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Direct Democracy and Political Engagement of the Marginalized

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Direct Democracy and Political Engagement of the Marginalized

by

Jeong Hyun Kim

A dissertation presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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Jeong Hyun Kim

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Direct Democracy and Political Engagement of the Marginalized

by

Jeong Hyun Kim

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science,
Washington University in St. Louis, 2018.
Professor Margit Tavits, Chair

This dissertation examines direct democracy’s implications for political equality by focusing on how it influences and modifies political attitudes and behaviors of marginalized groups. Using cases and data from Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States, I provide a comprehensive, global examination of how direct democratic institutions affect political participation, especially of political minority or marginalized groups.

In the first paper, I examine whether the practice of direct democracy supports women’s political participation. I theorize that the use of direct democracy enhances women’s sense of political efficacy, thereby promoting their participation in the political process. I test this argument by leveraging a quasi-experiment in Sweden from 1921 to 1944, wherein the use of direct democratic institutions was determined by a population threshold. Findings from a regression discontinuity analysis lend strong support for
the positive effect of direct democracy on women’s political participation. Using web
documents of minutes from direct democratic meetings, I further show that women’s
participation in direct democracy is positively associated with their subsequent partici-
pation in parliamentary elections.

The second paper expands on the first paper by examining an individual-level mech-
anism linking experience with direct democracy and feelings of political efficacy. Using
panel survey data from Switzerland, I examine the relationship between individuals’
exposure to direct democracy and the gender gap in political efficacy. I find that direct
democracy increases women’s sense of political efficacy, while it has no significant effect
on men. This finding confirms that the opportunity for direct legislation leads women
to feel more efficacious in politics, suggesting its further implications for the gender gap
in political engagement.

In the third and final paper, I examine how direct democratic votes targeting ethnic
minorities influence political mobilization of minority groups. I theorize that targeted
popular votes intensify the general public’s hostility towards minority groups, thereby
enhancing group members’ perceptions of being stigmatized. Consequently, this creates
a greater incentive for minorities to actively engage in politics. Using survey data from
the United States, combined with information about state-level direct democracy, I find
that direct democratic votes targeting the rights of immigrants lead to greater political
activism among ethnic minorities with immigrant background.
These studies contribute to the extant study of women and minority politics by illuminating new mechanisms underlying mobilization of women and minorities and clarifying the causal effect of the type of government on political equality.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Inequality in political engagement poses an enduring challenge for representative democracies. Unequal participation leads to unequal representation, which in turn, leads to unequal influence. As Lijphart (1997, p.1) writes, “unequal participation becomes a major dilemma for representative democracy, because democratic responsiveness depends on citizen participation.” Scholars have sought to identify the conditions that support equal political participation. At the core of this scholarship is the role of political institutions. Many previous studies have demonstrated that political institutions that promote broader representation may contribute to political equality by encouraging participation of historically marginalized groups (Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Barnes and Burchard, 2013; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2010, 2012).

While these studies provide valuable insights into understanding the relationship between institutional conditions and political equality, they have neglected the role of political institutions that grant citizens participatory opportunities. This is a surpris-
ing oversight because direct democracy, a political process allowing ordinary citizens to deliberate and vote directly on laws, has become an integral part of policy formation in many democracies. Despite ample work documenting how direct democracy affects political attitudes and behaviors of the general population, we do not know as much about how it brings differing social groups to politics. However, the opportunity for direct legislation may have different psychological and behavioral impacts on groups that have varying experiences with the political system, which in turn, will affect political equality across these groups.

This dissertation examines direct democracy’s implications for political equality by focusing on how it influences and modifies political attitudes and behaviors of marginalized groups. The dissertation is broken into three papers. Using cases and data from Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States, I provide a comprehensive, global examination of how direct democratic institutions affect political participation, especially of political minority or marginalized groups.

In the first paper, I examine whether the practice of direct democracy supports women’s political participation. I theorize that the use of direct democracy enhances women’s sense of political efficacy, thereby promoting their participation in the political process. I propose that direct democracy leads to two channels that underpin women’s political engagement. First, its presence signals the openness of the system to women’s political activism. Second, it enables women to more closely observe how their political actions translate into changes in their lives, thereby solidifying the belief that they
do indeed have political influence as a group. I test this argument by leveraging a quasi-experiment in Sweden from 1921 to 1944, wherein the use of direct democratic institutions was determined by a population threshold. Findings from a regression discontinuity analysis lend strong support for the positive effect of direct democracy on women’s political participation. Extending this main analysis, I further test how women’s participation in direct democracy translates into their electoral participation. To do this, I analyzed web documents of minutes from direct democratic meetings in Swedish municipalities during this time period, and developed measures of women’s participation in these meetings. Using this unique dataset, I show that women’s participation in direct democracy is positively associated with their subsequent participation in parliamentary elections.

The second paper expands on the first paper by examining an individual-level mechanism linking experience with direct democracy and feelings of political efficacy. Using panel survey data from Switzerland, I examine the relationship between individuals’ exposure to direct democracy and the gender gap in political efficacy. I find that direct democracy increases women’s sense of political efficacy, while it has no significant effect on men. This finding confirms that the opportunity for direct legislation leads women to feel more efficacious in politics, suggesting its further implications for the gender gap in political engagement.

