their electoral strategies. These questionnaires included general questions about their initiative, how they collected signatures, and questions about why these petitioners wanted to change legislation in this manner; whether they felt that the legislature was not doing its job; or if this was a way of bring attention to issues that were being ignored. These petitioners were asked if they tried other methods – such as contacting their state representative to look into this issue before going forward to the initiative process. I also asked these petitioners if initiatives were successful in getting attention for their issue and if this was the only way to change legislation. Further, this survey focused on the role of citizen knowledge in the initiative process – through campaigns, education, and achievement to indicate whether the petitioners for initiatives account for levels of political knowledge in the process. For a complete sample of the survey, see Appendix C.

## **Who are Petitioners?**

When looking at petitioners it is important to investigate their personal and political characteristics to determine who these individuals are and to explore their motives and activities. This is something that has not been fully investigated in the literature, and when looking at the role that ballot languages has on participation, then it is understandably necessary to understand who is petitioning to change policy. Figure 5.1 provides a breakdown of education levels of the petitioners in Oregon. There is a clear relationship between higher levels of education and petitioning for initiatives. Of the petitioners, only two percent had not attended college or graduated from a program and nearly 80 percent have graduated from college or a graduate program. While this is expected because of the high level of readability of the ballot questions in this state, this can also be a function of who is the most involved in elections (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). It confirms this relationship and expands our understanding of the direct democracy process. Second, these petitioners are citizens who actively participate and petition for initiatives, consistent with voting literature. These petitioners want to influence government through voting for representatives as well as through petitioner and voting on ballot propositions. From this study, petitioners indicated that they frequently, if not always, vote in federal and state elections, indicating that they are the citizens who are most active in the electoral system and demonstrating the similarities and activeness of these petitioners in the state.

Besides education, other socioeconomic issues are important to analyze to determine more about the petitioners and the role in the process. Looking at the age breakdown of petitioners, it is evident from this that older citizens primarily do petitioning with only 21 percent of petitioners being younger than 45 years of age. This, combined with educational and voting findings, indicates that petitioners represent higher amounts of voter features consistent with

previous voting literature (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980) and a picture of those who propose to change the policy of the state through direct democracy.

Consistent with the idea that petitioners are among the more active citizens in the state, Figure 5.2 looks at the civic engagement levels of these petitioners. Civic engagement refers to involvement in one's community and willingness to address public issues (Milner 2002; Putnam 1995, 2000). The majority of petitioners indicated that they were active members in community groups. Based on the expectations of our society (Putnam 1995, 2000), this demonstrates that petitioners are engaged citizens – not only in participation and education rates but also in their activism within the community.

Of the petitioners that participated in the survey, over half had been involved in more than one initiative as a chief petitioner and almost all had been involved in the process at least once in another capacity. Five of these petitioners indicated they had been involved in the petitioning of over 20 different initiatives. While not previously tested, this is not surprising. There is a substantial amount of knowledge that is required to develop an initiative and to petition in this system. It is hard to imagine someone not involved in the issue or in the process to go out and petition for a measure without background understanding. However, measuring and testing this demonstrates and provides evidence about petitioners to further theory about whom petitioners are and what contributions they make to society as well as these ballot measures.

Several of these petitioners indicated that they were current and former members of the state legislature as well as former governors.<sup>37</sup> This provides a fascinating aspect to the process, that there are members of the legislature that feel that they need to circulate petitions and go

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<sup>37</sup>This comes from publically available information as well as the information provided on the survey. The responses of these individuals are not connected to their name, in order not to compromise their anonymity, but rather this shows that there are members of government who participate in this process.

directly to the people to pass certain legislation or draw attention to particular issues to force the legislature to act. This is enlightening because it demonstrates that there are aspects of direct democracy that do circumvent the legislature, this may also be a way of overcoming partisan division in the legislature and to put more power in the hands of the people.

## **Ideology**

In terms of political division of the petitioners, this analysis looks at the political divide of petitioners to determine if one ideological group (perhaps one that is in opposition to the legislature) utilizes direct democracy. Figure 5.3 provides the ideological breakdown of petitioners. While the ideological perspectives of these petitioners are relatively equal, there are slightly more Democrats who petition rather than Republicans. The slightly higher number of Democratic petitioners is attributed to the higher number of Democratic identifiers nationally. The striking feature about Figure 5.3 is the number of independents in the respondent sample who petition for initiatives. This is striking as it demonstrates that citizens who do not identify with mainstream political parties can find outlets for contributing to policy change without having members in the legislature.

In contrast to partisanship, when looking at ideology, among these petitioners there are far more independents. The number of petitioners who do not align themselves with one political group (party or ideological), demonstrates that there are alternatives to voting that contribute to the state policy and indicative of individuals who are able to contribute to that policy even if they do not agree with either major political party. The ideological distribution of Figure 5.4 also demonstrates strength of these allegiances. This ideological and partisan breakdown



demonstrates that initiatives used or abused by one political faction; rather it is indicative of a true division among parties and ideological perspectives.

### **Devising the Text**

When asked about the number of direct democracy elections and whether citizens should be more involved in policy processes, many of these petitioners cited concerns with increasing limitations on direct democracy in Oregon; thus, taking the power out of the hands of the people. This may be attributed to bitterness about the failure of specific ballot propositions but could speak to a larger issue of unhappiness with government and how this contributes to direct democracy measures. Another 22 percent indicated that they strongly believed that the state limits citizen participation in government. What was interesting in the petitioner survey data is that almost half (38 of 78)<sup>38</sup> indicated that the measure that appeared on the ballot was not what they intended and that they felt that there was significant interference on the behalf of the state. Acknowledging this interference, the state does have some requirements for ballot initiatives,<sup>39</sup> indicating that citizen petitioners in Oregon have guidelines and regulations, in regards to campaigning and what appears on the ballot.

The petitioners of initiatives are completely responsible for developing the language of ballot measures they propose. In Oregon, this text has sparing regulations, as discussed above the Attorney General writes the title, which appears in juxtaposition with the text. The petitioners, in conjunction with ballot title regulations, can appeal these titles. There is supposed

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<sup>38</sup> As this was an open-ended question, some petitioners chose not to answer this question, thus, resulting in a lower number of respondents.

<sup>39</sup> Note: despite differences in procedures for legislative and more popular forms of direct democracy, there is little difference in grade level in Oregon; according to this study, initiatives have a mean grade level of 14.22 (range of 11.1-18.3), popular referenda have a mean of 13.65 (range 10.8-16.9), and legislative referenda have a grade level of 14.02 (range of 11.4-17.1).

to be a word limit, but analysis of ballot questions demonstrates that this is not strictly enforced. One thing that is clear in the regulations are the terms “clear and impartial” and “simple and understandable”, which appear quite frequently in the regulations of Oregon initiative process.

Petitioners as part of this study were asked to explain how they devised text for ballot measures. These petitioners provided varied responses, while for some this process was more than ten years ago and details were not clear. Several were able to provide details about the process specifically. Some took a simplistic approach to writing the ballot language; including writing some of it on their own, some examples of their responses are included in the quotes below:

“I personally wrote 40+ drafts of the measure.”

“A committee developed the text”

“I had legislative counsel for the Assembly draft the text.”

“Based upon initiatives used in other states on this subject.”

These quotes provide the four options for the petitioner to devise the text: writing the text themselves; using a committee (either of interested parties, the sponsoring committee or groups of individuals who are experts in the field); having the legislative council assist in the writing of the text; and utilizing propositions and laws from other states. While these responses were quite simple, several petitioners offered a more extensive approach to writing the proposition. These complex answers are provided in the following quotes:

“We formed a group of citizens, educated ourselves, and then worked together with the help of a state legislator and lawyers”

“I researched other legislation and used similar language. I also research the federal ARIA laws to make sure my ballot if passed would pass a challenge in court.”

“Composed the text within a political/community organization, then vetted/alterd it through discussions with other state political/community orgs. Finally having lawyers review the text.”

“The language was written by attorneys familiar with writing initiatives. However, the language was constantly disputed and sent to the state supreme court.”

“[Devised by] working with veterans groups and leaders. Being a government official. I had the knowledge of how to craft the language to stand a legal challenge.”

These quotes demonstrate the influence and time that it takes to devise the text of ballot measures. The text of these measures comes from a complicated process that requires a significant petitioner involvement to develop a text that will appear on the ballot. One notable thing is that no petitioner ever mentioned the readability or understanding of the question to the citizenry; moreover, they are focused on getting the measure by legal challenges and having legal components to the proposition. This focus on legal challenges demonstrates that while trying to abide by the state regulations, there are influences (legal and organizational) over the process that dictate the writing of the ballot, not how approachable the proposition is by the public.

## **Discussion and Findings**

In order to establish the importance of ballot propositions to petitioners in Oregon, I look at petitioner views on the process and state role. First, this analysis looks at the petitioning possibilities and effectiveness of initiatives in changing policy. Table 5.2 investigates the

correlation between petitioner belief that some issues can only be addressed through direct democracy and that policy changes are more successful through initiatives than by the legislature.

Table 5.2 demonstrates that petitioners feel strongly that there are issues that can only be addressed by ballot propositions. There is a divide amongst these petitioners in whether ballot propositions are more successful than legislation. The majority of petitioners who believe there are some issues that can only be addressed through ballot propositions feel that these changes are more successful than legislation. There was a high correlation between those who do not feel that there are issues that can only be addressed by ballot propositions and those who feel that these measures are not more successful than legislation. Some of the elaboration of petitioners in the survey can explain the dichotomy of the answers on success. Petitioners offer explanations such as deadlocked legislatures but the legislature being more equipped to address complex issues than the citizenry, or that the wrong issues were being pursued by initiatives. For example, the following two quotes provide petitioner comments on the need for more citizens input into the process.

“Legislatures, in my opinion, should NOT be the sole voice of the people in terms of how the people are governed.”

“The legislature in Oregon is controlled by public employee unions and environmental extremists who don't let the legislators they have bought to vote on measures popular with the voters. Accordingly, the only option we have is to change public policy via the initiative.”

These quotations show the value that petitioners place on ballot measures, that they are the only way to get the public's voice heard as well as an alternative method of changing policy. Many

petitioners indicated that they hope that citizens could one day make more changes but when asked about change being more successful in initiatives than through the legislature, petitioners offered the following quotes:

“Things are easier to stop in legislature than to accomplish.”

“Maybe the wrong changes; you must watch very carefully the writing of state administrative rules regarding the initiative, everything can be lost in the process!!!”

“Unfortunately citizens don't pay enough attention to think about making changes. They don't know the question so they certainly don't know the answer”

These quotes demonstrate the range of feelings about the success and consequences of initiatives. It also demonstrates petitioner feelings towards the legislature and citizenry. While petitioners value the process, they are also capable of explaining the problems and complications of the process. Surprisingly, some petitioners believe that initiatives are never more successful in changing policy than legislation and that there are never issues that are better served through initiatives than legislation. This is surprising, as these people endeavor to change policy in this manner and yet, they do not entirely support the enterprise.

This dichotomy is explored by looking at the role petitioners feel that the public should play in the policymaking process. Tables 5.3 and 5.4, provide correlation between citizen involvement and more success in making changes. Table 5.3 indicates that petitioners are divided in their beliefs on state limits on participation, indicating that there is a divide in how petitioners view the state's role in limiting participation of the public in policymaking. This enlightens a larger argument about the desire for citizens to have an increased role of

government – through direct democracy. Among those who believed that there was not limited participation, the majority believed that change was not more successful through direct democracy. This supports the notion that petitioners who feel that participation is not limited believe that initiatives are not successful in changing policy and it should be left to the legislature. Thus, there is not a need for more participation in government.

Amongst those who believe that the state does limit participation in policy, the majority of these believed that policy change is more successful through direct democracy. This demonstrates that those who are more committed to making change through direct democracy are more likely to believe that the state does not give them enough chances to do this. This elaborates the argument about why petitioners propose amendments in the first place. If this is a way of getting attention to an issue but petitioners have little faith that it will result in change, it is understandable why they are not concerned about limited participation. However, if petitioners are focused on changing public policy to circumvent the legislature, it seems that they would be focused on citizen participation and would feel it is limited in this circumstance. The variation in these opinions provides greater insight into the divergence of petitioner perspectives and motivations in direct democracy.

In order to tap into this relationship in another way (and to ensure that it is not a result of question wording), Table 5.4 looks at this same relationship in a more positive way, by providing a correlation of whether this country needs more citizen involvement and whether direct democracy is a successful way to change policy. Table 5.4 indicates that amongst those petitioners who believe that we need more citizen involvement there is a high correlation with those who believe that direct democracy is more likely to result in successful change. This confirms that the majority of petitioners believe that initiatives are a successful way to change

policy; this is consistent with the theory advanced earlier in this research. Petitioners are going to be more active in policymaking because they value the process, and its contribution to policy change. Thus, as expected petitioners feel that there should be more citizen involvement as well as feeling that initiatives are a successful way to change policy. Likewise, petitioners who do not want more citizen involvement in government believe that the direct democracy process does not always result in successful change. This continues to explore the relationship between citizen motivations and their activities.

To examine petitioner opinions and motives in an additional way, Table 5.5 looks at the correlation between petitioners' opinion of Oregon limiting citizen participation in government and its correlation with petitioners who feel that some issues can only be addressed through ballot propositions. Of those who feel that the state limits participation, petitioners feel that there were issues that could only be addressed by propositions. Again, this is consistent with the theory of this work that in order to spend the time to propose and campaign for their initiatives, the petitioners must value the process. Among those petitioners who feel that there should be no limitations on citizen participation in policymaking, there is a high correlation among those who feel there were issues that could only be addressed through propositions. This demonstrates the importance that petitioners in Oregon put on this process and how it contributes to a more responsive government.

Table 5.6 looks at the positive side of this issue, looking at the correlation between whether petitioners feel more government is needed and there are some issues that can only be addressed through ballot propositions. In this Table, overwhelmingly petitioners feel that there should be more citizen involvement and that there are issues that need to be addressed only through ballot propositions. Given that only petitioners are being surveyed, these findings are

not necessarily surprising but it does indicate that there is some motivation behind proposing these measures other than the topic of the measure. This contributes to the theory of this work as it demonstrates that there are at times ulterior motives to proposing a measure to be placed on the ballot.

The previous four tables provide evidence that while there are different motivations among petitioners, the majority of petitioners believe in the success of ballot propositions in changing policy. Further, their value and desire for citizen participation indicates that in general petitioners want to have more influence over policy making in Oregon. The responses by petitioners and their correlations presented indicate that there is support for Hypothesis 1.

Contributing to these findings - it is possible that there is voter fatigue with the number of elections in the system. Oregon often has several direct democracy propositions on the ballot in addition to the candidate races during an election. Petitioners were asked if they felt there were too many elections in Oregon's system. A large percentage of petitioners (60%) believe there are not too many elections in their system. In Table 5.7, this is correlated with responses that "there are issues that can only be addressed through ballot propositions" and found that overwhelmingly petitioners who feel that ballot propositions are the only way to address some issues feel that there are not too many elections in our system. While this continues to provide evidence for Hypothesis 1, it does illustrate the focus and value that petitioners have for ballot propositions and elections in the system. Indicative of my previous findings, Table 5.7 shows that elections are important to petitioners, depicting the value that petitioners place on the democratic system – both through direct democracy and candidate races. This contributes to the earlier theoretical arguments about petitioner motivations based on the proposition process that requires dedication and time on the part of the petitioner.



To investigate Hypothesis 2, it is vital to look at how petitioners view citizen sophistication in terms of policy. What is fascinating about the findings of petitioners is that many of these petitioners do not believe that citizens are sophisticated about policy; rather they feel that citizens are not overly sophisticated about policy and very few indicate that they feel that citizens are very sophisticated on policy. This is surprising as these are the citizens who vote on direct legislation. This indicates that while petitioners are attempting to bring policy to the citizenry they have low expectations about citizens in terms of sophistication. Hypothesis 2 offered a divergence in expectations about citizen sophistication and petitioner activities. This variance in expectation builds primarily from the differences in opinions of citizen sophistication. It would seem that if petitioners were aiming to place policy questions on the ballot, they would have higher expectations about citizen sophistication on policy issues. Theoretically, both responses can be explained, if petitioners have low expectations of voter sophistication they are using direct democracy as either a signal to the legislature or a way of taking advantage of voters. From Figure 5.5, a large number of petitioners do not feel that citizens are sophisticated in terms of policy. This means that they are not qualified or knowledgeable enough about policy to make decisions. This is confusing, if the petitioner is trying to change policy through citizen involvement, and yet they do not believe citizens are competent, does this not speak to other motivations (sinister or not) for putting these measures before the public?

Once establishing that petitioners have low expectations about citizen sophistication, in terms of policy, this analysis looks at several relationships to determine how petitioners expect this sophistication to impact direct democracy. In Table 5.8, the bivariate analysis indicates that petitioners want more citizen involvement, even when they do not believe citizens are

sophisticated. In this table, those who believe there is some moderate sophistication among the public have a high correlation with those who believe there should be more involvement, in comparison to those who believe there is less sophistication among citizens. While there are few petitioners who believe that citizens are very sophisticated, these petitioners are divided in terms of whether citizens should have more involvement – however, half of those respondents did suggest that they would like more citizen involvement in policy decisions.

The high number of petitioners who believe that citizens are unsophisticated when it comes to policymaking is somewhat shocking. It seems counterintuitive that petitioners of direct democracy measures believe that citizens are not sophisticated about policy and yet, propose to put policy measures on that ballot for citizens to decide. This leads to questions about why petitioners propose measures. The following quotes are taken from petitioner responses to the surveys and provide evidence for this argument. Petitioners were asked why they proposed an initiative; quotes of their responses are below:

“Other measures (legislatively) were ineffective.”

“Because the Legislature would not act.”

“High frustration level with partisan legislature that got nothing done. Public seemed ready to seriously consider public financing of elections as option. No success whatsoever in legislature for passing provisions through normal channels (legislative process) and availability of national money to run campaign.”

“The initiative process allows the majority of the voters to make a decision when one is not able to convince a majority of its representatives to pass their policy.”

“Because the legislature is unwilling to address the problem. In our state, the legislature is controlled by special interests that oppose the subject matter of our initiatives. As a result, we are forced to go out onto the ballot, where we typically prevail.”

“We use the titles to field test concepts which may be part of our legislative agenda, to intimidate the opposition, and to nudge the legislature to pursue good public policy.”

These quotes show that the actions of the legislature are not consistent with the desires of these petitioners. They are using this process to propose alternative solutions to get attention to issues and make policy. This is not always a positive experience, petitioners also demonstrated significant frustration with their elected officials. The quotes below demonstrate the anger and disappointment petitioners associate with the legislature. This points to larger arguments about why Oregonians utilize direct democracy- both to circumvent the legislature and prodding them to pay attention to specific issues and demonstrate that there are downsides to petitioning for initiatives.

“You don't have to pay state senators and delegates' money for their campaigns to get them to introduce a bill, push it through committees, watch it get stuck in a committee, etc. Direct democracy shows wide support and bypasses an elected representative albeit is very expensive and time consuming.”

“Legislature needed to take our position and concerns seriously. If we go directly to the people than the legislature loses control and some bad laws are passed by the people. The threat of this is going to the ballot is enough to make legislators rethink their position.”

These quotes show that there are other influences and impacts of having citizens propose and participate directly in the law making process. These quotes indicate the desire of petitioners to bypass the legislature or at a minimum forcing them to act. The second quote points to problems

with ballot propositions and the feeling by petitioners that citizens do not always make good public policy through these measures either.

Table 5.9 furthers the findings to determine how petitioners felt about citizen sophistication and how this influenced their campaign activities. Table 5.9 looks at the correlation between sophistication and the amount of educating petitioners had to do to educate citizen about their initiative. In Table 5.9, petitioners who believed that citizens are very sophisticated did significant educating about the initiative, creating the circular relationship that has been studied in the literature (Smith 2002, Smith and Tolbert 2004; Smith and Tolbert 2007). As the views of citizen sophistication decline, so does the citizens willingness to educate on their initiative. This demonstrates a relationship, where petitioner opinions on sophistication influence their campaign focus on educating on the initiative.

Further, to investigate this to ensure that it is not a lack of campaign that led to these views on ballot educating and sophistication rather it is important to determine whether petitioners view campaigns as a way to educate citizens. This is investigated in Table 5.10. This table indicates that among petitioners who believe that campaigns always educate there is a higher correlation with those who indicated that they did a lot of educating. This provides an illustration of petitioner motives and understanding. Those who do not believe that campaigns have any educative benefits are less likely to spend time on educating the public. This is congruent with the previous finding and provides support for Hypothesis 3, that there is a divergence in attitudes and activities of petitioners.

Surprisingly, this table also demonstrates that among those who do not believe that campaigns are supposed to educate, a large number of petitioners indicated that they had to do a lot of educating. This is methodologically troublesome because in an earlier section of the

survey, petitioners did not distinguish between educational activities and campaign activities. While these petitioners do not believe that campaigns educate they still campaigned as a way of educating citizens on their initiative. Perhaps, this finding can be further broken down to understand what is driving this relationship.

This is also examined by looking at petitioner responses to how much educating they did about their ballot propositions – 50 percent of the petitioners surveyed said that they strongly agreed that they did have to do a lot of educating; whereas only 15 percent indicated that they did not do much if any educating. This is reassuring because if petitioners have low opinions about citizens attributes but are willing and able to educate them; this supports the notion that they want an informed citizenry to participate. An inconsistency that appears in these surveys is that only 25 percent believed that campaigns are a way of educating the public but when asked about how they worked to inform the public most cited campaign activities. This is a complex result showing that while campaigns are the way to inform citizens, many petitioners do not believe that it is effective, offering suggestions that campaigns are a way to obfuscate the truth; fool, mislead or deceive the public; and focusing on influencing rather than informing. These beliefs are explained in the petitioner quotes below:

“‘Attempts’ surely, but frequently biased and obfuscating on purpose.”

