Sources of Variation in the Frequency of Statewide Initiatives: The Role of Interest Group Populations

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Abstract

In this paper I study the factors that determine the number of initiatives that appear on statewide ballots, with an emphasis on the characteristics of state interest group populations. In particular, I test whether the size of state citizen or economic group populations influences the frequency of initiative use. The relationship between these two categories of groups and initiative use is important in light of recent claims that the initiative process no longer benefits citizen groups and is now dominated by economic interests. In addition, I consider the role of other factors, including initiative regulations, state political characteristics, state economic performance and state demographic characteristics. My results indicate that states with more citizen groups have more initiatives overall and in specific issue areas and that the number of economic groups has a negative or negligible effect.

Increasing attention has been paid lately to whether the direct legislation process, which permits citizens and interest groups to draft and propose legislation directly to voters, has been co-opted by economic and business interests. Whereas the original intent of Populist and Progressive reformers was to break business interests' perceived stranglehold on state legislatures, critics of the process charge that it is merely another tool with which wealthy economic interest groups can further their agendas.

Whether economic interests are now the most important users of the initiative process is an important question given that recent research has shown that the initiative process can help increase the representativeness of state interest group populations. In particular, initiative states have more interest groups and a higher percentage of citizen groups (Boehmke 2002). This decrease in bias is important given that economic interests typically dominate political arenas relative to their prevalence in the general population — specifically in their ability to represent their interests in the legislative process — both in Washington D.C. (Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman 1984; Baumgartner and Leech 2001) and in state capitals (Gray and Lowery 1996). If the initiative process is to continue to help ameliorate this bias, then it must be an avenue available to citizen groups and not just another part of the political process dominated by economic groups. Otherwise, the representational effect of the initiative process will evaporate and perhaps even start to work against citizen groups.

Investigations of the primary beneficiaries of the initiative process have led to two very different conclusions. Consistent with the intent of direct legislation reformers during the Progressive era, who saw the initiative process as a check against business dominance and a way to increase

the involvement of the common citizen in the political process, a variety of academic studies have found that the initiative process can spur citizen involvement and benefit broader interests (Boehmke 2002; Gerber 1999; Matsusaka 2004; Tolbert and Smith 2004).[1] One of the key assumptions underlying the theories behind these studies is that broader interests are better situated to use the initiative process, providing an additional motivation for determining if citizen groups are responsible for ballot measures. The other side, composed mainly of politicians, journalists and a few academics, argues that the initiative process is in fact another way for business to get what it wants (Broder 2000; Schrag 1998; Smith 1998).

The goal of this paper is to provide additional information on which category of groups use the initiative process. To do this I examine how a variety of factors influence the frequency of ballot measures across all initiative states from 1976 to 2000. Primary among these factors are the number of economic and citizen groups in each state. States with more citizen groups having more initiatives is consistent with the argument that they benefit more from its use and that it has not been co-opted by economic interests. In addition, I also study the frequency of initiatives dealing with specific issues including taxation, civil rights and the environment in order to obtain a better understanding of how citizen and economic groups use the process and which areas may be most affected by their activity. Besides interest groups, I also study the effect on initiative use of state regulations governing ballot access and state economic and political conditions. Previous studies of initiative use (Banducci 1998; Matsusaka and McCarty 2001; Price 1975) have not examined the role of state interest group populations and did not explore variation in the frequency of initiatives in different issue areas.

The next section of the paper develops the argument for the link between citizen interest groups and initiative use, paying particular attention to studies of sponsorship and proposal. These studies are important for my argument because they provide individual-level evidence of citizen group involvement in the initiative process. In the following section I discuss the data and the empirical model I use. The findings of this model indicate that states with more citizen groups have more initiatives overall and in specific issue areas whereas states with more economic groups experience no change or actually have fewer initiatives. Further, initiative use is greater in states experiencing budgetary difficulties, in states with greater racial diversity and in states with less stringent qualification hurdles. Finally, I conclude by discussing the implications these findings have for our understanding of the effect of the initiative process on political representation as well as their implications for initiative reform.

Who Uses and Benefits from the Initiative Process?

Much of our expectations about what types of groups benefit from the initiative process is guided by our theoretical understanding of the way that groups use it to influence policy outcomes. In particular, Gerber (1999) argues that citizen groups have a comparative advantage in using the initiative process because they possess the financial and personnel resources required to overcome the hurdles to successful initiative proposal. Economic groups, on the other hand, rely more on financial resources and are better equipped to fight initiatives rather than propose and pass them on their own. Empirical support is provided by examining initiative sponsorship, contributions and success rates.

Based on this conclusion, Boehmke (2002, 2005) argues that if citizen groups are better situated to avail themselves of the initiative process, then we should see evidence of this not just in their use of the initiative process, but in their broader patterns of mobilization and lobbying behavior. Specifically, if access to the initiative process disproportionately benefits citizen groups, then we would expect to see more of them mobilize to take advantage of it. Further, the types of lobbying strategies that they rely on, even when influencing the legislature, should reflect their ability to propose an initiative. Both of these predictions are supported by empirical evidence.