In the third and final paper, I examine how direct democratic votes targeting ethnic minorities influence political mobilization of minority groups. I theorize that targeted
popular votes intensify the general public’s hostility towards minority groups, thereby enhancing group members’ perceptions of being stigmatized. Consequently, this creates a greater incentive for minorities to actively engage in politics. Using survey data from the United States, combined with information about state-level direct democracy, I find that direct democratic votes targeting the rights of immigrants lead to greater political activism among ethnic minorities with immigrant background.

The findings of the first two papers have important implications for those who study women and politics. In the first paper, I show that women’s exposure to direct democratic institutions leads to their greater political participation thereby reducing the existing gender gap in participation. In the second paper, I develop and test an individual-level mechanism underlying this effect, where the use of direct democracy enhances women’s sense of political efficacy at a greater rate than men’s. The women and politics literature has primarily focused on the role of women’s representation at the elite level in promoting women’s political engagement at the mass level. Focusing exclusively on this top-down approach, however, may lead women and politics scholars to overlook a potential bottom-up mechanism, where increased participatory opportunities for citizens strengthen women’s political influence. My findings illuminate this alternative mechanism by demonstrating how political institutions that provide participatory opportunities at the mass level have important influence on women’s political orientations.

My dissertation also contributes to the literature on the effect of political decision rules, in general, and direct democracy, in particular. Previous studies direct democracy
have examined its effects on political knowledge and civic engagement of the general population (Schlozman and Yohai, 2008; Smith, 2002; Smith and Tolbert, 2004; Tolbert and Smith, 2005). This study offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between direct democracy and political engagement. In particular, I demonstrate that direct democracy’s impact on political engagement varies by political status within a purely representative system. These findings further provide insights into developing institutional mechanisms that ensure citizens’ political equality and subsequently, improve the democratic process. Finally, my findings will directly appeal to development community seeking to introduce participatory institutions in developing countries as a means to empower citizens and improve democratic governance, especially among minority and marginalized groups.
Chapter 2

Direct Democracy and Women’s Political Engagement

2.1 Introduction

Across the world, women’s engagement in politics tends to lag behind that of men. Research shows that women participate less frequently in political activities such as making campaign contributions, joining a political organization, persuading others to vote, or discussing politics with others (Burrell, 2004; Desposato and Norrander, 2009; Fraile and Gomez, 2017; Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Women’s lower propensity to engage in politics raises normative concerns, and has important policy consequences. Given that men and women tend to hold divergent political preferences (Aidt and Dallal, 2008; Alvarez and McCaffery, 2003; Gottlieb, Grossman and Robinson, 2016; Lott and Kenny, 1999), lower levels of political participation among women can produce policies
that are systematically biased against women’s preferences, which in turn can reinforce
gender inequalities in social and economic domains.

In this paper, I argue that the use of participatory institutions supports women’s po-
political activism. Specifically, I focus on the effects of direct democratic procedures. In
broader terms, direct democracy refers to political processes that allow ordinary citizens
to directly decide on laws rather than select representatives to make decisions on their
behalf (Matsusaka, 2005). The most widespread forms of direct democracy include citi-
zen initiatives, where citizens vote on fellow citizens’ policy proposals, and referendums,
in which citizens vote on a law already approved by the legislature. Direct democracy
also covers town meetings, in which citizens gather on a regular basis to make public
decisions. In several advanced democracies, most famously in the United States and
Switzerland, direct democratic procedures have become an integral part of the policy
making process across different levels of government.

I propose that the presence of direct democracy signals the openness of the system
to women’s political activism, and confirms that women are also competent to make
important contributions to political decision making. It also enables women to more
closely observe how their political actions translate into changes in their lives, thereby
increasing their sense of having political influence.

I test the effect of direct democracy on women’s political participation through lever-
aging a natural experiment in Sweden. Between 1919 and 1953, a population thresh-
old determined whether direct democratic institutions governed Swedish localities or
whether elected representatives governed it through a local council. This plausibly exogenous variation in local political institutions coincided with the introduction of universal suffrage in the country, providing a rare opportunity to identify the effect of local direct democratic institutions on women’s political participation, while controlling for their past behavioral patterns. Results from regression discontinuity (RD) analyses confirm that the presence of direct democracy has strong effects on women’s political participation. Extending this baseline analysis and using rich information from minutes of municipal meetings I find some evidence that women’s participation in direct democratic meetings is associated with their participation in subsequent parliamentary elections.

This paper makes three important contributions. First, it extends the literature on political institutions and women’s political inclusion. Most studies on this topic have focused on how electoral institutions, especially those that are expected to increase women’s representation, bring women closer to politics. Notably, many scholars have examined how the adoption of gender quotas in elections affects women’s presence in elected positions (Krook, 2009; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009; Tripp and Kang, 2008), access to political leadership (O’Brien and Rickne, 2016), and political engagement (Barnes and Burchard, 2013; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). My findings complement this research by showing that institutions that are not specifically designed to promote representation of women, such as direct democratic procedures, have unintended positive effects on women’s political inclusion. They also suggest that providing participatory
opportunities at the mass level has important impacts on women’s political orientations. This insight highlights the need to explore the role of broader institutional contexts in shaping women’s political behavior.

