The Ballot Measure/Citizen Interest Link: Information, Engagement and Participation

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Introduction

The dominant focus of previous research on direct democracy and citizen attitudes and behavior has been political participation, with a growing consensus that ballot measures stimulate turnout in low-profile (midterm elections). We have a much more limited understanding of the impact of direct democracy on civic engagement. Nor has the literature adequately explained why ballot measures increase voter turnout. Is it opportunities for direct input in policy decisions that stimulates engagement and participation consistent with expectations of democratic theorists (Pateman 1970; Barber 1984; Dryzek 2000) and Progressive Era reformers (Smith and Tolbert 2004; Allswang 2000)? Or is it that ballot measure campaigns provide information to the electorate stimulating interest in politics, which in turn leads to increased participation? In this essay we analyze previously unexamined data that is particularly well suited to allowing us to assess the latter hypothesis. We suggest the previous research on ballot measures and voting has not taken into account the endogeneity of civic engagement and political participation.

The primary focus of this paper is political interest, a critical building block for all other forms of political engagement and participation. Among the forms of civic engagement commonly studied, political interest may be the most important for mobilization, as well as long-term sustained participation in politics. If an individual pays attention to politics, they are more likely to be politically active in a range of activities over their lifetimes. In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam contends that "Political knowledge and interest in public affairs are critical preconditions for more active forms of involvement. If you don't know the rules of the game and

the payers and don't care about the outcome, you're unlikely to try playing yourself" (2000, 35). Do controversial policies placed on statewide ballots, such as gay marriage and affirmative action, enhance a general interest in politics? This research seeks to theoretically and empirically unpack the relationship between direct democracy, political interest and participation.

Central to most notions of representative democracy is the idea that engaged, attentive and informed citizens should be able to select representatives and make other meaningful political choices consistent with their preferences. That is, citizens ought to participate in the process of choosing elected officials and expressing opinions on public policy. Critical to this process is the assumption of "sufficient, relevant data available in the political environment and that citizens will be able and inclined to draw on this information in making their choices" (Freedman, Franz and Goldstein 2004). We suggest that the informational needs of American citizens are supplemented when salient ballot measures (particularly citizen initiatives) appear on statewide ballots. That is, ballot measures may provide citizens with additional information about politics, leading to a more attentive and participatory citizenry (Lassen 2005). The literature on media effects shows that all forms of media can increase engagement in politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), but much less is known about the informational effects of ballot measures on civic engagement. We argue ballot initiative campaigns are rife with both informational and emotional content that contributes to a more engaged citizenry.

The argument that ballot measures may increase civic engagement is consistent with what Progressive reformers referred to as the "educative effects" of direct democracy (Smith and Tolbert 2004). Chief among these educative effects is the positive impact of direct democracy on voter turnout.

A growing literature, both in the U.S. and cross-nationally, examines whether providing opportunities for direct input in policy decisions boosts voter turnout (Smith 2001; Donovan and Smith 2004; Smith and Tolbert 2004; Lacey forthcoming; Lassen 2005; Tolbert, Grummel and Smith, 2001; Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003;). Some studies detect effects of ballot measures on voter turnout only in midterm elections (Smith 2001; Lacy forthcoming), although others find effects in both presidential and midterm races (Tolbert, Grummel and Smith 2001; Smith and Tolbert 2004). Other research focusing on voter eligible population (VEP) turnout, instead of voter age population (VAP) turnout, found a significant turnout effect in presidential elections (Tolbert and Smith 2005). Using an experimental design, Lassen (2005) finds citizens allowed to vote on referenda in Switzerland have increased levels of participation. Scholars have even begun to explore *who* is mobilized when policy questions are on the ballot using survey data with direct individual-level measures of salience of ballot measures. A study of three states (Donovan and Smith 2004) found regular (partisan) voters were more likely to be mobilized to turnout by ballot initiatives than episodic (non-partisan) voters.

A limitation of this literature is the causal mechanism for *how* ballot measures trigger participation. Do opportunities for active participation in policy decisions trigger participation, consistent with normative theorists (Barber 1984; Pateman 1970; Dryzek 2000; Fishkin 1993, 1995)? Or do controversial ballot initiatives and referenda create a richer information environment about politics, stimulating interest in the election, which in turn leads to greater participation?

Mark Smith's (2001) innovative research begins to untangle this relationship between ballot measures, interest and participation. Smith argues the combination of salient ballot measures and campaign efforts can raise turnout. Arguing that not all ballot measures are the

same, Smith measures the presence of "salient" initiatives and legislative referenda—those with a high percentage of front-page newspaper coverage devoted to ballot issues on the day following the election—from 1972 to 1996. Smith finds that the presence of salient initiatives and referenda increases turnout in midterm elections by roughly 3 percent over states without ballot measures, but not in presidential election years. Without a presidential race on the ballot, voter and media attention focuses instead on state-level issues and candidate contests. Using Smith's measure of salience and Current Population Survey (CPS) data, Lacey (forthcoming) similarly finds that turnout increases with salient initiatives and referenda on the ballot, but only in midterm elections.

