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No-Vote Stadium Subsidies and the Democratic Response

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1 Abstract

2 Scholarship on sports stadium subsidies has covered myriad topics, including economic impact,
3 finance, political strategy, and voter behavior. One area receiving much less attention from
4 researchers is the emergence of the no-vote subsidy—where stadium-finance decisions are
5 decided without a public vote—as a frequent alternative to direct democracy (i.e., referendums or
6 initiatives). In this article, it is contended that an unfavorable no-vote subsidy can have damaging
7 effects on a team’s financial performance, the reputation of elected officials, and citizen
8 confidence in the democratic process. Whereas previous analyses of stadium-subsidy debates
9 often end with a voting outcome (i.e., the issue is passed or rejected), the conceptual model
10 presented in this article explores how attitudes toward a no-vote stadium subsidy are formed, and
11 how these attitudes can have widespread effects on a number of individuals, groups, and
12 institutions.

13 **Keywords:** public policy, political science, public subsidies, public sports facilities, sport
14 finance, stadium construction

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1 **No-Vote Stadium Subsidies and the Democratic Response**

2 The contribution of the professional sports stadium (e.g., arena, ballpark, football or
3 soccer stadium) to its city has long been debated by team owners, elected officials, scholars,
4 activists, fans, sportswriters, and ordinary citizens. This debate intensifies whenever the
5 possibility of publicly funding a stadium's construction or renovation is raised. When it comes to
6 the question of public investment in the US, researchers have focused on voter decision-making
7 and the tools of direct democracy (i.e., the referendum and initiative; Brown & Paul, 2002;
8 Dehring, Depken, & Ward, 2008; Mondello & Anderson, 2004). Historically, however, stadium
9 referendums and initiatives are relatively rare; since 2005, for example, over 30 North American
10 stadium projects have been allocated over \$8.5 billion of public funds without any form of voter
11 approval (Kellison & Mondello, 2014; Long, 2013). In this article, the practice of allocating
12 public funds toward a project without direct public consent is referred to as a no-vote subsidy. In
13 the absence of ballot results or poll numbers, policymakers can presume the public's will to
14 reflect their own preferences. However, it may also be possible that the enacted policies do not
15 correspond to the wishes of the electorate.

16 Recent stadium developments in Atlanta, Detroit, Edmonton, Minneapolis, and
17 Washington, DC, illustrate the latest instances of no-vote subsidies in North America (City of
18 Edmonton, 2013; Karoub, 2013; Kellison & Mondello, 2014; O'Connell 2013, Tucker & Suggs,
19 2013). A review of the stadium-financing literature illustrates that scholarly inquiry, though
20 extensive, has been limited mostly to studies focusing on economics, finance, or urban regime
21 theory (cf. Kellison & Mondello, 2014). Perhaps because of the lack of available data on no-vote
22 subsidies, researchers have also largely neglected discussions of these cases. Additionally,
23 investigations of voter characteristics and behavior in stadium-financing issues have failed to

1 look beyond voting outcomes. In this study, a serious paucity in the literature is addressed by
2 underscoring the no-vote subsidy and considering how this entire stadium-financing process may
3 change voters' attitudes toward an array of individuals, groups, and institutions.

4 The purposes of this study are to consider how a citizen's favorability or unfavorability
5 toward a public-financing plan is formed and to theorize the public response to such financing
6 decisions. Two research questions (RQs) are proposed to achieve these aims. First, it is necessary
7 to pinpoint the factors that influence a citizen's attitude toward a stadium-financing plan
8 approved without the public's direct consent. Although there is reason to suspect that citizens
9 would oppose policymakers' allocation of taxpayer dollars without a public vote, some factors
10 may contribute to citizens' favorable attitude toward a subsidy. Thus, the following RQ is
11 proposed:

12 RQ₁: What factors influence a private citizen's favorability (or unfavorability) toward a
13 no-vote stadium subsidy?

14 Citizens may support the public financing of a stadium if they perceive doing so will result in
15 benefits to the community, including positive economic impact and civic pride (Horne, 2011;
16 Winfree & Rosentraub, 2012). Additionally, citizens may simply trust policymakers' motives; in
17 this case, ordinary citizens may acknowledge their own lack of understanding and defer to
18 elected officials with greater expertise who they believe will act in ways that reflect the will of
19 the people.

20 Despite the common-sense prediction that enacting policies contrary to one's preferences
21 will displease a voter, the target (or targets) and extent of this discontent is unclear. Citizens
22 dissatisfied with public policy may express their dissatisfaction in a variety of ways (e.g., with
23 antagonism, with apathy) and toward a number of individuals, groups, or institutions (e.g., civil

1 servants, policy benefactors, the democratic process). To guide this line of inquiry, a second
2 research question is proposed:

3 RQ2: What are the consequences of a private citizen's favorable (or unfavorable)
4 assessment of a no-vote stadium subsidy?

5 Answers to these RQs contribute to the academic study of both sport and public policy by
6 providing insight into the no-vote subsidy, an understudied, yet common, phenomenon.

7 Policymakers in these cases are under no legal obligation to acquire the consent of local citizens.

8 In the absence of a constitutional mandate, policymakers are able to enact legislation without the
9 direct approval of the public. Dissenting citizens are commonly afforded the opportunity to
10 petition and introduce a referendum, and in most cases, have failed to initiate such an apparatus.

11 In spite of these facts, it is unsurprising that many are uneasy with the evasion of public opinion
12 that this phenomenon seems to represent.

13 The sociopolitical connection between democracy and stadium finance is discussed
14 further below. First, a review of literature will highlight the role of direct democracy in
15 American governance and its application to the sport-facility financing process. Based on these
16 theoretical foundations, a conceptual model of the public response to the no-vote subsidy will be
17 presented. Additionally, a series of research constructs and related hypotheses will be proposed.
18 This model and the accompanying hypotheses will be used to set an agenda for future research,
19 which is outlined in the concluding section.

