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The Limits of Citizen Support for Direct Democracy

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Abstract

Direct democracy is extraordinarily popular and has become a pervasive policymaking tool at the state and local level. Repeated surveys demonstrate that Americans strongly approve of allowing people to vote on citizen-proposed laws, a method currently allowed in about half the states and in many municipalities. This paper examines the extent of this support. Using dimension reduction techniques, we present evidence that demonstrates that with regards to approval of direct democracy, most voters find themselves in the middle. On principal, they approve of voting on ballot measures, but they express concern about campaigns and would support reforms. Opinions about direct democracy are unidimensional and close examination of questions demonstrates that Californians will express general support for direct democracy, but are amenable to changes to the process that would fundamentally alter its usage.

Keywords: direct democracy, initiative, referendum

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1. Introduction

One of the most cited pieces of evidence in support of direct democratic institutions such as the initiative and referendum processes currently practiced in American states is that the public overwhelmingly supports their use. In seemingly every survey taken where citizens are asked about their institutional preferences regarding initiatives or referendums,[1] strong majorities voice their support (Baldassare 2002; Bowler and Donovan 1998, 45; Lindsey 2003, Matsusaka 2004). This finding holds up in national samples across states and locales like California with the most active direct democracy cultures, in states that have never used direct democratic means of law-making (Lindsey 2003, 477–80), and even among racial and ethnic groups thought to be potentially disadvantaged by tyrannical majorities[2] (Matsusaka 2004, 118). So, while other debates and questions persist in the scholarly community about direct democracy, the empirical evidence is so consistent on the question of citizen support for direct democracy that it has elicited almost no debate. If there is any widely agreed upon finding regarding attitudes about direct democracy, it is simply that people in overwhelming numbers like it.

This study is an attempt to challenge and encourage debate regarding the meaningfulness of survey questions that ask voters how much they like direct democracy. While it's true that citizens often voice their support for general democratic principles in the abstract, they often hedge their support when it comes to specifics (Prothro and Grigg 1964; Page and Shapiro 1992). The most meaningful discus-

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sions going on in states that have direct democracy do not center around abolition of the institution, but rather on reforms that would make the institution operate better (c.f. Silva 2000). In this paper, we attempt to move beyond public support for direct democracy as an abstract, dichotomous concept to offer a more nuanced view of people's opinions regarding their support for the actual processes related to direct democracy in the states. Chiefly, we are concerned with the structure and potential limits of citizen support for direct democratic means of lawmaking.

To study this phenomenon, we draw on original data from two very different California initiative elections in consecutive years, 2005 and 2006. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger called the 2005 California special election in attempt to push some of the central policy issues of his gubernatorial agenda after the recall election of 2003: (1) curbing union campaign contributions, (2) reforming California's redistricting policies, (3) increasing the amount of time before California public school teachers receive tenure, and (4) granting the governor power to finalize a budget, given an impasse between the governor and legislature. This election gives researchers a unique opportunity to determine the structure of opinion about ballot issues since there were no candidate elections on this ballot; initiatives were the centerpiece.

Juxtaposed to 2005, which was widely considered an abject failure for Schwarzenegger, we turn to 2006, an election where Schwarzenegger was re-elected and a majority of voters supported his infrastructure bond package. We find considerable evidence that there are in fact limits, provisos, and hedges in citizen willingness to support direct democracy. Just as people support free speech in the abstract, but are resistant to allowing Nazis to march in their hometown parades, people favor direct democracy in the abstract, but place restrictions on their support for the institution in practice.

2. Theoretical Perspectives

In recent years, a growing body of literature has tried to evaluate whether institutions like the ballot initiative as practiced in California and 23 other states makes democracy better. The first way scholars go about doing this is by evaluating primary effects; that is, does the ballot initiative make policy that creates a better or more responsive outcome. Journalists have commonly criticized the system as dominated by special interests (Broder 2000; Schrag 1998). Political scientists are divided on this question, with some arguing that ballot initiatives move policy closer to the median voter (Gerber 1999; Matsusaka 2004; Lupia 1992) while others contend they fail to do so (Lascher et al. 1996; Monogan et al. 2009). Still others have focused on something called secondary or spillover effects, which rest on the idea that ballot initiatives educate voters and activate a latent interest about politics

that needs to be primed by exposure to institutions where citizens can see the links between their own preferences and policy outcomes. The results of this literature are decidedly mixed (Smith and Tolbert 2004; Schlozman and Yohai 2008; Dyck and Lascher 2009; Dyck 2009).

One of the most direct ways to see if direct legislation produces better outcomes is to ask citizens who frequently vote on ballot measures about their experience with the process and to ask those in noninitiative states if they would like to try out the institution. The greatest breadth of coverage on this question comes from a Portrait of America (POA) poll conducted in 1999–2000. POA President Alan Lindsey wrote up the results for the Initiative and Referendum Almanac, and the results also appear in part on the Initiative and Referendum Institute's website (Lindsey 2003).