Both of these studies argue and provide evidence that citizen groups profit more from the initiative process. Further, this conclusion is consistent with changes in the number and behavior of citizen groups in initiative states.[2] Extending these conclusions to sponsorship of measures suggests that an increase in the number of citizen groups should lead to an increase in the number of ballot measures in a state. Of course, the need to rely on the initiative process may depend on their size relative to economic interest groups. If the number of citizen groups increases, but the number of economic interests remains constant, then citizen groups may accomplish more through the legislature and have to rely on the initiative process less. This logic implies that citizen groups use the initiative process to counteract the influence of economic interests. While this may certainly be the case, it is important to remember that citizen groups are better equipped to use the initiative process. This implies that they do so not just because they feel they have no alternative, but also because they are more effective at it. Thus determining whether states with more citizen groups use the initiative process more is an important test of the theoretical arguments underlying these studies.

In addition to these theoretical studies, a variety of empirical studies have examined initiative sponsorship to determine whether citizen or economic groups support or oppose specific ballot measures. These studies provide important individual level evidence that a greater number of initiatives are sponsored by citizen groups. In fact, when combined with the fact that citizen groups comprise a smaller part of state interest group populations, the fact that they sponsor more initiatives than economic groups indicates an even greater importance of the initiative process for citizen groups.

The first two studies are similar in that they both examine what type of interests sponsor specific measures on the ballot. Donovan, Bowler, McCuan and Fernandez (1998) examine a sample of all California general election initiatives from 1986 to 1996 and find that thirty-nine of the fifty-three initiatives during this period were supported by diffuse interests (74%) while narrow interests supported the other fourteen. Ernst (2001) takes a similar approach for all initiatives proposed between 1898 and 1995, breaking the analysis into three time periods. The results for the last time period indicate that a majority of initiatives (56%) receive support from his Other category while the Narrow-Material category supports the other 44%. Both studies find that measures supported by narrow interests are less likely to pass than those supported by broader interests, further bolstering the evidence that citizen groups are better able to use the initiative process than economic groups.[3]

The final study of initiative involvement focuses on interest groups' attempts to propose measures rather than sponsorship of measures that qualify. Boehmke (2003) uses survey data from a random sample of all groups registered to lobby in Arizona and Oregon that includes a ques-

tion about whether a group was involved in favor of a ballot measure on a specific issue of their choosing.[4] The results indicate that groups with more revenue are significantly less likely to support potential initiatives. The effect of membership, however, is found to be contingent on resources: groups with larger memberships are significantly more likely to get involved, especially when they have the financial resources to qualify an initiative. These findings are consistent with Gerber's (1999) argument that groups need both financial and personnel resources to succeed at the ballot. Given that citizen groups are the most likely to meet this profile, the evidence indicates that they are more likely to attempt to use the initiative process than economic groups.

Combined, these studies all provide theoretical arguments or empirical evidence that citizen groups have a comparative (and probably an absolute) advantage in using the initiative process relative to economic groups. This implies that states with more citizen groups should see greater initiative usage, which is the primary hypothesis tested in this paper. And while some of these studies show that initiatives are more often sponsored by citizen groups, we can not conclude that citizen groups sponsor initiatives more often absent a measure of how prevalent they are in a state. Yet it is this conclusion that is more important for understanding the effect of the initiative on representation.

Frequency of Initiative Use

The few studies that examine the frequency of statewide initiative measures (i.e., Price 1975; Banducci 1998; Matsusaka and McCarty 2001) do not consider the role of interest group populations,

but along with other research on the initiative process they suggest a variety of important measures that should be controlled for. In this section I review these studies and discuss the importance of other state characteristics in influencing initiative proposals. In general, the different factors can be divided into four categories: economic, political, social and regulatory.

The role of regulations has been discussed in most studies of the initiative process — the link between these hurdles and qualifying measures for the ballot is best elucidated in Gerber (1999), but most formal models of the initiative process all conclude that the magnitude of its effect depends directly on how much it costs to make a proposal (Boehmke 2005; Gerber 1999; Matsusaka and McCarty 2001).[5] There are a variety of hurdles to overcome between drafting a proposal and ultimately passing it, but the largest are those related to signature gathering. This includes the number of signatures to be gathered, the time period in which to gather them and how they must be distributed across the state.[6] These different requirements for qualification have a sizable impact on the number of measures that qualify for the ballot: in California only 25% of titled measures end up qualifying (Shelley 2002). Thus any analysis of initiative use must account for variation in regulations governing ballot access.

In addition to regulatory considerations, characteristics of a state can influence when citizens and groups choose to propose ballot measures. For example, ballot measures may be a response to dissatisfaction with government's management of the economy, leading to more ballot measures in times of fiscal difficulties. In addition to economic considerations, social characteristics may also matter. In particular, the initiative process has often been criticized for targeting minority groups, suggesting that states with more racial diversity may have more initiatives. Hajnal, Ger-

ber and Louch (2002) argue that while initiatives that specifically target minority groups may be rare — only 5% in California over the last thirty years — the effects of other proposals may be disproportionately felt by minority groups.[7] Besides attempts by the majority to restrict minority rights, Matsusaka and McCarty (2001) argue that larger population size and greater heterogeneity increase uncertainty about voters' preferences, leading to more ballot measures.

Finally, political characteristics of a state besides interest groups may also matter. For example, states under divided government may find it more difficult to pass new legislation, leading to more initiatives. Changes in legislative professionalism may influence legislators ability to forge compromise, which would decrease the number of initiatives (Price 1975), or may alienate voters and produce politicians beholden to campaign contributions and the groups that provide them, leading to more initiatives (Banducci 1998). Lastly, the partisanship of elected officials and voters might also affect the number of ballot measures.