Second, this paper advances our understanding of developments of women’s political engagement by analyzing historical data from the early decades of women’s electoral participation. This builds on an emerging interest in the research on women and politics in utilizing historical data to test previously untestable arguments about women’s political behavior.

These studies have addressed how women’s economic status (Morgan-Collins and Teele, 2017), contextual stimuli (Corder and Wolbrecht, 2016), or electoral rules (Skorge, 2017) shaped women’s voting behavior in early 20th century. My paper makes a distinct contribution to this literature by examining how the availability of direct policy influence affected newly-enfranchised women’s participation in elections. Furthermore, both my theory and finding suggest that women’s participation in direct democratic procedures has durable implications for their subsequent political behavior. This is consistent with the recent evidence on the relationship between women’s earlier involvement in political activities and their political activism in the future (Carpenter and Moore, 2014).

Finally, this paper provides a new theoretical perspective on the relationship between direct democracy and marginalized groups. Some empirical studies have shown that direct democratic procedures tend to produce outcomes that are systematically biased against the interests of socially marginalized groups, such as racial and ethnic
minorities (Gamble, 1997; Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2015; Hajnal, 2009). Contrary to this, my study indicates that opportunities and experience under direct democracy may create some positive behavioral implications for marginalized groups. It further suggests that direct democracy helps citizens, who have been politically excluded and socially marginalized develop a sense of political efficacy, leading them to become more engaged in politics. This, in turn, may provide them greater political influence in the long run.

2.2 Previous Literature on Women’s Political Engagement

Why does women’s political engagement tend to lag behind men’s? Many attribute this to individual women’s limited access to political resources. Scholars have argued that differences in resources that enable political engagement, such as education and income, create political inequality across groups (Conway, 1991; Leighley and Nagler, 1992; Leighley and Vedlitz, 1999; Verba and Nie, 1972). With fewer financial, organizational, and civic resources, women on average face higher barriers to acquiring and processing political information than men (Verba, Burns and Schlozman, 1997). Moreover, as women tend to have more housework and caregiving responsibilities than men (Ferguson, 2013), devoting extra time to political activities becomes particularly costly for women.

Other studies suggest that differences in psychological dispositions, such as political efficacy or trust in government, may explain disproportionate rates of political partici-
pation between men and women (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001; Gimpel, Lay and Schuknecht, 2003; Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). In particular, scholars have argued that women tend to have lower levels of political efficacy vis-à-vis men, and this is largely due to historical marginalization of women in the political arena. In many societies, politics have been considered men’s activities, and women remain as unwelcome actors in the political arena (Jaros 1973, 44; Welch 1977). Within this context, women themselves tend to internalize traditional gender stereotypes, and thus, consider themselves unsuitable to participate in political activities at rates comparable to men’s (Inglehart and Norris, 2003).

More importantly, women’s structural underrepresentation in political bodies has created psychological barriers to female citizens’ engagement in politics. The exclusion of women from political power sends a strong signal to female citizens that they are subject to political hierarchy, and incompetent to influence political decision making (Atkeson, 2003; Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001; Hansen, 1997). Moreover, the low presence of female representatives is likely to produce policies that are less responsive to women’s interest (Bratton, 2005; Jones, 1997; Swers, 2005; Vega and Firestone, 1995), leading women to become skeptical about the system’s openness to their voice, as well as their ability to achieve desired policy outcomes.

While women’s political engagement globally lags behind that of men, there exists substantial variation in the level of women’s political participation across geographical units and over time. Previous studies have suggested several explanations of this vari-
First, scholars believed that contextual stimuli, such as the closeness of electoral competition, strongly influences women’s participation. They reasoned that women, especially in the early stage of suffrage, lacked the experience and socialization for voting. As a result, they will be more responsive to electoral incentives shaped by contextual factors than voters who are more experienced and thus, more inclined to vote (Kaufmann, Petrocik and Shaw, 2008; Kleppner, 1982). A study by Corder and Wolbrecht (2016) supports this reasoning by showing that turnout of newly-enfranchised women in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s was higher when the election was competitive and the difference in turnout between competitive and non-competitive states was much higher among women than men. Studies have also found that previous mobilizational activities, such as the suffrage movement (Corder and Wolbrecht, 2006) or petition canvassing (Skorge, 2016) increase women’s political participation.

Another explanation of variation in women’s participation is that the increase in women’s presence in political offices can attenuate psychological barriers to women’s political engagement (Atkeson and Carrillo, 2007; Barnes and Burchard, 2013; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006; Swers, 2002; Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2007). Extending this argument, studies have explored how political institutions that promote women’s descriptive representation affect women’s political participation. Notably, a growing body of work finds that the introduction of electoral gender quotas signals the system’s inclusiveness to women’s perspectives, legitimizes women’s presence in the political process, and consequently motivate women to engage with the politics at a greater rate (Bauer, 2012;
Bhavnani, 2009; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). More recently, Skorge (2017) finds that proportional representation (PR) systems has positive impacts on women’s electoral participation using the exogenous change in electoral institutions in early twentieth-century Norway.