POA asked voters in 49 of 50 states: "In many states, citizens can place initiatives on the ballot by collecting petition signatures. If a majority of voters approve the initiative on Election Day, it becomes law. Is this a good or bad idea?" The results of the poll are striking. In every state, over 50% of respondents say good idea, and the margin between good idea and bad idea is 30 percentage points or more. Support is greatest in states that use the ballot initiative the most, suggesting that those with more experience with the institution favor it the greatest.

Matsusaka (2004, 118) provides even more compelling evidence, noting that racial and ethnic minorities in California overwhelmingly say that ballot proposition elections are a good thing for California, rather than a bad thing, even in the face of some evidence that minorities are targeted at the ballot box (Gamble 1997; see also Bowler, Nicholson, and Seguara 2008). Other works, including a book by Bowler and Donovan (1998) add further evidence to what appears to be a mounting empirical premise—large majorities of citizens in both initiative and noninitiative states generally approve of the idea of citizens voting on citizen-initiated laws. Summarizing the work on this question in an undergraduate textbook, Donovan, Mooney, and Smith (2011) show data regarding whether the public views ballot measures as a "good thing" or a "bad thing." They conclude that "[t]he public looks at direct democracy quite differently, and more positively, than many political observers and elected officials. Even voters who have experienced California's high-stakes, high-cost ballot initiatives remain generally supportive of the process" (Donovan, Mooney and Smith 2011, 144).

Some work has tried to present evidence of what leads citizens to support direct democracy cross-nationally; among the reliable predictors are having status as a continued electoral 'loser' and being younger (Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2007; Donovan and Karp 2006). Support for a national referendum in the United States also appears to be tied to short and long term electoral fortunes of groups (Smith, Tolbert and Keller 2010). The findings from this literature paint a picture of those

who favor direct legislation as being those who feel shut out by the current political process and favor greater involvement in their democracy.

3. Theoretic Critique

The present paper seeks to amend the conventional wisdom that support for direct democracy in the American states, or at least in California, holds a sacrosanct status with citizens and voters. The empirics we present will support this point. In order to motivate that analysis, however, we offer two general critiques with the characterization of extant results on citizen support for direct democracy. The first point is entirely theoretical; simply, contemporary theories suggest strong reasons why, in the abstract, citizens might not want more direct legislation. The key to this point is that there are strong, nonexperiential reasons that citizens might dislike direct legislation. Further, there are also experiential reasons that may have less to do with policy outcomes, and more to do with process experiences. Second, we argue that the dichotomous nature of most survey questions regarding ballot initiatives stack the deck in favor of a pro-democracy response, as citizens acquiesce to the socially desirable response, particularly if they are offering top-of-the-head responses. This suggests that a more thorough set of questions would produce more nuanced and meaningful opinions about direct democracy.

Participatory theorists like Barber (1984) and Pateman (1970) have long argued that citizens are encouraged to take on a greater role in their society when they are empowered by political processes that challenge them to be more informed and involved. Empirically, this finding has been tested repeatedly in the ballot initiative literature, with the most comprehensive argument appearing in Smith and Tolbert's *Educated by Initiative* (2004). However, many of the premises proposed in participatory theory and the empirical findings from this literature have had their premises challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds by recent work from Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002).[3]

In *Stealth Democracy*, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) argue that Americans unwillingly take on an expanded role in their democracy and the primary motivation for taking on this expanded role is a lack of faith in governmental officials to moderate their corruption. In truth, citizens see skilled, technical, unbiased, incorruptible bureaucrats and politicians as the most desirable outcome in democratic society. However, they do not believe that such mythical political creatures exist. They, therefore, unwillingly agree to greater citizen responsibility by favoring more public oversight. The critical point is that they do so because they feel they have to, not because they want to. Likewise, citizens will also favor reforms that focus on bureaucratic delegation and specialization, as long as power is removed from self serving politicians.

To the extent that this finding is applicable to citizen support for direct legislation, we may find that the roots of such support are considerably more nuanced and fragile than has been portrayed in the literature. The seemingly ubiquitous finding that citizen support for direct democracy can be challenged on the grounds that citizens may see it as a slightly worse option than pure representative democracy (which is wrought with corruption, etc.) rather than a purely positive one. This criticism should focus attention on issues of measurement.