Sources of Variation in Statewide Initiative Use

Initiative Use

Data on initiative use are available from the Initiative and Referendum Institute's website for each year from 1898 to 2001.[8] In this paper I examine measures for the period 1976-2000 and only consider those sponsored by citizens, excluding legislatively-referred measures.[9] This period is chosen for a few reasons.[10] First, it corresponds to what is considered the modern period of initiative use, which saw a resurgence in attention to and use of the process after relative dormancy

in the middle decades of the twentieth century. While this resurgence began in the 1970s, the passage of Proposition 13 in California in 1978 is often viewed as a watershed in the initiative's history (Cronin 1989; Magleby 1984). Second, limitations on data availability make it increasingly difficult to obtain valid measures for many key independent variables as one moves back in time. This is specifically problematic for data on state interest group populations, which go back only to 1975. Lastly, this time period allows me to offer a better comparison between my results and similar studies.

In addition to the total number of initiatives, I also study the frequency of ballot measures in different issue areas.[11] These data are useful for a few reasons. First, if larger citizen group populations do generate more initiatives, I can obtain a more detailed estimate of which issue areas they are most active in. Second, the effect of citizen groups may be expected to be more prevalent in certain issue areas. Evidence that the size of citizen group populations matter more in these areas would increase our confidence in the underlying causal logic that more citizen groups lead to more initiatives.

The dependent variable for the analysis is formed by summing the number of initiatives that appear on a state's ballot over a two year election cycle. Thus the number of initiatives on all statewide California ballots in 1975 and 1976 form the first observation for California, those in 1977 and 1978 form the second observation, etc. As with some previous studies of initiative use, I use election cycles as the unit of analysis for a few reasons. Since some states allow initiatives on odd-year or primary ballots, studying the number per two-year election cycle makes the dependent variable comparable across states.[12]

This process is repeated for initiatives in the eleven different subject categories coded by Braunstein (2004). Because the total number of initiatives is not that large — the average per state per election cycle is only 2.7 — partitioning them into eleven issue areas produced a few categories that were not amenable to regression analysis. Specifically, I am unable to obtain reliable estimates for the following six categories: regulation of business and labor; health, welfare and housing; civil service and public employee compensation; education; transportation; and miscellaneous.[13] Yet even without these categories, I am left with five issue areas that represent a variety of topics: government and political process; public morality; revenue and taxation; civil liberties, civil rights and law and order; and environment, energy and land use. Further, seventy-nine percent of all initiatives fall into these five categories.[14] One problem with these different categories is that I have no information about whether measures reflect the interests of citizen groups or economic groups. For example, the public morality category might be expected to reflect the concern of citizen groups, but includes many gambling measures that are often sponsored by and intended to benefit economic groups. Yet despite this complication, analysis of the specific issue areas can provide a more nuanced understanding of how different factors influence initiative use.

0.1 Empirical Model

Since the dependent variable is a count of the number of initiatives that qualify for the ballot, the empirical model that I estimate is one designed for count data. Event count models such as Poisson and negative binomial regression are superior to linear regression models for these type of data. In fact, linear regression models have been shown to produce biased coefficients when estimated on

count data (King 1988). This is a potential problem for some previous studies of initiative use, as they rely on linear regression models (Banducci 1998). Other studies of initiative use have relied on the more appropriate Poisson model. While the negative binomial and Poisson are similar, the negative binomial is more general because it allows for overdispersion.[15] This difference is important because while ignoring overdispersion does not affect the Poisson coefficient estimates, it can lead to standard errors that are too small (King 1989).[16]

There are two processes that are commonly used to motivate overdispersion, both of which are likely relevant for initiative sponsorship. Heterogeneity occurs when unobserved phenomena within a state influence the number of proposals that reach the ballot. For example, if the rate of sponsorship of initiatives is different across issue areas or across potential sponsors within issue areas, then the data would exhibit overdispersion.[17] Contagion occurs when the occurrence of an event in one time period increases the chance of additional events in the same time period, leading to a form of clumping. In the context of initiative proposal, contagion can arise through the use of counter-initiatives to help defeat proposals already on the ballot (Banducci 1998). As an example, California had five initiatives on the ballot in 1988 dealing with auto insurance reforms; sponsors of these measures included the insurance industry, trial lawyers and consumer groups (Lupia 1994).

0.2 Empirical Measures of Interest Groups and State Characteristics

To test my main hypothesis about the relationship between the size of state citizen group and economic populations and the number of measures appearing on statewide ballots I used Gray and Lowery's (1996) data on the number of interest groups registered to lobby in each state in 1975,

1980 and 1990. To control for state regulatory, social, political and economic characteristics, I gathered a variety of data to measure various components of these factors.

The most important variables, however, are the data on interest group populations. Gray and Lowery used state lobbying registrations to count the number of organizations that were active in each state; they also counted the number of organizations active in ten subcategories. Following previous studies (Boehmke 2002), I combine these ten categories into two, which I label economic and citizen groups.[18] Since these data are available only in three years, I use them to construct decennial measures for each state.