In summary, previous studies showed that the political and institutional environment surrounding women can explain variation in women’s political participation. These studies, however, did not look at how the availability of direct policy influence might affect women’s participation.

2.3 Direct Democracy and Women’s Political Engagement

The subsections below will address the mechanisms I propose that can explain why direct democracy promotes women’s political engagement: signaling, informational, and spillover effects.

2.3.1 Signaling Effects of Direct Democracy

Scholars have long argued that where political institutions encompass broad views and interests in policy-making processes, citizens are more likely to engage in the political process, because they signal the openness of the political system to citizen, and thus altering their belief about their influence (Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Karp and Banducci, 2008; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2012; Wells and Krieckhaus, 2006). Build-
ing on this literature, I argue that the presence of direct democracy has signaling effects that can improve women’s belief about their political influence. Direct democracy provides opportunities to make meaningful input in policy-making processes to underrepresented groups, who otherwise would have few channels of political influence. The availability of such alternative channels of policy influence conveys a message to citizens that their voice is heard, independent of how well elected officials represent their interests. These signaling effects lead women to believe that the political system values their opinions, despite their exclusion and marginalization under representative institutions.

In nearly all democracies around the world, women have been severely underrepresented in political offices. As a consequence, policy-making processes do not adequately address women’s needs and interests (Carroll, 1984; Thomas, 1994), and tend to sideline legislation that promotes women’s socioeconomic status (Burrell, 1995; Jones, 1997; Swers, 2002), and women believe that politics is not for them and that getting involved is unlikely to achieve their desired policy outcomes (Verba, Burns and Schlozman, 1997). The presence of direct democratic institutions transmits a message that women can have important policy influence in spite of underrepresentation. This signaling effect of direct democracy is likely to have less impact on men, because their governments address their interests have been better addressed than women’s.

Another signaling effect consists of validation. Direct democracy offers an implicit confirmation that ordinary citizens are politically competent and trustworthy (Smith, 2002). This effect is also likely to be accentuated for women, because women have been
politically marginalized, and thus, are on average less confident about their political competency than men. Direct democracy functionally puts women’s opinions on equal footing with men’s.

### 2.3.2 Informational Effects of Direct Democracy

Direct democracy improves the supply of political information available to citizens. First, it can provide greater access to political information. Direct democratic processes usually involve intense campaigns and media coverage of politics, and stimulate informal conversations about politics among citizens, providing political information to citizens at a lower cost (Benz and Stutzer, 2004; Mendelsohn and Cutler, 2000; Smith and Tolbert, 2004).

Second, direct democracy increases citizens’ information about why and how their political participation matters. Representative democratic institutions often create policy through multiple and complex stages, which make it extremely challenging for ordinary citizens to track down how policy decisions are made (Powell, 2004). In contrast to this, most direct democratic decisions become final policy outcomes with fewer bargaining processes, than those made through legislative processes (Matsusaka, 2005). Thus, direct democracy makes policy-making process becomes more transparent and relatively easier to track. Ultimately, direct democracy can help individuals better observe how their input in decision-making translate into final policy outcomes.
Furthermore, direct democracy communicates the importance of politics and public
decisions more closely, by highlighting their tangible impacts. People engage in politics
at greater rates when they believe they have direct interests at stake in political deci-
sions (Campbell 2002; Soss 1999, Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, 392). For example,
previous studies suggest that experience with dramatic events, such as natural disasters
or crime victimization increase rates of political participation, as people begin to realize
the importance of politics in their lives (Bateson, 2012; Blattman, 2009; Fair et al., 2013).
Similarly, while women tend to show lower levels of political knowledge than men, pre-
vious studies have also argued that women are better informed than men about policy
issues that are more relevant to their lives (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Dolan, 2011).
For instance, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 146) find that women are equally knowl-
edgeable as men in local politics, because they perceive local issues as more directly
related to their lives than national issues.

Campaigns under representative institutions tend to center on a candidate or party’s
broad principles or general ideological stances, which ordinary citizens might find too
abstract and remote from their daily experiences. By contrast, direct democratic pro-
cedures focus on specific policies that often directly address citizens’ everyday needs
(Benz and Stutzer, 2004; Smith, 2002), such as employment, infrastructure, social insur-
ance, education, or family policy. By allowing citizens to directly decide on these issues
that have immediate and tangible consequences, direct democratic procedures can ef-
fectively highlight that their participation in politics can make important differences in their own lives.

Both signaling and informational mechanisms suggest that the presence of direct democracy motivates women to more actively participate in politics. These logics lead to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1 (Presence Hypothesis)** The presence of direct democracy will increase women’s political participation.

2.3.3 Spillover Effects of Direct Democracy

Direct democracy may encourage women’s political engagement by its mere presence as discussed above, but equally important, women’s actual participation in direct democratic procedures may have durable impacts on their political engagement. Importantly, direct democratic experiences can empower women with political skills and resources that enable political activism. Research suggests that social and political interactions provide political awareness and skills that promote later political activism. For example, there is evidence that black veterans were more likely to engage in civil rights movement than other southerners, because their military experience offered them both motivation and organizational resources for political activism (Parker, 2009). Thus, past experience of political engagement spills over into future engagement.