“Attempt to influence not educate”

“Most campaigns are to win, not to educate”

“They can be more like deceptive advertising aimed at getting people to vote for the sponsor's initiative”

“It [campaigning] is a brainwashing process”

“Yes, but too many times they are misleading.”

These quotes demonstrate the range of opinions about ballot proposition campaigns. Seemingly, these petitioners feel that campaigns are not always educative rather they are a means to an end or provide particular perspectives. It is consistent that the findings of this analysis and demonstrates that those who believe that campaigns are not educative are not willing to educate the public on their measures. This combined with the earlier findings about citizen sophistication and education of citizens depicts a bleak picture of petitioners and their attitudes towards average citizens while providing support for Hypothesis 3.

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions of this chapter are supportive of the hypotheses and theory proposed earlier. This expands the literature on the motives and activities of petitioners. First, petitioners are not exactly representative of the public; they are older educated citizens who are very involved in their community. This is expected based on the voting literature and scholarly expectations about voting, and this analysis has found that it is further emphasized among petitioners. There is also substantial support that the perspective petitioners value and want more citizen participation and feel that ballot propositions are the best way to achieve policy ends. Further, there is a strong belief among petitioners that ballot propositions are the best way to change policy, that there should be more elections and more opportunities to exhibit these policy preferences. This chapter provides the background for petitioners and their activities and motivations, supporting Hypothesis 1. This advances the theory on petitioners and their activities because it demonstrates the importance that petitioners put on these measures – either through the measures themselves or the pressure these measures put on the legislature to change policy.

The belief that ballot propositions are needed to change policy and the correlation with more citizen participation is enlightening, as it demonstrates the importance that these petitioners put on citizen involvement in the process.

When taking this relationship one-step forward, this analysis looks at petitioner views on citizen sophistication as well as how these views influence petitioner activities. Hypothesis 2 posits that the petitioner view of citizens influences how they approach the public. In terms of what petitioners think about citizen sophistication on policy, petitioners think that the majority of citizens are usually unqualified on some issues. Petitioners who had a more positive outlook on the sophistication of citizens felt they had to do more educating on their initiative. This advances the theory on petitioners and their motives but demonstrating that it is the petitioners' perspective of citizens that leads to their campaign activities. There is an expectation in the literature that petitioners have different motives when they petition for measures, be they self interested in their propositions or if they are trying to make a more altruistic policy change. This provides an explanation for the divergence in petitioner activities. When looking at petitioners' views of citizen sophistication levels in terms of policy, it would seem that if petitioners are moving toward having more citizen involvement in government, that political knowledge and sophistication would be necessary. This contributes to the larger theory of petitioners role in direct democracy by demonstrating that all petitioners are not motivated by the best interests of the citizenry rather it demonstrates that educational activities are based on how petitioners view the sophistication of citizens.

In order to determine that this is not a fallacy of question wording or the questions asked, this analysis looks at educational activities. This proposes a contrasting position that complicates the initiative process is opinions on ballot campaigns. There is substantial disagreement among

petitioners as to what the role of a campaign is, whether it is to educate or if a campaign is used to manipulate or persuade the public. Nevertheless, among petitioners who felt that campaigns are educational there was a feeling that they had to do a lot more educating on their initiative. This indicates that petitioners who value education and feel that campaigns are a way to transmit that education are more likely to educate, supporting Hypothesis 3; thus, expanding the theoretical implications of this research by looking at the role of campaigns in the educational process, how petitioners seek to educate the public, and under what circumstances.

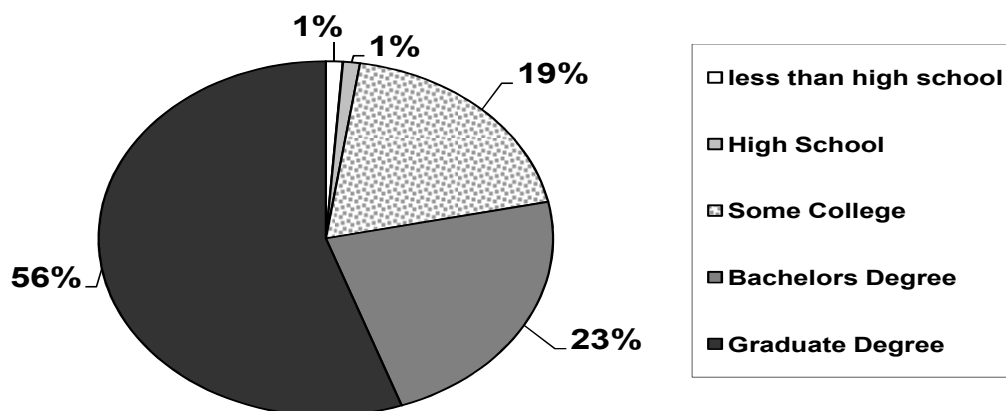
This analysis contributes to the overall theoretical components but also is able to develop a better understanding of opinions and activities of petitioners. Oregon's substantial use of direct democracy is not only a way to get people involved but also a way of influencing the legislature. The focus of petitioners on their own agenda, not always educating and certainly not addressing the public's understanding of the ballot question as a component of writing the ballot text, has resulted in a process of the few not the many. The majority of petitioners' view citizens sophisticated as poor or at least low, and yet, they make few attempts to engage the public in the process – through educating and making the ballot language accessible to the public. The dichotomy of opinions on citizen sophistication leads to a variation in activities on behalf of the petitioners, and this provides the differences in activities of petitioners. While there are some petitioners who do pay attention to educating citizens on their proposition and feel that citizens are fairly sophisticated about policy – these citizens still did not indicate that they considered citizen competence when writing the ballot proposition. Thus, the dichotomy of activities and beliefs combined with the attention to ballot language, contributes to the overall theoretical discussion about the link between political knowledge and participation.



All of the hypotheses in this chapter are supported, demonstrating the importance petitioners place on citizen participation in the process as well as their willingness to educate the citizenry on their proposition. This aside, the petitioners indicated that they were unhappy with the amount of participation in the process, wanting more or feeling that the state limited their participation. Further, when asking the petitioners about the text of their ballot proposition many indicated that they were not happy with the resulting text on the ballot but no petitioner indicated that citizen readability/comprehension was important to them, rather their focus seemed to be the development of a proposition that would survive legal challenge. This leads to questions about what impact ballot language has on participation and vote choice on ballot propositions. This is explored in the next chapter.

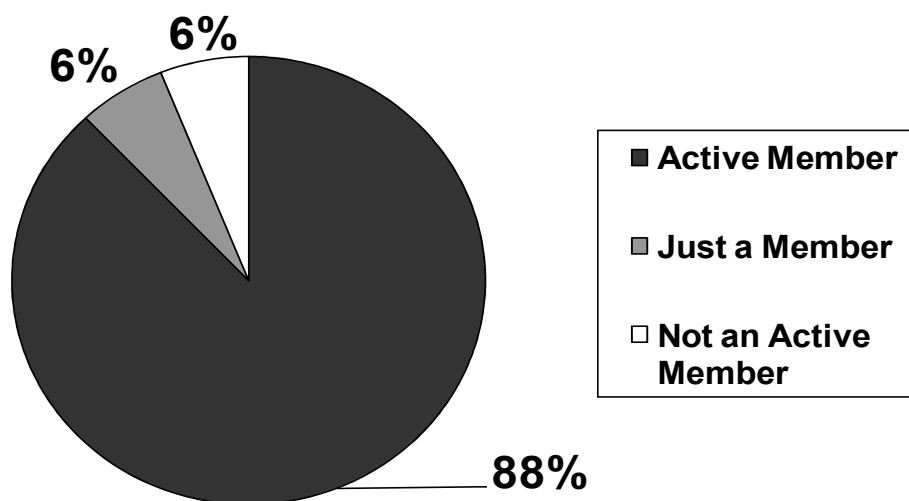
**Table 5.1 Presidential Election Results in Percentages in Oregon, 1996-2008**

	Republican	Democrat
2008	41.6	58.4
2004	47.9	52.1
2000	49.8	50.2
1996	45.3	54.7

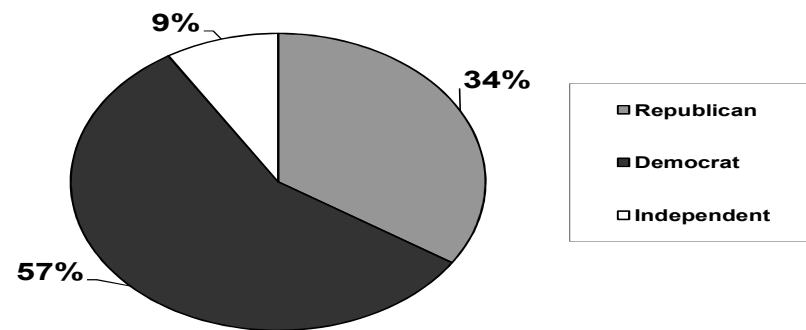


**Figure 5.1: Education Levels of Petitioners (N=86)<sup>40</sup>**

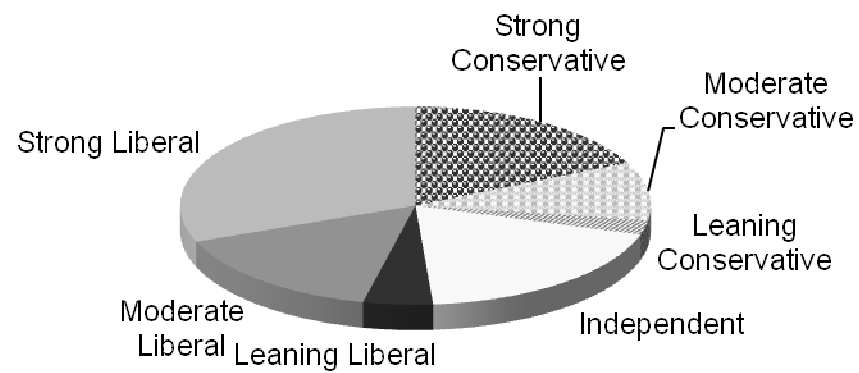
<sup>40</sup> As there are only two petitioners with education levels of high school or less, findings of the motives and the language of ballot measures by these individuals would not be statistically significant or representative of the population.



**Figure 5.2: Civic Engagement of Petitioners (N=86)**



**Figure 5.3: Partisanship of Petitioners (N=86)**



**Figure 5.4: Ideological Distribution of Petitioners (N=86)**

**Table 5.2: Bivariate Analysis of Initiatives by Success**

Only Initiatives	Changes more Successful		
	Never	Sometimes	Almost Always
Never	6 (7.2%)	1 (1.2%)	3 (3.6%)
Sometimes	5 (6%)	4 (4.7%)	2 (2.4%)
Almost Always	14 (16.7%)	23 (27.1%)	27 (32%)
N	85		
Chi-Square	146.96**		
LR test	10.04**		
Gamma	.350**		
Spearman Correlation	.345**		
Kendall's tau-b	.286**		

**Table 5.3: Bivariate Analysis of Limited Participation by Success**

Limited Participation	Change more Successful		
	Never	Sometimes	Almost Always
Never	16 (19.2%)	10 (12%)	7 (8.4%)
Sometimes	3 (3.6%)	5 (6%)	4 (4.8%)
Almost Always	5 (6%)	13 (15.6%)	20 (24%)
N	83		
Chi-Square	129.20**		
LR test	104.37*		
Gamma	.442**		
Spearman Correlation	.484**		
Kendall's tau-b	.387**		



**Table 5.4: Bivariate Analysis of Involvement by Success**

More Citizen	Successful Change		
	Never	Sometimes	Almost Always
Never	10 (11.9%)	4 (4.8%)	2 (2.4%)
Sometimes	5 (6%)	5 (6%)	4 (4.8%)
Almost Always	10 (12%)	19 (21.5%)	25 (30%)
N	84		
Chi-Square	138.92**		
LR test	100.16		
Gamma	.478**		
Spearman Correlation	.488**		
Kendall's tau-b	.398**		

**Table 5.5: Bivariate Analysis of Limited Participation by Propositions**

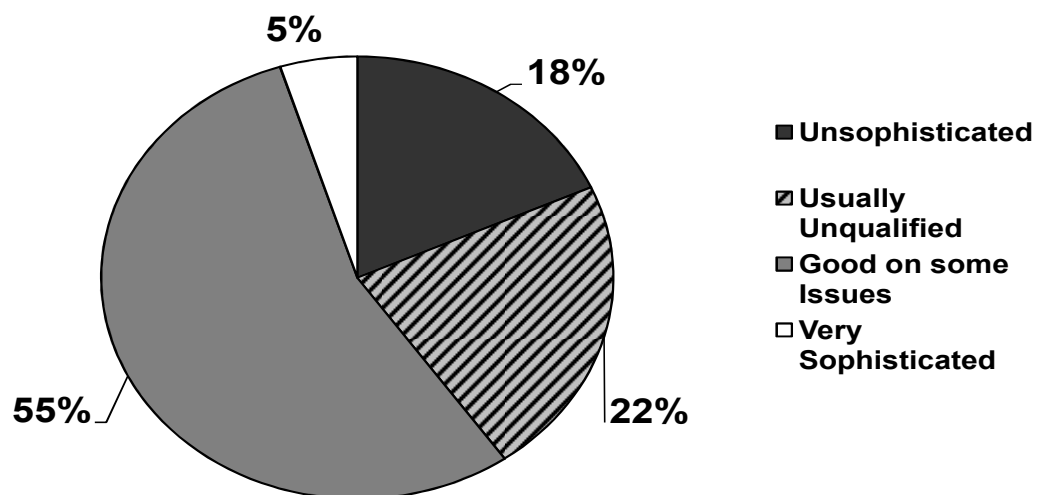
Limited Participation	Only Ballots		
	Never	Sometimes	Almost Always
Never	8 (9.6%)	5 (6%)	20 (24%)
Sometimes	1 (1.2%)	2 (2.4%)	15 (18%)
Almost Always	1 (1.2%)	2 (2.4%)	27 (32%)
N	83		
Chi-Square	104.13*		
LR test	80.70		
Gamma	.378**		
Spearman Correlation	.379**		
Kendall's tau-b	.308**		

**Table 5.6: Bivariate Analysis of Involvement by Only Propositions**

More Citizen	Only Ballots		
	Never	Sometimes	Almost Always
Never	4 (4.8%)	3 (3.6%)	9 (10.8%)
Sometimes	4 (4.8%)	2 (2.4%)	8 (9.6%)
Almost Always	2 (2.4%)	5 (6%)	47 (56.4%)
N	84		
Chi-Square	128.33**		
LR test	94.65		
Gamma	.395**		
Spearman Correlation	.378**		
Kendall's tau-b	.320**		

**Table 5.7: Bivariate Analysis of Only Ballots by Too Many Elections**

Only Initiatives	Too Many Elections		
	Never	Sometimes	Almost Always
Never	2 (2.4%)	3 (3.6%)	4 (4.8%)
Sometimes	7 (8.4%)	3 (3.6%)	0 (0%)
Almost Always	41 (49.3%)	18 (21.6%)	6 (7.2%)
N	83		
Chi-Square	106.28*		
LR test	71.73		
Gamma	-.232*		
Spearman Correlation	-.224*		
Kendall's tau-b	-.182*		



**Figure 5.5: Petitioner Views of Citizen Sophistication (N=86)**

**Table 5.8: Bivariate Analysis of Citizen Sophistication by Involvement**

More involvement	Citizen Sophistication			
	Unsophisticated	Usually Unqualified	Good on Some Issues	Very
Never	3 (3.6%)	2 (2.4%)	10 (24%)	1 (1.2%)
Sometimes	3 (3.6%)	5 (6%)	5 (6%)	1 (1.2%)
Always	9 (8.3%)	11 (9.5%)	18 (36.9%)	2 (2.4%)
N	84			
Chi-Square	22.24			
LR test	25.52			
Gamma	-.074			
Spearman Correlation	-.061			
Kendall's tau-b	-.051			

**Table 5.9: Bivariate Analysis of Citizen Sophistication by Educating**

Initiatives Educate	Citizen Sophistication			
	Unsophisticated	Usually Unqualified	Good on Some Issues	Very
Little to None	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.8%)	4 (5%)	0 (0%)
Some	2 (2.5%)	2 (2.5%)	7 (8.9%)	0 (0%)
Lots	12 (15.1%)	12 (15.1%)	33 (41.3%)	3 (3.8%)
N	84			
Chi-Square	16.91			
LR test	22.15			
Spearman Correlation	.006			
Kendall's tau-b	.007			

**Table 5.10: Bivariate Analysis of Campaigns Educate by Educating**

Campaigns Educate	Educating on Initiative		
	Little	Some	A Lot
Never	4 (5%)	3 (3.9%)	17 (21.5%)
Sometimes	2 (1.3%)	6 (7.5%)	10 (12.6%)
<u>Almost Always</u>	<u>4 (5%)</u>	<u>2 (2.6%)</u>	<u>33 (37.8%)</u>
N	80		
Chi-Square	117.26**		
LR test	98.88*		
Gamma	.185		
Spearman Correlation	.185		
Kendall's tau-b	.151		



## CHAPTER SIX

### TESTING THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE COMPLEXITY ON PARTICIPATION IN STATEWIDE DIRECT DEMOCRACY ELECTIONS: A NATIONAL STUDY

Is ballot question language a barrier to participation in direct democracy elections? Does language complexity lead to higher roll-off for direct democracy measures? This chapter answers these questions by focusing on characteristics of the ballot, namely grade level and position, to explain participation. Ballot measures are far more complex than traditional candidate elections. These measures are composed of a question asked to the public in a variety of circumstances and with few ‘traditional’ cues such as party identification, incumbency and name recognition. The results in this chapter demonstrate that ballot measure readability is an important detriment to participation in these elections. The wording of some of these questions leads to concerns about whether Americans truly understand what they are voting for and why participation on ballot measures is lower than for higher offices. Further, as this chapter will demonstrate, the grade level of these questions is often far above the reading levels of average citizens. The complexity of ballot language leads to ballot roll-off. This study uses the ballots themselves as the unit of analysis from 1997-2007, addressing ballot roll-off as a function of readability and ballot characteristics.

This chapter focuses on the assertion that citizen understandings of elections are paramount to participation in direct democracy – this will be studied in aggregate form in this chapter and in individual form as part of the experiment in the next chapter. In fact, citizen comprehension is a significant component of why direct democracy elections are available – for the public to assert their policy desires. However, if citizens are unwilling or unable to understand the question this can only lead to a more pronounced effect of this response bias and

roll-off, because citizens get discouraged and feel that they do not know the basis of what they are voting. This results in a plausible effect that citizens are discouraged from participating because of a lack of comprehension, which can contribute to overall desire to participate in elections. This is consistent with voting literature, which demonstrates that decreased efficacy and lack of understanding lead to decreased participation (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Miller and Shanks 1996; Putnam 2000, 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). This breeds concern for other democratic elections – the study endeavors to establish that the readability affects participation in direct democracy elections; however, research indicates that citizens turn out at a higher rate when there are direct democracy elections on the ballot (Smith and Tolbert 2007; Smith and Tolbert 2004; Smith 2002).

In this study, the link between ballot question readability and political participation is developed. By gathering the question wording for each ballot measure (from the State Election Boards and the NCSL) and putting them through a readability test, it is possible to ascertain the length of the question (number of words, paragraphs, sentences) as well as what grade level (Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level). This will provide information about the questions and demonstrate, in part, how ballot difficulty leads to decreased participation on ballot measures.

## **Hypotheses**

This research is focused on the impact of ballot language on participation in direct democracy elections. This leads to a main hypothesis as well as a second, supporting, hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 4:** If ballot propositions are complexly worded, they will lead to higher ballot roll-off.

This is analogous to the discussion of comprehension and wording of public opinion polls. Grade level indicates how many years of education a citizen would require in order to understand the question.

**Hypothesis 5:** The lower the position of the ballot proposition on the ballot the lower the participation.

Ballot position is an important component to understanding participation in terms of roll-off. The more electoral races on the ballots, the less interest and motivation a citizen will have to complete a long ballot. This has been researched in terms of judicial elections that are typically at the bottom of the ballot, similar to direct democracy measures (Walker 1966; Taebel 1975; Brockington 2003; Hall 1999; Dubois 1979). These elections have lower participation than on upper ballot elections – such as the Presidential and Congressional elections. Therefore, the position on the ballot for these individual elections contributes to participation levels because of longer ballots and decreased efficacy.

## **Data and Method**

This chapter unlike the previous chapter focuses on statewide ballot propositions from across the country, evaluating 1211 propositions and participation levels from 1997-2007. This extensive data set includes all questions that were available for this period.<sup>41</sup> Table 6.1 provides the breakdown of grade level of ballot questions by state.

Table 6.1 shows that Colorado has the largest spread of readability, including both the lowest and highest-grade level scores for ballot questions. Further, Southern states, notorious for barriers to participation, have readability scores that average 18.8, just over a grade level higher

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<sup>41</sup> Despite exhaustive research to find these questions some questions are not be available – Secretary of State's offices, Election Divisions, the National Council of State Legislatures as well as newspapers were consulted to gather these questions. However, despite lengthy efforts, not all questions are available and used in this study. .

than the national average. This demonstrates that grade level issues are a national problem, rather than an individual state or regional issue. Two extreme examples are provided below; these examples show the difficulty and ease of readability that ballot questions can have.