Because a lot of information may be lost or ignored by filling in the key variable in this way, it is important to point out that more appropriate methods such as multiple imputation were not feasible due to the large amount of missing data.[19] Failing to fill in the missing values this way, I performed a couple of checks to see if the decennial measures were artificially influencing my findings. First, I used linear interpolation and extrapolation on a state-by-state basis and found that the results were unaffected. Second, I re-ran the analysis using only observations that are directly proximate to the years with valid interest group measures. Despite the fact that this meant a loss of over 50% of the data, the conclusions were again the same as those I report. Given these findings, then, I am confident that the limitations in my measures of interest group populations are not influencing my findings.

To test the effect of regulations governing ballot access and to control for important differences in the type of initiatives that can be proposed in a state, I use data from the Initiative and Referendum Institute's website as well as the *Book of the States*. First, I include indicator variables for

whether a state allows statutory initiatives, whether it allows constitutional initiatives and whether it allows both. Since this covers all possible categories, I do not estimate a constant in the regression model. Statutory initiatives are usually easier to qualify, though they are also generally easier to overturn if they pass. On balance, however, I expect states that allow statutory initiatives to have more ballot measures than states that only allow constitutional initiatives; states with both should have the most.

In addition, I include a variety of measures that help indicate how difficult and costly it would be to qualify a measure. First, I include a measure of the signature requirement to qualify an initiative, which is usually a percentage of the turnout in the previous general or gubernatorial election.[20] Second, I included an indicator variable for whether a state has a signature distribution requirement, which increases the cost of qualification by mandating that signatures must come have a broader geographic composition.[21] Third, I include two variables to measure the length of time in which to gather signatures. The first is the actual circulation period measured in days; the second is whether the state has any limitation on this period at all. Fourth, I include a variable for whether a state imposes a single-subject restriction on ballot measures. Single subject restrictions can discourage use by making it harder to qualify and pass a proposal, but they also may produce more proposals since initiatives encompassing multiple issues must be broken into their separate issue components.[22] Finally, I include a variable for whether states allow initiatives on off-year and primary ballots. While I attempt to control for this through the construction of the dependent variable, there may still be variation in the total number measures proposed.[23]

Besides interest group and initiative regulations, I include a variety of measures of state char-

acteristics. First among these are measures of state political characteristics. To test for partisanship effects I include variables for whether the governorship and state legislature are controlled by Republicans; I also include a measure of voter ideology to test whether this influences initiative use, particularly in different issues areas.[24] I expect that liberal states may have more initiatives overall due to its history as a progressive institution and a potentially greater concern with post-material, quality-of-life issues that legislatures may be slower to respond to.[25] In addition, I include a measure of legislative professionalism. These predictions and findings for this variable are diverse. Price (1975) notes that initiatives have often been viewed as arising due to legislative failure to forge compromise between competing interests. One might therefore expect more professionalized legislatures to be better equipped to forge compromises. On the other hand, Banducci (1998) expects more professional legislatures to lead to more initiatives for three reasons: 1) public opinion may be more less supportive of the legislature in states with professionalized legislatures; 2) legislators may be more dependent on interest groups for campaign money and therefore less willing to take sides; and 3) legislators may be able to raise a broader range of issues, some of which they will not be able to resolve. These three considerations result in more groups taking the initiative route in professionalized states. Given the different directions of these predictions, I have no prior expectation regarding the net effect of legislative professionalism on initiative use.

To test whether the initiative process is often used as a response to larger minority group populations, I include a measure of state racial diversity. This measure is constructed by taking one minus sum of the squared proportions of five different racial categories from decennial census data: $Diversity = 1 - (white^2 + black^2 + asian^2 + hispanic^2 + native\ american^2)$.[26] Other controls for state populations were not found to be significant and were omitted from the final results. Im-

portantly, this includes a measure of state population, which Matsusaka and McCarty (2001) argue captures uncertainty about legislative outcomes.[27]

Lastly, I control for state economic conditions. Specifically, I include a measure of net state budget surplus to measure voters' potential discontent with state government performance.[28] When states are running a deficit, groups may be motivated to propose initiatives to fight for spending in particular areas or because voters may be more likely to support new policies when current ones seem to be failing. I also included a variety of other measures of state economic conditions, including real income per capita, income growth and long-term state debt and found none of them had even a near-significant effect.

In general, I have no particular expectation about how these factors might vary across different issue areas, but some factors are likely to matter more in some areas relative to others. For example, it seems likely that minority diversity would influence the number of civil rights initiatives more than the number of environmental initiatives; economic factors may matter most for taxation and revenue initiatives. Matsusaka and McCarty (2001) argue that uncertainty may be particularly important for initiatives relating to taxation issues.

1 Findings for Interest Groups and Initiative Use

The results for the negative binomial regression for the number of initiatives appearing on statewide ballots per two-year election cycle are presented in Table 1. The first column of results is for the overall total number of initiatives on the ballot; the following columns present the results for

the five issue areas in which I was able to obtain meaningful estimates.[29] The most important conclusions should be taken from the combined results since the different issue areas often contain few proposals and may have more heterogeneity in terms of whose interests are represented by proposals.

[Insert Table 1 here.]