This research suggests that ballot measures that spark interest from a wide cross-section of the public appear to increase voter turnout, but Smith and Lacy's work doesn't directly measure political interest with individual-level measures. Rather Smith's salience variable measures front-page media coverage of ballot measures aggregated to the state level as a proxy for citizen interest. Citizen interest resulting from policy questions on the statewide ballot may diverge from newspaper coverage, as media coverage of the election may reflect the bias of newspaper editors. This may be especially the case in states that do not ordinarily refer policy questions to the voters. Smith's salience measure also doesn't take into account other sources of information available to citizens, including television, discussions with friends and family, as well as online news. Because of these limitations we are interested in building direct measures of citizen interest at the individual level when exposed to ballot measures, and then modeling the effect of this increased attention to politics on the probability of voting. Our use of survey data to measure interest rather than aggregate state data also allows us to account for other information

sources known to affect civic engagement at the individual level as well, such as the media (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Freedman, Franz and Goldstein 2004).

Another way to distinguish the argument developed here from Smith and Lacy's research is in terms of supply and demand. We know that citizens are able to learn more in information-rich environments about politics in general (Lupia 1994; Popkin 1991; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Yet it is not just the supply side (availability of salient initiatives, referenda, and political campaigns), but the demand side of the equation (citizen interest) that work in tandem. Previous research on ballot measure salience (Smith 2001, 2002; Lacy forthcoming) may only account for supply-side factors. This research directly models both the supply of information (number of initiatives on the ballot) and demand side of the equation (citizen interest in politics), as factors in predicting voter turnout using two-stage causal models.

Building on previous research showing ballot measures have the greatest effect on participation in low-information (midterm) elections, we draw on two national surveys of the 2002 midterm elections to explore the effects of ballot initiatives on civic engagement. The 2002 Pew Internet and American Life Daily Tracking Survey and the 2002 American National Election Study (ANES) survey data are used to test whether citizens exposed to ballot initiatives have a heightened interest in politics. An interest in politics is understood as one of the most basic ingredients for mobilization of episodic and non-voters. Two-stage causal models are used to analyze the impact of exposure to ballot initiatives (x1) on attention or interest in the election (x2), and in turn on the probability of voting (y).

Ballot Measures and Civic Engagement

While a handful of previous studies show an engagement effect from exposure to ballot measures (Smith 2002; Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000; Benz and Stutzer 2004; Smith and Tolbert 2004), theoretically the scholarship on civic engagement and voting/participation are distinct (An exception is the work of Smith and Tolbert (2004) who frame the impact of ballot initiatives on both civic engagement and turnout in terms of "educative effects" based on arguments developed by Progressive Era reformers).

Do ballot measures heighten citizen knowledge of, interest in and deliberation about politics? Mark Smith (2002) maintains that initiatives and referenda are institutional arrangements that over time can encourage the development of skills that make for more informed citizens. Using the 1992 Senate Election Study merged with his aggregate state-level measure of newspaper coverage of measures, Smith finds that citizens exposed to salient initiatives and referenda show an increased capacity to correctly answer factual questions about politics. That is, there is a positive relationship between salient ballot measures and political knowledge. Similarly, two European scholars find that in Switzerland citizens are better informed when they reside in cantons with more opportunities for direct political participation (Benz and Stutzer 2004). Research on a Canadian referendum found that exposure to the referenda lead to increased citizen interest in politics as well as knowledge (Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000). This research tends to be based on the analysis of one election, or even one salient referendum.

Scholars studying the effects of ballot initiatives on civic engagement over time report mixed, though generally positive, results. Using 1996, 1998 and 2000 American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys merged with number of initiatives appearing on state ballots in

these years, Smith and Tolbert (2004) find that citizens residing in states with frequent exposure to ballot initiatives report higher levels of interest in politics in both the 1996 and 1998 elections, after controlling for other factors, but exposure to ballot initiatives was not associated with an individual's interest in the 2000 presidential elections. Similarly, exposure to ballot measures increased the frequency of political discussions, but only in one year (1996). While the authors find opportunities for direct participation in policy making has a more consistent effect on political interest than political discourse, the result is only a partial confirmation of the hypothesis that ballot initiatives increase civic engagement. This research suggests, however, that engagement effects of ballot measures are the strongest in low-information elections (1998 midterm election or non-competitive 1996 presidential election), consistent with previous research on voting. Our focus on the 2002 midterm elections allows a closer examination of this engagement hypothesis in the most recent low-information election.

Other positive effects of ballot measures have also been reported in the literature worth mentioning briefly. Citizens exposed to ballot measures report more confidence in government or enhanced political efficacy (Bowler and Donovan 2002; Hero and Tolbert 2004; Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000), and are more likely to contribute to citizen interest groups (Smith and Tolbert 2004). Scholars have also found that states with more frequent use of ballot initiatives have more citizen and non-profit interest groups (Boehmke 2002; Smith and Tolbert 2004; see also Gerber 1999). In that efficacy and civic engagement tend to go together, these are important findings as well.

Despite this growing empirically grounded literature, there has been little attempt to link the findings on civic engagement and political participation. A concern is that endogeneity between civic engagement and political participation may bias (under or overstate) the results of

previous studies. We propose a simple causal model; exposure to statewide ballot initiatives should increase attention or general interest in the election, and in turn the probability of voting. We hypothesize direct democracy stimulates civic engagement and in turn political participation.

We suggest ballot measure campaigns may supplement an individual's information environment, leading to increased opportunities for learning about and being interested in politics. This argument is bolstered by research showing that political learning and interest is heavily influenced by the political environment (Nie and Andersen 1974; Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979). Robert Luskin (1990) argues that political sophistication is endogenous to three broad factors: a person's ability to assimilate and organize political information; his or her motive or desire to follow political affairs; and his or her exposure to political information—that is his or her information environment. Exposure to political information may be a function of the frequency with which such information is made available and media use (Luskin 1987, 1990).