The spillover effects of political engagement are likely to be particularly evident among women, who typically have fewer opportunities to participate in politics than
men. A study supports this claim by showing that experience with antislavery petition canvassing led many American women to become active in later women’s rights campaigns (Carpenter and Moore, 2014). More recently, Arab women’s unprecedented participation in both online and offline political activism during the Arab Spring uprisings has led to substantial growths of feminist organizations in this region (Khamis, 2011).

In a similar vein, women’s participation in direct democracy may help them develop political awareness and civic skills. Under direct democracy, women can gain some hands-on experiences of policy-making, such as public deliberation of policies, evaluating different policy proposals, and resolving disagreements, which would be otherwise unavailable to them. As women gain these experiences in political processes, they become familiarized with their roles in the political arena, and enhance the beliefs about about their political influence. They can also acquire some important skills for political activism, such as the ability to process political information, articulate their policy preferences, and persuade others with opposing views, which in turn, can motivate them to seek political participation in other forms. Moreover, many direct democratic processes, particularly citizen assembly or town meetings, involve public deliberation, where individuals could develop capabilities to express their opinions, persuade others with opposing views, and resolve disagreements (Fishkin, 1991; Gastil, Deess and Weiser, 2002; Gutmann and Thompson, 2009). These skills motivate individuals to seek out more active roles in political activities.
It is also well established in the literature that the current political participation generates behavioral legacies for the future. Most notably, scholars argue that political participation is self-reinforcing and habit forming, because the repetition makes people more familiar and comfortable with a given form of action, and they develop conceptions of themselves as a civic-minded and politically involved citizens (Fowler, 2006; Franklin, 2004; Gerber, Green and Shachar, 2003). Research showing that immigrants who were politically active in their home countries tend to engage in politics in the host country at a greater rate than immigrants who were not supports this view (Eckstein, 2006).

Together, women’s direct democratic experiences can enhance their political consciousness and skills, thereby facilitating their deeper engagement in politics. This implies that women’s participation in direct democratic institutions spills over into participation in other political processes, which generates the following empirically observable implication:

**Hypothesis 2 (Spillover Hypothesis)** *After participating in direct democratic institutions, women will participate in other political activities at greater rates.*

### 2.4 Case Selection

I test my hypotheses on data from Swedish municipalities during the period of 1921 to 1944. In most observational data, it is extremely challenging to isolate the effect of a single political institution from the effects of unobserved confounders. Consequently,
research estimating the effect of political institutions based on cross-sectional data is often subject to endogeneity bias, which can undermine the reliability of the estimate. I overcome this methodological challenge by exploiting the unique institutional setting in Swedish municipalities and employing a regression discontinuity (RD) design. In this section, I describe the historical context of Sweden focusing on women’s political movement during this period and the institutional background of municipal reform in 1918.

2.4.1 Women in Swedish Politics

Swedish women gained political rights later than women in their neighboring countries. In Finland, men and women simultaneously achieved universal suffrage in 1906, and women in Norway were allowed to vote in both general and local elections since 1913 (Rokkan, 1970, 87). In Sweden, it was not until 1921 that universal woman suffrage was introduced. In principle, the voting right in Sweden was based on the ownership of property, and Swedish women with taxpaying ability were allowed participate in clergy and mayor elections in towns and cities beginning in 1862 (Sjögren, 2006; Wängnerud, 2012). However, only a few wealthy unmarried women could participate in practice, as most women were financially dependent on their husbands or fathers (Sjögren, 2006, 73).

In 1884, the Swedish parliament debated the question of granting the voting rights to women in national elections for the first time, and the establishment of Fredrika Bremer
Society, the first women’s right organization in the country, followed (Wängnerud, 2012, 245). In 1903, the National Association for Woman Suffrage was founded, which served as a driving force in women’s movement for universal suffrage (Sainsbury, 2001, 125). A long battle between the Liberals and the Social Democrats on one side and Conservatives on the other over universal suffrage for both men and women led to incremental removal of property restrictions for male voters from 1911 to 1921, followed by the extension of equal and universal suffrage to women in parliamentary elections (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Tilton, 1974).

Women’s political mobilization in Sweden featured several distinct patterns. First, the class division between the working class and the bourgeoisie was less evident than in other Scandinavian countries. In Sweden, the long-held denial of married women’s political rights provided “a common rallying point” for both lower and upper-class women (Sainsbury, 2001, 116). Moreover, the gradual extension of suffrage together with the delayed electoral reform in Sweden strengthened the alliance between the liberals and social democrats, enabling cross-class cooperation in the women’s movement (Sainsbury, 2001).