The most relevant variable for testing my hypothesis is the measure of the number of citizen groups in a state. This variable has a positive and highly significant effect on the total number of initiatives that appear. Further, the effect for citizen groups is larger in magnitude than for economic groups, suggesting that changes in the number of citizen groups increase initiative use more than changes in the number of economic groups. In fact, the estimated coefficient for economic groups is negative and significant, indicating that adding more economic groups actually decreases initiative use. Taken together, these results are consistent with my argument that the initiative process is most beneficial for citizen groups.[30]

Because these results form the test of my central hypothesis, I estimated a few additional specifications to rule out some alternate explanations. First, it may be the case that citizen groups use the initiative process only when economic groups are disproportionately numerous. To test this, I included an interaction term for the number of citizen and economic groups. The coefficient for the interaction was not significant, indicating that citizen group use of the initiative process is not predicated on the number of economic groups.[31] Second, citizen groups may propose initiatives when they are few and find it less necessary to propose them when they are many. To test this, I re-ran the analysis with the number of citizen groups and the number squared. The results indicate

the exact opposite: the coefficients for both variables are positive.[32]

Comparing the results across the five issue areas indicates that both types of groups matter for different issues, but always in the same direction as for the total number of initiatives. The effect of citizen groups is found to be positive and at least weakly significant in three areas: government, taxation ($p = 0.102$) and environment. Economic groups are only found to have a significant effect for government initiatives, which include measures dealing with term limits, campaign finance, government organization and administration.

These results indicate that direct legislation still provides an important tool that traditionally under-represented interests use to attempt to further their goals. The question remains, however, as to the size of this effect. To obtain an estimate of the substantive effect of these and other variables, I performed a series of first difference calculations. These calculations indicate the effect that a change in an independent variable has on the number of initiatives in a hypothetical state, holding the other variables constant.[33] The first difference calculations for citizen groups indicate an increase of 2.1 initiatives; for economic groups the effect was the same, but in the opposite direction. Given that the average number of initiatives per two-year election cycle is 2.7, these both represent sizable changes.

Because there are so many more economic groups than citizen groups, the net effects cancel out. If I instead set the number of groups for my hypothetical state at the values for California in 1990 and then add one hundred of both types of groups, the number of initiatives is predicted to increase by two-thirds. The estimates can also help explain why some states have more initiatives than others. For example, Oregon and Washington both have about 215 citizen groups in 1990,

yet because Washington has 559 economic groups to Oregon's 409 the model predicts one fewer initiative per two-year cycle. Turning to variation across issue areas, similar first differences for my hypothetical state indicate that citizen groups have the greatest effect — about one-half an initiative — on tax and environment initiatives and a smaller effect of 0.15 proposals for government initiatives. The only significant effect for economic groups is for government initiatives and the first difference is -0.25.

In terms of regulatory considerations, most of the hurdles to initiative proposal are found to have significant and sizable effects. States with greater signature thresholds have fewer total initiatives and fewer initiatives in all issue areas except government. The first difference overall is almost two fewer initiatives; the effect is greatest for tax initiatives (-0.5), then environmental initiatives (-0.4), then civil rights initiatives (-0.33). Distribution requirements also have a large effect, leading to two fewer initiatives per year with the largest effects among civil rights and environmental initiatives (about -0.4). A similar finding results for circulation periods. Finally, both single subject laws and allowing initiatives on primary and off-year ballots influence the total number of proposals, though the latter actually decreases the total number of initiatives. Examining the different issue areas shows some variety in this finding, as only tax initiative are decreased and government and morality initiatives are increased.

Now consider the effect of other state-level political and demographic characteristics. Partisanship is found to matter in a variety of ways. The party of the governor does not significantly impact the number of initiatives, but states with Republican-controlled legislatures have significantly fewer total initiatives, driven mostly by a decrease in tax initiatives. Citizen ideology, on

the other hand, has a more consistent effect overall and across the different issue areas. States that are more liberal have more of all types of initiatives and the effect is insignificant only for morality initiatives. Again, the effect is greatest for civil rights and environmental initiatives, with a first difference of about 0.75 initiatives per election cycle.

Other characteristics of the legislature do matter, as demonstrated by the significant and negative coefficient on legislative professionalism. States with more professionalized legislatures have almost one fewer initiative. This finding is the opposite of those obtained by Banducci (1998) and Price (1975).[34] In particular, legislative professionalism appears to influence tax initiatives, but not other kinds. While clearly not a definitive answer, my results suggest that the ability of more professional legislatures to mediate disputes may outweigh contrary effects such as a greater reliance on interest group contributions or an expansion in the set of issues raised.

I also find that state racial diversity matters. States that are more diverse have more initiatives overall, with a first difference of over two initiatives. In particular, diversity increases the number of government and taxation initiatives, with the relative effect greatest for taxation initiatives.[35] Keeping in mind that many of the issue areas combine measures that reflect the desires of vastly different types of interests, these results are more consistent with the argument that initiatives caused by diversity may either indirectly target minorities or may merely be a reflection of uncertainty. Finally, my results indicate that when states are facing budgetary crunches more initiatives appear on the ballot, particularly tax initiatives.