20 **Theoretical foundations**

21 *Direct democracy*

22 In this paper, *democracy* refers simply to the fundamental idea that a society should be
23 governed by the will of its people. When it comes to legislating, the will of the people may be

1 expressed by elected representative legislators or by direct popular vote on a proposed piece of
2 legislation. The foundations for this democratic idea can be found in the work of classical
3 theorists of democracy like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, and John
4 Stuart Mill, all of whom argued for the sovereignty of the people (Peonidis, 2011; Tuck, 1999;
5 Turner, 2010; Waldron, 2002).¹ Its echoes are clear in the philosophies of early framers of
6 American democracy such as Thomas Jefferson (Bernstein, 2003).

7 *Will of the people* can be understood simply as the majority preference. Adopting
8 “majority rules” as an expression of will of the people is not without controversy. For example,
9 Shapiro (2003) cited “poor quality of decision making, low levels of participation, declining
10 legitimacy of government, and ignorant citizens” (p. 22) as evidence that the popular vote is an
11 imperfect tool of democracy. Despite these challenges, the popular vote has been accepted
12 throughout democratic nations as a tool to quantify the people’s will (United Nations General
13 Assembly, 1948). Furthermore, initiatives and referendums held throughout the United States are
14 decided by majority vote, as are elections of representatives (Magleby, 1984).

15 The contemporary challenges of democracy include limiting the influence of special
16 interests (“When Other Voices Are Drowned Out,” 2012), attenuating citizen cynicism in the
17 political process (Caldwell, 2006), and reengaging voters (Norris, 2004). Today, the American
18 people’s contempt of government is expressed through historically low approval ratings of
19 Congress (Rampell, 2011), calls for term-limit and campaign finance reform (Dionne, 2012;
20 Pearson & Kidwell, 2009), growing support of third-party candidates (Goebel, 2002), and recall
21 elections (Davey, 2012).

22 In addition to statewide issues, the initiative and referendum have been utilized locally at
23 the city and county levels on issues ranging from tax levies to permitting liquor sales on Sundays

1 (Cronin, 1989). As has been the case in a number of past stadium-financing issues, propositions
2 seeking to increase city or county tax rates often are justified as a way to obtain additional
3 revenues necessary to finance professional sports venues, convention centers, performing arts
4 theaters, or other public-assembly facilities (Petersen, 2001). Both the initiative and the
5 referendum as instruments of democracy are generally supported among the American public at
6 all levels (i.e., city, county, and state; Bowler, Donovan, & Karp, 2007). Furthermore, a majority
7 of Americans favor the idea of a national referendum (Smith, Tolbert, & Keller, 2010). The
8 national referendum is a tool common in most other democratic nations and could range in uses
9 from advising policymakers to arbitrating during congressional impasses (Cronin, 1989). Despite
10 its popularity, direct democracy has also been the target of a fair share of criticism (Fort, 1999).

11 Over the past 2,500 years, little has changed in the talking points of critics and defenders
12 of citizens' direct participation in government affairs. For example, in *The Republic*, Plato
13 rejected the citizen-centered democracy of ancient Athens. He argued that permitting uninformed
14 citizens to participate in matters of government alienated those with leadership and knowledge—
15 in other words, those most capable of governing. Furthermore, he argued that ordinary citizens
16 might fall prey to the influence of special-interest coalitions, a concern common among
17 contemporary critics of direct democracy (Held, 2006).

18 Aspects of these historic roots can be seen in contemporary concerns with voter
19 competence. Modern political thinkers believed an active and involved society is the foundation
20 of a sound democracy (Held, 2006). Opponents of direct democracy agreed, but contended that
21 the ideal citizen—one armed with the knowledge and motivation necessary to contribute to
22 public policymaking—was nothing more than make-believe. Walter Lippmann, a Pulitzer Prize-
23 winning newspaper columnist, championed this idea in his influential book *The Phantom Public*:

1 “For when public opinion attempts to govern directly it is either a failure or a tyranny”
2 (Lippmann, 1925, p. 71). For Lippmann and others—like political scientist Joseph Schumpeter
3 (1943), who said “the electoral mass is incapable of action other than a stampede” (p. 283)—
4 placing responsibility in the hands of an uninformed and apathetic public would only produce
5 chaos.

6 Despite the criticism that the initiative and referendum are poor tools of democracy, the
7 American people have largely advocated for the continued accessibility of citizen-led
8 propositions. As Cronin (1989) noted, their merits notwithstanding, the contemporary arguments
9 against the tools of direct democracy are unlikely to supplant the initiative and referendum. In
10 addition to the tools themselves, polling has indicated that people generally favor the outcomes
11 produced by popular votes (Matsusaka, 2004). These outcomes have included tax and
12 expenditure cuts and restructuring public financing from a tax-based system to one based on user
13 fees.

14 Although the role of direct democracy in public-stadium finance is of central importance
15 in this paper, it must be acknowledged that an active and involved citizenry can be realized using
16 other democratic methods. For example, as chronicled by Scherer and Sam (2008), the public
17 forums held to deliberate the subsidization of a rugby stadium in Dunedin, New Zealand,
18 exemplify one method to foster citizen participation in issues of governance. Still, while the
19 referendum and the initiative are not unique tools of the American democracy, a precedence of
20 using direct democracy to decide U.S. stadium-finance issues supports the argument that many
21 American citizens are accustomed to voting on such projects (Brown & Paul, 2002; Dehring et
22 al., 2008; Mondello & Anderson, 2004). As discussed below, however, direct voter participation
23 is becoming increasingly exceptional.

1 *Politics and the no-vote subsidy*

2 Since 2005, less than one-sixth of all North American stadium projects have been directly
3 approved by voters (Kellison & Mondello, 2014). The no-vote subsidy includes any instance in
4 which a stadium (or more broadly, any project) receives public financing without the direct
5 approval of voters, and it can occur in one of two ways: (1) no vote is held or, perhaps more
6 egregious, (2) a proposal is rejected by voters but the subsidy occurs anyway. Although this
7 study focuses on the no-vote subsidy as a means of public financing since 2005, its use predates
8 this timeframe, including in Seattle in 1995 and Pittsburgh in 1997 (Mecham, 2006).