Supply-Side Factors: Informational Content of the Media vs. Ballot Measures

The effects of exposure to initiative and referenda campaigns on civic engagement (specifically political interest) may resemble the effects of media exposure. The consumption of political information from media sources enhances civic engagement by increasing citizens' knowledge about politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Tan 1980). Watching television news has been found to be positively associated with political knowledge in a variety of contexts (McLeod and McDonald 1985), although more learning occurs from reading about politics in newspapers than watching television (Smith 1989). With regard to the specific mechanisms through which individuals accrue knowledge, McLeod and McDonald (1985) find that viewing television news and reading newspapers increases individuals' political knowledge. More

specifically, voters acquire information on candidate traits (Weaver 1996) and issue positions (Chaffee and Kanihan 1997; Weaver and Drew 1993) through the consumption of media news. Campaign spending enhances voters' knowledge about candidates (Coleman and Manna 2000, Coleman 2001) through the political communication it purchases. Voters' awareness about the importance of issues in Senate elections is enhanced by the degree to which the issues are discussed by candidates and the media (Kahn and Kinney 2001). Research has found campaign advertising increases levels of interest and knowledge among citizens, especially those with low levels of information (Freedman, Franz and Goldstein 2004). Finally, consumption of online news has been shown to increase political knowledge, interest and discourse, after controlling for traditional media use and other demographic factors (Tolbert, MacDonald and McNeal n.d.).

Can controversial policy issues on statewide ballots spark a general interest in politics? Conceptually similar to media exposure studies, ballot measure campaigns may improve the political information environment available to citizens, potentially reducing the costs of being informed and engaged. The vote on most ballot measures is a simple yes or no, and ballot measures campaigns tend to focus on this bottom line, encouraging the consumer to either support or oppose the issue on Election Day. But campaign ads encouraging either support or opposition of a ballot measure tend to be rich in informational content, and research has shown advertising conveys information in an efficient, easily digestible way that has positive effects on civic engagement (Freedman, Franz and Goldstein 2004). Ballot measure campaigns are skillfully produced, using professional media consultants, pollsters, and campaign ads to persuade voters (McCuan, Bowler, Donovan and Fernandez 1998; Broder 2000). Exposure to ballot measure campaigns (including advertising, media coverage, yard signs, etc.) can help

citizens learn about the issues and is thus an efficient means for campaigns to communicate with potential voters.

Like the media, political organizations such as parties and interest groups (the sponsors, promoters and opponents of ballot measure campaigns) may lower citizens' information gathering costs (Smith and Tolbert 2001, 2004; Bowler and Donovan 1998). Scholars have shown that citizens can make rational voting decisions on ballot questions with simple cues (heuristics) from the media, elected officials, political parties and interest groups (Lupia 1994; Bowler and Donovan 1998; Gerber and Phillips 2003). As voters use the partisanship of candidates to draw meaningful inferences about their policy stances, similarly, voters can form attitudes on issues without studying them by taking cues from opinion leaders. As discussed above, a growing literature documents the value-added of more information on civic engagement and participation, showing citizens exposed to salient ballot measures (initiatives and referenda) have increased political knowledge (Smith 2002) and express more interest in politics (Smith and Tolbert 2004). Drawing on the media effects literature and previous research on direct democracy, there are good theoretical reasons to expect that exposure to ballot measures should enhance civic engagement and participation.

Demand Side Factors: Political Interest

Research on media effects finds that campaign ads (even negative campaigning) can increase civic engagement, particularly political interest, because campaign ads not only convey information about politics, but they do so in an emotional context (Freedman, Franz and Goldstein 2004). While often nonpartisan, ballot measure campaigns convey information with an emotional coating. Harold Lasswell argued that issues with a "triple appeal"—those appealing to

an individual's passions, rational reason and morality—will likely lead to action (Lasswell 1932). Ballot measure campaigns over controversial issues, such as gay marriage, affirmative action, taxation, the environment, animal rights, etc., rarely present information in dispassionate, emotionally neutral terms. Rather, these campaigns are often emotionally rich, provoking diverse responses ranging from anger and fear to morality and sympathy, either directly, through advertising, or indirectly, by way of elite endorsements from elected officials and interest groups (Bowler and Donovan 1998). As a result, issue campaigns may facilitate use of the likeability heuristic, by which people make informational inferences on the basis of their likes and dislikes (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). In summary, we argue that ballot measure campaigns are rife with both informational and emotional content that may spark public interest in politics, contributing to a more attentive citizenry.

Recent Evidence of the Ballot Measure/Citizen Interest Link

Descriptive survey data from the 2004 presidential elections suggests ballot measures do indeed spark widespread interest from the public. A Pew Research Center for the People and Press nationwide telephone survey conducted in October 2004 of 1,568 adults explored the salience of ballot measures in the 2004 election. The survey found that 86 percent of respondents who were aware of ballot measures in their states were "very" or "somewhat interested" in the policies on their state's ballot (Pew 2004). That is, 41 percent said they were "very interested" in such ballot issues this year; 45 percent said, "fairly interested." Comparable numbers of people across the ideological spectrum of liberals, moderates, and conservatives expressed interest in ballot measures (Pew 2004).