The common way that support for ballot propositions has generally been posed is as a dichotomous forced-choice question that asks citizens to either support or oppose some form of "direct democracy." Methodologically, such an approach might be problematic. As decades of survey research have taught us, citizens tend to respond to questions about which they have not given much thought in a top-of-the-head manner, sampling across relevant considerations in a stochastic manner (see Zaller and Feldman 1992). However, we also know that great weight is put on question content and wording as individuals are likely to engage in what is known as response acquiescence, choosing the response that they think is correct or consistent with interviewer predispositions (see Schuman and Presser 1996 for a thorough treatment of the subject and problems).

One possibility when asking questions about common definitions of democracy (i.e., whether or not citizen voting is a good thing) is that questions will tap into attitudes about the democratic creed, irrespective of citizen experiences or opinions about institutions in practice. As has been shown repeatedly, citizens strongly approve of many aspects of the American creed such as universal suffrage, majority rule, and support for civil liberties in the abstract, but they do not follow through on these expressed opinions in practice when they are asked to apply the principle to a difficult situation (Prothro and Grigg 1960; Page and Shapiro 1992). The strong possibility exists, therefore, that citizens are responding in the pro-democracy direction simply because of perceived negativity in the social acceptability associated with responding in a non-democratic fashion.

When we merge the possibility of measurement pitfalls with the theoretic premises generated by the work of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), several questions arise about citizen support for direct democracy:

- How supportive are citizens of direct legislation?
- Are there limits to support for direct legislation?
- What are the parts of direct legislation that citizens like and dislike?
- Can we develop a more comprehensive metric of citizen support for direct legislation?

In what follows, we present the results of two original surveys in an attempt to clarify the nuance in citizen support for direct legislation in California, one of the biggest users of the ballot initiative. Our results suggest that consistent with our

theoretic and empirical premises that support for direct democracy is in fact nuanced and complicated. Citizens support the institution in theory but offer several criticisms of its less than fine points to the extent that they would support some modest reforms of the system. Also clear from the survey results is that many of the things that motivate citizen concerns with representative democracy, such as the concern for bias created by wealthy interest groups, are present for direct democracy as well. Our survey questions reduce well into a single dimension using Horn's parallel regression analysis.

4. Data

The primary data used are from two surveys conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California after the 2005 special election and 2006 gubernatorial election. In 2005, the ballot consisted of eight citizens' initiatives, and four of the citizens' initiatives were either sponsored or promoted by GOP Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. The governor had called the election early in the year when his approval ratings were at 60 percent. At the time, he had made little headway on moving key pieces of legislation that were the centerpieces of his reform agenda through the Democratic legislature. Governor Schwarzenegger had been a successful promoter of several ballot measures in the past, such as an after-school funding initiative in November 2002 and a fiscal recovery package in March 2004, and thus he decided to take his reform proposals directly to the people by calling a special election in November 2005 (Mathews 2006; Baldassare and Katz 2007).

For California voters, this was the fourth consecutive year that they had been asked to go to the polls; regular general elections occurred in 2002 and 2004, the recall was in 2003, and the new election would be in 2005. In the state's history, California governors have rarely called special elections. By the summer of 2005, the governor's job approval ratings had dropped precipitously and dipped below 40 percent. In the end, the governor's four initiatives, in addition to the other four initiatives put forward by various citizen groups failed to pass muster with voters.

The election post-mortem read like an obituary to Governor Schwarzenegger's political career in California. The election was seen as a referendum on his tenure as governor, and the outright defeat of his four reform initiatives was viewed as a stunning rebuke of not only his policy proposals, but of his overall job performance. The pundits, it turns out, were too quick to pronounce the governator's career as dead-on-arrival. In one of the more amazing political comebacks in recent memory, Schwarzenegger revamped his staff and policy agenda and won convincing reelection in 2006. On the 2006 ballot were another quartet of Arnold-approved measures of a very different kind: $37.3 billion in bonds to improve the infrastructure of the state. Propositions 1B—surface transportation, 1C—affordable housing,

1D—school facilities, and 1E—water and flood controls, all passed by comfortable margins. In addition, these measures had been forged in consultation with Democratic legislative leaders.

The case of California affords a unique and potentially fruitful opportunity to understand the structure of citizen support for direct democracy, especially given that we have detailed survey data available from both 2005 and 2006. As has already been established, scholars and interest groups continue to cite the seemingly overwhelming support for direct democratic institutions among the mass public. Here, we provide evidence that support for direct democracy is better thought of as a continuous, rather than dichotomous measure, and that there is clustering towards the center of the distribution that indicates support for direct democracy has very real limitations. This measure is relatively stable over two very different electoral environments.

In Figures 1 and 2, we present the distributions from 2005 and 2006 of additive indices of a variety of questions that tap into direct democracy attitudes. Questions range from general feelings of satisfaction with the process to general questions about changes needed to the process, along with specific questions about proposition wording, money spent on campaigns, and a series of hypothetical reforms to the process. The entire set of questions from each survey (13 in 2005; 8 in 2006) is detailed in the appendix.