9 The Pittsburgh case, in which a plan was approved to subsidize two sports facilities after
10 voters rejected a public financing plan six months earlier (Dvorchak, 1998), was highlighted in
11 testimony given at congressional hearings for the *Stadium Financing and Franchise Relocation*
12 *Act of 1999*. One witness, then-state representative Andrew Carn, expressed concern that
13 Pennsylvania decision-makers circumvented the democratic process and were hypocritical in
14 their ideologies regarding the use of the tools of direct democracy:

15 The...most disturbing [aspect] of the Pennsylvania stadium experience is the exclusion of
16 the public. In 1997, the people of Pittsburgh and the 10 surrounding counties voted
17 against public financing for stadiums, yet public money is being spent on stadiums.

18 In Philadelphia, some people want to provide school choice and others want the
19 public to have a choice on riverboat gambling, yet many of these same proponents of
20 public choices on issues vehemently oppose public choice in stadium financing.

21 In fact, I offered southeastern Pennsylvania voters a choice on stadiums when I
22 offered a referendum measure on the House floor in June. The Republican

1 Appropriations Committee indicated the referendum would not cost the State any money,
2 and the cost to the city was minimal.

3 My proposal was defeated 101 to 97, with many southeastern Pennsylvania
4 Representatives, including some Philadelphians voting against the measure. Some of my
5 colleagues have a lot of explaining to do, because many of them voted to allow the
6 Pittsburgh referendum then turned around and voted against their own constituents
7 having the opportunity to have their say on this issue. (*Stadium Financing*, 1999)

8 For Carn, it did not make sense for the same legislators who valued direct democracy in some
9 cases (e.g., riverboat gambling) to circumvent a public vote in stadium-financing propositions.
10 His objection was further strengthened by the fact that a referendum had failed in Pittsburgh,
11 only for policymakers to find an alternative public funding mechanism.

12 Arguably, the most radical use of the no-vote subsidy in recent history occurred in
13 Charlotte in the early 2000s. In 2001, Mecklenberg County voters defeated a referendum (57%
14 no) to use existing hotel and motel occupancy taxes and new car rental and county seat taxes to
15 construct an uptown arena along with a number of other projects (Mecklenberg County Board of
16 Elections, 2001). A year later, however, city councilmembers voted by a count of eight to three
17 to raise \$265 million in municipal bonds for the construction of a new arena. During
18 deliberations, many of the councilmembers noted that the new plan was not the same as the issue
19 rejected by voters in the year prior. On the other hand, dissenting councilor Harold Cogdell
20 lamented that the city council's deal directly affronted the democratic process by ignoring voter
21 sentiment. The following excerpt captures his apprehension:

22 First and foremost, when you are given an opportunity to participate in government's
23 decision-making process, like it or not, the will of the people must be adhered to by our

1 governmental leaders. In today's [Memorandum of Agreement], circumstances and terms
2 are different than they were when the referendum was presented to the voters, but
3 [Councilmember Cogdell] does not believe the terms have so substantially changed that
4 the will of the voters should be disregarded. In every election, we all like the outcome of
5 some races and we are disappointed by the outcome of others, but the results must be
6 adhered to. That is the fundamental principle on which democracy is founded.

7 Convenient exceptions to this principle jeopardize the very democratic fabric that makes
8 our nation great. (City Council of the City of Charlotte, 2002, p. 592)

9 Each of the voting councilmembers was certainly aware of the previous year's public vote, but as
10 the outcome of the council's vote showed, the majority of the council did not perceive the new
11 actions to be problematic.

12 The sections above provide the foundation for the conceptual model presented next. From
13 a practical standpoint, this model may aid understanding of the impact of the no-vote subsidy on
14 citizens' attitudes toward policymakers and the professional sports team. Additionally, this
15 model may be useful in approaching the consequences of the no-vote subsidy from an idealistic
16 perspective—that is, how cases of no-vote subsidies impact ordinary citizens' attitudes toward
17 democracy. Below, these concepts are defined in further detail and introduce the conceptual
18 model and associated hypotheses.

19 **Conceptual model**

20 The public's response to a no-vote subsidy is conceptualized in the multistage conceptual
21 model presented in Figure 1. The first stage of the public response concerns a citizen's *attitude*
22 *toward the policy*. Within the context of a public stadium-financing policy, two antecedents (i.e.,
23 *perceived stadium impact, trust in government*) are theorized to influence an individual's support

1 of a financing plan. The second stage analyzes the *direct outcomes* of a citizen's favorability or
2 unfavorability toward the stadium-financing plan. The variables of interest in the second stage
3 include *team consumption intentions*, *congruence with democratic norms*, and *attitude toward*
4 *policymakers*. The final stage is concerned with *implications for democracy* and contains two
5 variables: *political apathy* and *voting intentions*. Moderating variables appear throughout the
6 model and include *political ideology*, *team identification*, and *political apathy*.

7 Unlike other examinations that have compared individual characteristics with the
8 electoral outcomes of a public stadium-financing issue (e.g., Ahlfeldt and Maennig, 2012; Coates
9 & Humphreys, 2006; Dehring et al., 2008; Fort, 1997; Mondello & Anderson, 2004), this model
10 is intended to serve *ex post* analyses focusing on the reactions of individual citizens. Past
11 research has been dedicated to determining *why* a stadium initiative or referendum passed or
12 failed (e.g., Brown & Paul, 2002; deMause & Cagan, 2008; Horn & Fort, 2009; Paul & Brown,
13 2001; Trumbour, 2006). Certainly, this line of research has merit: millions of dollars have been
14 spent on stadium-financing campaigns, stadium-financing issues often polarize communities, and
15 ill-advised stadium subsidies can wreak havoc on local (i.e., city, county, regional) economies
16 (Kellison & Mills, 2013). In cases of no-vote subsidies, there may be other consequences felt by
17 individuals, groups, or institutions. Policymakers who allocate public funding toward a stadium
18 through a no-vote subsidy may satisfy the immediate goals of "saving" teams, jobs, or
19 businesses, but there may be other unintended and anticipated consequences.

20 -----
21 Insert Figure 1 about here
22 -----
23

24 Public votes on stadium-finance issues are often preceded by contentious and costly
25 political campaigns (Curry, Schwirian, & Woldoff, 2004; deMause & Cagan, 2008). Of course,

1 stadium-subsidy advocates also have to face the possibility that the electorate will reject a public-
2 financing plan if it appears on the ballot. The no-vote subsidy, on the other hand, represents the
3 path of least resistance. On the surface, the no-vote subsidy allows a stadium project to receive
4 public appropriations while policymakers (and the team) can avoid any political wrangling.
5 However, in cases of unfavorable no-vote subsidies (i.e., in which voters would have defeated
6 the subsidy plan if given the opportunity), the negative consequences may be more severe than
7 suspected. In the model presented in this section, these penalties may become more apparent.