An amendment to Article X of the Constitution of the State of Colorado, establishing a homestead exemption for a specified percentage of a limited amount of the actual value of owner-occupied residential real property that is the primary residence of an owner-occupier who is sixty-five years of age or older and has resided in such property for ten years or longer, and, in connection therewith, allowing the general assembly by law to adjust the maximum amount of actual valued of such residential real property of which such specified percentage shall be exempt, requiring the aggregate statewide valuation for assessment that is attributable to residential real property to be calculated as if the full actual value of all owner-occupied primary residences that are partially exempt from taxation was subject to taxation for the purpose of determining the biennial adjustment to be made to the ratio of valuation for assessment for residential real property, requiring the General Assembly to compensate local governmental entities for the net amount of property tax revenues lost as a result of the homestead exemption, specifying that said compensation shall not be included in local government fiscal year spending, authorizing a permanent increase in state fiscal year spending to defray the cost to the state of said compensation, and specifying that said compensation shall not be subject to any statutory limitation on general fund appropriations.

**Colorado Referendum A, 2000 (grade level 95.1)<sup>42</sup>**

An Act to Extend from 4 to 6 Terms the Limits on Legislative Terms. Do you favor extending term limits for Legislators from 4 to 6 terms?

**Maine 2007 (grade level 6.7)**

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<sup>42</sup> In 2000, the Colorado Referendum A had a roll-off of 11.5% from the Presidential race. While this is a relatively low roll-off, the difference between the yes and no vote was only 4.7%. This means that those who rolled off could have affected the electoral results of the election and changed the outcome of the result. Similarly, in 1998 Colorado Amendment 4A had a roll-off of 46.8% and the margin who voted yes on the measure was only 6.8% demonstrating the real impact that ballot roll-off can have on participation in direct democracy elections. If only a fraction of those who rolled off had voted against the measure, it would have failed and had a real impact on the outcome.

These two examples demonstrate that there are ballot questions that are quite easy to understand and others that are far more complex. A grade level of 95.1 indicates that an individual needs the equivalent of 95 years of education in order to understand this ballot question, which demonstrates that this is beyond the understanding of the majority, if not all, voters. This measure is extreme but it depicts ballot questions that are far too difficult for voters to understand. This question could be written in more easily understood language. For example, a ballot question that looked something more like the example below to replace the aforementioned Referendum A from Colorado and provide additional information to voters in a voter's guide.

An act to extend homestead exemptions for homeowners sixty-five years and older and require the General Assembly to compensate local governments for the loss in income? (Grade level: 16.3 substantially less than the 95.1 of the original propositions)

The question has the same meaning but is in far more comprehensible language. This is a far superior question to that proposed in Referendum A described above.

Table 6.2 provides the descriptive statistics for this analysis and Table 6.3 provides the grade level breakdown by direct democracy type. Table 6.3 demonstrates that there is important variation across these measures. The citizen-driven initiatives are less frequent in the past ten years; nonetheless, these initiatives do have a wide range in reading complexity from seventh grade to requiring average citizens to have nearly seventy years of education to understand ballot questions. The legislative referenda, introduced and written by the state, have a larger spread from the fifth grade to ninety-five years of education. What is startling is that the mean reading level for all types of direct democracy is around the 17<sup>th</sup> grade level – almost double the national

average reading level. Further, legislative referenda written by the state have the highest mean grade level. This indicates that state proposed measures, as well as citizen-driven ballot measures, are beyond the typical reading level of citizens.

This analysis also includes tests for the position of ballot propositions on the ballot. Expecting that the further down the ballot a proposition is the more likely it is to experience roll-off due to voter fatigue, and in this analysis, this is controlled for by the ballot position (Taebel 1975; Brockington 2003). *Position* refers to the number of vote choices on the ballot prior to the individual ballot proposition on the same ballot. Long ballots can result in voter fatigue, which increases ballot roll-off (Walker 1966). There is research to support the notion that the length of ballot decreases the participation rates at the polls (Walker 1966; Darcy and Schneider 1989; Nichols and Strizek 1995; Nichols 1998; Kimball and Kropf 2006). There can be several ballot propositions on a single ballot (in 2000 Oregon had 24 ballot propositions; in 2004 California had 14). The high number of measures on a ballot in addition to candidate races leads to longer ballots, higher fatigue (Bowler, Donovan and Happ 1992) and higher roll-off potential.

Another factor controlled for in this analysis is the *word count* for the question on the ballot. If questions are especially lengthy, the voters may skip these because of the time required to read the question. Tests reveal that word count is not collinear with the readability measure, *grade level*. *Word count* is the number of the words in the ballot proposition.

This analysis includes several control variables. The research on voting demonstrates that certain socioeconomic variables influence participation (Miller and Shanks 1996; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Fiorina 1981; Campbell et al 1960) and this has been tested on an individual level in direct democracy (Branton 2003). This analysis includes aggregate census measures for the states. To measure economic variability by state, the median household *Income*

for each state is used, standardized to 2006 dollars to account for inflation, and this information is collected from the Census. Minority populations including state percentages of *Blacks* and *Latinos* are included to account for racial composition in states as the literature indicates that race has on roll-off (Magleby 1985; Darcy and Schneider 1989; Vanderleeuw and Engstrom 1987). This analysis also controls for education levels in the state, as education levels have been demonstrated throughout the voting literature to explain participation.

In addition to socioeconomic variables, year variables are accounted for when looking at participation, as at the election year level there are numerous factors, which may influence roll-off. Type of elections (*Special*, *Primary* and *General* elections held every calendar year) have different amounts of attention, interest and knowledge that the public has in these propositions (Sheppard 2005). Special election is included because many of the propositions included in this data set occur during special elections when there are only ballot propositions on the ballot. During these elections, it is expected there to be lower roll-off.

Each type of election is coded dichotomously, with special elections being used as the base category in the regression models below. There are variations in *Turnout* during elections that may influence roll-off, which is measured as percentage of voting age population who voted. A *Presidential year* variable is utilized because Presidential elections have a higher roll-off because often voters will only vote for the top election on the ballot.

To analyze the data a Hierarchical Linear Model (HLM) and an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression are utilized (in several models – detailed below). There is clustering in the data at the state and year level that must be accounted for (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992; Draper 1995; Pedhazur 1997; Hoffman and Gavin 1998). The hierarchical model is used for two

reasons. First, theoretically, there is a significant amount of clustering because ballot propositions are done on a state level and there are variations in the state qualification process (Bowler and Donovan 2004) that will necessarily lead to clustering. Furthermore, a likelihood ratio test was significant, indicating clustering in the data. State variables used in clustering account for variation across states. The clustering of data means there are several data points that share similar characteristics and are more similar than if they were randomly selected. This analysis has substantial clustering because of state qualification and insulation measures that can mean that certain states have higher numbers of measures than others. Further, because this analysis is over time, there is a variation in the number and types of measures in each year – because of issue salience and popularity. For example, in 2004 eleven states had gay marriage measures on the ballot – thus, there is clustering on a yearly level. Further, several of these ballot measures are on the same ballots as at least one other ballot measure – these measures on the same ballot share similarities. Thus, when measuring participation on these ballots these measures (which are not completely independent for the previous reasons) clustering at these levels must be addressed.

This chapter proceeds as follows: first, this analysis looks at the relationship between ballot language and roll-off of voters. Second, this chapter looks at this relationship, while accounting for clustering at the ballot, state and year levels. Third, this study looks at the ballot language on one topic (gay marriage) and the according roll-off across twenty-six states.

## **Discussion and Findings**

Table 6.4 provides three different OLS models. The first model is a depiction of the impact of grade level on roll-off. The second model includes state variables to show state



demographic impacts on roll-off. The third model includes political control variables. In all the models, there is a consistent impact of readability on increasing roll-off. For one unit change in log of grade level, there is a positive change of one-third of the standard deviation in log of roll-off (.40). Therefore, ballot wording has a significant influence on voting in direct democracy measures.

For ballot-level controls there is little to no impact from the ballot position and word count on roll-off. This is inconsistent with the expectations of Hypothesis 5 and previous literature. This means that Hypothesis 5 is rejected, as ballot position or length of individual proposition word-count does not statistically contribute to lower participation. This is a substantive finding of this research, indicating when controlling for ballot language these factors are not significant influences on participation (or roll-off) in ballot measures. This substantiates the effect of variable is important as it demonstrates that rejecting Hypothesis 5, strengthens the value of this measurement.

There are significant normative implications to the issue and argument that citizens are unable to understand direct democracy propositions. If the creation of ballot questions beyond citizen comprehension is a purposeful activity, it not only develops strong arguments about creating obstacles to voting and participation but it also targets specific segments of the population (this is explored in the next Chapter). As previous studies state and our analysis confirms, education and race are important considerations in who participates in direct democracy elections, furthering the argument that these elections are only for the elite.

Citizen understandings of elections are paramount to participation in direct democracy; in fact, it is a significant component of why direct democracy elections are available – for the public to assert their policy desires. However, if citizens are unwilling or unable to understand

the question this can only lead to a more pronounced effect of this response bias and roll-off, because citizens get discouraged as well as feel that they do not know the basics of the races on which they are voting. This is consistent with voting literature and demonstrates that decreased efficacy and lack of understanding lead to decreased participation (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Miller and Shanks 1996; Putnam 2000, 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). This generates concern for other democratic elections – this chapter establishes that the readability affects participation in direct democracy elections; however, research indicates that citizens turnout at a higher rate when there are direct democracy elections on the ballot (Smith and Tolbert 2007; Smith and Tolbert 2004; Smith 2002). Therefore, if these elections are too difficult it may drive people away from participating in any elections.

How can we expect citizens to vote in these less salient direct democracy elections, particularly when they are so difficult for them to understand? Citizens are not going to spend the time to educate themselves and learn about these ballot questions, therefore their participation is often dependent on what is on the ballot when they go to vote. This is problematic, as we will establish that most citizens cannot comprehend the questions on the ballot – thus producing yet another barrier to participation and completion of the ballot.

Some political controls also contribute to increased roll-off. When there are ballot propositions in a presidential year this contributes to increases in roll-off, as expected because these are higher salience elections. Further, the higher the turnout the higher the roll-off. This is also expected because higher salience elections bring out voters who do not usually participate and further, do not participate down ballot. There are also some electoral level impacts on roll-off, both general and primary elections experience higher roll-off than special elections. Again, this is because special elections usually focus on the ballot measures and there are fewer salient

elections. At the state-level, the higher the percentage of African American population in the state, the higher the roll-off, this is consistent with previous research indicating that minorities do not participate in these less salient elections as frequently.

Table 6.5 continues this examination, while accounting for the clustering of ballot proposition roll-off by ballot, state and year. The models in Table 6.5 show the same results as shown by the OLS regressions in Table 6.4. This demonstrates that despite clustering in the data, this is not a factor in these relationships. According to the HLM specification, one unit change in log of grade level results in an increase of around one fourth of a standard deviation in the log of roll-off (or approximately .30). This means that it explains about 30 percent of the roll-off on ballot measures. The substantive impact of this means that a question at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade complexity will have a roll-off of 3.03%, likewise roll-off will be 4.03% for those propositions at a 12<sup>th</sup> grade complexity and 5.02% at the 16<sup>th</sup> grade complexity. These results confirm the impact of readability on voting in direct democracy elections. To demonstrate the magnitude of this impact Table 6.6 provides a table of the closeness of ballot races. Looking at Table 6.6, many of these races are close, and the roll-off from ballot language and inconsistent voting (examined in Chapter 7), could account for the differences between a yes or no votes.

Some variables are not significant in the HLM models that were in the OLS models, namely state level differences. These state-level characteristics do not have a significant impact on participation as they did in the OLS models. However, readability is still an important contributor even when controlling for these factors. Further, at the year level, depicted in Model 3, only primary elections (in comparison to special elections) have a significant impact. Other year variables are not significant in this model.

The next component of this chapter is to look at ballot language on one particular question. The issue of gay marriage has been prevalent in ballot measures over the last five years. These ballot questions (collected from 26 states) are on a clear issue, namely what is the definition of marriage. Figure 6.1 provides a graph of readability of ballot propositions on gay marriage and their subsequent participation rates. The horizontal axis represents the grade level of the measure while the vertical axis represents participation rates. From this depiction, there are examples where ballot language increases and participation rates decrease, like that explained in this Chapter, but there are also times when the grade level increases and participation increases. This demonstrates that this is not an absolute rule, there will be exceptions in term of participation and in this case, the increased participation could be because of the salience of this issue and these elections. The next chapter looks at voting - and how ballot language is an asset or detriment to voters' casting votes consistent with their policy preferences.

## **Conclusions**

Throughout the statistical analysis of this chapter, there is a consistent influence of question readability on roll-off of voters. This is an important finding, expanding early research on ballot language and participation (Magleby 1984) across not only states and time, but shows clear repercussions of readability on participation in direct democracy elections. The results in this analysis indicate that ballot complexity is paramount in determining aggregate participation on ballot questions. The results demonstrate a consistent and negative impact that in addition to previous explanations of roll-off, readability of the question has a strong influence on participation in direct democracy. This problem indicates serious issues with direct democracy as currently practiced. Furthermore, the expectation that voter fatigue from lengthy ballots and

questions would lead to higher ballot roll-off is diminished (if not deleted) when accounting for ballot complexity. Thus, the impact of ballot readability is clear and has substantive policy repercussions for states that utilize direct democracy. The desire for more citizen input into lawmaking has consequences, laws that the legislature does not want or for which there is a public policy reason not to pass. However, if readability of these measures is above most citizens' comprehension ability, this can contribute to policymaking that neither the citizenry nor the state wants. The impact of readability on voting policy preferences is investigated in the next Chapter to develop this argument more fully.

Despite the seriousness of not having citizens participate in all elections, and only getting a select few, either because of obstacles such as inability to understand the question or being unknowledgeable about these less salient elections, there are ways to repair this lack of participation. There are several ways to counteract high roll-off – namely having elections with fewer races on the ballot – giving citizens more opportunity to research the elections. However, we do understand from previous research that this means that we will have lower turnout because these are less salient elections. Another way to counteract high roll-off would be to ensure that ballot propositions are proposed in a way that is accessible to citizens – either through substantial education (as done in California and Oregon<sup>43</sup>, among others), through limiting the number of these races, or through making the questions far more understandable to the public. Nonetheless, the expectation that we will have high levels of participation in direct democracy elections may need to be adjusted in order to understand what drives participation in these elections and what contributes to roll-off.

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<sup>43</sup> California and Oregon put out voter information leaflets prior to the election with a sample ballots and information on what each vote option means. Voters still need to read and educate themselves on the individual races and ballot proposition. This is a commendable action by the state and an expensive one, but it demonstrates the importance they place on citizen participation in the process.

The results show that ballot language needs to be addressed as part of participation in these elections. States should address the language of ballots to make them more accessible to the public. Some programs have been developed by states to decrease the complexity of the ballot language. Oregon, for example, indicates that the text should be “clear and impartial” and “simple and understandable”, yet does not provide guidelines about what that entails. The next chapter continues to look at what impact this language has on whether citizens can vote their preferences under circumstances of different readability and what impact political knowledge has on this relationship.

**Table 6.1: Descriptive Statistics of Grade Level by State**

State	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Alabama	32	18.2	6.4	12.2	35.3
Alaska	30	12.8	5.3	7.5	30.4
Arizona	70	16.5	3.1	10.8	26.3
California	105	13.3	1.8	8.7	18.1
Colorado	62	25.6	15.2	5.2	95.1
Connecticut	1	10.7		10.7	10.7
Florida	40	16.8	5.0	7.6	37.7
Georgia	33	21.8	10.4	9.9	57.2
Hawaii	10	22.0	10.9	9.9	43.6
Idaho	16	13.6	2.3	11.8	19.5
Indiana	6	17.0	3.5	13.1	23.3
Iowa	5	13.9	4.0	10.5	20.6
Kansas	4	17.9	1.7	16.0	19.9
Kentucky	7	22.1	6.1	13.9	30.3
Louisiana	61	17.3	6.8	8.0	44.3
Maine	66	18.4	6.6	7.6	37.3
Maryland	11	19.9	4.1	13.4	26.4
Massachusetts	18	14.3	2.1	10.2	19.0
Michigan	18	14.3	3.1	9.4	21.4
Minnesota	1	26.4		26.4	26.4
Mississippi	3	13.7	5.0	8.4	18.3
Missouri	27	19.4	8.2	8.0	43.8
Montana	29	16.1	7.4	11.2	52.2
Nebraska	37	17.9	3.4	11.1	25.2
Nevada	36	19.0	6.4	10.9	42.0
New Hampshire	8	16.3	5.0	9.9	27.1
New Jersey	20	23.0	6.6	13.0	34.0
New Mexico	14	27.5	9.3	12.0	38.8
New York	8	18.8	8.3	7.6	35.4
North Carolina	1	10.7		10.7	10.7
North Dakota	13	12.6	2.8	8.5	18.4
Ohio	19	16.9	4.9	9.4	30.2
Oklahoma	38	9.2	1.1	7.3	11.6
Oregon	94	14.1	1.7	10.8	18.3
Pennsylvania	6	23.8	5.4	17.0	33.1
Rhode Island	35	13.5	6.1	6.4	33.0
South Carolina	19	25.4	10.8	16.0	62.5
South Dakota	36	12.3	2.1	7.0	17.2
Tennessee	6	16.6	5.8	10.0	24.8
Texas	84	19.9	12.0	12.0	45.0
Utah	6	15.6	5.3	10.1	23.9
Vermont	1	16.5		16.5	16.5
Virginia	3	21.6	3.2	18.5	24.9
Washington	57	15.4	2.8	9.6	22.2
Wisconsin	3	19.6	16.6	16.6	23.4
Wyoming	12	17.5	3.6	12.0	24.9
All	1211	17.1	7.2	5.2	95.1

**Table 6.2: Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max.	N
Roll-off	0.13	0.15	0	0.99	1211
Log of roll-off	-2.64	1.19	-9.76	-.01	1211
Grade Level	17.08	7.22	5.20	95.10	1211
Log of Grade Level	2.77	0.35	1.65	4.56	1211
Position	12.70	7.65	1.00	36.00	1211
Word Count	118.00	107.19	5.00	1075.00	1211
Income	43372.90	8972.26	3778.00	82906.00	1211
College	25.16	4.40	2.20	37.00	1211
Latino	12.57	11.82	.60	44.00	1211
Black	9.15	9.71	.20	37.20	1211
Presidential year	0.28	0.45	0	1.00	1211
General Elections	0.86	0.35	0	1.00	1211
Primary	0.08	0.27	0	1.00	1211
Turnout	0.61	1.03	0	22.04	904 <sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Turnout information is not available for every state. Several states do not provide registration numbers (or do not require registration prior to the election) and turnout numbers – this is particularly more difficult to collect when going back to 1997.



**Table 6.3: Grade Level by Type of Direct Democracy**

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max.	N
Initiative	15.38	5.94	7.0	68.9	355
Legislative Referenda	17.98	7.71	5.2	95.1	805
Popular Referenda	14.68	4.08	7.6	30.2	50
Other <sup>45</sup>	16.90		16.9	16.9	1
All	17.08	7.22	5.2	95.1	1211

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<sup>45</sup> As previously indicated there are some types of direct democracy that are classified by other according to the National Council of State Legislatures. These are elections that do not fall into the three other categories, perhaps because of state classification or state laws.

**Table 6.4: Determinants of Roll-off on Ballot Questions (OLS regression)**

Variable	Model 1 (SE)	Model 2 (SE)	Model 3 (SE)
Log of Grade Level	.272* (.108)	.248* (.121)	.315**(.118)
Word Count		.001 (.000)	.000 (.000)
Position		-.004 (.006)	-.009 (.006)
College Graduates		.012 (.010)	.012 (.010)
Black++		.053** (.005)	.052** (.005)
Median income		.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
Presidential Year		.255** (.079)	.207** (.078)
Turnout		.201** (.048)	.190** (.047)
General election			.870** (.189)
Primary			1.706** (.247)
Intercept	-3.489** (.299)	-4.220** (.403)	-4.961** (.416)
Observations	1051	726	725
F Test	6.38*	21.57*	23.21**
Adj R <sup>2</sup>	.01	.19	.23

\*p < .05 \*\*p < .01

++ Latino was included in some models to account for minorities in different states. However, this variable was not significant.