Political mobilization in Sweden in the early twentieth century was also marked by its high levels of rural participation (Alestalo and Kuhnle, 1986; Castles, 1973). Swedish peasantry had substantial political influence even in the old estate system. Also, Sweden’s industrialization was scattered across smaller rural areas, unlike other European countries where industrial enterprises were concentrated in cities, thereby limiting po-
itical influence of the urban bourgeoisie (Tilton, 1974). Previous scholarship expects turnout of newly enfranchised women to be lower in rural areas than in cities (Rokkan and Valen, 1962; Tingsten, 1937), as women in rural areas are likely to be less endowed with political resources. According to Rokkan (1970, 123), this urban (centre) - rural (periphery) cleavage will be even greater in smaller countries, as they are more politically, economically, and culturally dependent on the outside structure, and therefore, resources are more likely to be concentrated on cities. Yet, such urban-rural division was not particularly salient in Sweden’s mobilization process.

2.4.2 Municipal Reform in 1918

The Swedish case allows me to causally identify the effect of direct democracy on women’s political participation using the RD design, because the type of local political institutions in each of Sweden’s municipalities during earlier decades of 20th century depended on its population size.

A direct democratic institution called Kommunalstämma was the highest decision-making body in all municipalities in Sweden from 1863 to 1918. Under this system, each municipality held three mandatory resident meetings every year, where anyone who paid taxes had a right to attend and vote. At these meetings, residents decided on all local matters, except those related to school and the church. Although each municipality had the right to transfer its decision-making authority to the municipal council, this was very unusual prior to 1918.
The Liberals and the Social Democrats gained a majority in the 1917 Riksdag election, when the economic crisis in this country caused the public’s discontent with the Conservative government. A new Liberal-Social Democratic government implemented a series of institutional reforms. At the national-level, the new Liberal and Social Democratic coalition government implemented a program for democratization of voting rights by extending the voting rights for Riksdag elections to women and releasing the financial restrictions on the voting right (Särkvik, 2002). At the same time, the coalition government gathered proposals for a municipal reform from experts, and implemented a reform that mandated a transition from direct democratic decision-making process to a representative council system. This decision was based on the belief that “a representative council will produce better policy decisions, because representatives are more knowledgeable, more responsible, and more engaged in societal issues than ordinary men on the street (Wallin, 2007, 55)”.

After the initial implementation, only 18 out of more than 2400 municipalities voluntarily transitioned to representative system, and the government confronted the opposition from many municipalities that valued the old decision-making process. In particular, small localities did not favor the reform. Hence, the government decided to limit the implementation of the reform to municipalities with more than 1,500 inhabitants (Wallin, 2007). Many municipalities valued the old decision-making process. In particular, small localities did not favor the reform. As a result, the central government mandated that localities with a population greater than 1,500 must create a municipal council and transfer
all decision-making power to the council, while those below were free to choose between the status-quo direct democracy and representative democracy in the form of the municipal council.\footnote{This case was first introduced in Hinnerich and Pettersson-Lidbom (2014). In their work, the authors find that public spending is lower in municipalities with direct democracy than those with representative democratic systems. Information in this section is based on Swedish Code of Statutes (Svensk författningssamling, SFS) 1918:573, 1930:252, 1953:753.} The resulting institutional variation across municipalities continued until 1954, when representative democracy replaced Kommunalstämma in all municipalities as the highest decision-making body.

Since the reform led larger municipalities to curtail the preexisting direct democratic institution, this setting may seem primarily relevant to questions about the effect of transition to representative democracy. However, I believe that the Swedish case is also relevant to test my theoretical argument for two reasons. First, my theory focuses on the effect of the presence of direct democracy on women’s political participation, rather than its directional effect (i.e., the expansion or reduction of direct democracy). Second, I compare observations with and without direct democracy, not observations before and after the reform. The estimated effect in my analysis is thus, equivalent to the effect of having direct democracy relative to not having direct democracy.

The RD design will not be applicable to this case if politicians had strategic reasons for implementing the reform, especially if those reasons included depressing the influence of women in larger municipalities. However, no historical or scholarly evidence suggests strategic motivations behind this reform. Moreover, the fact that the reform was implemented by the Liberals and Social Democrats, who had long pursued the ex-
tension of political rights to women, implemented the reform makes it less likely that it was intended to curtail women’s influence.

The underlying assumption of this design is that municipalities with population size just below and above the cutoff only differ in the presence of direct democracy, while other factors determining levels of political participation remain highly similar. The Supplementary Information provides a set of balance tests that confirms this by showing that the municipalities of each side of the population threshold were comparable in political, economic, and demographic characteristics. This implies that the presence of direct democracy was plausibly exogenous to other determinants of women’s political engagement, and thus I can derive an unbiased estimate of the causal effect of direct democracy by comparing these observations. Many researchers have used this population-based RD design to identify the effects of public policies or political institutions (Eggers, 2015; Pettersson-Lidbom, 2012).