2 Discussion

The empirical results in this paper provide evidence consistent with views of the initiative process as a tool for traditionally under-represented citizen interest groups. States with more citizen groups experience greater initiative usage; states with more economic groups experience less usage. This result confirms my prediction based on existing theoretical (Boehmke 2005; Gerber 1999) and empirical evidence (Boehmke 2002; Boehmke 2003; Donovan, Bowler, McCuan and Fernandez 1998; Ernst 2001; Gerber 1999) and provides evidence that supports one of the key assumption of those theories. On the other hand, it runs contrary to concerns that the initiative process has now come under the purvey of wealthy, economic interests (Broder 2000; Smith 1998). Further, it appears that variation in citizen group populations is particularly important for certain issue areas, namely governance, taxation and environment initiatives.

One concern that may arise about these results is that they are based on an aggregate relationship and may suffer from problems associated with ecological inference. Namely, initiative use may be greater in states with more citizen groups not because citizen groups use the initiative process more often, but because their increased power forces economic groups to use the initiative more often. Yet this alternate interpretation seems unlikely based on my results and those of other studies. First, I found no evidence of an interaction effect between the size of economic and citizen groups populations, suggesting that use by one set of groups is not contingent upon the size of the other set. Second, I found no impact of the relative size of the two groups. In addition, other studies that use individual-level data or examine initiative sponsorship find that citizen groups are the ones sponsoring the initiatives. Lastly, this alternate explanation does not explain why states

with more economic groups experience fewer initiatives. Overall, then, the evidence appears to be supportive of the argument that citizen groups are directly responsible for increased use of the initiative process.

That being said, a couple caveats are in order. First, while I have attempted to provide some insight into how groups influence initiative use in different issue areas that account for almost eighty percent of all initiatives, I do not have data on whose interests those initiatives represent. This may cloud my findings across issue areas somewhat; certainly it would be useful for future work to separate initiatives into those that benefit broader interests and those that benefit narrow interests to provide a more nuanced perspective on this question. Further, analyzing the passage rates of different measures may also help clarify who benefits from the initiative process. Second, by focusing on initiatives on the ballot, I only study the direct use of the initiative process and have ignored any possible indirect effects that it may have on policy. Despite these limitations, this study does add an important piece to our understanding of how the size of citizen and economic interest group subpopulations affect the frequency of initiative use; its findings are consistent with individual-level studies showing that citizen groups use the initiative process more than economic groups.

Considerations about how groups use the initiative process must be taken into account by legislators and other proponents of initiative reform. Increasing the difficulties associated with qualifying an initiative for the ballot would hurt the citizen groups the most. Thus restricting ballot access would erode the beneficial effect of the initiative process in terms of reducing bias in interest representation. My findings indicate that qualification hurdles have a substantively large effect

on the frequency of use; examining particular issue areas indicates that their effect is largest for areas citizen groups may be more active in, such as civil rights and environmental initiatives. As Gerber (2001) notes, regulations interact in many ways and changing one may have unintended consequences for the efficacy of others. Further, the consequences of reforms may not be felt equally by interests representing different segments of society. Calls for reform should take into account the fact that they would most likely hurt broader interests more than narrow interests.

Notes

[1]This is a simplification of the politics surrounding the adoption of the initiative and referendum during the Progressive era. See Cronin (1989) and Magleby (1984) for more information. Cain and Miller (2001) provide an extended discussion of the different goals of Populist and Progressive reformers at the time.

[2]These findings are important for the current argument because most theoretical studies of the initiative process conclude that there is not only a direct effect revealed through use of the initiative process, but also an indirect effect that can increase the ability of groups to get what they want from the legislature. If the indirect effect is large for economic groups, it could cancel out the direct effect for citizen groups. These studies that show that the empirical effects of the initiative process are greater for citizen groups suggest that the total, combined effects are also greater for citizen groups.

[3]The lower success rate for economic groups may be caused by a variety of factors such as lack of appropriate resources, sponsorship of less popular issues and strategic choices that lead economic groups to sponsor initiatives for reasons other than directly influencing policy (Gerber 1999).

[4]These data therefore may be a better measure of who seeks to benefit from the initiative process since they include attempts to sponsor measures that may ultimately fail to reach the ballot (or that may be withdrawn due to legislative action).

[5]Matsusaka and McCarty (2001) go so far as to formally state the prediction that states with greater proposal costs have fewer initiatives.

[6]In addition, see Tolbert, Lowenstein and Donovan (1998) for a discussion of the various regulations and procedures governing ballot access.

[7]The authors subsequently perform an extensive test of whether ethnic minorities find themselves on the wrong side of initiatives and find that this is the case in only a very small number of initiatives (Hajnal, Gerber and Louch 2002). A more critical conclusion is made by Gamble (1997), though see Bowler and Donovan (1998).

[8]The URL is http://www.iandrinstitute.org.

[9]Legislative measures are often procedural in nature, such as with bond issues. Further, they are not subject to the same qualification requirements as citizen initiatives.

[10]The only state to adopt the initiative process over this period is Mississippi, which did so in 1993. It enters the data set at that point.

[11]These data were made available to me by Richard Braunstein and were gathered in part to update the data available from the Initiative and Referendum Institute. Discussion and analysis of the updated data for a variety of topics, including initiative subject matter, can be found in Braunstein (2004, see esp. Ch. 6).

[12]Banducci (1998) also uses two-year cycles. Matsusaka and McCarty (2001) use five-year cycles due to a lack of variation in many of their independent variables.