**Table 6.5: Determinants of Roll-off on Ballot Questions (HLM)**

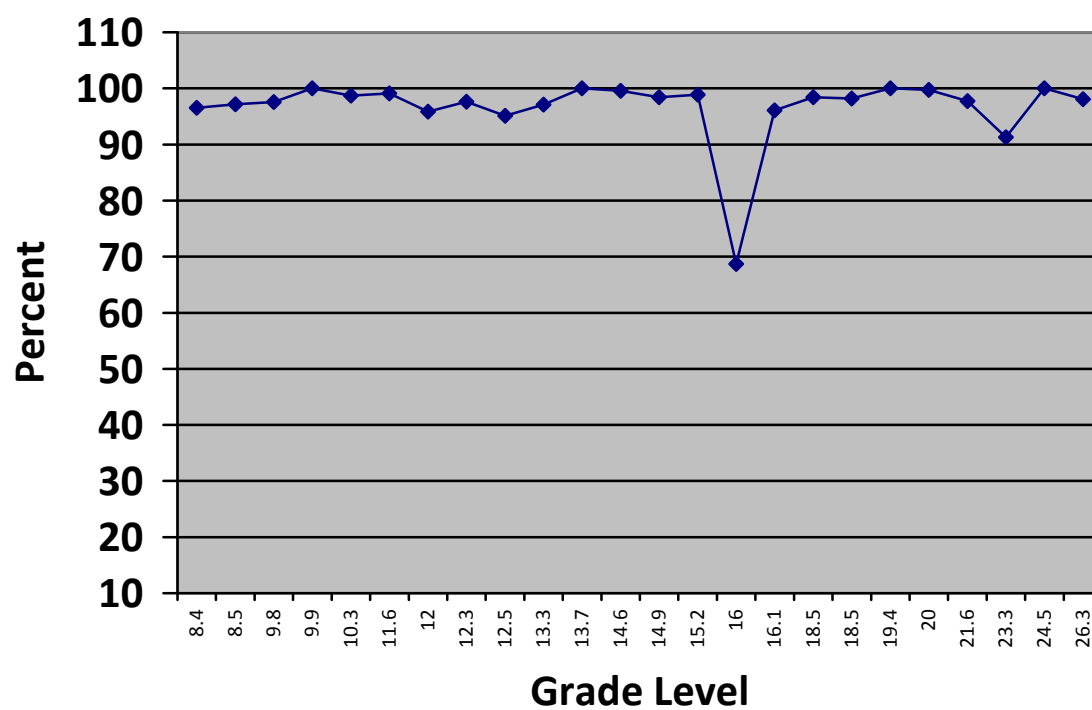
Variable	Model 1 (SE)	Model 2 (SE)	Model 3 (SE)
<b>Ballot Level Variables</b>			
Log of Grade Level	.190+ (.103)	.199* (.103)	.322** (.114)
Position	.000 (.007)	.000 (.007)	-.001 (.007)
Word Count	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
Ballot intercept	-3.016** (.319)	-3.056** (.315)	-3.362** (.341)
<b>State-Level Variables</b>			
College Graduates		.022 (.015)	.004 (.066)
Black		.014 (.023)	.018 (.016)
Median income		.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
State-Level intercept	.693** (.103)	.321 (.715)	.635* (.320)
<b>Year-Level Variables</b>			
Presidential Year			.001 (.096)
General election			.208 (.595)
Primary			1.574** (.435)
Turnout			.093 (.071)
Year-level Intercept	.714** (.061)	.713** (.061)	.443 (.289)
Observations	1049	1049	725
Wald $\chi^2$	3.51	3.83	8.08*
-2 Log likelihood	-1448.21	-1443.34	-714.12
LR test	496.91**	494.73**	429.20**
+p < .10 *p < .05 **p < .01			

**Table 6.6: Percent of Yes Votes on Ballot Propositions<sup>46</sup>**

Vote %	Below 30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81-90	91+
Raw Number	69	151	228	354	320	180	61	6
Percent	0.5	11.2	16.6	25.8	23.3	13.1	4.4	0.04
Number between 49 – 51% = 90 (6.6%)								
Number between 45 – 55% = 324 (23.6%)								

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<sup>46</sup> This includes results available from 1370 ballot propositions between 1997 and 2007.



**Figure 6.1: Percent Roll-off by Grade Level on Gay Marriage Ballot Measures<sup>47</sup>**

<sup>47</sup> The exact question wording for these ballot measure questions can be found in Appendix E.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL ANALYSIS:

#### AN EXPERIMENT OF PREFERENCE VOTING

Does political knowledge influence participation and ‘voting correctly’ on ballot propositions of different readability? Political knowledge has been demonstrated to impact engagement and participation (Lupia 1994a and 1994b; Luskin 1987; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Milner 2002). Ballot measure participation requires more knowledge than traditional candidate elections because these complex elections are composed of a variety of issues and circumstances and provide few ‘traditional’ cues such as party identification, incumbency and name recognition. The wording of some of these ballot questions leads to concerns about whether Americans truly understand what they are voting for and how they are voting. This is confounded by lower participation on these measures than on higher offices. Often the language of ballot questions is not clear. This analysis will answer three questions. How much impact does political knowledge have on participation in direct democracy propositions? What role does ballot complexity have on participation? Finally, is citizens’ ability to vote consistent with their policy preferences affected by complex language?

#### **Hypotheses**

This chapter looks at five different hypotheses investigating political knowledge, ballot language, issue salience, participation and vote choice.

**Hypothesis 4:** If ballot propositions are complexly worded, they will lead to higher ballot roll-off.

This hypothesis was initially explored in Chapter 6 in regards to ballot language; this chapter further develops this hypothesis. This part of the experiment looks to determine whether ballot language affects participation on these ballot propositions. For the more complexly worded ballot questions, there will be less participation because participants do not understand the ballot questions. This combined with the findings of Chapter 5 demonstrates the importance of ballot language - voters find them so difficult to read that they will not vote on them. By using ballot questions from actual elections, this provides examples of obstacles that voters encounter at the ballot box and provides results that are applicable to election participation.

**Hypothesis 6:** If voters have higher levels of political knowledge, they are more likely to participate.

Hypothesis 6 looks at participation in direct democracy rates. These elections have lower salience and this results in lower participation in these elections. However, participants with higher political knowledge struggle through the ballot completing more propositions than those with lower political knowledge. This means that, with all else being equal, citizens with higher levels of political knowledge will participate in higher numbers on direct democracy measures. Certainly in a real election there would be more information available and citizens could educate themselves on these issues prior to voting. In an experiment, however, the impact of the ballot language will be more evident and can provide insight into voting on ballot measures during a real election.

**Hypothesis 7:** If there is a ballot language effect, it will be larger for individuals with lower levels of knowledge.

Hypothesis 7 looks at the differences between those with higher political knowledge and those with lower political knowledge in dealing with barriers of complex ballot language. Those with higher political knowledge will be able to overcome the difficult ballot language and

participate. These differences demonstrate that ballot language influences participation and there are variables in the impact based on political knowledge.

**Hypothesis 8:** If voters have a gut response to some issues, this will enable them to overcome the ballot language barrier.

Hypothesis 8 explores the impact of the topic of ballot measures to explain how different topics influence participation in ballot propositions. The expectation is that there are some issues such as abortion, where voters will have gut opinions and will be able to vote their preferences on these measures regardless of ballot language. The voter will struggle through questions that are more complex and make more attempts to ensure that their votes match their preferences. Additionally, the ranking of topics will be consistent on these issues both before and after being exposed to ballot measures of different complexity because this is such a salient issue to the voter.

**Hypothesis 9:** If ballot propositions are complexly worded, votes on these propositions will have lower congruence with the voter's policy preferences.

Hypothesis 9 looks at the congruence between vote choice and policy preferences. I hypothesize that the more difficult (complex) the ballot language the less congruence there will be between the vote choice and policy preferences because citizens are less able to understand what is going on in the proposition, which limits their ability to vote their policy preferences.

## **Experimental Methodology**

This analysis uses an experiment, involving 366 university students in a pre-test/post-test design, to evaluate ballot complexity influences on participation in simulated direct democracy elections. There are two experimental groups and one control group. The pre-test involved questions about policy preferences and political knowledge, as well as socioeconomic questions.



These students were randomly assigned to one of the three groups to participate in ballot questions. While controlling for topic, one experimental group received propositions with a high complexity, others received propositions with low complexity. Complexity is measured through grade level analysis provided by the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level as measured and tested in Chapter 6.

The main dependent variable is the number of ballot questions the participant answered among those ballot questions provided in each of the treatments. The participation rates are used in raw number form to account for different numbers of questions on each treatment. The main independent variable of readability is operationalized by analyzing questions through a readability test provided by Microsoft Word to determine what grade level (Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level) ballot questions are. The other main independent variable of political knowledge is operationalized by using the scale devised by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996).

Research in Chapter 6, as well as Magleby's (1984) study, indicates that ballot readability has a negative impact on participation in ballot questions, demonstrating the importance of readability in elections and direct democracy questions. This chapter furthers that research by looking at the larger role that political sophistication can have on participation, as well as the role of political knowledge in comprehending and voting on propositions of complex wording.

Another component of this experiment is looking at policy preferences and the translation into electoral decisions. Studies have indicated that there is a connection in direct democracy between vote choice and policy preferences (Bowler and Donovan 1998). The present study expands these findings exploring what role readability has in limiting or increasing this correlation. To do this, participants were asked to answer eleven policy questions, ranging from abortion to term limits, and then asked them how important these issues were to them personally

prior to voting on ballot propositions.<sup>48</sup> More questions were asked in the experiment than were utilized in order to divert the attention of the participants away from the particular issues and ballot propositions under analysis.

These students answered questions about themselves, ideology, vote choice, and policy preferences (as well as strength of these preferences) in the pre-test. Participations were asked a battery of political knowledge questions (using National Election Survey questions that are used to comprise the Delli Carpini and Keeter index as well as some less direct political knowledge questions). These participants were shown a brief film as a distracter<sup>49</sup> about gun control, participants were then asked to answer some questions related to the video. The participants were given questions on gun control and school safety in the control group, while the experiment groups had two ballot propositions on the topic to transition into the ballot measures section. These questions were the same for both the treatment groups. These were both at a twelfth grade level and were consistent across the treatments. The next step for the treatment experimental groups was to participate in direct democracy ballot propositions where they had the choice to vote for, against or ‘no vote’ for individual questions. After being exposed to the different treatments’ ballot questions, the control group and the two experimental groups were asked to rank if they would participate in ballot questions on specific topics. Then these students as well

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<sup>48</sup> The Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University approved this experiment and no identifying information was collected from the participants that could connect them to their responses. To ensure there were no problems with the surveys, we ran a preliminary test of the experiment. The control post-test was expanded to ensure that it took the same time to complete as the experimental groups.

<sup>49</sup> As there is substantial correlation in terms of the ballot questions asked in the post-test and the pre-test policy questions, it is standard to provide a brief distracter in between the tests. These can comprise of videos, word searches, or even time breaks (a day or week). I provided a film about gun control – which was not related to the subject of the experiment – as the distracter. This video depicted both sides of the arguments of gun control, was not a method of persuasion or an attempt to exacerbate political attitudes, rather this video was used to get participants minds off the questions they had answered in the pre-test. According to IRB protocol, we were required to debrief subjects after the experiment. None of the participants indicated that the video was particularly persuading nor did it seem to intensify any partisan feelings. There were two questions included on all post-tests on gun control to allow participants to connect their reactions to the video (if there were any) to questions prior to completing the rest of the experiment. This was followed with questions about the video and the university in order to distract the groups from the purpose of the experiment.

as the control group were asked to rank whether they would participate on ballot propositions on different topics.

This experiment used two treatment groups and a control group to explain the impact of political knowledge on participation in direct democracy questions of different levels of difficulty. There were two treatments of different ballot language to determine if there is higher participation among those with higher levels of knowledge and if there is variation in participation based on difficulty of questions.

**Treatment 1:** Participants were given direct democracy propositions of high complexity and then asked to rank on what topics they would participate in a direct democracy election.

**Treatment 2:** Participants were given direct democracy propositions of low complexity and then asked to rank on what topics they would participate in a direct democracy election.

**Control:** Participants are not subjected to any ballot proposition questions, only asked to rank on what topics they would participate in a direct democracy election.

Treatments 1 and 2 had paired questions on the same topic, selected with the extreme differences in grade level, to see the most dramatic changes in the variable. This included ballot questions of some of the more frequently used proposition topics such as state taxes, abortion, gay marriage, medical marijuana, and representative term limits. These questions were matched with policy preferences and strength of preferences as well as issue topics the rankings for the

three topics. The pre-test and corresponding experimental and control post-tests are included in Appendix F.

The ballot propositions used in the experimental groups were selected from the ballot questions analyzed in the complexity and language chapter. These were actual ballot propositions that appeared on ballots across the United States in the past ten years. They appeared in the experiment as they did on the state ballots with a few minor changes.<sup>50</sup> The average grade level of easy ballot questions in Treatment 1 was 9.3 and average grade level of difficult ballot questions in Treatment 2 was 46.8. This provides an excellent dichotomy of complexity between the two experimental groups.

To analyze the results of this experiment, several bivariate correlations are used to demonstrate the relationships between the two variables. By using an experiment and random selection of participants into these categories, several variables (individual characteristics, education levels, partisanship) are controlled. Since each individual has the same probability of being in each experimental group, it is unnecessary to control for particular characteristics of the participants (Barrentine 1999; Cochran and Cox 1992; Montgomery 2005).

### *Participants*

This experiment was conducted in seven different undergraduate classes (five Global Issues Classes, one American Government class and one State Politics class)<sup>51</sup> with different

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<sup>50</sup> In order to make this appropriate for the experiment I did change the questions that mentioned their home state to Georgia, where the experiment took place to ensure that the participants felt like they were participating on ballot propositions that might appear on the ballot in their home state (i.e. when the ballot question mentioned Colorado, it was replaced with Georgia). This manipulation did not affect the complexity of the ballot proposition.

<sup>51</sup> While there may be some external validity issues with using undergraduate students much of experimental design has used undergraduate students as subject (Druckman 2001). Global Issues classes were used to pre-empt any knowledge effect from the American political science classroom environments. This study seeks to explore 'long-term' political knowledge not classroom learned information; thus, a variety of classes were used to prevent the bias of classroom information. As these questions are not specifically taught in the Global Issues classes and were not

instructors. This resulted in a culmination of 366 different participants. Participants were randomly divided into the different treatments and control groups. Of the 366 experiments distributed, 358 were completed and returned. The participants in this experiment included 210 women and 134 men. Further, these students range in education levels from freshmen (72), juniors (94), sophomores (132) and seniors (53). The majority of these were between 18-25 years old (310) but included 26-30 year olds (20), 31-45 year olds (20) and 5 participants who were over 46 years of age.<sup>52</sup> By using random assignment of students into groups, every student had the same probability of being in the control or experimental groups. This reduced the confounding effects of individuals on the experiment, as everyone had equal probability of selection, providing roughly comparable groups.

While some may dispute using political science students for the experiment, Table 7.1 provides the political knowledge levels of Global Issues and American Government classes. This is included to counteract arguments that knowledge levels are a function of being in a particular class. The five-point scale represents the Delli Carpini and Keeter index. There is only a .04 difference in the average score on the five-point scale between the two groups; nonetheless, both measures approximate the findings of Delli Carpini and Keeter in terms of average knowledge levels. When including two lesser known knowledge questions (the Chief Justice and the Speaker of the House) into a seven point scale the disparity between the two groups does increase, demonstrating the empirical benefit of using the Delli Carpini and Keeter scale. Therefore, this study utilizes the proven measure of the five-point Delli Carpini and Keeter index (1996).

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covered in the American government class prior to the experiment, it is more likely that these are a result of long-term knowledge rather than short term memory from classes.

<sup>52</sup> Not all participants answered these age, education and gender questions.

## Discussion and Findings

The first analysis of this chapter looks at grade level, participation and political knowledge by treatment. Table 7.2 provides a breakdown of participation in the amendments included in the experiment by their level of political knowledge (as indicated by the Delli Carpini and Keeter index). This table shows that there is higher participation among participants with higher political knowledge levels amongst the first treatment group. Table 7.2 also provides the grade level of these ballot propositions of easier complexity. From this table there is stable participation across the different ballot questions, with some participants ‘rolling off’ the ballot by the time they reached Amendments 13 and 14. This demonstrates that the number of propositions in the treatment may have fatigued participants. Nonetheless, many participants still completed the ballot. Those with higher levels of political knowledge participated in a higher number of questions and participated more consistently across the questions, failing to vote on very few. This is further analyzed in the next correlation.

Table 7.3 analyzes the number of ballot propositions that participants answered by their level of political knowledge. This bivariate correlation demonstrates that the higher the participants’ political knowledge, the more likely they were to participate on more ballot propositions. This provides support for the Hypothesis 6 that higher levels of political knowledge will lead to higher levels of participation. Therefore, higher political knowledge results in lower roll-off of ballot questions. This is graphically demonstrated in Figure 7.1.

There is a similar pattern when looking at the second treatment group. Table 7.4 looks at the breakdown of participation and political knowledge by proposition. There is substantially higher participation among those with higher political knowledge in these propositions. Those with higher levels of political knowledge answered more proposition questions, and answered

ballot questions with readability that is more difficult. Grade level has a more pronounced effect on participation in this section, when compared to the easy readability treatment group.

Amendment 9 on the more complex ballot propositions had a grade level of 95.1 and looking at the political knowledge levels and participation as a whole, there was a decline in participation among all participants, but those with higher political knowledge levels were willing to participate on propositions that are more difficult. As demonstrated in Table 7.4, half of the participants did not vote on Amendment 9, and those participants who did, have a political knowledge index of three or higher.

Table 7.5 is a bivariate analysis of the total number of ballot measures completed correlated by political knowledge level; evidently, those with higher political knowledge (those scoring a 3, 4, or 5 on the Delli Carpini and Keeter index) participate on more ballot propositions than those with lower political knowledge levels. This finding is graphically demonstrated in Figure 7.2. This is consistent with the findings of the first treatment and confirms Hypothesis 6 and Hypothesis 7. Additionally, there is a difference in how participants participated in the easy and difficult treatment groups. Participation was lower on the ballot questions of more complexity. When correlating this relationship with political knowledge, to support Hypothesis 7, there is ample evidence that participants with higher levels of political knowledge answered more ballot questions.

When looking at the differences between participation and ballot wording, a difference of means test was constructed to determine what the difference is in participation when confronted with ballot propositions of different ballot language. Table 7.6 is the resulting difference of means test. The findings of Table 7.6 are quite useful in terms of understanding participation but also in understanding the repercussions of ballot language. According to this test, in an election,

participants vote on 4.8% more ballot propositions when confronted with easier ballot propositions than when confronted with more complex ballot propositions. This means that there is difference in participation on easy and difficult ballot questions, when there is little difference in election outcomes, these voters who roll-off could change the electoral outcome. This is a significant difference. If ballot questions are more difficult then we can assume that participation will be 5 percent less than if the ballot questions were easier to read. As demonstrated in Table 6.6 in the previous chapter, 23.6 percent of ballot measures in this study were within five percent of victory. This means that ballot language can affect electoral outcomes. This result combined with the impact of ballot language on vote choice can have drastic influences on electoral results.

There are varying degrees of ballot questions, if this is applied to ballot questions in actual elections the results can be expected to be more extreme. In an actual election, the more politically knowledgeable will be more familiar with the issues and vote on more ballot propositions than those who are unfamiliar – this will only exacerbate the effects of the ease and difficulty of ballot questions as discussed above. Further, there are precipitating effects – such as election year and saliency can increase this effect, as demonstrated in Chapter 6. Hypothesis 7, about the differential effect of ballot language on participation, is supported in conjunction with confirming the earlier findings of Chapter 6. There is a substantive policy repercussion from this finding; primarily it means that ballot participation can be increased if the questions are easier to comprehend. While some may argue that not all topics are easily reduced to understandable topics, attempts to increase readability can have substantial effects. Additionally, this may be an opportunity for the state to step in and pass legislation on the topic if it is too complex to appear



on the ballot. This is important, as noted earlier in the theory section; citizens participate when they understand ballot elections.

The consistency between ballot proposition votes and previous policy preferences is a complex discussion. There is a discussion in the literature about how citizens are not fooled on ballot propositions at the ballot box (Bowler and Donovan 1998) and how there are minimal cues that allow citizens to vote their preferences (Lupia 1994a, 1994b, 2001). However, this has not been examined under different ballot wording circumstances. Previous results in Chapter 6 show that there are participation effects from the ballot language - but what about vote consistency? Three topics that have appeared most frequently as direct democracy measures in the past few years were selected for this analysis. They include abortion, gay marriage and legalization of marijuana. These three topics were used to determine if citizens are voting consistent with their policy positions and if this relationship changes under different complexity effects. This is analyzed in two different ways. First, by looking at how important these issues were to the participant and if this was consistent with how they ranked issues in terms of importance after being exposed to the treatment groups. Second, the relationship between preference and vote choice is tested by looking at whether participants' votes are consistent with their identified policy preferences.

The first analysis looks at importance and rank to test Hypotheses 7 and 8. Participants were given the opportunity to indicate how strongly they felt about an issue – strongly, somewhat, or not at all. At the end of the experiment, participants were asked to rank their preferences of topics in direct democracy elections. There were twelve topic areas, which were divided into three groups, indicating rank of top importance, middle or lowest importance. Table 7.7 explores this relationship in regards to the issue importance of abortion. Among the control

and first treatment (easier complexity), there is a high amount of consistency (58.7 percent) between importance and rank. However, the second treatment (more complex readability) there was slightly less consistency between importance and rank, with only 50.5 percent voting consistent with their preferences, indicating the effect of the treatment (exposure to more complex ballot propositions) on participation. The inconsistency between rank and importance of the issue supports Hypothesis 9 in that there is a difference in effect from the easy and more difficult ballot propositions.

The second part of the importance and rank analysis looks at gay marriage in Table 7.8. In this analysis, there is a consistency of 65.7 percent in first treatment between issue importance and rank of participation. However, among the second treatment there is a more pronounced difference in the ranking of issue importance and rank of participation, with only 48.4 percent voting consistent with their policy preference, showing a more substantial effect of the treatment. This is somewhat surprising although Hypothesis 8 expects that there are issues that elicit a gut response, regardless of ballot language. Nonetheless, these findings further strengthen support for Hypothesis 9.

The third topic is analyzed in the bivariate analysis in Table 7.9 involves the legalization of marijuana. On this topic, the first treatment or more easily comprehended treatment there is a congruent relationship of 71.7% between ranking and importance. However, the control has a confusing result – with the same number ranking legalization in the three sections among those who view it as a very important issue. The rest of the control group is consistent with previous findings and confirms Hypothesis 9. The difficult complexity or second treatment results in less consistency between ranking and importance, with 52.4 percent voting consistent with their policy preferences.

The rankings and importance analysis demonstrates that there is an inconsistency in terms of issue importance and policy preference. Thus, a more comprehensive study of these three topics and participants' votes is required. This is analyzed below by looking at the correlation between policy preferences and vote choices. Under the first topic, participants were asked about their policy preferences towards abortion in the pre-test of the experiment. They were given a scale suggesting a preference always limit access to abortion, sometimes limit and permit as a personal choice. During the ballot propositions, participants were asked about parental notification for abortions.

Table 7.10 shows the relationship between vote choice and policy preference when looking at questions involving parental consent for abortions. The results of this table indicate that there is a higher correlation in this relationship between policy preference and vote choice for those exposed to the first treatment (easier complexity) than those exposed to the second treatment (difficult complexity). When controlling for political knowledge, the variation among the second treatment is far more pronounced. Those who are less politically knowledgeable are more likely to vote inconsistently with their policy preferences than those with higher political knowledge. This provides support for Hypothesis 9, that there will be higher congruence in votes under easier readability than under more complex readability. This also shows that topic does not counteract the effect of ballot language on this issue of gut response (Carmines and Stimson 1980), demonstrating that Hypothesis 8 is not confirmed. Hypothesis 8 looks at the ease of issues and how voters should be able to counteract any language issues - as issue salience should elicit a gut effect from the majority of respondents.