The first note of import about Figures 1 and 2 is that they are both reasonably normally distributed with a slight right skew. Higher values indicate more pro-direct democracy opinions, while lower values indicate a more negative disposition towards direct democracy.[4] In 2005, values can range from 0 to 13. The mean is 4.35 and the median is 4.17, with a standard deviation of 2.15. In 2006, values can range from 0 to 8. The mean of the distribution is 2.75, and the median is 2.67, with a standard deviation of 1.5. The scalability and distribution of the questions included in these post-election studies tells us something interesting about direct democracy opinions; namely, they do not appear to be dichotomous. Individuals offer somewhat lukewarm support for direct democratic institutions when pressed on the specifics.

This is detailed more explicitly in Table 1 (as well as the appendix). In Table 1, we present the frequency distributions of seven questions about direct democracy, common to both the 2005 and 2006 data. In both data sets, we observe general support for direct democratic institutions; but that support is not overwhelming. The median voter in California is somewhat (but not very) satisfied with the way the initiative process works, thinks that the process is in need of minor changes, agrees somewhat that proposition wording is complicated and confusing, somewhat disagrees in 2005 that there were too many initiatives (8) on the ballot, but somewhat agrees with that statement in 2006 when there were more initiatives (13)

Figure 1. Histogram of Initiative Process Opinions, California 2005

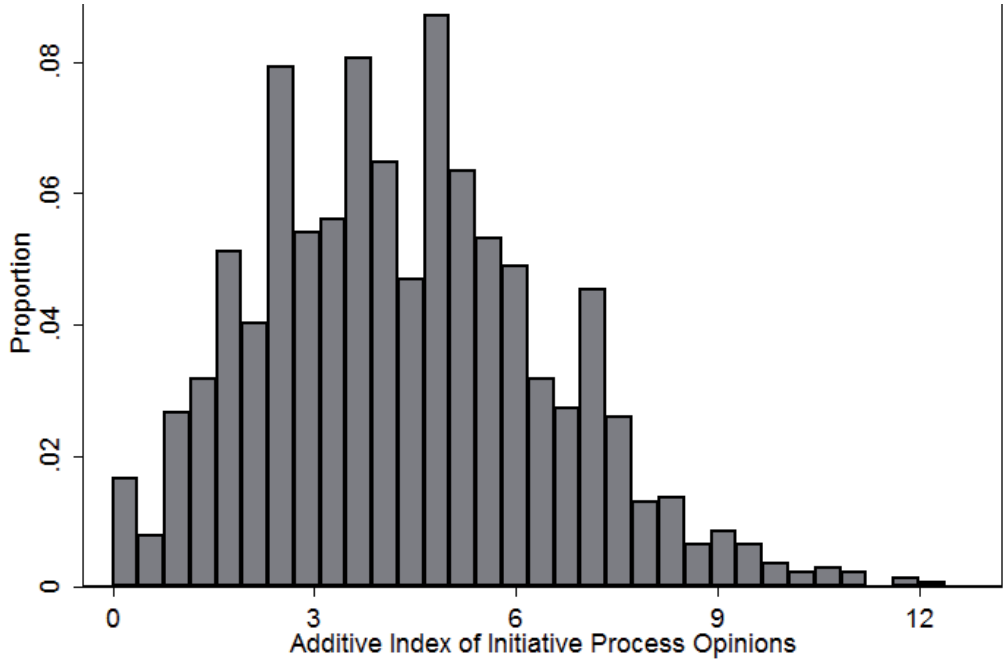

Figure 1. Histogram of Initiative Process Opinions, California 2006

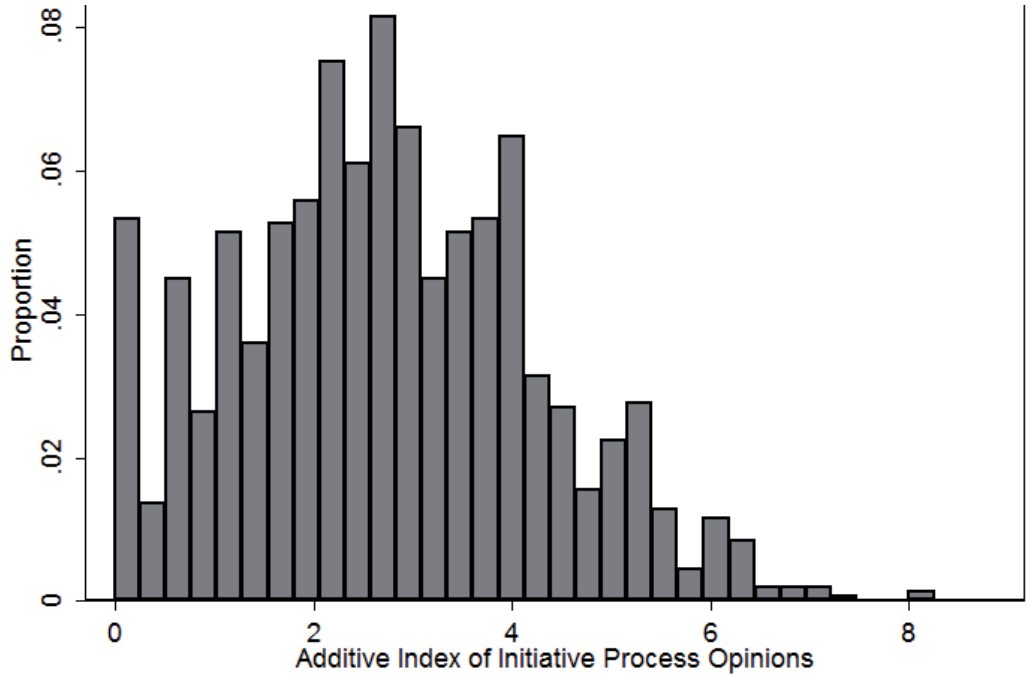

Table 1. Public opinion about ballot initiative policymaking in California

Generally speaking, would you say you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or not satisfied with the way the initiative process is working in California today?

	Not Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied
11/05	44%	43%	11%
11/06	27%	50%	19%

Do you think the citizens' initiative process in California is in need of major changes or minor changes or that it is basically fine the way it is?

	Major Changes	Minor Changes	Fine the way it is
11/05	38%	34%	23%
11/06	35%	32%	26%

The Wording of propositions on the state ballot was too complicated or confusing

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11/05	28%	27%	25%	18%
11/06	33%	30%	22%	13%

There were/are too many propositions on the state ballot

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11/05	26%	15%	29%	28%
11/06	35%	25%	23%	15%

There was too much money spent by the initiative campaigns

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11/05	69%	14%	7%	6%
11/06	56%	22%	9%	5%

Would you Favor or Oppose the following reforms:

1. Having a period of time in which the initiative sponsor and the legislature could meet to see if there is a compromise solution?

	Favor	Oppose
11/05	83%	13%
11/06	80%	15%

Table 1. Cont.

2. Increasing public disclosure of funding sources for signature gathering and initiative campaigns?

	Favor	Oppose
11/05	85%	11%
11/06	84%	11%