2.5 Empirical Analysis

2.5.1 Direct Democracy’s Effect on Women’s Political Participation

In order to evaluate whether and how the presence of direct democracy affects women’s political participation in a given locality, it is necessary to have data on women’s political participation across different localities. Yet, these data rarely exist, because men’s and women’s political participation are not counted separately in many areas.
Sweden from 1921 to 1944 is an exception. The Swedish National Data Service provides municipal-level data on the size of male and female voting population, and the number of votes men and women cast in parliamentary elections.²

Figure 2.1.: Women’s Turnout in Parliamentary Elections (1921-1944)

From this dataset, I construct two variables of women’s political participation. The first variable, Women’s turnout, is the number of women voting divided by the number of eligible female voters. It is noteworthy that regardless of the type of municipal government, all residents above the age of 23 in each municipality were able to vote in

²The 1921 election was the first time when women over age of 23 were allowed to vote in the Riksdag election. For more explanation of Swedish women’s political participation, see the balance test section in the Appendix. The gender-disaggregated municipality level turnout measures for elections after 1944 are not available.
Figure 2.2.: % Votes Women Cast in Parliamentary Elections (1921-1944)
parliamentary election during the time of investigation. This fact allows me to identify the effect of municipal-level direct democracy by comparing participation of female residents in parliamentary elections between municipalities with direct democracy and those without direct democracy.

The second variable is \% Votes Women Cast. This measure is operationalized by dividing the number of votes women cast by the total number of votes. This measure captures gender inequality in the voting population. The closer the value is to 50\%, the more egalitarian the voting population is.

Figure 2.3.: Histogram of Running Variable (Population_{t-1})

In order to validate the use of RD design, I need to show that the density of the running variable (i.e., population in $t - 1$) is continuous around the threshold (i.e., 1,500). A
A considerable difference in the number of observations just below and above the threshold would indicate municipal governments might have manipulated the population number (Eggers et al., 2015). Figure 2.3 displays a histogram of the running variable around the cutoff, and it does not show a clear sign of such sorting effect. Following McCrary (2008), I formally test for a significant discontinuity at the cutoff. The test fails to reject the null (p=.466). Also, manipulation of the population size was unlikely, since the population registers were carefully recorded and administered by the Swedish State church, not by the local governments.

Table 2.1: Number of Observations by Institution Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct Democracy</th>
<th>Representative Democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population ≤ 1,500</td>
<td>9257</td>
<td>1463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population &gt; 1,500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9257</td>
<td>7453</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 shows that 13.6% of observations (municipality, election year level) that were below the population threshold voluntarily had representative democracy. To account for this issue, I employ a fuzzy RD design. The convention in the literature is to estimate the treatment effect under a fuzzy RD setting as a version of complier average treatment effect (CATE) (e.g., Hahn, Todd and Van der Klaauw 2001). Following this, I estimate two-stage linear regressions using the assignment rule as an instrumental variable. Although it is not required in RD analyses, I also include covariates that are expected to capture some demographic and political characteristics to improve the precision of estimations. These covariates include support for leftist parties and the number
of female voters in a given municipality in a given election year. In addition, I include fixed effects for election years to account for any time trends. In order to account for any dependence within municipalities across time, I report standard errors that are clustered at the municipality level.

Table 2.2 presents the results from the RD analysis. Regarding the choice of bandwidth within which to perform analysis, I use a method suggested by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014), which is to search for a bandwidth that minimizes mean squared error (MSE) of local linear estimator.

The results confirm the positive effect of Direct Democracy on women’s political participation. In the first column in Table 2.2 I report the estimates of the effect of Direct Democracy on Women’s Turnout. The result indicates that having direct democracy at the local level boosts women’s turnout in national level elections. When using the optimal bandwidth, the estimated effect of Direct Democracy is 4.25 percentage points, and this appears to be a sizable effect in comparison to previous findings with the same outcome measure. For example, a study finds that the victory of female candidate increases women’s turnout in the subsequent election by 5 percentage points (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras and Iyer, 2013). The estimate is also comparable to the effect of having a minority candidate on the ballot on turnout among that minority group (2-3 percentage points) (Washington, 2006). Figure 2.4 indicates that within the bandwidths in the range of 110-600, the estimated effect is positive and statistically distinguishable from zero.
As a comparison, I also report the estimated effect of Direct Democracy on Men’s Turnout in the second column in Table 2.2. It appears that direct democracy has positive effects on men’s turnout in parliamentary elections as well. The estimated effects of Direct Democracy on Women’s Turnout range from 3.50 to 9.96 percentage points across different bandwidths. Its effect size for Men’s Turnout is in between 1.65 and 6.12 percentage points, as seen in Figure 2.5.

The third column in Table 2.2 shows that direct democracy has important impacts on gender equality in the voting population. The share of votes women cast is 1.94 percentage point greater in municipalities with direct democracy than that of similarly-sized municipalities without direct democracy. Figure 2.6 illustrates the effect of Direct Democracy on % Votes Women Cast in the bandwidths within a range of 50 to 600. We see that Direct Democracy has a positive effect on women’s participation not just within the optimal bandwidth, but across different bandwidths. The effect size ranges from 1.37 to 3.79 percentage points.