Issue preference on 'easy' issues does not transcend ballot language in this analysis. The expectation was that because these issues have an instinctual response, voter preferences should

be clearer and they will focus on ensuring that their responses are congruent with their policy preferences. However, these findings demonstrate that this is not the case. Complex ballot language affects even the most intense policy preferences and leads voters to vote inconsistently with the previously indicated policy preferences. This inconsistency demonstrates that there are clear effects of ballot language, regardless of the salience of topic.<sup>53</sup>

This process is repeated for ballot propositions on gay marriage. Participants were asked about their feelings towards gay marriage on a 10-point scale. These are aggregated into three groups: favor, oppose and neutral. Table 7.11 looks at vote consistency with position on gay marriages. Under the first treatment, there is substantial consistency with the vote choice and the policy preference. However, akin to the previous findings on abortion voting, those exposed to the more complex ballot propositions are more likely to vote inconsistently with their policy preferences. Of those who oppose gay marriage as a policy in the more complex treatment, 42.8 percent still vote to allow gay marriages in their state whereas 2.5 percent did so under the easy ballot treatment. This shows the impact of complexity on vote consistency and demonstrates that there are significant implications for ballot readability. Further, when controlling for political knowledge, these effects are exacerbated; thus, supports Hypothesis 9.

The third bivariate analysis looks at legalizing marijuana. Participants ranked their policy preferences on the legalization of marijuana on a 10-point scale. These are aggregated into three groups: favor, oppose and neutral. Table 7.12 provides a bivariate analysis of the relationship between policy preference and vote choice on legalizing marijuana. Under the easy experimental treatment as well as the control group, the majority voted for the ballot proposition

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<sup>53</sup> This analysis, using experiment, allows control of individual level variables. However, ballot level variables that can be controlled for include the length and position of ballot, each of the experiment have the same number of questions and they are in the same order. Further, none of the participants were not primed campaign coverage for any of these measures so there was no prior knowledge about these measures, rather votes are a function of the question being asked.

to legalize marijuana, regardless of their policy preferences. What is interesting and consistent with the theory of this section is that under the difficult ballot treatment of those participants who wanted to legalize marijuana, only 39.4 percent voted consistently with their policy preferences.<sup>54</sup> The inconsistency of those who want to legalize marijuana and those who vote for legalization in the difficult readability demonstrates the effect of the ballot language complexity and supporting Hypothesis 9.

## Conclusions

The findings of this chapter provide significant contributions to the literature, demonstrating the role that political knowledge plays in increasing participation in ballot measures and how ballot language contributes to more consistent ballot voting – affecting the participants’ ability to vote consistently with their policy preferences. Further, the findings of this chapter demonstrate that there is a significant inconsistency in voting and policy preferences, under the difficult treatment with complex readability when controlling for complex readability. This contributes to our understanding of citizen participation but also exploring the debate about ballot measures and comprehension. This research explains why scholars have found that citizens vote consistently with policy preferences (Bowler and Donovan 1994; Lupia 1994, 2001) because they are not controlling for ballot complexity. This chapter demonstrates that even in topics that are more salient to the public and should have more instinctive responses than bond or tax code changes, the complexity of the ballot language does harm citizens’ ability to vote their preferences. The next chapter provides a conclusion of all the findings and offers

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<sup>54</sup> As demonstrated in the pre-test in Appendix F, a battery of questions are used to determine policy preferences on abortion. The most viable measure is used in this analysis.

suggestions about the normative and theoretical impact of this study as well as policy proposals for future direct democracy measures.

**Table 7.1: Comparison in Political Knowledge Among Classes**

Difference between Global Issues and American Government classes				
	Global		American	
	5 point	7 point	5 point	7 point
Knowledge	3.51 (1.40)	4.14 (1.81)	3.55 (1.29)	4.63 (1.92)

Means presented with standard deviations in brackets

Global N=270

American N=88

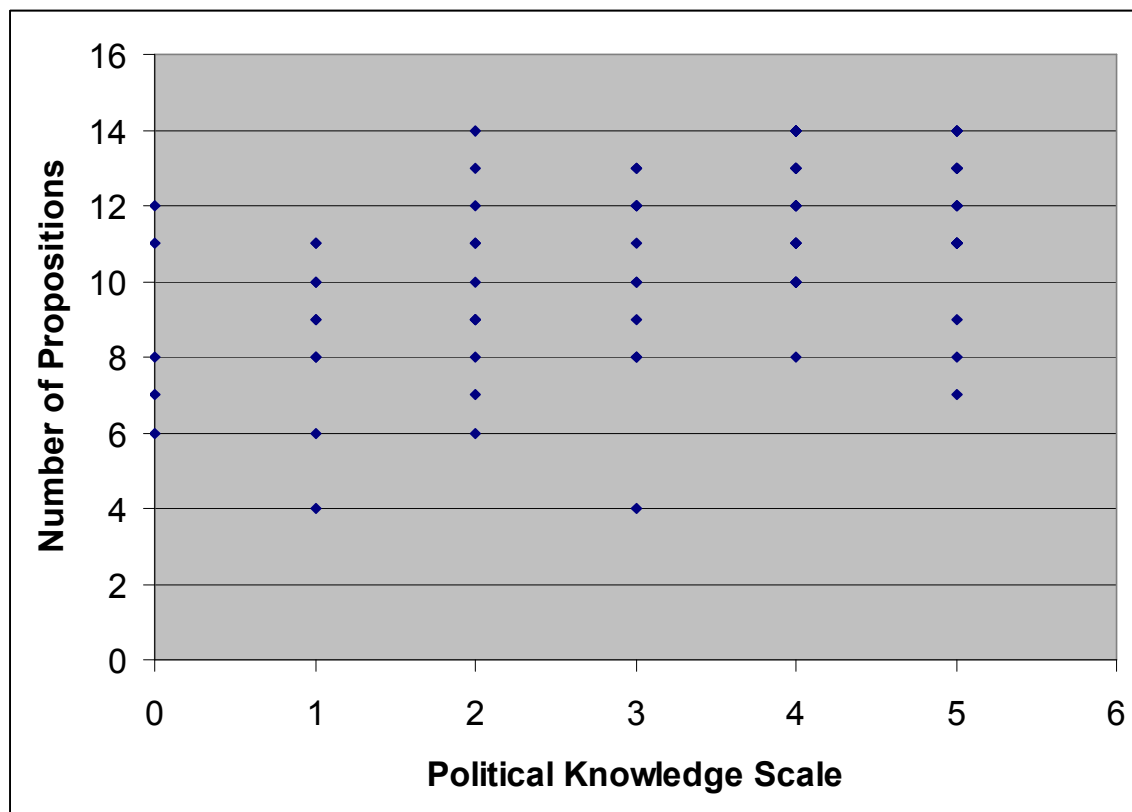
Total N=358

**Table 7.2: Political Knowledge and Participation (Easy)**

Amendment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Political Knowledge Index														
0	4	2	5	2	4	5	5	2	2	4	1	5	1	2
1	12	8	11	7	4	12	13	7	12	11	9	11	4	7
2	11	12	10	8	9	11	12	12	9	11	7	11	6	10
3	17	9	15	15	9	14	15	12	14	15	11	14	7	11
4	35	31	30	32	22	34	32	29	34	32	29	36	21	28
5	26	25	25	19	19	26	24	25	25	20	20	25	10	21
Total	105	87	96	83	67	102	101	87	96	93	77	102	49	79
Grade Level	12	12	8.4	7.6	8	7	11.3	8.2	14.2	8.3	7.5	11.1	8.2	11.7





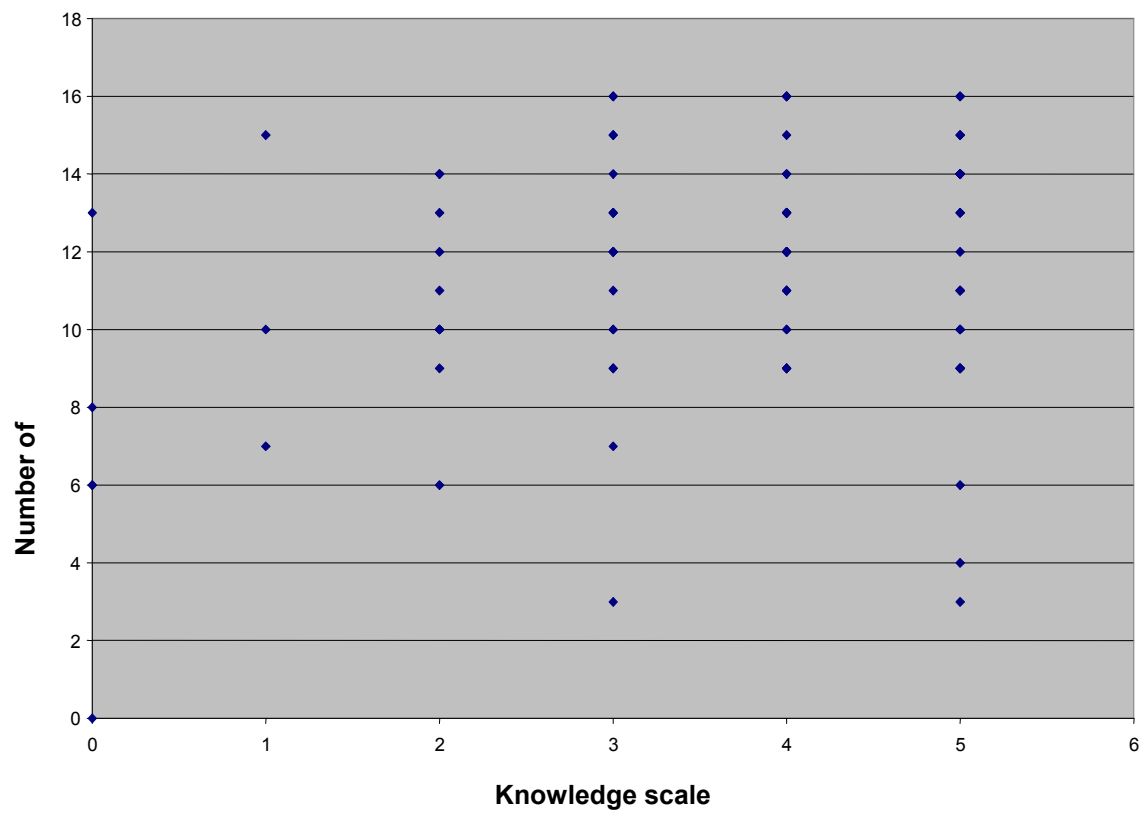


**Figure 7.1: Participation in Easy Propositions by Knowledge Level**

**Table 7.4: Political Knowledge and Participation (Difficult)**

Amendment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Political Knowledge Index																
0	5	3	4	4	2	2	4	6	1	5	3	3	5	4	4	3
1	3	1	1	2	3	3	1	3	1	3	1	2	3	2	3	0
2	11	7	10	6	8	8	7	8	2	9	6	9	8	9	9	6
3	24	18	20	23	21	17	20	23	14	23	17	19	23	24	26	18
4	32	28	32	30	23	24	24	31	19	30	25	27	31	32	32	19
5	33	31	31	28	20	23	19	28	13	29	24	22	25	27	25	21
Total	108	88	98	93	77	77	75	99	50	99	76	82	95	98	99	67
Grade Level	12	12	46.8	45.5	46.5	46.5	45	37.7	95.1	68.9	41.8	37.1	28.7	22.9	42	51.1





**Figure 7.2: Participation in Difficult Propositions by Knowledge Level**

**Table 7.6: Difference of Means Test: Participation in Easy and Difficult Questions**

	T	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Easy Total Participation	44.78**	116	.754	.181
Difficult Total Participation	40.17**	120	.719	.196
Easy-Difficult		-3.3%	4.8%	-7.6%

**Table 7.7: Importance by Rank: Abortion**

Rank	Easy			Difficult			Control		
	Top	Middle	Bottom	Top	Middle	Bottom	Top	Middle	Bottom
Importance									
Very	27	10	9	24	6	8	11	14	6
Somewhat	10	12	8	11	14	10	11	27	16
Not	4	10	9	2	10	10	0	2	1
LR Test		25.85*			29.93**			10.91	
Kendall's tau-b		-.308**			-.373**			-.270**	
Valid Cases		99			95			102	

**Table 7.8: Importance by Rank: Gay Marriage**

Rank	Easy			Difficult			Control		
	Top	Middle	Bottom	Top	Middle	Bottom	Top	Middle	Bottom
Importance									
Very	16	3	4	10	4	4	13	8	0
Somewhat	4	21	13	5	9	19	6	20	19
Not	4	6	28	6	9	25	5	6	25
Chi Square		49.81**			14.51**			36.21**	
LR Test		44.72**			13.29**			41.38**	
Kendall's tau-b		-.491**			-.305**			-.464**	
Valid Cases		99			91			102	



**Table 7.9: Importance by Rank: Marijuana**

Rank	Easy			Difficult			Control		
	Top	Middle	Bottom	Top	Middle	Bottom	Top	Middle	Bottom
Importance									
Very	13	4	0	8	4	2	5	3	5
Somewhat	1	15	12	4	6	11	1	16	17
Not	3	8	43	7	11	29	3	7	40
Chi Square		23.66			13.47**			26.69**	
LR Test		25.85*			13.08**			21.85**	
Kendall's tau-b		-.601**			-.319**			-.355**	
Valid Cases		99			82			97	

**Table 7.10: Consistency in Vote Requiring Parental Consent for Abortion**

Position	Easy		Difficult	
	Voted For	Voted Against	Voted For	Voted Against
Never allowed	7	0	3	4
Limited	28	7	17	29
Personal Choice	14	35	17	23
Chi-Square	29.54**		4.36	
LR Test	33.90**		5.11	
Kendall's tau-b	.037		.069	
N	91		95	

*Note:* The variation for difficult is more pronounced when you control for knowledge. Those who are unknowledgeable were more likely to vote inconsistently with their policy preferences than those with higher political knowledge.

**Table 7.11: Vote Consistency with Allowing Gay Marriage**

Position	Easy		Difficult	
	Voted For	Voted Against	Voted For	Voted Against
Oppose	1	39	18	24
Neutral	4	13	15	1
Favor	29	7	28	10
Chi-Square	51.30**		17.02**	
LR Test	58.75**		19.10**	
Kendall's tau-b	-.356**		.172*	
N	93		98	

*Note:* When controlling for political knowledge, those with lower political knowledge are more susceptible to the difficult ballot language than those with higher political knowledge.

**Table 7.12: Vote Consistency with Legalizing Marijuana**

Position	Easy		Difficult	
	Voted For	Voted Against	Voted For	Voted Against
Illegal	36	6	1	2
Neutral	29	2	33	6
Legalize	24	3	13	20
Chi-Square	1.12		17.08**	
LR Test	1.19		17.68**	
Kendall's tau-b	-.260*		.042	
N	100		99	

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSIONS: AN ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP, POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND POTENTIAL EXPANSION**

From this study, one can see that political knowledge plays a role at each step of the direct democracy process. At the petitioner level, the political knowledge levels of the public (or at least the perception of political knowledge) influence how petitioners act. In the voting booth, it is evident that higher levels of political knowledge results in higher participation. Finally, in the voting booth, the role of political knowledge plays a significant role in how individuals vote on ballot propositions.

This study establishes the role of political knowledge at each step of the direct democracy process by advancing research on political knowledge and direct democracy participation, as well as theory about the role of political knowledge in the direct democracy process. This model demonstrates the role of political knowledge throughout the process and how it affects different activities of petitioners, voter participation, and finally, vote choice. This study provides original findings that counteract and confirm much of the research on direct democracy. This study finds that ballot language is important to determining participation and when controlling for it other variables, such as ballot position, are less significant in determining participation. Further, this project contradicts Lupia (1994) and Bowler and Donovan (1998) by indicating that under more complex the ballot language there is less congruence between vote choice and policy preference. Third, this project demonstrates that ballot complexity affects vote choice, regardless of issue, and there not issues that can counteract the effects of this language. This conclusion will examine each step of the ballot proposition process and demonstrate its contribution to both our understanding of direct democracy elections and the role of political knowledge on participation

in these elections. This chapter will conclude by providing policy suggestions and ideas for future research in this area.

### **Before the Ballot Box: Views on Citizen Comprehension and Petitioner Activities**

The direct democracy process has multiple components, and this dissertation first explores the development of ballot measures on the part of the petitioners. In this component of the study, petitioners exhibit opinions about the knowledge levels of citizens. Further, petitioner perception of citizens' political knowledge influences petitioner activities. The study of Oregon petitioners in this analysis found support for each of the tested hypotheses, demonstrating that political knowledge plays an important role at the beginning of the direct democracy process.

Petitioners have similar characteristics to that of typical voters and put time and effort into the petitioning process as well as the campaigning process. These petitioners take the initiative to petition to change public policy in the state. While petitioners are rarely discussed in the literature, and never in this context, this finding is consistent with the expectations of the voting literature. Further, these petitioners are ideologically divided indicating that direct democracy is not only a tool of one political group or individuals; rather there is widespread use by both political parties and as well as independents.

The divergence of petitioner perspectives and values in the direct democracy system in Oregon is a new finding and expands the literature on direct democracy, as it is the first research project to investigate petitioner perceptions and their corresponding approaches to the initiative process. The petitioners have divergent attitudes about citizen sophistication, and differing activities associated with these beliefs. Petitioners who feel that the public is not equipped to deal with policy issues make little effort to educate the citizenry on their ballot measure. This

may be because they are trying to take advantage of voter ignorance. Alternatively, those petitioners who believe that the public is at least somewhat sophisticated in terms of dealing with policymaking are more likely to provide education materials associated with their ballot measure. This means expanding citizen knowledge and engaging them in the campaign in an attempt to influence their vote choice.

The findings about petitioners highlight two important and innovative components of this research. First, petitioners have a variety of motives in petitioning for initiatives. Educating the citizenry about ballot propositions is only important to some petitioners – indicating that there are other motives behind proposing a measure besides changing policy. Second, it provides an explanation for motives in proposing an initiative. Throughout the analysis and with supporting quotations, direct democracy is not always about getting the people involved in the process. Initiatives can be a way of drawing attention to a problem or policy issue in the community and encouraging/forcing the legislature to act, rather than encouraging citizen involvement in the policy process.

Another surprising finding from this analysis is the large number of former and current legislators who are involved in the process. These legislators turn to direct democracy because they can no longer achieve policy goals in the legislature. This, combined with the earlier findings, provides empirical support for the assumption in the literature that petitioners have different motives when they petition for measures, be they self interested or altruistic policy change.

Those petitioners who choose not to educate because of their view of citizens sophistication are challenging the notion of direct democracy's value. Direct democracy's attempt to enhance democracy by putting power back in the hands of the people seems to be

neglected in this view of the process because petitioners do not believe citizens are sophisticated or important in the process. The majority of citizens do not have the resources to collect signatures nor to run campaigns for the issues that are proposed – they rely on external funding, such as interest groups or choose not to pursue these issues to the ballot. If a significant proportion of petitioners are trying to enact policy change by pursuing it through the process they believe to be the least informed, then we have reason to be concerned about the role direct democracy plays in the policymaking process.

### **Getting to the Propositions: Knowledge, Ballot Language and Participation**

Once a ballot proposition is placed on the ballot, citizens are called on to decide the policy question. Political knowledge plays a large role in participation on ballot measures, the expectation being that voters with higher levels of political knowledge will be more likely to vote on ballot propositions. This is examined by looking at factors that contribute to voting – such as ballot language, topic, and position on the ballot. Ballot language and the influence of political knowledge was a theme that was addressed in multiple chapters. The reason for discussing these issues is that there are many issues that affect voter participation.

Those with higher levels of participation vote with a higher rate on ballot measures. This demonstrates the value of political knowledge in the process, demonstrating that citizens with higher political knowledge are more willing to struggle down the ballot and vote on ballot measures. Some may argue that this is a good thing that voters without political knowledge are not voting on ballot measures that they do not know anything about. This argument has merit and demonstrates the importance of civic education and campaigns in creating an electorate that



can vote on ballot measures. It also demonstrates that expectations about participation on direct democracy may need to be altered in order to accommodate uninformed voters.

There is a democratic expectation that citizens will participate in all electoral contests, yet Americans often fail to participate in very salient elections. How can we expect citizens to vote in often less salient direct democracy elections, particularly when they are so difficult for them to understand? Not all citizens are going to spend the time to educate themselves and learn about ballot propositions; therefore their participation is often dependent on what is on the ballot when they go to vote. This is problematic, as this study will establish that many citizens cannot comprehend the questions on the ballot – thus producing yet another barrier to participation and completion of the ballot.

When looking at ballot questions it is important to start at the beginning with how ballot questions are written. Petitioners, who wrote ballot propositions, indicate that they are unhappy with the amount of influence they have on policymaking, wanting more or feeling that the state limits their participation. This desire to have a larger role in the policy process does not transfer to the general public – both in their campaigning techniques as well as when discussing how they conceived the proposition language that appears on the ballot. When asked about the text of their ballot proposition, many petitioners indicate that they are discontent with the resulting text on the ballot. However, none of the petitioners indicated that citizen readability/comprehension was important to them, or even was something they considered. Rather, petitioners seemed to focus on the development of a proposition that would survive legal challenge in the Courts. This contributes to the larger study as it demonstrates that ballot language is not a minor component of the direct democracy process and how there are a variety of influences on ballot language that need to be addressed.