The 2005 data are from the Public Policy Institute of California survey of special election voters conducted from November 9-20, 2005. N=2002. 2006 data are from the Public Policy Institute of California 2006 survey of likely voters conducted from November 8=19, 2006. N=2000.

under consideration. This voter also strongly agrees that too much money is spent in initiative campaigns, would favor a waiting period on proposed initiatives for compromise to occur, and favors increasing public disclosure of funding sources in initiative campaigns.

Additionally, the data in Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate stability in opinions across time and electoral environments. The 2005 and 2006 California comparisons offer the most compelling results of the statics of direct democracy opinions. As previously noted, the conventional wisdom about the 2005 election was that voters were particularly hostile to the governor and his use of the initiative process, prompting more overtly negative process opinions. Conversely, 2006 was a very different election, with Schwarzenegger resurrecting his political career and successfully promoting the passage of almost $40 billion in infrastructure bonds. Among the eight other propositions considered by voters in 2006, two passed, bringing the total to seven of 13 ballot measures passing. Despite very different outcomes, voters offered strikingly similar lukewarm process opinions with regard to direct democratic institutions.

The difference between opinions in 2005 and 2006 shows up most clearly in the first question in Table 1—voter satisfaction with the initiative process, with 17% more voters in 2005 than in 2006 expressing that they were not satisfied with the way the process was working. But across the scale of questions, opinions in 2005 and 2006 are remarkably consistent, as are the underlying correlates. In both years, supporters of direct democracy are more likely to be Republican, conservative, young and male. This is demonstrated in Table 2, where we regress the first factor from the PCA on party identification, ideology, and socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

A skeptical reader might be concerned that the data we present here are time-bound. While we do not have the same comprehensiveness in future surveys, repeated questions from PPIC surveys from 2008 to 2010 show that attitudes have

Table 2. Predicting Support for Ballot Initiatives in California, 2005 and 2006

	2005			2006		
	β	Robust Std. Error	p	β	Robust Std. Error	p
Republican	0.771	0.105	0.000	0.539	0.099	0.000
Conservative	0.582	0.103	0.000	0.015	0.096	0.877
Age	-0.133	0.031	0.000	-0.217	0.031	0.000
Gender	-0.292	0.086	0.001	-0.162	0.084	0.052
Black	-0.020	0.159	0.899	0.153	0.158	0.335
Latino	0.048	0.124	0.701	-0.097	0.120	0.417
Education	-0.162	0.042	0.000	-0.087	0.041	0.035
Income	0.020	0.028	0.494	-0.047	0.026	0.072
Constant	0.648	0.233	0.006	1.290	0.238	0.000
N		1223			1399	
R-squared		.161			.065	

been relatively stable over the last decade. Frequency tables for 2008–2010 are presented in Appendix Table A1. Little has changed with regards to general support for the ballot initiative process, or citizens' receptiveness to reform.