Overall, 42 percent of respondents said initiatives, referenda, or state constitutional amendments were on the ballot in their states. Among respondents residing in the 34 states where statewide proposals actually appeared on the ballot, 56 percent of voters were aware of such measures. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of voters in Western states were aware of policies on the ballot, which reflects the fact that statewide measures appeared in every state in that region. Fewer voters in the South (43 percent), Midwest (35 percent) and East (17 percent) were aware of ballot measures in their states (Pew 2004).

Of the policies sparking the most awareness among voters, gambling measures were the most visible, followed by proposed constitutional amendments to ban gay marriage (Welsh-Huggins 2004). Twenty percent of respondents who were aware of ballot measures in their states mentioned some type of gambling issue. Gay marriage was a close second to gambling in its visibility. Eleven states had proposals to amend state constitutions to ban gay marriage. Overall, 15 percent of voters aware of ballot measures mentioned gay marriage, and this figure climbed to 45 percent in states with gay marriage proposals on the ballot (Pew 2004).

A limitation of the Pew analysis is the lack of multivariate statistical methods to test the relationship between ballot measure exposure and political interest, controlling for other factors known to increase attention to politics, such as education, age and income. In the following analysis we use multivariate statistical analysis to explore whether ballot measure exposure leads to a heightened interest in politics, and in turn an increased probably of voting.

Research Hypotheses

From the media effects literature we can develop an information/engagement hypothesis about the link between exposure to information from ballot measure campaigns and engagement.

We hypothesize that citizens frequency exposed to ballot measures are more likely to have a general interest in politics, and in turn an increased probability of voting. That is we propose an *information/engagement hypothesis*—citizens frequently exposed to ballot measures will be more interested in politics, and in turn more likely to vote. It is worth noting how this hypothesis differs from Smith and Tolbert (2004) who discuss the educative effects of ballot measures, but tend to suggest that the education of citizens occurs because of opportunities for direct participation in policy making, consistent with Progressive reformers' expectations, rather than additional information.

Data and Methods

The data for this analysis are drawn from two representative national surveys conducted immediately after the 2002 midterm elections to gain leverage on the question of the impact of ballot initiatives on civic engagement and participation; The 2002 post-election Pew Internet and American Life Daily Tracking Survey and the 2002 American National Election Studies (ANES) post-election survey. The NES is a nationwide large-scale randomly conducted in-person and telephone survey and contains data on our dependent variables, and extensive variables related to individuals' political composition, which are often used as control variables in analyses of political engagement. Like the NES survey, the Pew survey of 1,884 respondents interviewed after the 2002 midterm (November) is a nationwide large-scale randomly conducted telephone survey. One disadvantage of the Pew survey is that it contains fewer questions about individuals' political composition, e.g., efficacy. However, it includes a larger overall sample of respondents, more equal samples from 48 or the 50 states than the NES, as well as a core group of attitudinal and demographic questions commonly used in studying political participation. Using geographic

identifiers, data from both surveys were merged with the actual number of initiatives appearing

on 2002 election ballots in each respondent's state. The National Conference of State

Legislatures (NCSL) served as the source of these data (www.ncsl.org). We measure ballot

initiatives, rather than referenda referred by the legislature, as proposals initiated by citizen

petition tend to be more salient with the public (Magleby 1984; Bowler, Donovan and Tolbert

1998).

　　We employ a two-staged estimation procedure to test the hypothesis that the exposure to

ballot initiatives (and likely a richer information environment) increases engagement and in turn

participation. Specifically, we model the impact of exposure to ballot initiatives (x1) on

probability of being interested in the election (x2) and on voting (y). In the first stage for each

model we estimate general interest in the election as a function of a critical set of independent

variables employed in the second stage. To do so, we use a two-stage estimation procedure

employed in previous research estimating two-stage models with limited dependent variables, in

that our models assume a logistic distribution instead of a normal distribution in the second stage

(Alvarez and Bedolla 2004; Alvarez and Butterfield 2000; Alvarez and Glasgow 2000).

　　We begin this two-stage estimation procedure by estimating the reduced form equations

for political interest for both the NES and Pew survey data. These equations are estimated using

ordered logistic regression with robust standard errors.[1] From the reduced-form estimates we

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[1] As with any two-stage model, we made some identification assumptions in the structural models. We hypothesize
that demographic factors, such as gender, race, age, education and income would affect interest in politics. We
hypothesize that traditional media use (television news and newspapers) would be important in attention to the
election, as well as online news and partisanship. As well as exposure to ballot measures, based on previous research
on race and voter turnout we include a measure of state racial diversity (Hero 1998; Hill and Leighley 1999). We
also control for whether there was a competitive senate race on the ballot. We hypothesize that political efficacy and
political discourse would affect the probability of voting, but not political interest. At the same time, we hypothesize
that state contextual factors (racial diversity and competitive senate elections) would affect general interest in the
election, but not the decision to vote per se. While ordered logistic regression coefficients are reported in Table 1,
the predicted probabilities used in the second stage models are estimated using Poisson regression to simply
calculation of the predicted values. The coefficient size and statistical significance remain unchanged.

produce predicted values for each respondent in the two surveys used in this analysis. We substitute these predicted values (of being interested in the election) for the endogenous variables on the right-hand side of the equation modeling voting. We estimate the second stage models using logistic regression because the dependent variable is whether the respondent voted in the election (1=yes and 0=no). Again, robust standard errors are used in the second stage estimates.