The national study of ballot language and roll-off demonstrates the impact of the readability of ballot propositions. When there is high ballot language complexity, there is a higher level of roll-off, indicating that citizens do not struggle through these more complex questions; rather, they skip these measures on the ballot. The findings indicate that ballot language influences participation, and expands earlier research by Magleby (1984) by both time and across states, establishing a clearer relationship between these two variables. The results demonstrate a consistent and negative impact that, in addition to previous explanations of roll-off, the readability of the question has a strong influence on participation in direct democracy. This problem indicates serious issues with direct democracy as currently practiced, and provides a strong addition to the literature because it demonstrates the value of ballot language.

Though this study finds an important role for ballot language, ballot position is not significant in determining participation on direct democracy measures. The expectation that voter fatigue from lengthy ballots and questions would lead to higher ballot roll-off is insignificant when accounting for ballot complexity – leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 5. This means that previous studies that found that length of ballot is a contributing factor when looking at participation need to include other variables in order to ensure their validity. The findings presented in this study indicate that ballot language complexity is a necessary component to understanding participation, rather than ballot and question length. This analysis requires that future research on direct democracy utilize these measures. This is a significant finding as it provides a new way of examining ballot complexity.

One could argue that there are topics that are too complex to be written into simple language or too complex to be decided by the public, but should there be limits on what is allowed to be on the ballot? Some states provide limitations on the ballot topics – allowing only

one topic per ballot proposition. However, few, if any, states have established policy areas where propositions cannot be proposed. Nevertheless, there are some topics that may require more complex language – such as municipal or state bonds; and there are some topics that might lead to an easier vote choice. Do complex topics belong on the ballot? If state legislatures prevent the inclusion of some topics, it undermines the purpose of direct democracy that allows the people to influence policymaking.

There is a problem with ballot propositions of greater complexity. If we acknowledge that higher complexity in ballot language leads to higher roll-off or nonparticipation, it would seem that these questions are only being decided by a select few. There are state level mechanisms that could be used to decrease the complexity or to add limitations to ensure that very complex issues do not appear on the ballot. This does not mean ‘dumbing down’ the proposition, but rather presenting the issue in an easily understood manner to facilitate participation. Easily understood ballot propositions might mean using less complex language and requiring more explanation of the question. While this accommodates the notion of citizens participating in policymaking, it demonstrates that there may be issues that require legislative attention rather than citizen lawmaking. This does not mean that the direct democracy process only requires issues of average complexity rather it means that attention needs to be paid to ballot language and its impact on participation. For example – bond issues need to be examined so that they can be written in language that voters understand. Below are two examples of propositions dealing with taxation issues; the first is one that is difficult to understand and the second is more comprehensible.

An amendment to Article X of the Constitution of the State of Colorado, establishing a homestead exemption for a specified percentage of a limited amount of the actual value of owner-occupied residential real property that is the primary residence of an owner-occupier who is sixty-five years of age or older and has resided in such property for ten years or longer, and, in connection therewith, allowing the general assembly by law to adjust the maximum amount of actual valued of such residential real property of which such specified percentage shall be exempt, requiring the aggregate statewide valuation for assessment that is attributable to residential real property to be calculated as if the full actual value of all owner-occupied primary residences that are partially exempt from taxation was subject to taxation for the purpose of determining the biennial adjustment to be made to the ratio of valuation for assessment for residential real property, requiring the General Assembly to compensate local governmental entities for the net amount of property tax revenues lost as a result of the homestead exemption, specifying that said compensation shall not be included in local government fiscal year spending, authorizing a permanent increase in state fiscal year spending to defray the cost to the state of said compensation, and specifying that said compensation shall not be subject to any statutory limitation on general fund appropriations.

#### **Colorado Referendum A, 2000**

Concerning the extension of the existing property tax exemption for qualifying seniors to any United States military veteran who is one hundred percent permanently disabled due to a service-connected disability, and, in connection therewith, excluding payments made to compensate local governmental entities for property tax revenues lost as a result of the extension of the exemption from state fiscal year spending.

#### **Colorado Referendum E, 2006**

Making ballot propositions that advance the interests of the state in a comprehensible manner means that the system really is one that is representative of the many rather than the few.

There are several significant findings of this research. First, the development of a measurement of language complexity explains thirty percent of roll-off on ballot measures. This has implications for research on participation and direct democracy. Second, an influential

component of this chapter was the rejection of Hypothesis 5, which suggested that position on the ballot would influence participation. This hypothesis is consistent with the literature; however, the statistical analysis in Chapter 6 showed that ballot position was not significant. This is an original and fascinating finding because it demonstrates that ballot position is not as central to questions of direct democracy as is often suggested. This strengthens the finding of this project because it demonstrates the importance of the measurement and the inclusion of ballot complexity as it alters our understanding of participation. This leads to the rejection of the hypothesis, and demonstrates how important ballot language is to participation in direct democracy measures.

### **Casting Votes: Knowledge and Vote Choice**

Once voters make it to the ballot proposition, they have to make a choice about *how* they are going to vote. Voters need to rely on their instincts about ballot issues, read the ballot questions and access their pre-existing political knowledge to vote on the measure. Political knowledge is a significant feature both in participation and vote choice.

Building on the findings of the last section, when voters cast ballot votes there are three important features: level of political knowledge, ballot language and topic of the proposition. When looking at vote choice, this study was able to connect the importance of political knowledge to participation in direct democracy elections, particularly under different levels of ballot language complexity. Voters with higher levels of political knowledge vote on more ballot propositions and, when faced with complex ballot language, have more congruence between their policy preference and ballot votes.

This suggests that ballot language affects citizens' ability to translate their policy preferences into vote choices. This study finds inconsistency in how citizens vote on ballot measures and their policy preferences, particularly when confronted by more complex ballot language. This is contrary to much of the literature, which indicates that citizens make reasoned choices and have cues to support their vote selection (Bowler and Donovan 1998; Lupia 1994, 2001). This study demonstrates that this is not a consistent effect. Under different levels of ballot complexity, voters are correspondingly hindered in their ability to vote consistently with their policy preferences.

This was tested under different topic areas, to determine if there are some topics that are so ingrained in our society that provide gut responses that overcome complex ballot language. This builds on the argument that there are 'easy' issues in our society that voters are familiar with and can voice their preferences quite easily. Carmines and Stimson (1980) consider abortion an 'easy' issue because people have a gut response to questions on this issue. When this is tested in the direct democracy context, voters are not able to transfer their policy preferences in their vote when confronted with difficult ballot language. The finding of this study indicated the rejection of Hypothesis 8, rejecting the influence of 'easy' issues on ballot participation. This means that voters are confused by the ballot question on an "easy" issue (under complex or more difficult ballot language), and vote against their policy positions.

The findings of this chapter indicate that ballot language complexity can affect vote choice, even when voters have strong and clear opinions on the topic on the ballot. However, political knowledge can transcend this difficult ballot language. This demonstrates that there is a significant impact of ballot language on the quality of voter participation, which is indeed problematic.

This develops a larger theory about ballot proposition voting and participation, and strengthens the findings for this analysis. The point of having direct democracy elections is to give voters a way of influencing policy, but influencing policy contrary to their preference defeats the purpose of these elections, and could even lead to more dissatisfaction with the government. The policymaking process is hampered by the ability of citizens to influence policy. Ballot language is a barrier to participating in direct democracy elections – and while political knowledge is valuable to overcoming this barrier, states need to address complex ballot language, as well as civic education, in order to engage the citizenry in these propositions and enable them to vote their policy preferences at the ballot box.

These three sections have provided insight and depth to the connections between direct democracy and political knowledge. By connecting political knowledge to the activities of petitioners, it demonstrates not only the divergence in motivations but also how petitioners perceive the public. The role that political knowledge (or perception of political knowledge) has on petitioner campaign activities demonstrates how important this knowledge is to the process. Furthermore, this analysis looks at the language of ballot propositions and examines how this contributes to participation in direct democracy by demonstrating the importance of citizen comprehension in elections. The more complex the ballot language the more difficult it is for voters to participate, as they will roll-off more easily. The third section of this analysis combines political knowledge and participation in an experimental setting to demonstrate that those with higher levels of political knowledge participate at higher levels on ballot propositions. Further, this analysis demonstrates that the more complex ballot language is, the less citizens are going to participate - exhibiting the importance of ballot language and political knowledge combined. This dissertation also examines the ability of citizens to vote their policy preferences under

different levels of ballot language complexity. When voters are confronted with more complex ballot language they are not always able to vote their policy preferences – but those with higher political knowledge are able to struggle through the measures and vote more consistently. The findings of this analysis explain the importance of ballot language and political knowledge for participation and voting policy preferences in direct democracy elections. The next section offers policy implications and suggestions to address these findings.

### **Normative Implications**

Given the findings from this research, what should states that use direct democracy to make policy do? One possibility is have smaller elections with fewer races on the ballot – giving citizens more opportunity to research the elections. However, from previous research this means there would be lower turnout because these would be less salient elections. Thus, there are trade-offs between these two types of elections, and those who turn out for less salient elections will, in general, to be more informed. Thus, the vote choices made in these elections will be more consistent with the policy preferences of voters. The trade-off is that lower turnout and the overall result may not reflect the preferences of citizens at large.

Preventing voting because of a lack of knowledge is never justified, and literacy tests have been outlawed in the United States for decades. Is the creation of ballot questions beyond the reading level of an average American not creating a similar limitation? In reality, these questions could be construed as a modern literacy test, preventing the public from fully understanding the consequences of their vote. While this is an extreme perspective on complex ballot language, it does demonstrate the importance of the relationship between ballot language and direct democracy participation. The influence of difficult ballot language indicates that the



use of direct democracy, or the expectations about the role of direct democracy, in our society needs to be modified – through either increased civic literacy or changes in complexity of ballot language. As demonstrated earlier with Proposition 13 in California, and an alternative case with the Quebec referenda, ballot language does have an impact on proposition outcomes. If people do not understand exactly what they are voting on, they may make decisions inconsistent with their policy preferences. The variety of ballot language complexity present on ballots means that expectations of high levels of participation on direct democracy elections may need to be adjusted - to include our understanding of what drives participation in these elections.

One could argue that there are reasons to limit the accessibility of ballot propositions to the public; this would mean only those who are informed and interested in these issues vote on these ballot measures. The burden is on the citizen to educate himself or herself, or to become interested or develop preferences on these topics. This study does not presume to ignore this component as citizen development of political knowledge is of utmost importance for the functioning of a democracy, the concern is with voters who are affected or interested in the topic but cannot understand the ballot proposition. What if a voter goes to the ballot box intent on keeping their country together, but does not understand the question they are presented with? This was the case in Quebec in 1995, and while the stakes are high in this case, voters face similar issues when confronted with tax measures or other complex ballot questions in the United States.

### **Policy Repercussions and Suggestions**

The results of this study demonstrate that there are two issues where states can improve participation in direct democracy elections – both initiatives and referenda. These two issues

include increasing political knowledge among voters and changing the language of ballot questions to make them more accessible to voters.

When looking at the state's role in increasing voters' political knowledge or awareness about ballot propositions, there are opportunities to educate and expand citizens' knowledge base. First, as mentioned earlier, some states (namely California and Oregon) publish voter information guides providing information about the ballot propositions as well as the ballot text so that voters can educate themselves on the issues. California has an average of 10.4 percent roll-off and Oregon has an average roll-off of 4.2 percent. While the effects of these voter guides are not tested as part of this analysis, they do demonstrate that there are states that are making efforts to educate their citizenry and increase participation. Several states could benefit from expanding their civic education programs and including them as part of their policies for direct democracy. By actively increasing citizen access to ballot measures and other political information, states can increase participation and use of direct democracy by the public.

The results of this study show the impact of ballot language and demonstrate that ballot language needs to be addressed as part of state initiatives to affect participation in these elections. States ought to address the language complexity of ballots to make them more accessible to the public. Some states have developed programs to decrease the complexity of the ballot language. Oregon, for example, indicates in their initiative guidelines that the text should be "clear and impartial" and "simple and understandable"; yet does not provide guidelines about what that entails. Nor is this strictly enforced, as demonstrated by the variance in ballot language complexity of ballot propositions within that state. In order to ensure higher participation rates among voters, action needs to be taken to increase the accessibility of these measures. The readability of ballot measures should be clear and at a reading level that the majority, if not all,

citizens can understand. Direct democracy is a way for the public to garner unambiguous influence over specific policy issues, circumventing their elected representatives. If the readability of the ballot question is only accessible to elites then the process of circumventing the elected representatives not only affects the quality of democracy, it influences the democratic process as a whole.

The readability of the ballot is of absolute importance, and to prevent an end run around democracy, it must be accessible to all voters. After all, the results of this study demonstrate that even on topics of high salience and importance, voters cannot translate their policy preferences into vote choices. State governments ought to ensure that direct policymaking is a function of citizen understanding and participation. This will prevent complication of the ballot and enable citizens to vote consistent with their policy preferences. States and scholars could use focus groups and experiments to test ballot language to determine if voters can decipher what ballot questions mean to determine whether voters can understand the question. This would be an excellent opportunity for the state to use my quantification of ballot language.

Another policy suggestion is that if there is a shortened question on the ballot that voters be provided with a tool to access more information on election day. This could be easily provided by adding a button to the screen that allows voters to read the full description of the proposition and what their votes mean. This would simplify the ballot but also provide more detailed information to voters to access should they want clarification or more detail. When looking at these questions, one suggestion could be to provide a button for voters to select more information. This would simplify the ballot language but also allow voters who want/need more information when they cast their vote to access more information. Of course, this would also

need to be easily accessible language but it would be an option that could provide more details should a voter want more information.

### **Future Research**

This study has tested numerous hypotheses on political knowledge and direct democracy elections in the United States, demonstrating the effect of political knowledge on participation in these elections. This is a growing area of research and has numerous opportunities for expansion and further development.

Further research ought to develop detailed investigations into ballot design and language, which are accessible to the public. By creating a formula or set of rules to regulate propositions create understandable propositions, to increase participation, and improve vote consistency. These formulas will need to account for various ballot topics and state laws. Research that can inform states as to how ballot measures can be constructed to increase participation and vote consistency could eliminate many troubling issues at the ballot box.

The expansion of direct democracy and its inconsistent use across different states needs further examination. Bowler and Donovan (2004) have provided an excellent analysis of state laws that contribute to the use of the direct democracy mechanism, but there are also socioeconomic factors that need to be investigated fully to understand the contributions to American democracy in both a positive and negative perspective. If ballot language is used to decrease voting, is this language disenfranchising particular groups of citizens? Expanding this research to analyze particular regions of the United States, might suggest where policy changes are needed.

One area of this research that could also be further expanded would be to look at opinion leadership to determine that when in an experimental situation if participants will look to social groups or confer with others to determine how to vote on these complex ballot questions. It would seem that voters rarely make decisions in a vacuum and thus, these discussions would assist the voter in making decisions and perhaps counteract the impact of ballot language.

Additional expansion of this research could include looking at different types of electoral arenas. The United States only utilizes direct democracy elections at the sub-national level; however, other countries are using these elections at the national and supranational level. An expected area of future research would be to expand these findings to include national and supranational direct democracy elections to demonstrate whether the findings of this study can be confirmed or modified at those levels. It would seem that the connection between political knowledge and direct democracy in these lower level elections is stronger than at other levels, but more salient direct democracy elections at the national and supranational levels could provide deeper insight into this relationship. The growth of the use of direct democracy elections in Africa and Latin America provide the opportunity to continue to explore these elections in a comparative context – looking. For example, at states with established institutional roles of direct democracy elections and those who are expanding their versions of democracy to include this type of election.

Political knowledge has been demonstrated, to play a large role in the American direct democracy system. Expanding this research to other situations will provide a greater understanding of these findings as well as examine whether political knowledge plays a larger role in these state level ballot measures than in other electoral situations. As a political scientist, the role of political knowledge both in society and elections is of utmost importance. When

increased political knowledge leads to increased participation of the citizen in government, particularly in direct policymaking, it can only lead to stronger democratic institutions and governance.

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## APPENDIX A

### QUALIFICATION AND INSULATION INDEX BY STATE<sup>55</sup>

	Qualification Index	Insulation Index
Alaska	5	6
Arizona	3	3
Arkansas	2	2
California	1	1
Colorado	1	4
Florida	4	5
Idaho	2	4
Illinois	4	5
Maine	4	8
Massachusetts	3	8
Michigan	2	3
Mississippi	5	7
Missouri	3	6
Montana	3	6
Nebraska	4	6
Nevada	4	5
North Dakota	1	3
Ohio	2	6
Oklahoma	3	4
Oregon	0	3
South Dakota	2	4
Utah	3	4
Washington	3	4
Wyoming	6	9

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<sup>55</sup> Classification done by Bowler and Donovan (2004).

## APPENDIX B

### KNOWLEDGE INDEX QUESTIONS

These are the knowledge questions suggested by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) to measure political knowledge. These were included in the experiment to measure political knowledge of the participants.

Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Richard Cheney?

\_\_\_\_\_

Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not.... Is it the President, the Congress or the Supreme Court? \_\_\_\_\_

How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington before the upcoming November elections?

Would you say that one of the parties is more conservative than the other at the national level? Which party is more conservative? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### MAIL SURVEY INSTRUMENT

**Georgia State University  
Department of Political Science  
Survey Instrument**

**If you are willing to volunteer this research, please sign below.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Title:** Direct Democracy Study

**Principal Investigators:** Dr. Richard Engstrom, PhD, and Shauna Reilly, PhD Candidate,  
Department of Political Science, Georgia State University, 38 Peachtree Center Ave. Suite 1005,  
Atlanta, GA, USA 30303-2514

**Your Measure:**

Have you pursued more than one direct democracy measure? If so, how many?

Thinking of your most recent pursuit of a ballot measure, why did you decide to pursue a direct democracy measure on that topic?

How did you devise the text for proposed direct democracy measure?

Did the state limit your text/title? How?

During the election, what campaign techniques did you use?

How did you approach the public about your initiative?

How did you provide information to the public about your measure during the campaign?

**Citizen Attributions:**

How sophisticated are citizens in terms of policy?

- A. Very Sophisticated
- B. Good on some issues
- C. Usually unqualified
- D. Unsophisticated

**Personal Motivations:** Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

1. I feel there are issues in my community that can only be addressed through constitutional amendment or ballot proposition.
2. I have considered or previously run for elected office.
3. Before pursuing an initiative, I contacted my state legislator to address my issue.
4. Changes are more likely to be more successfully implemented through initiatives than legislation.

**Election Opinions:** Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

1. Our country needs more opportunities for citizens to exercise direct influence over public policy.
2. Our state government limits citizen participation in government.
3. There are too many elections in our electoral system.
4. Campaigns are an attempt to educate the public on ballot propositions, issues and candidates.
5. We had to do a significant amount of educating in support of our initiative.

**Personal information: (Please circle the answer that best describes you)**

**Ideology:**

Do you consider yourself politically conservative, or liberal?

- |                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Strong conservative   | 5. Leaning liberal  |
| 2. Moderate conservative | 6. Moderate liberal |
| 3. Leaning conservative  | 7. Strong liberal   |
| 4. Independent           |                     |

**Social networks:** Now, tell us about various organizations and groups you belong to. How actively do you participate in each of the following groups a residential association, alumni association, parent-teacher association, trade association, consumer cooperative, volunteer group, religious group, neighborhood improvement group, a crime watch, or another group not listed?

1. I am an active member
2. I am just a member
3. Not a member of any group

**Vote:** How often do you vote in national elections?

1. Almost never or never.
2. Sometimes
3. Almost every election
4. Every election



How often do you participate in state level elections?

1. Almost never or never.
2. Sometimes
3. Almost every election
4. Every election

**Party Identification:** Which political party do you usually support?

1. Democratic Party
2. Republican Party
3. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Independent
5. Don't know

**Education:**

Highest level of education attained:

1. Less than completion of High school
2. Completion of High School
3. Some college
4. Bachelor's Degree
5. Graduate Degree

**Age:**

Current Age

1. Less than 25
2. 26-35
3. 36-45
4. 46-55
5. 56-65
6. 66 and older

## APPENDIX D

### SAMPLE BALLOT QUESTIONS

#### Shortest Ballot Question in study:

Question 3: Transportation Bonds (\$63,500,000)

Rhode Island 2004

#### Longest Ballot Question in study:

Do you approve of a law summarized below, on which no vote was taken by the Senate or the House of Representatives before May 1, 2002?

#### SUMMARY

*As required by law, summaries are written by the state Attorney General, and the statements describing the effect of a "yes" or "no" vote are written jointly by the State Attorney General and the Secretary of the Commonwealth.*

This proposed law would replace the current state law providing for transitional bilingual education in public schools with a law requiring that, with limited exceptions, all public school children must be taught English by being taught all subjects in English and being placed in English language classrooms.

The proposed law would require public schools to educate English learners (children who cannot do ordinary classwork in English and who either do not speak English or whose native language is not English) through a sheltered English immersion program, normally not lasting more than one year. In the program, all books and nearly all teaching would be in English, with the curriculum designed for children learning English, although a teacher could use a minimal amount of a child's native language when necessary. Schools would be encouraged to place in the same classroom children who are from different native-language groups but who have the same level of English skills. Once a student is able to do regular schoolwork in English, the student would be transferred to an English language mainstream classroom. These requirements would not affect special education programs for physically or mentally impaired students or foreign language classes for children who already know English.

Parents or guardians of certain children could apply each year to have the requirements waived, so as to place their child in bilingual education or other classes, if the parents or guardians visit the school to be informed, in a language they can understand, about all available options. To obtain a waiver, the child must either (1) already know English; or (2) be at least 10 years old, and the school principal and staff believe that another course of study would be better for the child's educational progress and rapid learning of English; or (3) have special physical or psychological needs (other than lack of English skills), have already spent 30 days in an English language classroom during that school year, the school principal and staff document their belief that the child's special needs make another course of study better for the child's educational progress and rapid learning of English, and the school superintendent approves the waiver. If 20 or more students in one grade level at a school receive waivers, the school would have to offer

either bilingual education classes providing instruction in both the student's native language and English or classes using other generally recognized educational methodologies permitted by law. In other cases, a student receiving a waiver would have to be allowed to transfer to a school offering such classes.