[13]By reliable I mean that the estimates failed to converge after hundreds of iterations, that the (unconverged) estimates often exhibited coefficients that were orders of magnitude bigger than in the analysis of all issues, that the estimates often lacked standard errors and that the likelihood was not concave. In all but one of these categories, the number of non-zero observations is less than 12%; only one of the other five has fewer than 20% zeros. I did find that if I pooled these six categories into one miscellaneous category that the results were quite similar to the results for the overall total number of initiatives.

[14]By category the proportion of all initiatives in each of these five areas is: 0.23 for government, 0.10 for morality, 0.21 revenue and taxation, 0.10 civil rights, 0.14 environment and energy. All of the other categories were less than 0.06 of the total with the exception of business regulation (0.10).

[15]The Poisson assumes that the mean is equal to the variance ($E[Y] = Var[Y]$), known as equidispersion, whereas the negative binomial allows the variance to be greater than the mean. There are different ways to allow for overdispersion, but the two most common allow for constant or mean overdispersion. I report results for mean overdispersion $Var(Y_i) = E[Y_i](1+\alpha E[Y_i])$, but little difference was found. See Cameron and Trivedi (1998) for more information.

[16]Another possibility is that the variance is less than the mean, known as underdispersion. This case, along with the other two (constant overdispersion and equidispersion) can simultaneously be estimated using King's generalized event count model (King 1989). Unlike Matsusaka and McCarty's (2001) results, my results for total initiative use and use in some of the subcategories exhibit some small amounts of overdispersion.

[17]In addition, there may be unobserved heterogeneity across states. I allowed for this by estimating a random effects Poisson model and found no meaningful differences compared to the negative binomial estimates.

[18]The economic category combines the agriculture, mining, construction, finance, trade, service, transportation and manufacturing subpopulations while social and government groups comprise the citizen category. Gray and Lowery also combine the latter two categories to form their non-profit category. Measures for these variable were not available for Utah and Nevada prior to 1990.

[19]Specifically, I attempted to employ multiple imputation (King, Honaker, Joseph, Scheve and Singh 2001) using Amelia (Honaker, Joseph, King, Scheve and Singh 2000) to estimate the missing values, but the program either indicated that too much data are missing (almost all of the missing data is found in these two variables) or, if I ignored the time-series cross section nature of the data, just produced imputed values that appeared to be random draws from the overall distribution of groups (i.e., that did not vary across states or over time as I would expect them to) and that exhibited an enormous amount of variation.

[20]For states that have only statutory or constitutional initiatives, I include the corresponding signature percentage requirement; greater requirements should be associated with fewer ballot measure. For states that have both I include the average of the two percentages. I tried other approaches for dealing with states that have both, including using the minimum or including separate variables for each. The estimated effects were identical, so I stick with the average for reasons of parsimony.

[21]Because of the variety of these requirements, I only include an indicator variables for whether a state has a distribution requirement. It would be difficult and potentially ad hoc to come up with a single indicator of how onerous the requirement is. For example, Alaska requires one signature from at least two-thirds of its election districts

whereas Massachusetts dictates that no more than twenty-five percent of all signatures may come from one county. More typical is Nebraska's requirement that five percent be obtained in at least two-fifths of its counties.

[22]They may make it harder to propose and pass initiatives since courts may be more likely to remove proposals from the ballot if they violate the law and it may be harder for groups to organize log-roll initiatives that offer something for everyone.

[23]There are a variety of other regulations that I could include, such as content restrictions, pre- and post-election review and drafting and title assistance. These regulations are unlikely to affect the costs of ballot access to the same degree as the ones already included and are probably intended more to influence the content of proposals rather than to serve as hurdles for ballot access. Including them produced few interesting results and did not affect the overall findings.

[24]I also tested for effects of divided government, since that may make it harder for groups to achieve their goals through the legislature (Mayhew 1991), but found no effect.

[25]I use the Erikson, Wright and MacIver (1993) measure of citizen ideology. Missingness in this variable results in the loss of observations for Alaska. See Berry (1999) for a study relating the rise of citizen groups over the last three decades to an increase in the presence and frequency of debates and legislation relating to post-material concerns.

[26]I was unable to find measures for almost all years between census data, thus my measure is constant within decades, much like the Hero and Tolbert (1996) measure (see also Lieberson 1969). There are a couple minor differences between our variables, which are essentially one minus a Hirschmann-Herfindahl index of diversity and are calculated by summing the squared proportion of all categories. The Hero and Tolbert measure omits Native Americans. Since data before 1980 do not include information on the size of the Hispanic population, I calculate the index for 1976 and 1978 using only the four available categories. Matsusaka and McCarty (2001) use a Herfindahl index constructed by summing the squared proportions of blacks, hispanics and those that are neither black nor hispanic.

[27]Population showed some marginal significance when minority diversity is unaccounted for, but these results seemed to be driven almost entirely by California's large population and extensive initiative use.

[28]This variable is constructed by taking the difference between state total revenues and state general expenditures, then dividing by revenue to make the measure comparable across states, and then by lagging it.

[29]Because Illinois' limited form of the initiative process only permits proposals relating to legislative process and organization, I only include it in the results for the total number of initiatives and for government initiatives.

[30]These findings are particularly impressive given the large correlation between the number of economic and citizen groups ($\rho = 0.95$). Yet despite this correlation, I found that if I only included one type of group in the analysis the conclusions do change: the effect of citizen groups is still positive and significant and the effect of economic groups is negative, though insignificant.