In the first stage of the Pew survey data analysis, the measure of interest which we employ as the dependent variable is a four-point ordinal variable, with higher values indicating more interest, that catalogues respondents' answers to the question, "How much thought have you given to the midterm election?"[2] In the NES survey the dependent variable is the respondents' self-reported interest in politics using a three-point scale coded as "very much interested" (5), "interested" (3) and "not very interested" (1) in politics.[3] As discussed above, our primary explanatory variable is the number of statewide initiatives appearing on the 2002 election ballot in the respondent's state.

Following previous research, we employ a number of variables to control for demographic factors that affect individuals' interest in the election. In the Pew survey we measure income on an 8-point scale on which higher values indicate higher family income levels.[4] Educational attainment is measured on a 7-point scale with larger values indicating higher levels of education completed on the part of respondents.[5] To control for the race of respondents, we create dummy variables measuring whether respondents were African American, Asian American and Latino (1=yes; 0 otherwise) with non-Latino whites serving as

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[2] Respondents were asked "How much thought have you given to the upcoming midterm election?" with responses, "quite a lot, some, only a little, and none" with coding ranging from 4 to 1.
[3] Respondents were asked how interested they were in the 2000 election campaign with possible responses: "very much interested, interested, not very interested."
[4] Income is measured as an ordinal variable ranging from "1" indicates that family income ranges from $0 to $10,000 and "8" signifies a family income of $100,000 or more.
[5] Education is measured on an ordinal scale ranging from eighth grade education or less to PhD and age is measured in years.

the reference group. Finally, we control for the respondents' gender by creating a dummy variable (1 if female). Dummy variables are also used to control for geographic region, with suburban and urban respondents coded 1, with rural residents as the reference group (coded 0). Attitudinal factors are also important. To control for partisanship, we create dummy variables assuming the value of 1 if respondents indicated that they were Democrats or Republicans; 0 otherwise (Independent).

Similar demographic variables and coding are used for the NES survey data. We measure income along a 22-point scale (higher values indicate higher levels of income). We control for respondents' educational attainment using a 7-point scale (higher values indicate higher levels of attainment). To control for the impact of respondents' race, we created dummy variables for whether respondents were African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino (1 if yes; 0 otherwise). Non-Hispanic whites are also the reference group for this set of dummy variables. We measure respondents' age using their age in years. Finally, we measure gender using a dummy variable assuming the value of 1 for female respondents. Paralleling the previous coding, a dummy variable is used to measure geographic region with urban residents coded 1 and non-urban residents coded 0. To control for the likelihood that partisans are more interested in politics than non-partisans, we create a dummy variable assuming the value of 1 if individuals said that they were strong Democrats or Republicans; 0 otherwise (weak partisans or Independents).[6]

We also control for other information sources, such as media use, that may influence an individual's interest in politics. For the Pew survey we create two dummy variables measuring whether or not respondents had read the newspaper or watched a national T.V. news program the day prior to being surveyed, coding these variables as 1 if they had; 0 otherwise. In the NES

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[6] We created this variable from the NES's seven-point measure of partisanship.

survey we control for the degree to which respondents consume information about politics from traditional media sources by including a variable indicating the number of days during the previous week during which respondents read the newspaper or watched the national nightly news. The Pew survey also queried respondents about their consumption of online election news by asking, "Have you gone online to get news or information about politics or the campaign" (2002). From responses to this question, we create dummy variables indicating whether respondents had gone online to obtain information about each election (1=yes; 0=no). The NES stopped asking questions about consumption of online news after 2000, and thus this variable is not included. Previous research has reported that use of online news is important in predicting voter turnout (Tolbert and McNeal 2003).

Political discussions with friends and family also affect an individual's information environment. In the NES survey we control for the frequency of political discussions, as measured by a count of the number of days during the previous week during which respondents discussed politics.[7] We control for external political efficacy by combining the scores from two 5-point scales that range from strongly disagree to strongly agree with the following statements: "People don't have say in government" and "Public officials don't care about people like me." We are not able to analyze political discourse or efficacy with the Pew data due to limitations in the survey questionnaire.

Because we are interested in the information environment of the respondent, we include additional control variables measured at the state level that may affect an individual's attention to the election. Previous research found that states with higher racial diversity have lower voter turnout over time and weaker mobilizing institutions (Hill and Leighley 1999). We include a

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[7] Respondents were asked how many days in the previous week they discussed politics with friends or family, ranging from 0 to 7, where 0 indicates the respondent does not discuss politics and 7 indicates the respondent discusses politics every day of the week.

variable measuring the proportion of the respondent's state population that is Latino, African

American or Asian American (Hero 1998). Based on this research, we expect respondents

residing in states with higher racial diversity to have a decreased interest in politics. Following

Freedman, Franz and Goldstein (2004), we also include a variable measuring whether there was

a competitive senate election race in 2002 in the respondent's state using data from the Cook

Political Report.[8] Individuals residing in states with a competitive senate races should be exposed

to a richer information environment, and be more attentive to the election. While these state

contextual factors are deemed important in shaping interest in the election, they are not

predictors of an individual's decision to vote per se, and are thus not included as predictors in the

second stage models.

