

INITIATIVE-CENTERED POLITICS

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The New Politics of Direct Democracy

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*To our wives, Leslie Janik and Valerie O'Regan,
who put up with our countless chats and endless hours
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FOREWORD

The importance of direct democracy in contemporary politics is no longer in question. Its importance has been well established over the last quarter century and well documented by academic scholars and political journalists. Most of this attention has focused on the effectiveness of direct democracy as a policy tool and its faithfulness (or lack thereof) to the democratic ideals it embodied for its Progressive-era founders.

Our goal in this volume is to bring together a diverse group of scholars who investigate the many aspects of direct democracy across multiple dimensions. Our intention is to build on a recent volume, *Citizens as Legislators* (Donovan, T., S. Bowler, and C. Tolbert. 1998. Columbus: Ohio State University Press). Our volume pays particular attention to trends as we enter an era of “New Progressivism,” with direct democracy as a key institution of the new millennium. In our view, direct legislation has become a “parallel legislature” that is a defining feature of how the nation is governed. And as this institution has become an important policy arena, its practices and processes across multiple levels of government have implications for policy outputs. In addition to an emphasis on current trends, we also focus on an often forgotten side of direct democracy—local ballot measures. Finally, we make a case for the expansion of study into a truly comparative nature across issue dimensions and levels of government.

The book expands the focus of direct democracy research in a number of ways. First, we establish the need to develop a comprehensive understanding of the major political players involved in the process. In Part I, a group of scholars explore the changing roles of voters, interest groups, and political parties. We already know that these roles are different than the roles envisioned by the Progressive reformers. Direct democracy was supposed to be a way for the voters to circumvent powerful interest groups and entrenched political party bosses. Many scholars argue that the process is now an additional tool of interest groups and political parties. The true story, however, is not that simple. As much as these groups changed direct democracy, direct legis-

lation also reshaped the strategic decisions and activities of these groups. Part I examines the current relationship between these groups and direct democracy.

Secondly, this book expands our understanding of direct democracy by integrating ethnic politics into its contents. Progressives hoped that the initiative process could serve as a powerful check on entrenched special interests controlling political parties and governmental institutions. When majority and minority are viewed in terms of ethnicity, however, direct democracy enters a whole new dynamic. In Part II, our contributors investigate direct democracy and minority rights, minority voting patterns on certain issues, as well as media coverage of these ballot propositions.

In Part III, we expand our study into an important but oftentimes overlooked area of initiative-centered politics. While most research focuses on high-profile state initiative campaigns, most occurrences of direct democracy are at the local level. For every Proposition 13 (California, 1978) there are hundreds of local bond measures. Most are nearly invisible for voters, observers, and scholars. Others are expensive and bitterly fought political battles. In Part III, David M. Paul and Clyde Brown look into an increasing use of direct democracy— stadium measures. Dan Smith, with the assistance of Sure Log, University of Colorado-Boulder, examines the impact of yet another stadium measure in Denver, Colorado. Questions about taxpayer-supported sports facilities are sometimes examined from the viewpoint of economic development or the effectiveness of their celebrity spokespeople (including our current president and former Texas Rangers owner, George Bush).

Finally in Part IV, M. Dane Waters, founder and president of the Initiative and Referendum Institute (<www.iandrinstiute.com>), and David McCuan examine likely directions for direct legislation across multiple institutional settings and at both the state and local levels.

We would like to thank our families, especially Leslie and Valerie, for their patience and guidance with this volume. In addition, we would like to thank the contributors for their patience and contributions. Last, we want to thank Bob Conrow and Keith Sipe of Carolina Academic Press for making this volume a reality. We hope our readers find the work's chapters of value for this important policymaking arena.

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