8 ***Stage 1: Antecedents of policy support***

9 The public response to a no-vote subsidy is predicated on a citizen's favorability or
10 unfavorability toward the actual financing plan. The first stage represents an individual's
11 formation of attitudes toward the plan, the focus of RQ₁. The outcome variable is *support of*
12 *financing plan*, which is simply defined as an individual's favorability or unfavorability toward
13 the actual terms of the stadium-financing plan. *Support of financing plan* should not be confused
14 with one's attitude toward *the act* of providing a no-vote subsidy. For example, although an
15 individual may argue the plan should have been approved via a public vote, she or he may
16 nevertheless agree with the specific financing details. To determine how first-stage attitudes
17 develop, two antecedents of an individual's support of the financing plan are proposed: the
18 perceived stadium impact and trust in government.

19 *Perceived stadium impact* is defined as a multidimensional construct measuring a
20 citizen's assessment that a sports facility—as a provider of professional sport and
21 entertainment—produces meaningful tangible and intangible benefits for the community. Pro-
22 subsidy advocates have claimed a community receives a number of benefits from its local
23 stadium and sports teams, and these benefits are reaped by citizens regardless of whether they

1 attend the city's sporting events (Johnson, Groothuis, & Whitehead, 2001). Here, and in all
2 usages hereafter, the term *local* is meant to encompass citywide, countywide, or multi-county
3 issues. Past stadium-subsidy cases have fallen under each of these jurisdictions, and hypotheses
4 related to "local issues" in this article are versatile enough to be applied to any of these
5 categories.

6 Previous research related to stadium referendums indicates that voters support public-
7 financing issues when they anticipate benefits gained from attracting a new professional sports
8 team or penalties avoided from the relocation of one of the city's existing teams (Mondello &
9 Anderson, 2004). Other research has shown that pro-subsidy campaign spending has influenced
10 the outcome of the public vote (e.g., Blair & Swindell, 1997; Brown & Paul, 2002; Paul &
11 Brown, 2006). These campaigns highlight the positive benefits expected from a new or
12 renovated stadium and sometimes also highlight the potential consequences of a failed
13 referendum. These findings suggest that, the trustworthiness of the campaigns' communications
14 notwithstanding, citizens favor public-financing plans when expected benefits are clearly known.
15 Based on the findings in past stadium-election investigations, the following hypothesis is made:

16 H_1 : The perception that the value of the stadium is high will have a positive impact on a
17 citizen's support of the public stadium-financing plan.

18 The second hypothesized antecedent of a citizen's support of a public stadium-financing
19 plan is *trust in government*. The link between public trust in government and public support of
20 policies is commonsensical. Historically, however, public trust has been treated as a dependent
21 variable; that is, people's trust in government depended on their favorability in the policies
22 enacted (Dancey, 2012). Scholars have also provided empirical evidence, however, that a
23 citizen's trust or distrust in government has political consequences. For example, Hetherington

1 (1999) found that when distrustful of government in general, voters tended to penalize incumbent
2 candidates in elections. As Hetherington (1998) observed, “Rather than simply reflecting
3 dissatisfaction with incumbents and institutions, declining political trust contributes to this
4 dissatisfaction, creating an environment in which it is difficult for those in government to
5 succeed” (p. 791). Past research has indicated that in order for citizens to support government
6 policies, they must have trust in the government (Hetherington & Husser, 2012; Rudolph &
7 Evans, 2005). The same relationship is expected between a citizen’s trust in government and
8 support of the stadium-subsidy plan, as indicated in the following hypothesis:

9 H_2 : Trust in government will have a positive impact on a citizen’s support of the plan to
10 finance a professional sports stadium using public funds.

11 A citizen’s trust in government may originate from his or her belief that a policymaker is
12 behaving benevolently rather than out of self-interest. In a prior study of political decision-
13 making, Kellison and Mondello (2014) observed that elected officials justified unpopular
14 stadium-finance decisions by extolling the virtues of civic paternalism, actions believed to serve
15 the best interests of the local collective, regardless of whether those actions were contradictory to
16 public sentiment. Supporters of civic paternalism share the assumptions of representative
17 democracy advocates: that the individual voter does not have the capacity (by choice or by lack
18 of accessibility) to act on behalf of the entire community. In a case like Charlotte (discussed
19 previously), civic paternalism may have enabled policymakers to justify their public financing
20 plan, a decision that appeared to conflict with the wishes of the community collective.

21 Similar to a philosophy of civic paternalism, citizens exhibiting great trust in government
22 assumes leaders possess greater knowledge that informs their decision-making, and that these
23 leaders will act in ways that maximize the public benefit. On the other hand, a citizen lacking

1 trust in government may question the policymaker's base of knowledge or motives. Though the
2 concept of civic paternalism has only recently emerged in the literature, there has been much
3 consideration of the roles of knowledge and trust in government (cf. Caldwell, 2006;
4 Grundmann, 2008; Turner, 2008), both of which are important aspects of an individual's trust in
5 civically paternalistic leadership. It is not enough for a leader to possess omniscience; citizens
6 must also trust that policymakers will act based on the interests of all, and not the policymakers'
7 own self-interests. Some of this judgment may come from a policymaker's legislative record,
8 including the previous utilization of a no-vote subsidy (and its effectiveness).

9 It is important to emphasize that the authenticity of a policymaker's civic paternalism is
10 subject to the judgment of voters. That is, whether an elected official genuinely governs in the
11 best interests of the collective is irrelevant, particularly in a model designed to gauge voter
12 attitudes. In reality, policymakers may support a stadium subsidy for a number of reasons,
13 including backing the urban growth machine (Delaney & Eckstein, 2007) or pursuing their own
14 self-interests (Santo, 2010). Based on H_2 , it is posited that a voter's attitude toward a stadium
15 subsidy is dependent upon one's level of *trust* in the policymaker, rather than the policymaker's
16 actual motive.