Findings

Pew Survey Analysis

Columns 1 and 2 of Table 1 present the first and second stage models based on the Pew

survey data, while columns 3 and 4 present the same models based on the NES survey data. The

analysis based on the Pew data is robust, with a large N (over 1800 cases) and many statistically

significant variables. In column 1, the data indicates that citizens exposed to ballot initiatives in

the 2002 midterm elections were significantly more likely to be interested in the election,

holding constant demographic, attitudinal and other state contextual factors. That is, as the

number of initiatives on the state ballot increased, potentially enriching the respondent's

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[8] Competitive senate races in 2002 were in: Georgia, Iowa, Louisiana, New Jersey, Missouri, South Dakota, Minnesota, Colorado, Arkansas, New Hampshire, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. Respondents in these states were coded 1. Respondents residing in all other states were coded 0. The Cook Political Report considers competitive races those in which on party has an advantage (lean Republican or Democrat) or races in which either party has a good chance of winning (toss-up). Non-competitive races are seats that are not likely to be closely contested (solid) or seats that are not competitive at this point but have the potential to become engaged (likely).

information environment, they were more likely to be interested in the election. This finding is consistent with previous research based on the 1996 and 1998 elections (Smith and Tolbert 2004), and suggests that direct democracy does indeed contribute to an engaged citizenry. Ballot measures appear to be particularly important in stimulating civic engagement in low-information elections

Many of the control variables are also statistically significant and in the expected direction. Individuals residing in states with a competitive senate race expressed an increased interest in the election, while those in states with higher racial diversity were less civically engaged, consistent with previous research (Hill and Leighley 1999). Consumption of all forms of media (newspapers, T.V. and online news) increased interest in the election, again consistent with the media effects literature (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Tolbert and McNeal 2003; Freedman, Franz and Goldstein 2004). Partisans were more engaged in the election than non-partisans, and those with higher socioeconomic status were also more attentive. The number of statistically significant control variables in the expected direction lends validity to the finding that ballot measures stimulate a general interest in the election among the public.

Probability simulations (see box below) indicate that each additional initiative appearing on the election ballot in a respondent's state led to a 2 percentage point increase in the probability that the individual had thought "quite a lot" about the election. Holding the explanatory variables at their means or modal category (for binary variables), but varying the number of initiatives appearing on 2002 state election ballots increases the probability of high interest in the election from 42 percent for a respondent residing in a state with no initiatives on the ballot to 51 percent for the same respondent residing in a state with 5 initiatives on the ballot, *ceteris paribus.* The simulations reveal that a respondent residing in a state with two initiatives

on the ballot has a 46 percent probability of being very attentive to the election, compared to the

same individual with exposure to four initiative campaigns, who had a 48 percent probability of

interest. The substantive magnitude of the effect of ballot initiative exposure on political interest

is somewhat stronger, but consistent with previous published research (Smith and Tolbert 2004).

Impact of Ballot Initiative Exposure on Political Interest and Voting

Number of Initiatives on the Statewide Ballot	Prob. Very Interested	Political Interest (Predicted Value)	Prob. of Voting
0	.42 (.030)	-2 Stand. Dev.	.23 (.109)
1	.44 (.028)	-1 Stand. Dev.	.36 (.069)
2	.46 (.028)	Mean	.51 (.069)
3	.48 (.031)	+1 Stand. Dev.	.66 (.091)
4	.50 (.034)	+2 Stand. Dev.	.78 (.126)
5	.51 (.038)		
Change Low-High Exposure	**9%**	Change -1 to +1 Stand. Dev.	**30%**

Predicted probabilities estimated with Clarify (King, Tomz and Wittenberg 2000). Numbers in parentheses are standard errors for the predicted probabilities. To simulate political interest, we hold age, income, education, television and newspaper consumption, senate election exposure and state racial diversity at their means. Gender was set at female and race/ethnicity at white. The respondent is assumed to reside in a suburban region. Simulation estimated for non-partisans. To simulate voting, we hold age, income, education, television, newspaper and online news consumption at their mean. Gender was set at female and race/ethnicity at white. The respondent is assumed to reside in a suburban region.

In the second stage of the analysis (Table 1, column 2) we find that political interest

(measured by the predicted value from stage one) is an important predictor of voting in the 2002

election. Increased attention to the election significantly increased turnout, as expected. Again,

the demographic control variables are in the expected direction, as the older, wealthier and more

educated were significantly more likely to vote (Campbell et al 1960), as were those who

regularly consumed newsprint media. As shown in the box above, probability simulations reveal

the substantive magnitude of political interest on the probability of voting is large. Varying

political interest (predicted value) from minus 1 standard deviation below the mean to 1 standard

deviation above the mean, increases the probability that an individual voted in the 2002 election by 30 percent, *ceteris paribus.* When the endogenous relationship between civic and political participation is accounted for, ballot measures have a larger effect on voter turnout than previously recognized.

Using two-stage models and Pew survey data, the analysis suggests that ballot measures increase voter turnout by stimulating an interest in the election. These findings are consistent with previous research (Smith 2001; Lacy forthcoming) who report that states with salient initiatives or referenda on the ballot have higher voter turnout over time. The findings are also consistent with research by Smith and Tolbert (2004) who find ballot initiatives educate citizens, increasing both civic engagement and political participation. The contribution of this research is modeling the link between ballot initiatives, political interest and voter turnout. By analyzing a recent midterm election, it also serves to confirm the findings of previous research.

NES Survey Analysis

Identical analysis of the NES survey data yields surprisingly different results, supporting the null hypothesis. In stage one of the analysis (Table 1, column 3) we see that exposure to ballot initiatives has no measurable effect on interest in the 2002 midterm election. However, the same control variables discussed in the analysis of the Pew survey data are statistically significant here. Partisans report an increased interest in the election, as do those of higher socioeconomic status. Media consumption (T.V. and newspapers) increases interest in the election, as does residing in a state with a competitive senate race. Again, residents of states with higher racial diversity report depressed levels of attention to the election. The sign for the

coefficient for gender reversed when comparing the Pew and NES models of political interest, however.