In short, we find considerable evidence to suggest that while citizens favor the use of direct democratic institutions, that attitude is at least tempered with a healthy dose of skepticism as to how the system is used. Institutional satisfaction appears to be a continuous measure, with few citizens arguing for the outright abolishment or unrestricted use of the process. Additionally, we find little evidence to suggest that individual opinions are merely one-shot reactions to the current issues under consideration and more likely reflect a general predisposition to the process over repeated iterations.

To be sure, critical to our analysis is that there actually exists a latent dimension regarding attitudes towards direct legislation that we have uncovered in our survey questions. As this analysis is admittedly exploratory, we are inclined to examine the dimensionality of the data using principal components analysis (PCA). Typically, one would assess dimensionality in exploratory fashion by examining the number of eigenvalues greater than one. However, sampling error in survey data tends to inflate the variance that PCA uses in generating eigenvalues. Hence, the standard rule to assess dimensionality based on eigenvalues greater than one is problematic. Horn (1965) developed a procedure for dealing with sampling error present in survey data in administering principal components analysis. The procedure generates a series of random matrices as comparison points to generate confidence that a selected eigenvalue of greater than one is indeed actually greater than one. Horn's

analysis provides a way to assess how many dimensions there are with some degree of confidence in deference to sampling error.

Dinno (2009) has created a script for the easy incorporation of Horn's Parallel analysis into STATA. When we run Horn's parallel analysis on a principal components analysis of our data, we find that for both 2005 and 2006, only a single eigenvalue is returned that is significantly different from random. In 2005, Horn's analysis returned one eigenvalue greater than one that is not determined to be driven by random error: unadjusted eigenvalue=2.61, adjusted eigenvalue=1.5. In 2006, a similar pattern arises as Horn's analysis returned one eigenvalue greater than one that is not determined to be driven by random error: unadjusted eigenvalue=2.51, adjusted eigenvalue=1.42. Hence, not only does a reading of the frequency distribution in the data give the impression that voters offer a very real and conditional support for direct legislation, but this dimension reduction analysis suggests that the mixed feelings expressed towards direct legislation are scalable and reduce to an underlying dimension of citizen feelings towards direct legislation.

This analysis is important to our general claim as it demonstrates that each of the questions included in our scale picks up on a different part of an underlying attitude towards direct legislation. The dimension reduction suggests that our questions produce reliable answers and a reliable measure of attitudes about direct legislation. If the questions sorted neatly into separate "reform" and "democracy" dimensions, for example, then we might suspect that citizens were using other information at the top of their heads to evaluate questions about direct legislation.

We would, for instance, not expect general questions about ballot measures to scale well with questions about the role of special interests in the process if citizens are tapping general attitudes towards "special interests," rather than their specific view of special interests in the ballot initiative process. The single dimensionality of the scale lends credence to the idea that citizens do not dichotomously view direct democracy, but think about it in light of a variety of positives and negatives they have observed and experienced. Thus opinions about the ballot initiative process are to be understood as considerably more nuanced than they are commonly presented in scholarly and media accounts of the process.

5. Discussion

The preceding data and analysis establish a relatively straightforward point. When we ask individuals about a more complete sense of their views on direct legislation, they have good things and bad things to say. Voters think that ultimately people will make better decisions, but they also see flaws in the implementation of direct legislation in terms of how many initiatives they see, their complexity, and the campaigns that surround direct legislation. In terms of scholarly work on direct

legislation, many scholars have pointed to the general fact that citizens like ballot initiatives as implicit of the idea that ballot measures have the promise to increase political efficacy and that winning and losing is well distributed in direct democracy contests (for more on this see Hajnal, Gerber, and Louch 2002).

This support appears to have been overstated. Simply asking citizens whether or not they favor voting on policy matters taps into a pro-democracy bias in Americans' attitudes towards political institutions. We demonstrate the fragility of the impressive list of findings that claim widespread and monolithic support among citizens in places with and without the ballot initiative in the U.S. states by examining a more complete and detailed set of questions that tap into attitudes about what citizens like and dislike about their current political institutions in the state of California. California voters, as citizens of the state with perhaps the most vibrant ballot initiative culture in the country, have been exposed to myriad ballot measures in practice. The data show that Californians have some affinity for ballot measures, but also express real reservations with the usage of the institution. Thus, the repeated statement in the academic literature that citizens have a love affair with the ballot initiative, and that this is indicative of their satisfaction with the process, is something of a misnomer.