17 A citizen's favorability or unfavorability toward a stadium-financing issue has
18 historically been expressed via a vote of *yes* or *no* in a local election, and this outcome has been
19 the focus in past research. In some ways, the huge importance placed by citizens, the media, and
20 scholars on electoral outcomes has veiled the possibility that other implications may follow from
21 a voter's attitude toward a stadium-financing plan. In the following section, other potential
22 outcomes associated with voter opinions are discussed.

23 ***Stage 2: Direct outcomes***

1 In the second stage of the public response to a no-vote subsidy, citizens may change their
2 views of individuals, groups, or institutions to match their own assessments of the financing
3 plan. These targets may include the policymakers directly responsible for the plan or the
4 stadium's primary tenants, whose involvement in the actual planning may be more superficial.
5 Additionally, citizens may view the policymaking process as more or less congruent with
6 democratic norms based on their favorability or unfavorability toward the financing plan. These
7 concepts were originally raised in RQ₂.

8 It is important to consider how the primary beneficiary of the plan—in most cases, the
9 professional sports team—is perceived by the public following a no-vote subsidy. As suggested
10 in H_1 , a citizen who supports the public stadium-financing plan is expected to ascribe value to
11 the facility, and by extension, to its primary tenant. After all, a team's financial predicament is
12 often the impetus for the intervention by local policymakers.

13 *Team consumption intentions* are simply the expectation by citizens that they will engage
14 in future consumer behavior of the stadium's primary tenant. Such behavior may include
15 attending a game, purchasing licensed apparel, following a game through a television or radio
16 broadcast, or tracking the team's progress in the local news. Stadia are strongly intertwined with
17 their teams; as Underwood, Bond, and Baer (2001) noted, sports facilities are "tangible
18 representations of the brand" (p. 7). In past public stadium-funding debates, anti-subsidy groups
19 have called into question the existing wealth of team owners (Mondello, Schwester, &
20 Humphreys, 2009) and perceived inaccessibility of major professional sport to the lower and
21 middle classes (Collins, 2008). Still, despite the arguments levied against teams and public-
22 financing plans, past research has shown that teams benefit from a short-term surge in attendance
23 after opening a new facility (Clapp & Hakes, 2005). This phenomenon, known as the

1 honeymoon effect, exists regardless of whether a stadium is built primarily through public or
2 private means (Coates & Humphreys, 2005). This effect suggests anecdotally that if public anger
3 about a public-financing plan exists, it does not surface in the form of diminished consumer
4 behavior. Based on the belief that public attitudes toward the public stadium-financing plan will
5 influence the favorability or unfavorability of the team in the same way it will policymakers, the
6 following hypothesis is offered:

7 *H_{3a}*: Citizen support of the public stadium-financing plan will have a positive impact on
8 personal team consumption intentions.

9 Based on this hypothesis, a sports team's vested interests extend beyond the stadium
10 subsidy itself. When citizens are supportive of a no-vote stadium subsidy, their excitement
11 toward a new or renovated facility will manifest to some degree in the form of increased
12 attendance. On the other hand, if a no-vote subsidy is deemed inappropriate by citizens, they may
13 withdraw from activities related to the subsidy's primary benefactor (i.e., the team). Take, for
14 example, the recent case of the Miami Marlins, who received a \$490-million no-vote subsidy for
15 a new ballpark that opened in 2012 (Hanks, 2014). The no-vote subsidy was so heavily
16 scrutinized that it prompted an investigation by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission
17 and the eventual recall of Mayor Carlos Alvarez (Hanks, 2014; McGrory & Rabin, 2012).
18 Attendance at Marlins Park has also declined much more quickly than expected, a sign of what
19 has been called "the worst fan rejection of a new baseball stadium in at least a generation"
20 (Hanks, 2013, para. 2).

21 In cases where a stadium's primary tenant is a professional sports team, citizens with
22 previous affinity for the team are expected to be less influenced by unfavorable personal views
23 of the financing plan than those with weak connections to the team. To characterize the level of

1 support of the team prior to the approval of the stadium-financing plan, the model uses citizens'
2 *team identification*, or “the social identity that a group of people (i.e., fans) have in common in
3 relation to their favorite sport team” (Kwon, Trail, & James, 2007, p. 541). Citizens showing past
4 support for the team are expected to maintain their levels of support (through consumption
5 intentions) regardless of the financing plan under the rationale that without the financing plan,
6 the team could have relocated to another city. Conversely, citizens possessing even an apathetic
7 attitude toward the team are predicted to find the team unfavorable if they also disapprove of the
8 financing plan. Therefore, it is hypothesized that citizens’ support of the team prior to the
9 financing plan—measured through their attitudes toward the team—influences the strength of the
10 relationship between plan support and consumption intentions:

11 H_{3b} : A citizen’s attitude toward the team will moderate the relationship between support
12 of the public stadium-financing plan and team consumption intentions such that as
13 attitude toward the team increases in favorability, the positive relationship between
14 support of the public stadium-financing plan and team consumption intentions will
15 strengthen. Alternatively, as attitude toward the team decreases in favorability, the
16 positive relationship between support of the public stadium-financing plan and team
17 consumption intentions will weaken.

18 Past research utilizing the contingent valuation method (CVM) provides tangential support for
19 this hypothesis. Through the CVM, researchers are able to quantify intangible benefits of a
20 stadium, team, or event by asking study participants to predict their willingness-to-pay (WTP) in
21 order to attract a new sports team or keep an existing team from relocating (Johnson, Mondello,
22 & Whitehead, 2007; Johnson & Whitehead, 2000). In CVM analyses using cities with existing
23 professional sports teams, individuals with an interest in the team expressed higher WTP in order

1 to avoid the team's relocation to another city (compared to those without an interest in the team;
2 Johnson et al., 2007; Mitchell & Carson, 1989). This finding suggests fans of the team may be
3 more tolerable of an unpopular policy, so long as it keeps the team from relocating.