A parent or guardian could sue to enforce the proposed law and, if successful, would receive attorney's fees, costs and compensatory money damages. Any school employee, school committee member or other elected official or administrator who willfully and repeatedly refused to implement the proposed law could be personally ordered to pay such fees, costs, and damages; could not be reimbursed for that payment by any public or private party; and could not be elected to a school committee or employed in the public schools for 5 years. Parents or guardians of a child who received a waiver based on special needs could sue if, before the child reaches age 18, they discover that the application for a waiver was induced by fraud or intentional misrepresentation and injured the child's education.

All English learners in grades kindergarten and up would take annual standardized tests of English skills. All English learners in grades 2 and up would take annual written standardized tests, in English, of academic subjects. Severely learning disabled students could be exempted from the tests. Individual scores would be released only to parents, but aggregate scores, school and school district rankings, the number of English learners in each school and district, and related data would be made public.

The proposed law would provide, subject to the state Legislature's appropriation, \$5 million each year for 10 years for school committees to provide free or low-cost English language instruction to adults who pledged to tutor English learners.

The proposed law would replace the current law, under which a school committee must establish a transitional bilingual education program for any 20 or more enrolled children of the same language group who cannot do ordinary classwork in English and whose native language is not English or whose parents do not speak English. In that program, schools must teach all required courses in both English and the child's native language; teach both the native language and English; and teach the history and culture of both the native land of the child's parents and the United States. Teaching of non-required subjects may be in a language other than English, and for subjects where verbalization is not essential (such as art or music), the child must participate in regular classes with English-speaking students.

Under the current law, a child stays in the program for 3 years or until the child can perform successfully in English-only classes, whichever occurs first. A test of the child's English skills is given each year. A school committee may not transfer a child out of the program before the third year unless the parents approve and the child has received an English-skills test score appropriate to the child's grade level. A child may stay in the program longer than 3 years if the school committee and the parent or guardian approve. Parents must be informed of their child's enrollment in the program and have the right to withdraw their child from the program.

The proposed law's testing requirements would take effect immediately, and its other requirements would govern all school years beginning after the proposed law's effective date.

The proposed law states that if any of its parts were declared invalid, the other parts would stay in effect.

**WHAT YOUR VOTE WILL DO**

**A YES VOTE** would require that, with limited exceptions, all public school children must be taught English by being taught all subjects in English and being placed in English language classrooms.

**A NO VOTE** would make no changes in English language education in public schools.

**Massachusetts 2002 Question 2**

## APPENDIX E

### GAY MARRIAGE BALLOT PROPOSITIONS

#### **Constitutional Measure 1 – Defining Marriage**

State constitution would be amended to define marriage as being a legal union of a man and a woman; provides that no other domestic union can have the same legal effect.

**North Dakota 2004**

#### **Question No. 2 - An Initiative Relating to the Definition of Marriage**

Shall the Nevada Constitution be amended to provide that: "Only a marriage between a male and female person shall be recognized and given effect in this state?"

**Nevada 2002**

#### **STATEWIDE QUESTION NO. 2 - Amendment to the Nevada Constitution**

An Initiative relating to the definition of marriage

Shall the Nevada Constitution be amended to provide that: "Only a marriage between a male and female person shall be recognized and given effect in this state?"

**Nevada 2000**

#### **Amendment 22 - Limit on Marriages. Initiative Statute.**

Official Title and Summary Prepared by the Attorney General

LIMIT ON MARRIAGES. INITIATIVE STATUTE.

- Adds a provision to the Family Code providing that only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.

Summary of Legislative Analyst's Estimate of Net State and Local Government Fiscal Impact:

- Probably no fiscal effect on the state or local governments.

**California 2000**

#### **Constitutional Amendment**

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT - There is currently no constitutional provision regarding marriage. There is a statute, enacted by the legislature, that defines marriage as a civil contract between two persons who are of opposite sex and declares all other marriages to be contrary to public policy and void. A vote for this proposition would amend the Kansas constitution to incorporate into it the definition of marriage as a civil contract between one man and one woman only and the declaration that any other marriage is contrary to public policy and void. The proposed constitutional amendment also would prohibit the state from recognizing any other legal relationship that would entitle the parties in the relationship to the rights or incidents of marriage. A vote against this proposition would not amend the constitution, in which case the current statute that defines marriage would remain unchanged but could be amended by future acts of the legislature or modified by judicial interpretation.

**Kansas 2005**

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED AN ACT TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION TO PROVIDE THAT MARRIAGE is the union of ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN at one time, and this is the only marriage that is recognized as valid in this state.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**SECTION 1.** Article 14 of the North Carolina Constitution is amended by adding the following new section:

**"Sec. 6. Marriage.** Marriage is the union of one man and one woman at one time. This is the only marriage that shall be recognized as valid in this State. The uniting of two persons of the same sex or the uniting of more than two persons of any sex in a marriage, civil union, domestic partnership, or other similar relationship within or outside of this State shall not be valid or recognized in this State. This constitution shall not be construed to require that marital status or the rights, privileges, benefits or other legal incidents of marriage be conferred upon unmarried individuals or groups."

**SECTION 2.** The amendment set out in Section 1 of this act shall be submitted to the qualified voters of the State at the statewide general election in November of 2004, which election shall be conducted under the laws then governing elections in the State. Ballots, voting systems, or both may be used in accordance with Chapter 163 of the General Statutes. The question to be used in the voting systems and ballots shall be:

**North Carolina 2004**

#### **Constitutional Amendment 1 – Marriage**

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of Alabama of 1901, to provide that no marriage license shall be issued in Alabama to parties of the same sex and that the state shall not recognize a marriage of parties of the same sex that occurred as a result of the law of the law of any other jurisdiction. (Proposed by Act 2005-35).

**Alabama 2006**

#### **Referendum I**

Shall there be an amendment to the Colorado Revised Statutes to authorize domestic partnerships, and, in connection therewith, enacting the "Colorado Domestic Partnership Benefits and Responsibilities Act" to Extend to Same-Sex Couples

- In a domestic partnership the benefits, protections, and responsibilities that are granted by Colorado law to Spouses, providing the conditions under which a license for domestic partnership may be dissolved, making provisions for implementation of the Act, and providing that a domestic partnership is not a marriage, which consists of the Union of one man and one woman

**Colorado 2006**

**HJR 2 - A Marriage Between a Man and a Woman is the Only Domestic Legal Union that shall be Valid or Recognized in this State**

**Idaho 2006**

**Proposition 107** - Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Arizona Relating to the Protection of Marriage

**Protect Marriage Arizona**

This proposed amendment to the Arizona Constitution preserves marriage as only consisting of the union of one man and one woman, and prohibits the state and its political subdivisions from creating or recognizing any legal status for unmarried persons that is similar to that of marriage.

**Arizona 2006**

**Amendment 1 – Marriage**

Must Article XVII of the Constitution of this State be amended by adding Section 15 so as to provide that in this State and its political subdivisions, a marriage between one man and one woman is the only lawful domestic union that shall be valid or recognized; that this State and its political subdivisions shall not create, recognize, or give effect to a legal status, right, or claim created by another jurisdiction respecting any other domestic union, however denominated; that this amendment shall not impair any right or benefit extended by the State or its political subdivisions other than a right or benefit arising from a domestic union that is not valid or recognized in this State; and that this amendment shall not prohibit or limit the ability of parties other than the State or its political subdivisions from entering into contracts or other legal instruments?

**South Carolina 2006**

**Constitutional Amendment C: Relating To Marriage**

**Title:** An Amendment to Article XXI of the South Dakota Constitution, relating to marriage.

**Attorney General Explanation**

South Dakota statutes currently limit marriage to unions between a man and a woman. However, the State Constitution does not address marriage. Amendment C would amend the State Constitution to allow and recognize marriage only between a man and a woman. It would also prohibit the Legislature from allowing or recognizing civil unions, domestic partnerships or other quasi-marital relationships between two or more persons regardless of sex.

A vote “Yes” will change the Constitution.

A vote “No” will leave the Constitution as it is.

**South Dakota 2006**

**Questions 1 – Marriage in Louisiana**

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of Louisiana, to enact Article XII, Section 15, relative to marriage; to require that marriage in the state shall consist only of the union of one man and one woman; to provide that the legal incidents of marriage shall be conferred only upon such union; to prohibit the validation or recognition of the legal status of any union of unmarried individuals; to prohibit the recognition of a marriage contracted in another jurisdiction which is not the union of one man and one woman; to provide for submission of the proposed amendment to the electors and provide a ballot proposition; and to provide for related matters.

**Louisiana 2006**

**Amendment 1: Marriage**

Shall Article XI of the Constitution of the State of Tennessee be amended by adding the following language as a new, appropriately designated section:

SECTION \_\_\_\_\_. The historical institution and legal contract solemnizing the relationship of one man and one woman shall be the only legally recognized marital contract in this state. Any policy or law or judicial interpretation, purporting to define marriage as anything other than the historical institution and legal contract between one man and one woman, is contrary to the public policy of this state and shall be void and unenforceable in Tennessee. If another state or foreign jurisdiction issues a license for persons to marry and if such marriage is prohibited in this state by the provisions of this section, then the marriage shall be void and unenforceable in this state.

**Tennessee 2006**

"The constitutional amendment providing that marriage in this state consists only of the union of one man and one woman and prohibiting this state or a political subdivision of this state from creating or recognizing any legal status identical or similar to marriage."

Brief Explanation

HJR 6 would provide that marriage in Texas is solely the union of a man and woman, and that the state and its political subdivisions could not create or recognize any legal status identical to or similar to marriage, including such legal status relationships created outside of Texas

**Texas 2005**

**Proposal 04-2 - Specify What Can Be Recognized as a "Marriage or Similar Union" for Any Purpose**

A PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO SPECIFY WHAT CAN BE RECOGNIZED AS A "MARRIAGE OR SIMILAR UNION" FOR ANY PURPOSE

The proposal would amend the state constitution to provide that "the union of one man and one woman in marriage shall be the only agreement recognized as a marriage or similar union for any purpose."

Should this proposal be adopted?

**Wisconsin 2004**

**Ballot Question 1 - Marriage**

Shall Article I (the Bill of Rights) of the Constitution of Virginia be amended to state:

"That only a union between one man and one woman may be a marriage valid in or recognized by this Commonwealth and its political subdivisions. This Commonwealth and its political subdivisions shall not create or recognize a legal status for relationships of unmarried individuals that intends to approximate the design, qualities, significance, or effects of marriage. Nor shall this Commonwealth or its political subdivisions create or recognize another union, partnership, or other legal status to which is assigned the rights, benefits, obligations, qualities, or effects of marriage."?

**Virginia 2006**



**Amendment 1 – Definition of Marriage****AMENDMENT NO. 1: HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 56**

This proposed constitutional amendment provides that marriage may take place and may be valid under the laws of this state only between a man and a woman.

The amendment also provides that a marriage in another state or foreign jurisdiction between persons of the same gender may not be recognized in this state and is void and unenforceable under the laws of this state.

**Mississippi 2004**

**Constitutional Amendment 2 – Marriage Definition**

Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended so that to be valid and recognized in this state, a marriage shall exist only between a man and a woman?

**Missouri 2004**

**CI-96** – Requires that only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as marriage in this state.

Montana statutes define civil marriage as between a man and a woman, and prohibit marriage between persons of the same sex. The Montana Constitution currently contains no provisions defining marriage. This initiative, effective immediately, would amend the Montana Constitution to provide that only a marriage between a man and a woman may be valid if performed in Montana, or recognized in Montana if performed in another state.

☐ FOR amending the Montana Constitution to provide that only a marriage between a man and a woman may be valid or recognized as a marriage.

☐ AGAINST amending the Montana Constitution to provide that only a marriage between a man and a woman may be valid or recognized as a marriage.

**Montana 2004**

**Constitutional Measure 1 – Defining Marriage**

State constitution would be amended to define marriage as being a legal union of a man and a woman; provides that no other domestic union can have the same legal effect.

**North Dakota 2004**

**Question 711 – Defines marriage as between one man and one woman**

This measure adds a new section of law to the Constitution. It adds Section 35 to Article 2. It defines marriage to be between one man and one woman. It prohibits giving the benefits of marriage to people who are not married. It provides that same sex marriages in other states are not valid in this state. It makes issuing a marriage license in violation of this section a misdemeanor.

**Oklahoma 2004**

**State Issue 1 - Only a Union Between One Man and One Woman May be a Marriage Valid in or Recognized by This State and Its Political Subdivisions**

Be it Resolved by the People of the State of Ohio:

That the Constitution of the State of Ohio be amended by adopting a section to be designated as Section 11 of Article XV thereof, to read as follows:

Article XV Section 11. Only a union between one man and one woman may be a marriage valid in or recognized by this state and its political subdivisions. This state and its political subdivisions shall not create or recognize a legal status for relationships of unmarried individuals that intends to approximate the design, qualities, significance or effect of marriage.

A majority yes vote is necessary for passage.

**SHALL THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT BE ADOPTED?**

**Ohio 2004**

**Measure 36 – Amends Constitution: Only Marriage Between One Man and One Woman is valid or Legally Recognized as Marriage**

**AMENDS CONSTITUTION: ONLY MARRIAGE BETWEEN ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN IS VALID OR LEGALLY RECOGNIZED AS MARRIAGE**

**RESULT OF "YES" VOTE:** "Yes" vote adds to Oregon constitution declaration of policy that only marriage between one man and one woman is valid or legally recognized as marriage.

**RESULT OF "NO" VOTE:** "No" vote retains existing constitution without a provision declaring that only marriage between one man and one woman is valid or legally recognized as marriage.

**SUMMARY:** Amends constitution. Oregon statutes currently provide that marriage is a civil contract entered into in person between individuals of the opposite sex, that is, between males and females at least 17 years of age who solemnize the marriage by declaring "they take each other to be husband and wife." The existing Oregon Constitution contains no provision governing marriage. Currently, the State of Oregon recognizes out-of-state marriages that are valid in the state where performed, unless the marriage violates a strong public policy of Oregon. Measure adds to Oregon Constitution a declaration that the policy of the State of Oregon and its political subdivisions is that "only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or legally recognized as a marriage."

**ESTIMATE OF FINANCIAL IMPACT:** There is no financial effect on state or local government expenditures or revenues.

**Oregon 2004**

**Constitutional Amendment 3: Joint Resolution on Marriage**

Shall the Utah Constitution be amended to provide that: (1) marriage consists only of the legal union between a man and a woman; and (2) no other domestic union may be recognized as a marriage or given the same or substantially equal legal effect?

**Utah 2004**

**Measure 2: Constitutional Amendment Limiting Marriage**

This measure would amend the Declaration of Rights section of the Alaska Constitution to limit marriage. The amendment would say that to be valid, a marriage may exist only between one man and one woman.

SHOULD THIS AMENDMENT BE ADOPTED?

**Alaska 1998**

**Initiative 416: Ban same sex marriage**

*A vote "FOR" will amend the Nebraska Constitution to provide that only marriage between a man and a woman shall be valid or recognized in Nebraska, and to provide that the uniting of two persons of the same sex in a civil union, domestic partnership or other similar same-sex relationship shall not be valid or recognized in Nebraska.*

*A vote "AGAINST" will not amend the Nebraska Constitution in the manner described above.*

Shall the Nebraska Constitution be amended to provide that only marriage between a man and a woman shall be valid or recognized in Nebraska, and to provide further that the uniting of two persons of the same sex in a civil union, domestic partnership, or other similar same-sex relationship shall not be valid or recognized in Nebraska?

**Nebraska 2000**

**Amendment 1 – To Define Marriage as the Union of Man and Woman**

Shall the Constitution be amended so as to provide that this state shall recognize as marriage only the union of man and woman?

**Georgia 2004**

## APPENDIX F

### EXPERIMENTAL PRE-TEST AND POST-TESTS

#### PRE-TEST

##### **Partisan Identification (Circle the answer that best describes you)**

**Party Identification:** Which political party do you usually support?

1. Democratic Party
2. Republican Party
3. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Independent
5. Don't know

**Ideology:** Do you consider yourself politically conservative or liberal?

1. Conservative
2. Liberal

How strongly do you align yourself with this ideology; would you say you are a:

1. Strong conservative
2. Moderate conservative
3. Leaning conservative
4. Independent
5. Leaning liberal
6. Moderate liberal

##### **Personal Information: (please circle)**

Gender:            Male                      Female

Age:                18-25                      26-30                      31-45                      over 46

Level of schooling: Freshman                      Sophomore                      Junior                      Senior

##### **Citizen Attributions: (circle the answer you feel best describes your opinion)**

How sophisticated are citizens in terms of policy?

- A. Very Sophisticated
- B. Good on some issues
- C. Usually unqualified
- D. Unsophisticated

##### **Voting (check the box)**

Assuming you could vote in this fall's Presidential election would you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Who would you vote for?

- ☐ Obama
- ☐ McCain
- ☐ Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Political questions:** (Fill in the answers on the blanks below)

What job or political office is now held by Richard Cheney? \_\_\_\_\_

Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not.... Is it the President, the Congress or the Supreme Court? \_\_\_\_\_

How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you say that one of the parties is more conservative than the other at the national level? Which party is more conservative? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is the current Chief Justice of the Supreme Court? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is the Speaker of the House? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Opinion Questions**

There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Below is a short list of opinions. Circle which one of the opinions best agrees with your view.

1. By law, abortion should never be permitted.
2. The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger.
3. The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established.
4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.
5. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

How important is the issue of abortion to you personally? (Circle your answer)

1. Not at all important
2. Not too important
3. Somewhat important
4. Very important
5. Extremely important

Rate your agreement with the following statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

There should be legally sanctioned gay marriage allowed in this state.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

Legislators should be allowed to run for as many terms as they want.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

Homeland security/war on terrorism is a top priority for federal spending

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

Assistance for the poor should be a main concern for our government

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

Foreign aid should receive more federal spending

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

Social Security does not receive enough federal money

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

Border security is a top priority for our country

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

Minorities are not discriminated against in the United States

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

Marijuana should be illegal

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

It is important to limit our elected representatives' number of terms, to provide opportunities for different political leaders

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

State government should have more input on spending decisions

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      N/A

**Issue Importance**

Of the following issues circle the answer that best describes how important that issue is to you personally

Legal gay marriage is:

- A. not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Homeland Security

- A. not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Assistance to the Poor

- A. not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Foreign Aid

- A. Not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Social Security

- A. not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Border Security

- A. not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Equality

- A. not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Legalization of Marijuana

- A. not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Gun Control is:

- A. not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Circle the statement you agree with more:

- A. Marriage should be restricted to one man and one woman as currently required by law and supported by conservative and mainline religious institutions in North America, or
- B. All adults in committed relationships should be allowed to marry or enter into civil unions, regardless of their sexual orientation, as proposed by liberal religious groups and some secular organizations.





**Personal Motivations:** Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

1. I feel there are issues in my community that can only be addressed through constitutional amendment or ballot proposition. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I have considered or previously run for elected office. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Changes are more likely to be more successfully implemented through initiatives than legislation. \_\_\_\_\_

**Election Opinions:** Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

1. Our country needs more opportunities for citizens to exercise direct influence over public policy. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Our state government limits citizen participation in government. \_\_\_\_\_
3. There are too many elections in our electoral system. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Campaigns are an attempt to educate the public on ballot propositions, issues and candidates. \_\_\_\_\_

**Social networks:** Now, tell us about various organizations and groups you belong to. How actively do you participate in the following groups a residential association, alumni association, parent-teacher association, trade association, consumer cooperative, volunteer group, religious group, neighborhood improvement group, a crime watch, or another group not listed? (circle the best answer)

1. I am an active member
2. I am just a member
3. Not a member of any group

**Voting Attributes** (Circle the best answer)

How long would you wait in line to vote?

Less than 30 minutes      1-2 hours      3-4 hours      Unlimited

How far would you drive to vote in an election?

1-5 miles      6-25 miles      26-50 miles      over 50 miles

How did you find out about registration in your county?

Phone internet      paper      petitioners      teachers

Where do you get your news primarily from?

Newspaper      television      internet      Other: \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours of TV do you watch every day?

None      1-2 hours      3-4 hours      5+ hours

Do you frequently watch the Daily Show with Jon Stewart?

Yes

No

Do you find it more interesting to get your political news from:

Comedians

Professors

News Anchors Friends/Family

Do you think Actors and Comedians should run for political office?

Yes

No

Rank the following people/groups in terms of Trust. 1 being the highest trust to least trusted  
(you do not have to select them all)

\_\_\_\_ Oprah Winfrey

\_\_\_\_ Barack Obama

\_\_\_\_ Angelina Jolie

\_\_\_\_ John McCain

\_\_\_\_ Stephen Colbert

\_\_\_\_ Ben Affleck

\_\_\_\_ Harry Reid

\_\_\_\_ John Paul Stevens

\_\_\_\_ George Bush

\_\_\_\_ Laura Bush

\_\_\_\_ Anderson Cooper

\_\_\_\_ National Rifle Association

\_\_\_\_ Ralph Nader

Which of the following are you most like to vote for should they run for political office? 1 being most likely (you do not have to select them all)

- ☐ Oprah Winfrey
- ☐ Joe Biden
- ☐ Angelina Jolie
- ☐ Sarah Palin
- ☐ Stephen Colbert
- ☐ Ben Affleck
- ☐ Harry Reid
- ☐ John Paul Stevens
- ☐ Laura Bush
- ☐ Anderson Cooper
- ☐ Bill O'Reilly
- ☐ Ralph Nader
- ☐ Jon Stewart

Rank how important the following issues are to you in the form of ballot proposition elections. 1 being most important to least important (you do not have to select them all)

- ☐ Morality
- ☐ Gay Marriage
- ☐ Taxation
- ☐ Constitutional Issues
- ☐ Abortion
- ☐ Elections
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Drugs
- ☐ Tobacco Tax
- ☐ Legalization of Marijuana
- ☐ State and Local Issues
- ☐ Gun Control
- ☐ Term Limits for State Legislators

**EASY EXPERIMENTAL GROUP: SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

**Indicate the response that best describes your feelings.**

Which argument in the film was more convincing?