Furthermore, we find that there is some strong theoretical backing for the idea that citizens reluctantly like the idea of voting on citizen-initiated laws. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) have argued, citizens view greater involvement in democracy as a necessary evil, only when they have given up on the existence of benevolent politicians who are not looking to steal from the public coffers and skirt the public will for their own gain. Thus, support for direct institutions is to be understood as tenuous.

There are important implications of the findings for those groups who would propose to expand or retract the use of direct democracy in policymaking. The fact that the public expresses the desire for constrictive reforms to the initiative process is noteworthy, given the overwhelming amount of data that demonstrates that generally, citizens like direct democracy. This will not come as news to some, given the public's willingness to restrict the process in Oregon in 2002 and Florida in 2006, but the scholarly, policy and interest group communities have stated, and perhaps overstated, this finding time and again. Public opinion data support the notion that the California electorate would be open to reforms of the process that made greater use of the indirect initiative, capped spending on initiative campaigns, and made it harder to qualify a measure for the ballot.

What would these reforms look like? Our data show repeatedly that citizens favor a longer agenda setting process that involves the legislature. For instance, in Massachusetts, which has historically used the initiative process much less than California, initiative sponsors face a two-stage petition process in which they pres-

ent their initiative to the legislature and the legislature is given time to act. If they fail to address the proposed initiative, proponents can submit a second set of petitions to trigger a public vote. This is one of the more restrictive forms of the indirect initiative that allows legislatures to act by passing the bill in original or amended fashion. Additionally, Californians strongly support limits on the role of money in these contests, which suggests that bans on paid signature gathering companies, as well as stricter campaign financing rules are favored. Just a few seemingly small differences in institutional arrangements might drastically alter the way in which the initiative process was practiced in the state of California. Despite their general positive predisposition to the system, Californians appear to favor reform.

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Appendix

2005 Public Policy Institute of California Post Election Survey of Likely Voters

Questions about the ballot initiative process :

- Overall, how did you feel about having to vote on initiatives in the November 8th special election—would you say you were (22%) very happy, (24) somewhat happy, (22) somewhat unhappy, (29) very unhappy
- Thinking about the November special election, overall do you think the public policy decisions made through the initiative process by California voters are (48%) probably better, or (30%) probably worse than public policy decisions that are made by the governor and state legislature? (9) same volunteered
- The wording of citizens' initiatives on the state ballot was too complicated and confusing. (28%) strongly agree, (27) somewhat agree, (25) somewhat disagree, (18) strongly disagree
- There were too many propositions on the state ballot. (26%) strongly agree, (15) somewhat agree, (29) somewhat disagree, (28) strongly disagree

- There was too much money spent by the initiative campaigns. (69%) strongly agree, (14) somewhat agree, (7) somewhat disagree, (6) strongly disagree
- Generally speaking, would you say you are (10%) very satisfied, (43) somewhat satisfied, or (44) not satisfied with the way the initiative process is working in California today?
- Do you think the citizens' initiative process in California is in need of (38%) major changes or (34) minor changes or that it is basically (23) fine the way it is?
- How about only allowing initiatives in November general elections, instead of in any statewide election, such as primaries or special elections? (53%) favor, (40) oppose
- How about only allowing the governor to call special elections on initiatives with the approval of the legislature, instead of allowing the governor to call them without the legislature's approval? (54%) favor, (41) oppose
- How about a system of review and revision of proposed initiatives to try to avoid legal issues and drafting errors? (77%) favor, (15) oppose
- How about a period of time in which the initiative sponsor and the legislature could meet to see if there is a compromise solution before initiatives go to the ballot? (83%) favor, (13) oppose
- How about increasing public disclosure of funding sources for signature gathering and initiative campaigns? (85%) favor, (11) oppose
- How about requiring the yes and no sides of the initiative campaigns to participate in a series of televised debates? (77%) favor, (19) oppose

Survey data are from the Public Policy Institute of California survey of special election voters conducted from November 9-20, 2005. N=2002. The RDD telephone interviewing was conducted by Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, Inc. with all telephone exchanges in California eligible for calling. Once a household was reached, an adult respondent (18 or older) was randomly chosen for interviewing using the "last birthday method." Eligible respondents were those who reported that they were registered voters and had voted in the November 8th special election either at their local polling place or by absentee ballot (For this post-election survey, Response Rate 1 = 25.8%; Response Rate 2 = 30.8%). These response rates are in the context of screening for eligible election voters.