4 In addition to affecting an individual's attitude toward the team, a citizen's support of a
5 policy may also have political implications, including changing perceptions of policymakers and
6 democracy in general. *Congruence with democratic norms* is defined as the perception that the
7 will of the people is manifested in public policies. As stated in the theoretical foundations
8 section, the argument that all decisions should be made via direct democracy is atypical; instead,
9 most theorists believe that direct democracy methods should be complements to a representative
10 system. Both methods allow the will of the people to be exercised, as noted by Magleby (1984).
11 However, representative methods in which elected officials enact policies without the direct vote
12 of citizens provide greater opportunity for policymakers to govern in a manner that does not
13 reflect the people's will.²

14 Based on this line of reasoning, it is expected that an individual who supports the public
15 stadium-financing plan will, when prompted, express belief that the policymaking process is
16 consistent with democratic norms. In this scenario, the policymaking process is viewed as
17 consistent with democratic norms because the citizen's will (i.e., support of the plan) is reflected
18 in the policy. On the other hand, a citizen unsupportive of the financing plan is expected to view
19 the policymaking process as incongruent with democratic norms under the rationale that the local
20 leadership has undermined the people's will. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

21 *H4: A citizen's support of the public stadium-financing plan will have a positive impact*
22 *on the personal assessment that the local political process is congruent with*
23 *democratic norms.*

1 *Attitude toward policymakers* refers to a citizen's approval or disapproval of the local
2 government entities directly responsible for the development and approval of the public stadium-
3 financing plan. The above hypothesis highlights an important implication of perceived
4 democratic incongruence for policymakers. Although they may have achieved the goal of
5 stabilizing the team's—and as extensions, the stadium's and city's—economic situation,
6 policymakers may also have put their political futures in jeopardy. If policymakers are indeed
7 trustworthy, the confirmation of H_4 will highlight the risk taken in approving an unpopular
8 stadium financing plan.

9 In a case of direct democracy, public opinion can be best measured by the passage or
10 defeat of an initiative or referendum. In no-vote subsidies, policymakers act as proxies to direct
11 democracy by themselves acting on behalf of the citizens. These policymakers include the city
12 mayor or manager, city councilmembers, county commissioners, and state legislators. In general,
13 a citizen will favor a policymaker when agreeing with the policies enacted by that elected
14 official; conversely, when an elected official enacts policies that a citizen opposes, the citizen
15 will view the policymaker less favorably (Bechtel & Hainmueller, 2011; Hetherington, 1999;
16 Stimson, 2004). Policymakers' involvement in controversial plans can complicate their re-
17 election bids, while involvement in favorable policies can leave their political standing intact
18 (Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, & Su, 2010; Carson, Koger, Lebo, & Young, 2010; Jacoby, 2009;
19 Weisberg & Christenson, 2007). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

20 H_{5a} : Personal support of the public stadium-financing plan will have a positive impact on
21 a citizen's attitude toward local policymakers.

22 Although a citizen's support of the financing plan is predicted to influence his or her
23 attitude toward a policymaker, it must be acknowledged that other factors contribute to a

1 citizen's attitude toward policymakers. The most obvious of these are other positions or
2 decisions with which a citizen may agree or disagree. Furthermore, in the past 20 years, scholars
3 have observed a rise in voter partisanship in which a citizen's attitude toward a public official is
4 heavily dependent upon shared political ideologies (Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009; Fiorina & Abrams
5 2008; Jacoby, 2010). In this study, *political ideology* refers to a citizen's liberal or conservative
6 tendencies toward social and economic issues. Historically in the American two-party system,
7 fiscal conservatives have shown a greater propensity to oppose government spending and
8 taxation (Dyck, 2010). However, in public stadium-financing issues, political support has come
9 from both sides of the aisle (Sapotichne & Smith, 2011). Still, a citizen is more likely to have a
10 favorable opinion of a policymaker when they share the same political ideology, regardless of
11 that elected official's approval of a fiscally liberal policy. Thus, the following hypothesis is
12 proposed:

13 *H_{5b}*: A citizen's political ideology will moderate the relationship between support of the
14 public stadium-financing plan and the attitude toward local policymakers such that
15 as a citizen's political ideology corresponds to that of the policymaker, the positive
16 relationship between support of the public stadium-financing plan and favorability
17 toward local policymakers will strengthen. Alternatively, as a citizen's political
18 ideology moves away from that of the policymaker, the positive relationship
19 between support of the public stadium-financing plan and favorability toward local
20 policymakers will weaken.

21 Furthermore, policymakers are expected to feel the implications of a policymaking
22 process that does not align with democratic norms. In cases in which citizens deem the decision-
23 making process to be democratic, policymakers are expected to be viewed favorably.

1 Alternatively, when citizens perceive policymaker actions to be incongruent with democratic
2 norms, citizens may show less favorability toward the offending policymakers. Thus, the
3 following hypothesis is made:

4 *H₆*: A citizen's assessment that the local political process is congruent with democratic
5 norms will have a positive impact on the personal attitude toward local
6 policymakers.

7 The second stage of the model of public response focuses on direct, attitudinal outcomes
8 of a citizen's favorability or unfavorability toward the public stadium-financing plan. The final
9 stage centers on the democratic consequences of a citizen's Stage 2 attitudes. As discussed
10 below, unfavorable opinions of the policymaking process or policymakers may lead to troubling
11 implications for policymakers and for the democratic process altogether.

12 ***Stage 3: Implications for democracy***

13 An active and informed citizenry is a central tenet of Jeffersonian democracy, and this
14 involvement is important regardless of whether citizens participate by voting on issues directly
15 or through elected representatives. Schneider, Jacoby, and Lewis (2011) argued, "citizens'
16 beliefs and attitudes about governmental activity comprise a central element in their overall
17 orientations toward the political system" (p. 2). This concept is addressed in Stage 3, which
18 explores how opinions formed in the previous stages influence citizens' attitudes and behaviors
19 related to civic engagement and the democratic process.

20 In this study, *political apathy* refers to a particular state of mind wherein there is a lack of
21 feeling, passion, or interest toward political issues (Davis, 2009). A citizen's political apathy
22 may result from a number of factors, including the perception that one's government is
23 inadequate (Emmerson, 2012). A dysfunctional or illegitimate government can spur myriad

1 reactions from the polity, ranging from organized demonstrations to increased apathy (Useem &
2 Useem, 1979). Concerning the latter, Rosenberg (1951) argued that apathy emerges from
3 citizens' perceptions that they have no influence in public policy.