The control variables used in the two analyses were selected and coded to be as similar as possible. What then explains the null finding based on the NES data and statistically significant finding based on the Pew data? In contrast to the Pew survey, the NES sample size is smaller (1188 cases). The NES model may also suffer from omitted variable bias, as it is missing the control for consumption of online news, which as been found to be a predictor of not only voting and participation (Tolbert and McNeal 2003), but civic engagement as well (Tolbert, MacDonald and McNeal n.d.). Finally, the NES does not include samples of roughly equal size from the 48 continental states, as does the Pew survey, and may thus be inferior for analyzing the effects of state contextual factors on individual attitudes and behavior. In the NES the sample sizes of many small western states with initiatives on the ballot are not adequate.

In the second stage model (Table 1, column 4) we see that an interest in the election (predicted value) is not a statistically significant predictor of turnout in the 2002 election, again providing support for the null hypothesis. However, only two control variables approach statistical significance using a 90 percent confidence interval (gender and age). The lack of statistically significant demographic control variables known to be predictors of turnout (income, education, age, partisanship) casts a shadow on the validity of the findings (Campbell et. .al 1960; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Tolerance statistics indicate no problems of multicollinearity in any of the models reported here, but it should be noted that the NES created a an overall summary measure of turnout in 2002 based on both the traditional turnout question and an experimental question to try to control for over reporting of voting in survey data. The summary turnout variable is used here, because missing data was a significant problem with the

traditional turnout question. Measurement of turnout in the NES survey could also contribute to the model specification problems. Finally, the 2002 survey combined telephone and in-person interviews that were unique in the time series. The method of conducting the survey could also affect the reliability of the results.

Despite these limitations, previous published research based on earlier NES surveys finds that exposure to ballot initiatives increases voter turnout (Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003; Smith and Tolbert 2004) using simple (one-stage) models. Because no published research has examined the 2002 midterm election, we replicate our analysis, directly modeling the impact of exposure to ballot initiatives on the probability of voting, with results reported in the Table 2. Consistent with previous research, we find that citizens exposed to more ballot initiatives have an increased probability of voting, after controlling for other factors. The positive impact of ballot initiative exposure on an individual's probability of voting remains even after controlling for traditional media use, the frequency of political discussions, efficacy and political interest. The confidence interval for the effect of exposure to ballot initiatives on voting is 94 percent. Again, the lack of statistically significant control variables and very low explained variance raises concerns about the validity of this model as well.

Conclusion

In spite of a growing literature on the impact of ballot measures on citizen attitudes and behavior, there has been little attempt to link the findings on civic engagement and political participation. The previous research on direct democracy and voter turnout also does not account for the endogenous relationship between civic and political participation. Using two-stage models, Pew survey data and data the number of initiatives appearing on state 2002 election

ballots, we show that exposure to ballot measures produces citizens who are more interested in the election, and are considerably more likely to vote. When modeling the endogenous relationship between civic and political participation, the impact of ballot initiatives on the probability of voting is larger than reported in previous research. Overall the data suggests that ballot measures increase voter turnout by stimulating interest in the election. These findings are consistent with previous research (Smith 2001, 2002, Lacy forthcoming) that reports that states with salient initiatives or referenda on the ballot have higher voter turnout over time. The findings are also consistent with research by Smith and Tolbert (2004) who find ballot initiatives educate citizens, increasing both civic engagement and political participation. Analysis of the Pew survey data suggests direct democracy stimulates civic engagement and in turn political participation, especially in low-information electoral contexts. But why?

Freedman, Franz and Goldstein (2004) eloquently pose the following question— "Whether one puts faith in miracles of aggregation, looks to the discourse of competing elites (Zaller 1992), or falls back on cognitive shortcuts, someone, somewhere, must be in possession of some supply of information. Where does such information come from? What is the source of the raw informational ingredients that make democracy possible?" The answer they provide is campaign ads, even negative advertising.

This research provides an additional answer, suggesting ballot measures provide alternative sources of information about politics that "make democracy possible," above and beyond the media, such as television, newsprint and the Internet. We conceptualize ballot measure campaigns as providing information and emotional content to citizens, similar to the media. This informational content is necessary for civic engagement and participation in a democracy. Proponents and opponents of ballot measures help subsidize the costs of information,

and their interest group and political party allies do so as well (Smith and Tolbert 2001), distributing voting guides and offering heuristic cues with politically relevant information in an easily digestible form. The findings on ballot measures and engagement are consistent with a growing body of literature on the importance of information in elections and civic engagement (Alvarez 1998; Benz and Stutzer 2004; Bowler and Donovan 1998; Freedman, Franz and Goldstein 200; Lassen 2005; Lupia 1994; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Popkin 1991). Given the importance of sustained engagement in politics, the effect of ballot measures on civic engagement may be even more important than on turnout.

Parallel analysis of NES survey data, also from the 2002 midterm election, supports the null hypothesis and finds no evidence that exposure to ballot initiatives increases political interest or voter turnout. Limitations of the NES survey in terms of adequate state samples are discussed, as well as question wording, reducing confidence in the findings. Direct models of exposure to ballot initiatives on the probability of voting using the NES data reveals a positive and statistically significant relationship, as reported in previous research (Smith and Tolbert 2004; Smith 2001; Tolbert, Grummel and Smith 2001; Lacy forthcoming; Tolbert, McNeal and Smith 2003).