1. The argument advocating gun control.
2. The argument against gun control.

With the increase in school shootings over the past decade, do you feel safe in your classrooms?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What do you think needs to be done in order to achieve better security in schools? (Write your answer below)

Would private security in each classroom make you feel more secure?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Would you be willing to pay higher tuition for this security?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How important is the issue of gun control to you personally?

- A. Not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Imagine Georgia State is thinking of implementing a new security procedure where the doors to classrooms would lock automatically at the start of class. The doors would only be opened from the inside. Do you think this is a good system of security? (Explain your answer below)

Indicate how you would vote on the following Amendments, if you were in a voting booth on Election Day

**Amendment No. 1**

Title: Background Checks at Gun Shows

Summary: An amendment to the Georgia Revised Statutes concerning a requirement that background checks be conducted on prospective firearms transferees if any part of the transaction occurs at a gun show, and in connection therewith, directing that a gun show vendor require a background check on a prospective transferee and obtain approval of the transfer from the Georgia Bureau of investigation; defining a "gun show vendor" as any person who exhibits, offers for sale, or transfers a firearm at a gun show; requiring gun show promoters to arrange for the services of federally licensed gun dealers to obtain background check has not been obtained by a federally licensed gun dealer; requiring record keeping and retention by federally licensed gun dealers who obtain background checks; permitting federally licensed gun dealers to charge a fee of up to ten dollars for conducting each background check at gun shows; requiring gun show promoters to prominently post notice of the background check requirement; establishing criminal penalties for violations of these requirements; exempting transfers of certain antique firearms, relics and curios from the background check requirement; and requiring the appropriation of funds necessary to implement the measure.

- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Reject
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 2**

Title: Preservation of the Death Penalty; United States Supreme Court Interpretation of Cruel and Unusual Punishment

Ballot Summary: Proposing an amendment to Section 17 of Article I of the State Constitution preserving the death penalty, and permitting any execution method unless prohibited by the Federal Constitution. Requires construction of the prohibition against cruel and/or unusual punishment to conform to United States Supreme Court interpretation of the Eighth Amendment. Prohibits reduction of a death sentence based on invalidity of execution method, and provides for continued force of sentence. Provides for retroactive applicability.

- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Reject
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 3**

This proposed constitutional amendment provides that marriage may take place and may be valid under the laws of this state only between a man and a woman.

The amendment also provides that a marriage in another state or foreign jurisdiction between persons of the same gender may not be recognized in this state and is void and unenforceable under the laws of this state.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 4**

An Act to extend from 4 to 6 Terms the Limits on Legislative Terms

Do you favor extending term limits for Legislators from 4 to 6 terms?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 5**

Title: Decreases from one-half to three-eighths the amount of the Rainy Day Fund that may be spent in the event of revenue failure.

Summary: This measure amends the Georgia Constitution. It amends Section 23 of Article 10. This section involves the Constitutional Reserve Fund also known as the Rainy Day Fund. This measure changes the amount which could be spent from the Rainy Day Fund. The State Board of Equalization would decide if the taxes the state collects each fiscal year will be less than predicted. This is called revenue failure. If this happens, up to three-eighths ( $\frac{3}{8}$ ) of the Rainy Day Fund could be spent. The total amount spent from the Rainy Day Fund for revenue failure could not exceed the amount of the funds shortage predicted by the State Board of Equalization. The Rainy Day Fund can be used now if the prediction about state tax collections for the current year is less than the prediction made the year before. One-half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) of the Fund can be spent now if this occurs. If this measure passes, that amount would change to three-eighths ( $\frac{3}{8}$ ). Money can now be spent from the Fund for certain emergencies. One-half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) of the Fund can now be spent for these emergencies. This measure would change that amount to one quarter ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ).

- ☐ Approve  
☐ Reject  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 6**

Title: An act to exempt food from sales and use taxes.

Attorney General's Explanation:

The state collects a sales and use tax on the sale of food. Many cities and towns also collect a municipal sales and use tax on the sale of food.

Initiated Measure, if adopted, would exempt food from state and municipal sales and use taxes, and eliminate this source of revenue.

A vote "Yes" will change state law.

A vote "No" will leave state law as it is.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 7**

Do you want to ban a specific abortion procedure to be defined in law, except in cases where the life of the mother is in danger?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 8**

Title: Signature percentages to 15% on certain initiatives

Summary: This measure amends the Georgia Constitution. It amends Section 2 of Article 5. It changes the number of legal voters needed to propose an amendment to the law of this state. At present 8% of the legal voters are required to propose a change in the law. This measure will change the number of legal voters to 15%. It would only apply to certain types of laws. It would apply to laws that would do away with methods for hunting, fishing, or trapping. It would also apply to laws that would do away with occupations dealing with animals. Also, it would apply to laws that would do away with sporting or entertainment events dealing with animals.

- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Reject
- ☐ No Vote



**Amendment No. 9**

Title: Requires 48-hour notice to unemancipated minor's parent before providing abortion; authorizes lawsuits, physicians discipline.

Result of "YES" Vote: "Yes" vote requires abortion provider to give 48-hour written notice to unemancipated minor's parent, with certain exceptions. Authorizes administrative discipline for physicians, parental lawsuits.

Result of "NO" Vote: "No" vote retains current law allowing medical provider to provide minor 15 or older medical treatment, abortion, without parental notification; younger minors require parental consent.

Summary: Current law provides that minor 15 years or older may consent to and obtain medical treatment, including abortion, without parent notification; physician may notify parent without minor's consent. Minors 14 years or younger must obtain parental consent before treatment. Measure requires that provider notify unemancipated minor's parent 48 hours before performing abortion. Notification means written notice to parent by certified mail at parent's residence. Exceptions to notice requirement for documented medical emergencies, which do not include rape or incest. Unemancipated minor may apply for administrative hearing requesting abortion without notice to parent. Hearing shall be confidential, open only to minor, counsel, witnesses, judge. Failure to notify parent may subject provider to civil liability to parent; physicians face administrative sanctions, license suspension, or revocation. Other provisions.

Estimate of Financial Impact: This measure will require annual state budget expenditures of \$112,238.

This measure has no financial effect on state government revenues.

This measure has no direct financial effect on local government revenue or expenditures.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 10**

Title: Carryover Measure - Education Funding

Summary: Do you want the State to pay 55% of the cost of public education, which includes all special education costs, for the purpose of shifting costs from the property tax to state resources?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 11**

Title: School Lands - Funds to common schools & certain universities

Summary: This measure amends the State Constitution. It amends Sections 2, 3 and 5 of Article XI, which deal with the School Land Trust. The United States established the Trust to benefit the State's common schools and certain State universities. The permanent school fund is part of that Trust. That trust fund must now forever remain intact and the State can never diminish it. The State can now only use the trust fund's income to aid schools.

The measure changes how the State could use the permanent school fund. The measure allows the State to use more than the fund's income to aid schools. The measure allows the State to diminish the fund itself to aid schools. The measure allows the State to use between  $4\frac{3}{4}\%$  and  $5\frac{1}{2}\%$  of the market value of the fund for the last three years to aid common schools.

The measure also allows the State to use more than trust income to aid the specified universities. The measure allows the State to also diminish the trust fund established to aid the universities. The measure does not set a limit on the amount of trust funds.

- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Reject
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 12**

Title: Bill allowing medical use of marijuana

Summary: This bill would allow patients to use marijuana for certain medical purposes. A doctor must find that the patient has a debilitating medical condition that might benefit from marijuana. An eligible minor could use medical marijuana only under the consent and control of a parent. There would be limits on how much medical marijuana a patient could possess. Patients and their primary care-givers who comply with this law would not be guilty of a crime. The state would create a confidential registry of patients who may use medical marijuana. Non-medical use of marijuana would still be a crime.

Should this initiative become law?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 13**

Title: Modifying expenditures from Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust Fund

Summary: This measure amends the Georgia Constitution. It amends Section 40 of Article 10. This measure changes certain procedures related to the tobacco trust fund. It changes the way it is determined how much money in the fund may be spent each year. Now only earnings of the fund may be spent. This measure would base spending from the fund on the average market value of the fund. Each year an amount not to exceed 5½ percent of the average market value of the fund may be spent. The actual percentage amount to be expended is set by the Board of Investors. It cannot exceed 5½ percent. Monies from the fund may be used to pay outside vendors and for financial management services.

- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Reject
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 14**

Protection of Local Government Revenues

- Protects local funding for public safety, health, libraries, parks, and other locally delivered services.
- Prohibits the State from reducing local governments' property tax proceeds.
- Allows the provisions to be suspended only if the Governor declares a fiscal necessity and two-thirds of the Legislature approve the suspension. Suspended funds must be repaid within three years.
- Also requires local sales tax revenues to remain with local government and be spent for local purposes.
- Requires the State to fund legislative mandates on local governments or suspend their operation.

Summary of Legislative Analyst's Estimate of Net State and Local Government Fiscal Impact:

- Significant changes to state authority over local finances. Higher local government revenues than otherwise would have been the case, possibly in the billions of dollars annually over time. Any such local revenue impacts would result in decreased resources to the state of similar amounts.

- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Reject
- ☐ No Vote

Rank how important the following issues are to you in the form of ballot proposition elections. 1 being most important to least important (you do not have to select them all)

- \_\_\_ Morality
- \_\_\_ Gay Marriage
- \_\_\_ Taxation
- \_\_\_ Constitutional Issues
- \_\_\_ Abortion
- \_\_\_ Elections
- \_\_\_ Education
- \_\_\_ Drugs
- \_\_\_ Tobacco Tax
- \_\_\_ Legalization of Marijuana
- \_\_\_ State and Local Issues
- \_\_\_ Gun Control
- \_\_\_ Term Limits for State Legislators

**DIFFICULT EXPERIMENTAL GROUP: SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

**Indicate the response that best describes your feelings.**

Which argument in the film was more convincing?

1. The argument advocating gun control.
2. The argument against gun control.

With the increase in school shootings over the past decade, do you feel safe in your classrooms?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What do you think needs to be done in order to achieve better security in schools? (Write your answer below)

Would private security in each classroom make you feel more secure?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Would you be willing to pay higher tuition for this security?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How important is the issue of gun control to you personally?

- A. Not important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Very important

Imagine Georgia State is thinking of implementing a new security procedure where the doors to classrooms would lock automatically at the start of class. The doors would only be opened from the inside. Do you think this is a good system of security? (Explain your answer below)

Indicate how you would vote on the following Amendments, if you were in a voting booth on Election Day

**Amendment 1**

Title: Background Checks at Gun Shows

Summary: An amendment to the Georgia Revised Statutes concerning a requirement that background checks be conducted on prospective firearms transferees if any part of the transaction occurs at a gun show, and in connection therewith, directing that a gun show vendor require a background check on a prospective transferee and obtain approval of the transfer from the Georgia Bureau of investigation; defining a “gun show vendor” as any person who exhibits, offers for sale, or transfers a firearm at a gun show; requiring gun show promoters to arrange for the services of federally licensed gun dealers to obtain background check has not been obtained by a federally licensed gun dealer; requiring record keeping and retention by federally licensed gun dealers who obtain background checks; permitting federally licensed gun dealers to charge a fee of up to ten dollars for conducting each background check at gun shows; requiring gun show promoters to prominently post notice of the background check requirement; establishing criminal penalties for violations of these requirements; exempting transfers of certain antique firearms, relics and curios from the background check requirement; and requiring the appropriation of funds necessary to implement the measure.

- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Reject
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 2**

Title: Preservation of the Death Penalty; United States Supreme Court Interpretation of Cruel and Unusual Punishment

Ballot Summary: Proposing an amendment to Section 17 of Article I of the State Constitution preserving the death penalty, and permitting any execution method unless prohibited by the Federal Constitution. Requires construction of the prohibition against cruel and/or unusual punishment to conform to United States Supreme Court interpretation of the Eighth Amendment. Prohibits reduction of a death sentence based on invalidity of execution method, and provides for continued force of sentence. Provides for retroactive applicability.

- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Reject
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 3**

Title: Domestic Partnerships

Summary: Shall there be an amendment to the Georgia Revised Statutes to authorize domestic partnerships, an in connection therewith, enacting the “Georgia Domestic Partnership Benefits and Responsibilities Act” to extend to same-sex couples in a domestic partnership the benefits, protections, and responsibilities that are granted by Georgia law to spouses, providing the conditions under which a license for a domestic partnership may be issued and the criteria under which a domestic partnership may be dissolved, making provisions for implementation of the Act, and providing that a domestic partnership is not a marriage, which consists of the union of one man and one woman?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 4**

Title: Term Limits for Court of Appeals and Supreme Court Judges

Summary: Shall there be an amendment to the Georgia constitution concerning term limits for appellate court judges, and, in connection therewith, reducing the terms of office for justices of the supreme court and judges of the court of appeals to four years, requiring appellate judges serving as of January 1, 2007, to stand for retention at the next general election, if eligible for another term, prohibiting an appellate judge from serving more than three terms, specifying that a provisional term constitutes a full term, and making any appellate judge who has served ten or more years at one court level ineligible for another term at that level?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 5**

Title: Limiting a State Business Tax Income Deduction

Summary: Concerning the elimination of a state income tax benefit for a business that pays an authorized alien to perform labor services, and, in connection therewith, prohibiting certain wages or remuneration paid to an unauthorized alien for labor services from being claimed as a deductible business expense for state income tax purposes unless specified exceptions apply and, to the extent such a payment was claimed as a deduction in determining that business' federal income tax liability, requiring an amount equal to the prohibited deduction to be added to the business' federal taxable income for the purpose of determining state income tax liability.

- ☐ Approve  
☐ Reject  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 6**

Title: Limiting a State Business Tax Income Deduction

Summary: Concerning the elimination of state income tax benefit for a business that pays an unauthorized alien to perform labor services, and, in connection therewith, prohibiting certain wages or remuneration paid to an unauthorized alien for labor services from being claimed as a deductible business expense for state income tax purposes unless specified exceptions apply and, to the extent such a payment was claimed as a deduction in determining the business' federal income tax liability, requiring an amount equal to the prohibited deduction to be added to the business' federal taxable income for the purpose of determining state income tax liability.

- ☐ Approve  
☐ Reject  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 7**

Title: Local Property Taxes

Summary: The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to permit the voters of a municipality having a population of less than 10,000 to authorize the governing body of the municipality to enter into an agreement with an owner of real property in or adjacent to an area in the municipality that has been approved for funding under certain programs administered by the Georgia Department of Agriculture under which the parties agree that all ad valorem taxes imposed on the owner's property may not be increased for the first five tax years after the tax year in which the agreement is entered into.

- ☐ Approve  
☐ Reject  
☐ No Vote



**Amendment No. 8**Title Article X, Section 22

Summary: ARTICLE X MISCELLANEOUS Section 22. Parental notice of termination of a minor's pregnancy-- The legislature shall not limit or deny the privacy right guaranteed to a minor under the United States Constitution as interpreted by the United States Supreme Court. Notwithstanding a minor's right of privacy provided in Section 23 of Article I, the Legislature is authorized to require by general law for notification to a parent or guardian of a minor before the termination of the minor's pregnancy. The Legislature shall provide exceptions to such requirement for notification and shall create a process for judicial waiver of the notification.

- ☐ Approve  
☐ Reject  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 9**

An amendment to Article X of the Constitution of the State of Georgia, establishing a homestead exemption for a specified percentage of a limited amount of the actual value of owner-occupied residential real property that is the primary residence of an owner-occupier who is sixty-five years of age or older and has resided in such property for ten years or longer, and, in connection therewith, allowing the general assembly by law to adjust the maximum amount of actual valued of such residential real property of which such specified percentage shall be exempt, requiring the aggregate statewide valuation for assessment that is attributable to residential real property to be calculated as if the full actual value of all owner-occupied primary residences that are partially exempt from taxation was subject to taxation for the purpose of determining the biennial adjustment to be made to the ratio of valuation for assessment for residential real property, requiring the General Assembly to compensate local governmental entities for the net amount of property tax revenues lost as a result of the homestead exemption, specifying that said compensation shall not be included in local government fiscal year spending, authorizing a permanent increase in state fiscal year spending to defray the cost to the state of said compensation, and specifying that said compensation shall not be subject to any statutory limitation on general fund appropriations.

- ☐ Approve  
☐ Reject  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 10**

Shall there be an amendment to the Georgia Revised Statutes concerning the requirement that any woman who is considering an abortion give voluntary, informed consent prior to the abortion, and, in connection therewith, defining several pertinent terms so that "abortion" includes termination of a known pregnancy at any time after conception, specifying the information a physician must provide to insure that a woman's consent to an abortion is voluntary and informed, requiring a physician, except in emergency cases, to provide the specified information to the woman at least twenty-four hours prior to performing an abortion, requiring the department of public health and environment to provide specified informational materials for women who are considering abortions, establishing procedures for emergency situations, requiring physicians to annually report specified information, requiring the department of public health and environment to annually publish a compilation of the physicians' reports, and providing for the administration and enforcement of the amendment's provisions?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 11**

Title: Recall Deadlines

Summary: An amendment to Section 2 of Article XXI of the Constitution of the state of Georgia, concerning elections to recall state elected officials, and, in connection therewith, providing for the deadlines regarding recall petitions and hearings to be set in statute rather than in the Constitution and stating that a recall election shall be held as part of a general election if a general election will be held between fifty and ninety days after the time for filing a protest has passed and all protests have been finally decided.

- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Reject
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 12**

Title: Higher Education Capital Improvements and Acquisitions Bonds

Shall the state be authorized to issue general obligation bonds in an amount not to exceed one hundred eighteen million three hundred sixty thousand dollars (\$118,360,000) to make capital expenditures for certain higher educational capital improvements and acquisitions and provide for a general property tax imposition and levy for the payment of principal of, interest on and expenses incurred in connection with the issuance of the bonds and the collection of the tax as permitted by law?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 13**

Title: Macon County Tax on Sale of Tobacco, Liquor and Wine

Summary: Relating to Macon County, proposing an amendment to the Constitution of Alabama of 1901, to allow the Legislature, by local law, to authorize the Macon County Commission to levy a tax on the sale of all tobacco products and liquor or wine and to provide for the collection and distribution of the proceeds of any tax levied by any such local act. (Proposed by Act [2008-536](#))

- ☐ Approve  
☐ Reject  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 14**

Title: Tobacco Tax Increase for Health-Related Purposes

Summary: Shall State taxes be increased \$175 million annually through additional tobacco taxes imposed for health related purposes, and, in connection therewith, amending the Georgia Constitution to increase statewide taxes on the sale of cigarettes by wholesalers of three and two-tenths cents per cigarette and on the sale, use, consumption, handling, or distribution of other tobacco products by distributors at the rate of twenty percent of the manufacturer's list price; increasing such tobacco taxes effective January 1, 2005; requiring annual appropriations of specified percentages of the additional tobacco tax revenues to expand eligibility for and increase enrollment in the children's basic health plan, to fund comprehensive primary medical care through certain Georgia qualified providers, tobacco education programs, and prevention, early detection, and treatment of cancer and cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases, to compensate the state general fund, the old age pension fund, and local governments for tobacco tax losses resulting from reduced sales of cigarettes and tobacco products; specifying that the appropriations of additional tobacco tax revenues shall be in addition to and not substituted for appropriations for such programs on January 1, 2005; allowing the use of additional tobacco tax revenues for any health related purpose and to serve populations enrolled in the children's basic health plan and the Georgia medical assistance program as of January 1, 2005, upon a declaration of a state fiscal emergency by two-thirds of the members of each house of the General Assembly and the Governor; prohibiting the repeal or reduction of existing taxes imposed on cigarettes and other tobacco products; excluding all additional tobacco tax revenues from fiscal year spending for purposes of Section 20 of Article X of the Georgia Constitution; and exempting appropriations of additional tobacco tax revenues from the statutory limitation on general fund appropriations growth or any other existing spending limitation?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 15**

Title: Regulation of Marijuana

Summary: Shall Titles 32, 40 and 43 of the Georgia Revised Statutes be amended in order to allow and regulate the sale, use and possession of one ounce or less of marijuana by persons at least 21 years of age, impose licensing requirements on marijuana retailers and wholesalers, allow for the sale of marijuana by licensed marijuana retailers and wholesalers, impose taxes and restrictions on the wholesale and retail sale of marijuana, and to increase the criminal penalties for causing death or substantial bodily harm when driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No Vote

**Amendment No. 16**

Shall there be an amendment to the Georgia Constitution concerning the management of development, and, in connection therewith, specifying that local governments, unless otherwise excepted, shall approve development only within areas committed to development or within future growth areas in accordance with voter-approved growth area maps, requiring such local governments to delineate areas committed to development, requiring local governments proposing a future growth area to submit a growth area map to a vote at a regular election, specifying the content of growth impact disclosures to be distributed to voters in connection with such elections, and specifying the type of allowed action or development within growth areas, committed areas, or outside such areas?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No Vote

Rank how important the following issues are to you in the form of ballot proposition elections. 1 being most important to least important (you do not have to select them all)

- \_\_\_ Morality
- \_\_\_ Gay Marriage
- \_\_\_ Taxation
- \_\_\_ Constitutional Issues
- \_\_\_ Abortion
- \_\_\_ Elections
- \_\_\_ Education
- \_\_\_ Drugs
- \_\_\_ Tobacco Tax
- \_\_\_ Legalization of Marijuana
- \_\_\_ State and Local Issues
- \_\_\_ Gun Control
- \_\_\_ Term Limits for State Legislators