2006 Public Policy Institute of California Post Election Survey of Likely Voters

Questions about the ballot initiative Process

- Generally speaking, would you say you are (19%) very satisfied, (50) somewhat satisfied, or (27) not satisfied with the way the initiative process is working in California.
- Do you think the citizen's initiative process in California is in need of (35%) major changes, (32) minor changes or that it is basically (26) fine the way it is.

- The wording of propositions on the state ballot was too complicated or confusing. (33%) strongly agree, (30) somewhat agree, (22) somewhat disagree, (13) disagree
- There were too many propositions on the state ballot. (35%) strongly agree, (25) somewhat agree, (23) somewhat disagree, (15) strongly disagree
- There was too much money spent by the initiative campaigns. (56%) strongly agree (22) somewhat agree, (9) somewhat disagree, (5) strongly disagree
- Would you (80%) favor or (15) oppose having a period of time in which the initiative sponsor and the legislature could meet to see if there is a compromise solution before initiatives go to the ballot?
- Would you (84%) favor or (11) oppose increasing public disclosure of funding sources for signature gathering and initiative campaigns?
- Overall, how did you feel about having to vote on the 13 propositions in the November 7th general election? (18%) very happy, (42) somewhat happy, (25) somewhat unhappy, (10) very unhappy, (5) don't know/indifferent

Survey data are from the Public Policy Institute of California survey of special election voters conducted from November 8-19, 2006. N=2000. The RDD telephone interviewing was conducted by Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, Inc. with all telephone exchanges in California eligible for calling. Once a household was reached, an adult respondent (18 or older) was randomly chosen for interviewing using the "last birthday method." Eligible respondents were those who reported that they were registered voters and had voted in the November 8th special election either at their local polling place or by absentee ballot (For this post-election survey, Response Rate 1 = 19.3%; Response Rate 2 = 23.4%).

These response rates are, again, in the context of screening for eligible election voters.

Appendix Table 1. Public opinion about ballot initiative policymaking in California, 2008-2010

Generally speaking, would you say you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or not satisfied with the way the initiative process is working in California today?

	Not Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied
10/08	34%	50%	9%
10/10	42%	47%	6%

Do you think the citizens' initiative process in California is in need of major changes or minor changes or that it is basically fine the way it is?

	Major Changes	Minor Changes	Fine the way it is
10/10	52%	27%	14%

Overall, do you think public policy decisions made through the initiative probably better or probably worse

	Probably Better	Probably Worse
10/08	59%	24%
09/09	56%	27%
10/10	55%	27%

Would you favor or oppose having a system of review and revision of proposed initiatives to try to avoid legal issues and drafting errors?

	Favor	Oppose
10/08	74%	16%

Appendix Table 1. Cont.

Would you Favor or Oppose the following reforms:

	Having a period of time in which the initiative sponsor and the legislature could meet to see if there is a compromise solution?		Increasing public disclosure of funding sources for signature gathering and initiative campaigns?	
	Favor	Oppose	Favor	Oppose
10/08	79%	15%	78%	15%
09/09	79%	15%	82%	13%

N for 2008=2,004 respondents
N for 2009=2,006 respondents
N for 2010=2,002 respondents

Notes

[1] There are a variety of questions used to assess this. Some ask if "proposition elections are a good or a bad thing." (Bowler and Donovan 1998), "In many states, citizens can place initiatives on the ballot by collecting petition signatures. If a majority of voters approve the initiative on Election Day, it becomes law. Is this a good or bad idea?" (Lindsey 2003, 477), "Do you think that statewide ballot propositions are a good thing for [state], a bad thing, or don't you think they make much difference?" (Matsusaka 2004, 118), as well as several variants about if citizens trust people or government to make right/correct/just decisions (see Matsusaka 2004, 131). In every documented case in the research cited above, large margins supported direct democracy. Lindsey reports state by state differentials between pro and anti-initiative sentiment. Across all fifty states, the average differential between "good idea" and "bad idea" is 47%. Jeydel and Steel (2002) show that the finding holds up across a series of questions in Oregon.

[2] Some have argued that initiative policies disproportionately disadvantage minority groups (Gamble 1997) while others have shown that from a voting behavior standpoint, racial and ethnic minorities are just as likely to be on the winning side of the vote as white voters (Hajnal, Gerber and Louch 2002). Regardless, Matsusaka's data demonstrates across the board majority support for direct democracy as an institution among Asians, Latinos, Blacks and Whites.

[3] There are now numerous studies that bring into question claims about the so-called "educative" effects of initiatives (Dyck 2009; Dyck n.d.; Dyck and Lascher 2009; Dyck and Seabrook 2010; Schlozman and Yohai 2008).

[4] While these are additive indices, the variables from each of the surveys are scalable, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .65 for 2005 and .64 for 2006. Additionally, principal component's analysis reveals a single factor sufficiently different from a random distribution of variables in each year (Horn 1965). Further details are available in the Appendix.