If ballot measure campaigns create richer political information environments, stimulating interest in politics and voter turnout, direct democracy may serve to, in part, counteract a three-decade trend of declining engagement (Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Putnam 2000; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Of course, this is not to assert that direct democracy is a panacea for all that ails American democracy; rather, it is to emphasize that allowing citizens to make decisions on policy issues, rather than only elected officials, may be helpful—not the hindrance it is currently viewed as (Schrag 1998; Putnam 2000; Broder 2000).

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Table 1: Impact of Ballot Initiatives on Political Interest and the Probability of Voting

First and Second-Stage Estimates

	Pew 2002				NES 2002			
	Political Interest First Stage		Voted Second Stage		Political Interest First Stage		Voted Second Stage	
Explanatory Variables	Coef.(Robust S. E.)	P>|z|	Coef.(Robust S.E.)	P>|z|	Coef.(Robust S. E.)	P>|z|	Coef.(Robust S. E.)	P>|z|
Political Interest (Predicted Probability)			**1.353(.726)**	**.063**			-.552(.439)	.208
Number of Initiatives on Ballot, 2002	**.078(.030)**	**.009**			.045(.035)	.199		
State Control Variables								
State Racial Diversity	**-.671(.356)**	**.060**			**-.1297(.395)**	**.001**		
Competitive Senate Election Race	**.349(.122)**	**.004**			**.385(.137)**	**.005**		
Individual-Level Control Variables								
Newspaper Consumption	**.470(.109)**	**.000**	**.354(.212)**	**.096**	**.064(.023)**	**.005**	-.012(.031)	.708
Television (National) Consumption	**.683(.105)**	**.000**	.041(.243)	.865	**.177(.026)**	**.000**	.079(.051)	.122
Online News Consumption	**1.757(.168)**	**.000**	-.227(.508)	.655				
Republican	**.462(.123)**	**.000**	.254(.200)	.203				
Democrat	**.244(.132)**	**.065**	.008(.168)	.964				
Partisan					**1.081(.131)**	**.000**	.329(.306)	.281
Age	**.030(.003)**	**.000**	**.023(.010)**	**.022**	**.029(.005)**	**.000**	**.014(.009)**	**.103**
Male	**-.218(.103)**	**.034**	.008(.145)	.954	**.521(.122)**	**.000**	**.374(.197)**	**.057**
Education	**.169(.035)**	**.000**	**.142(.065)**	**.030**	**.210(.044)**	**.000**	.063(.070)	.366
Income	**.070(.271)**	**.010**	**.115(.040)**	**.004**	-.021(.033)	.527	.002(.037)	.953
Suburban	**-.228(.132)**	**.083**	-.161(.180)	.370				
Urban	-.148(.150)	.325	-.279(.192)	.145	-.123(.141)	.383	.058(.173)	.736
Latino	-.168(.191)	.379	-.138(.227)	.544	**.511(.245)**	**.037**	.238(341)	.485
African American	.132(.188)	.483	.188(.222)	.398	.069(.238)	.773	.082(.256)	.749
Asian American	**-.987(.326)**	**.002**	**-1.103(.648)**	**.089**	.435(.380)	.252	.755(.648)	.244
Political Efficacy							.047(.048)	.332
Frequency of Political Discussions							-.006(.031)	.860
Constant			**-6.155(1.220)**	**.000**			1.091(.692)	.115
Cut 1	-.688(.289)				1.049(.344)			
Cut 2	3.070(.294)				4.243(.372)			
Cut 3	3.259(.296							
Pseudo R^2	**.1408**		**.1953**		**.1412**		**.0073**	
Wald Chi^2	378.21	.000	276.20	.000	253.61	.000	8.69	.850
Number	1856		1430		1188		1046	

Source: The Internet and American Life Daily Tracking Survey, November 2002, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Unstandardized ordered logistic regression coefficients (columns 1 and 3) and logistic regression coefficients (columns 2 and 4) with standard errors in parentheses. Reported probabilities based on two-tailed test. Statistically significant coefficients at a 90 percent confidence interval or more in **bold**. Tolerance statistics indicate no problems of multicollinearity.

Table 2: Impact of Ballot Initiatives on the Probability of Voting (NES 2002)

Explanatory Variables	Coef.(Robust S.E.)	P>|z|
Number of Initiatives on the Ballot, 2002	**.075(.040)**	**.060**
Control Variables		
Newspaper Consumption	-.031(.027)	.243
Television (National) Consumption	.023(.029)	.422
Partisan	-.025(.155)	.874
Age	.004(.005)	.387
Male	.176(.146)	.228
Education	.000(.050)	.992
Income	.010(.037)	.779
Latino	.063(.321)	.843
African American	.132(.260)	.611
Asian American	.541(.659)	.411
Political Efficacy	.038(.048)	.433
Frequency of Political Discussions	-.022(.033)	.500
Political Interest	.076(.065)	.245
Urban	.047(.172)	.784
Constant	.172(.399)	.666
Pseudo R^2	.0100	
Wald Chi^2	12.11	.670
Number	1046	

Source: 2002 American National Election Studies, post-election survey. Unstandardized logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Reported probabilities based on two-tailed test. Statistically significant coefficients at a 90 percent confidence interval or more in **bold**. The lack of statistically significant control variables is cause for concern, as are the very low R^2 values. Tolerance statistics indicate no problems of multicollinearity.