4 As suggested in H_6 , citizens who perceive a financing plan to be undemocratic may form
5 negative opinions of the affiliated policymakers. For similar reasons, these individuals are
6 expected to perceive the local democratic system as broken. Although some citizens may feel
7 empowered to change the political process (such as the protesters mentioned by Useem and
8 Useem), in general, most are predicted to become more apathetic toward local government. On
9 the other hand, those who believe a financing plan to be democratically conceived will not
10 experience apathy. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

11 H_7 : A citizen's assessment that the local political process is congruent with democratic
12 norms will have a negative impact on political apathy.

13 *Voting intentions* is defined as a citizen's personal expectation to participate in
14 forthcoming elections. In Stage 3 of the model of public response, voter intent is measured by an
15 individual's engagement in or refrainment from political participation (i.e., voting). Studies of
16 voter turnout have revealed a number of reasons why citizens participate in elections, including
17 to vote for a highly favorable candidate or to vote against a highly unfavorable candidate (Harder
18 & Krosnick, 2008). In cases of so-called "democratic deficiency," citizens lack confidence that
19 their civic participation is reflected by the government (Hooghe, Marien, & Pauwels, 2011).
20 Voters have reacted to unresponsive governments by expressing their displeasure in subsequent
21 elections, thereby producing higher voter-turnout numbers (Sinclair, Hall, & Alvarez, 2011).
22 Additionally, political campaigns that highlight the plans of a political challenger as well as the
23 poor performance of an incumbent candidate have induced voter behavior in the forms of

1 increased voter registration and increased actual voting (Brader, 2006; Marcus, Neuman, &
2 MacKuen, 2000; Southwell, 2012; Timpone, 1998).

3 A similar response is expected in the conceptual model. The stronger a citizen's attitude
4 toward policymakers (regardless of whether the attitude is favorable or unfavorable), the more
5 likely the citizen is to participate in forthcoming elections. In other words, a voter with strong
6 positive feelings toward a candidate will vote in order to elect or re-elect that candidate, while a
7 voter with strong negative feelings toward a candidate will vote in order to prevent that official
8 from winning an election. The following hypothesis is provided to reflect this prediction:

9 *H_{8a}*: A citizen's attitude toward policymakers will have a curvilinear, U-shaped
10 relationship with personal voting intentions, such that as a citizen's attitude toward
11 policymakers moves away from a neutral position (toward either extreme), the
12 intention to vote will strengthen.

13 Of course, a citizen with strong voting intentions implies that the individual lacks apathy
14 toward political participation. The definition of political apathy connotes a lack of interest
15 toward political issues, and the literature shows that apathy decreases voter turnout (Eliasoph,
16 1998; Southwell, 2008). Therefore, the following hypothesis is made:

17 *H_{8b}*: Political apathy will moderate the relationship between a citizen's attitude toward
18 policymakers and voting intentions such that as political apathy increases, the
19 curvilinear relationship between the citizen's attitude toward policymakers and
20 intentions to vote will weaken. Alternatively, as political apathy decreases, the
21 curvilinear relationship between the citizen's attitude toward policymakers and
22 voting intentions will strengthen.

1 As discussed above, despite having many nuances, a common theme inheres in nearly all models
2 of democracy: the ideal society is one governed by the people. In order for that form of
3 government to be fully realized, however, citizens must be both informed and actively involved
4 in the affairs of the community. Thus, public policies that promote the withdrawal of citizens
5 from the political process may be considered contrary to the spirit of democracy.

6 The multistage model presented above reflects the various attitudinal and behavioral
7 responses of citizens affected by a no-vote stadium subsidy. In Stage 1 (RQ₁; H₁–H₂), attitudes
8 toward the no-vote-subsidy policy are formed based on how citizens perceive the sports facility
9 itself and their trust that leaders are knowledgeable and will serve the best interests of the
10 community. In Stage 2 (RQ₂; H₃–H₆), citizens' attitudes toward the team, the policymaking
11 process, and policymakers themselves are informed by their favorability or unfavorability toward
12 the financing plan. Then, depending on their attitudes, these attitudes can culminate in political
13 apathy or voting intentions, as reflected in Stage 3 (RQ₂; H₇–H₈). Each of the aforementioned
14 hypotheses are designed to contribute to a better understanding of how local citizens respond to
15 stadium subsidization, particularly when legislation is enacted without public approval.

16 **Concluding remarks**

17 While some have argued that the no-vote subsidy is simply an alternative exercise of
18 democracy—after all, policymakers are elected by their constituents to legislate—others raise the
19 concern that such governance fails to mirror the public will. In the absence of a public
20 referendum or initiative, it is also how the public will is gauged, or even if the public will is
21 meaningful to policymakers. The conceptual model presented in this paper represents an initial
22 attempt to address these and other sociopolitical aspects of the no-vote subsidy.

1 From a superficial perspective, the no-vote subsidy is a straightforward approach to
2 public-stadium decision-making: the case for a new or renovated stadium is made (usually by the
3 team), elected officials deliberate and vote on a financing package, and the public at large is kept
4 outside the sphere of influence. In cases where the public is either supportive or ignorant of a
5 stadium subsidy, the fact that the decision was made without the tools of direct democracy is
6 somewhat trivial. On the other hand, if the electorate is largely opposed to the stadium subsidy,
7 frustration over the absence of a referendum may manifest in various ways. For teams impacted
8 by a no-vote subsidy, sport managers must be cognizant of the possibility that locals (fans and
9 non-fans alike) will express their dissatisfaction by spending less money on tickets, merchandise,
10 and team-related media. Elected officials may also face implications from an unfavorable no-
11 vote subsidy. As an immediate consequence, they may face public censure, as was the case for
12 Miami Mayor Carlos Alvarez. Subsequent election bids could also become more contested,
13 thereby requiring incumbents to raise more campaign money to combat the subsidy-related
14 criticisms of challengers. Finally, citizens might distance themselves from political participation
15 altogether, thereby reducing the efficacy of American democracy. Such a decrease in citizen
16 involvement is problematic for those with an interest in safeguarding the democratic process.