[31]I also explored whether the proportion of citizen groups mattered and found it does not.

[32]While they were positive, they were both marginally insignificant due to their large correlation. A joint test indicated a highly significant effect, however.

[33]I created a hypothetical state with a statutory initiative process and set the dichotomous variables at their mode and the continuous variables at their mean. The reported values represent the change in the predicted number of initiatives based on an increase from one standard deviation below the mean to one above the mean for continuous variables and from zero to one for dichotomous variables, holding other variables constant at their mean or mode. The simulations were performed in Stata using Clarify (Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2001). See King, Tomz and Wittenberg (2000) for more information.

[34]Note that we use different measures of legislative professionalism. Price uses measures of functionality and accountability compiled by the Citizen Conference on State Legislatures (Burns 1971) and Banducci uses the Squire (1992) measure, whereas I use a more recent one developed by King (2000), which varies by decade.

[35]This finding is consistent with Matsusaka and McCarty's (2001) prediction that the effect of uncertainty is particularly important for tax issues.

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Table 1: Negative Binomial Analysis of Number of Statewide Initiatives, 1976-2000

	Total	Government	Public Morality	Taxation & Revenue	Civil Rights & Law	Environment & Energy
Citizen Interest Groups	$0.297**$	$0.212*$	0.023	0.276	0.103	$0.408*$
	(0.071)	(0.111)	(0.150)	(0.169)	(0.246)	(0.214)
Economic Interest Groups	$-0.156**$	$-0.177**$	-0.115	-0.076	-0.164	-0.088
	(0.048)	(0.084)	(0.099)	(0.117)	(0.135)	(0.100)
Statutory Initiative	$1.790**$	$-1.501**$	$-1.261**$	$0.924**$	-0.234	0.415
	(0.223)	(0.419)	(0.389)	(0.390)	(0.790)	(0.438)
Constitutional Initiative	-0.815	$-2.608**$	$-1.651*$	$-1.776**$	-1.625	$-5.405**$
	(0.659)	(0.507)	(0.876)	(0.743)	(1.328)	(1.634)
Statutory and Constitutional	$1.519**$	$3.390**$	$2.620**$	$2.428**$	1.81	$6.234**$
	(0.693)	(0.582)	(0.814)	(0.816)	(1.498)	(1.683)
Signature Requirement	$-0.168**$	-0.046	$-0.179**$	$-0.208**$	$-0.196**$	$-0.238**$
	(0.029)	(0.047)	(0.035)	(0.048)	(0.078)	(0.063)
Unlimited Circulation	$0.466**$	$0.647**$	$0.645**$	0.259	$1.096*$	$0.956**$
	(0.181)	(0.232)	(0.278)	(0.289)	(0.560)	(0.466)
Circulation Period	$0.085**$	0.02	$0.163**$	0.025	0.156	$0.328**$
	(0.036)	(0.038)	(0.052)	(0.042)	(0.140)	(0.127)
Single Subject	$0.422**$	-0.097	0.404	$0.461**$	0.553	0.528
	(0.130)	(0.201)	(0.253)	(0.193)	(0.573)	(0.380)
Distribution Requirement	$-0.871**$	$-0.274*$	$-0.785**$	$-0.597**$	$-2.407**$	$-1.449**$
	(0.117)	(0.153)	(0.191)	(0.133)	(0.591)	(0.242)
Primary and Off Year Ballots	$-0.250**$	$0.323*$	0.187	$-0.554**$	-0.213	-0.436
	(0.127)	(0.195)	(0.145)	(0.172)	(0.442)	(0.322)
Republican Governor	-0.123	$-0.554*$	-0.306	0.134	0.323	0.272
	(0.105)	(0.307)	(0.290)	(0.195)	(0.333)	(0.209)
Republican Legislature	$-0.272**$	0.173	-0.263	$-0.427**$	-0.195	-0.189
	(0.127)	(0.249)	(0.416)	(0.185)	(0.319)	(0.223)
State Ideology	$3.270**$	$2.098**$	1.618	$2.485*$	$7.752**$	$7.865**$
	(0.633)	(0.843)	(1.128)	(1.283)	(3.201)	(2.322)
Legislative Professionalism	$-0.785*$	-0.168	-0.442	$-1.520**$	-0.226	-0.393
	(0.435)	(0.695)	(0.843)	(0.650)	(1.380)	(0.838)
Racial Diversity	$2.235**$	$3.275**$	0.852	$2.892*$	2.531	-0.78
	(0.964)	(1.400)	(1.657)	(1.587)	(3.664)	(1.457)
Budget Deficit	$-1.961*$	1.495	0.842	$-3.304*$	-2.081	0.98
	(1.147)	(2.064)	(2.351)	(1.953)	(2.628)	(1.548)
Time	0.011	$0.045**$	$0.044**$	-0.029	$0.052*$	-0.011
	(0.010)	(0.020)	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.028)	(0.017)
Overdispersion (α)	0.109	0.195	0.044	0.000	0.094	0.980
	(0.048)	(0.108)	(0.113)	(0.000)	(0.215)	(0.339)
Observations	277	277	264	264	264	264

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * Significantly different from zero at the 0.10 level. ** Significantly different from zero at the 0.05 level. Illinois only allows initiatives dealing with the legislature and is omitted from the other issue areas.