17 As suggested in the conceptual model, policymakers may reconcile unpopular decisions
18 if it is believed they are acting in a form of democratic representation known as civic paternalism,
19 in which policymakers rely on their own expertise and judgment rather than the perceived public
20 preference. Though ultimately immaterial in the public-financing decision, public perception of
21 the subsidy may not be inconsequential. Subsequent testing of this model may show how voters
22 feel about the stadium-financing agreement influenced their attitudes toward the stadium's
23 primary tenant, democratic decision-making, and local policymakers.

1 Moving forward, the various stages of the proposed model should be evaluated and, when
2 applicable, improved. One method through which such improvement can be made is empirical
3 testing of the model. Survey research and secondary voting data may be integrated to examine
4 the relationships proposed in the model. As part of the empirical testing, a psychometrically
5 sound scale is required. Considering that at least one of the variables in the model has not been
6 used previously (e.g., support of financing plan), a portion of the scale development process will
7 include the generating of new measurement items.

8 The results of empirical testing would have several practical implications, including
9 illustrating how the popularity or unpopularity of a no-vote subsidy could impact the group
10 standing to benefit from a new stadium the most: the professional sports team. Clearly, the team
11 has a vested interest in the outcome of a stadium-subsidy debate. For owners and team
12 management, securing the capital necessary to rebuild or renovate an arena, ballpark, or stadium
13 eliminates any uncertainty about the team's future in a city. Intuitively, it might seem as though
14 the team faces few consequences when a no-vote subsidy is awarded. However, empirical testing
15 of the conceptual model may indicate the team also has an interest in the public's attitude toward
16 the financing plan. That is, even when a subsidy is awarded without direct public consent, the
17 team may alienate potential consumers or be penalized with an abbreviated honeymoon period.
18 The conceptual model also has broad implications for elected officials and advocates of
19 increasing public participation in civic issues.

20 The frequency with which no-vote subsidies occur has been unmatched by critical
21 scholarly inquiry of the phenomenon. Although each city involved in the stadium-financing
22 debate has its own unique characteristics, the multistage model proposed in this paper provides a
23 general outline of the hypothesized antecedents and consequences of public opinion related to

1 the debate. Additionally, this model contributes an understanding of the role of civic paternalism
2 in the formation of public attitudes. As noted throughout this paper, these attitudes may extend
3 beyond ones directed toward stadium tenants and policymakers associated with no-vote
4 subsidies.

5 Future empirical work, arriving from many directions, should consider these outcomes.
6 From a scholarly perspective, researchers should endeavor to engage in interdisciplinary research
7 moving forward. It is difficult to appreciate the nuance and complexity of the no-vote subsidy
8 from any one perspective, and incorporating knowledge from a wide range of disciplines can
9 bring to light new ideas for evaluating the merits of public-stadium financing and the democratic
10 process. The aim of this interdisciplinary approach, then, should be to engage the academy,
11 policymakers, activists, team executives, and ordinary citizens in such worthwhile debate.

12

Footnotes

- 1
2 1. Considering the scope of this paper, broad interpretations of each of these theorists'
3 writings are adopted in order to identify common themes and to operationalize a working
4 definition of democracy. However, it must be acknowledged that there are considerable
5 differences between each of these theorists' philosophies, including their views on the
6 role of participation in democracy. Many of these differences are outlined in Pateman
7 (1970).
- 8 2. Some proponents of civic paternalism argue that the will of the people need not be
9 reflected in public policy. Indeed, because of the civically paternalistic leader's
10 omniscient knowledge, the leader's decision-making is not informed by what people
11 desire most, but rather, what is best for the people. For more on this argument, see Chiu
12 (2002). For the purposes of this study, it is unnecessary to determine the merits of the
13 systems of democracy and civic paternalism. The population of interest in this model is
14 the citizenry, and therefore, it is their opinions about no-vote subsidies and congruence
15 with democratic norms that matter most.

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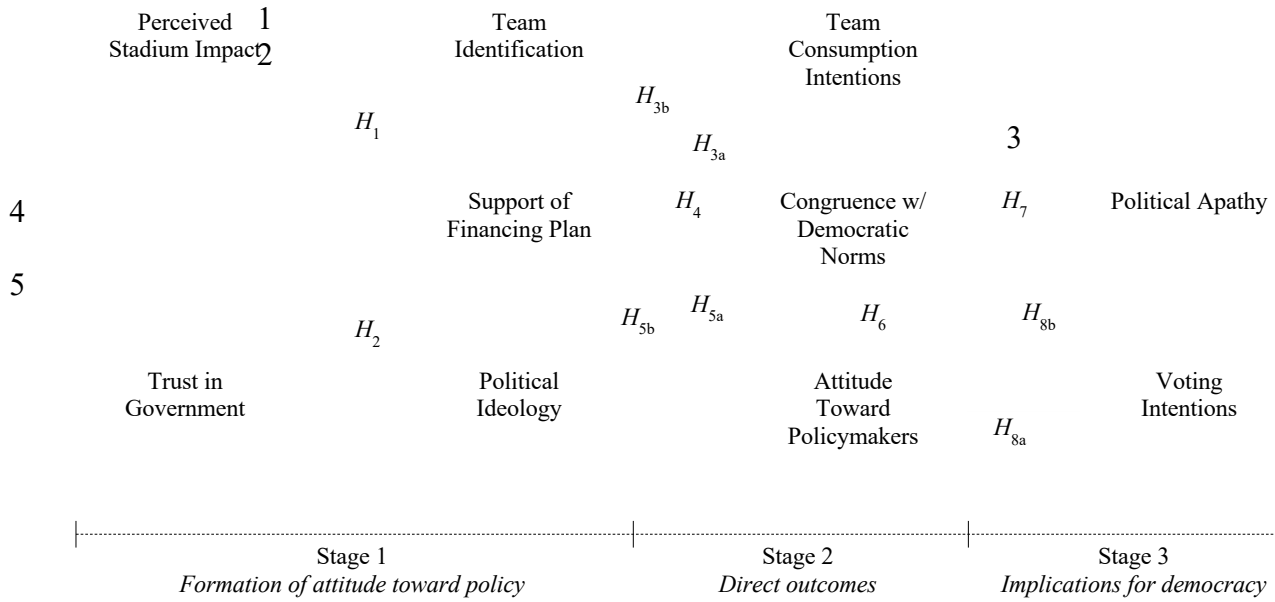
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6

7 Figure 1. A multistage model of the public response to a no-vote subsidy.

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