Together, the results reveal that municipalities that had direct democracy experienced a greater female turnout, compared to those where representative democracy had replaced direct democracy. They further show that direct democracy increases women’s presence in the voting population, thereby promoting gender equality in electoral participation.
Table 2.2: The RD Effects of Direct Democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Turnout (%)</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Turnout (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Votes Women Cast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandwidth [1500 ± ...]</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Democracy</td>
<td>4.287</td>
<td>3.621</td>
<td>1.967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.357)</td>
<td>(0.884)</td>
<td>(0.453)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariates</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Municipalities</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>2792</td>
<td>3705</td>
<td>2679</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors that are clustered at municipality in parentheses.
Figure 2.4.: The Effect of Direct Democracy on Women’s Turnout
Figure 2.5.: The Effect of Direct Democracy on Men’s Turnout
Figure 2.6.: The Effect of Direct Democracy on % Votes Women Cast
2.5.2 Discussion of an Alternative Mechanism

The finding in the main text shows that women’s political participation was greater in municipalities with direct democracy than municipalities with slightly greater population size that switched to representative democracy. This finding seems to suggest a strong association between direct democracy and women’s political participation.

A plausible alternative mechanism of this finding, however, would be citizens’ response to the institutional reform in larger municipalities. The higher level of women’s participation in direct democracy could be explained by some attitudinal and behavioral shifts among citizens in representative democracy after a sudden change in the municipal political system. For example, the institutional change from direct democracy to representative democracy might have dampened citizens’ trust towards the political system, thereby discouraging their participation in parliamentary elections. And this effect might have been stronger among female voters who were disengaged and less experienced with politics.

To investigate this possibility, I conducted the analysis using subsets of the dataset. Even if the reform in 1918 indeed changed citizens’ political attitudes in larger municipalities, it seems reasonable to expect that this effect will be strongest in the immediate aftermath of the reform, and then gradually decrease over time. Thus, if this alternative mechanism entirely drove the result in Table 2.2 and Figure 2.4, the effect of direct democracy should be much smaller or disappear when only the data in later elections are used for the analysis.
Table 2.3: The RD Effects of Direct Democracy (Subsample Analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women’s Turnout (%)</th>
<th>Men’s Turnout (%)</th>
<th>% Votes Women Cast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bandwidth [1500 ± ...]</strong></td>
<td>338</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Democracy</td>
<td>7.118</td>
<td>4.009</td>
<td>2.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.120)</td>
<td>(1.331)</td>
<td>(0.602)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Municipalities</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>2684</td>
<td>3271</td>
<td>2428</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) 1924 - 1944 Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women’s Turnout (%)</th>
<th>Men’s Turnout (%)</th>
<th>% Votes Women Cast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bandwidth [1500 ± ...]</strong></td>
<td>398</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Democracy$ t $</td>
<td>3.094</td>
<td>1.946</td>
<td>1.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.341)</td>
<td>(1.015)</td>
<td>(0.614)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Municipalities</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>2568</td>
<td>2852</td>
<td>2568</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) 1928 - 1944 Elections

Note: Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors that are clustered at municipality in parentheses.
Based on this belief, I estimated the same models, this time using the data excluding the first one or two elections after the municipal reform in 1918. In these models, I included the outcome variable from 1921 or 1924 election to control for the strength of electoral perturbations caused by the reform. Table 2.3 reports the results of this subsample analysis. From this table, we see that the effect of Direct Democracy remains positive and substantively large even when the first one or two elections after the reform were not considered. This shows that the alternative mechanism cannot explain the main effect of Direct Democracy.

2.5.3 Women’s Experience with Direct Democracy and Subsequent Political Participation

Next, I turn to test whether the mechanisms linking direct democracy and women’s political engagement are at work. Specifically, I test the spillover mechanism using the original dataset containing information about women’s actual participation in direct democracy.

My theoretical argument implies that by joining direct democratic procedures, women gain political awareness and skills, and this leads them to participate in political activities at a greater rate (Hypothesis 2). To test this spill-over process, I conduct an additional set of analysis using women’s participation rate in local-level direct democratic meetings as an explanatory variable. Here, the goal is to test whether women’s par-
participation in direct democratic meetings at Time $t$ explains women’s participation in a parliamentary election at Time $t+1$.

![Figure 2.7.: Histogram of Women’s participation in direct democracy(%)](image)

The measure of Women’s Participation in Direct Democracy is operationalized as the share of female attendees in all direct democratic meetings that were held in a given municipality in a given year. The data come from the minutes of municipal meetings from 1921 to 1944. The Swedish Local History Database provides digitized texts of

40
Figure 2.8.: Trend in *Women's participation in direct democracy* (Each dot is the mean of the share of female attendees in each year.)
minutes of all municipal-level meetings, including direct democratic meetings (Kom-
munalstämma), council meetings, and administrative committee meetings in six coun-
ties during this period. These counties are Halland, Jönköping, Kalmar, Kronoberg,
Älvsborg, and Skaraborg.

From these minutes, I extracted lists of attendees in each meeting, then identified
female participants based on their first names. Next, I calculated yearly proportion of
female attendees, by dividing the number of female participants by the total number of
participants in meetings held in that year. In this analysis, I only examine observations
that had direct democracy for two reasons. First, the measure of women’s participation
in direct democratic meetings in municipalities with representative democracy is not
available, simply because these municipalities did not hold direct democratic meetings.
More importantly, it is because the goal of this analysis is to test the dynamics within
direct democracy. My theoretical argument suggests that policymaking experiences that
women gain through direct democratic procedures help them develop political skills
and consciousness. In order to test this mechanism, I examine how the extent to which
women participated in direct democratic meetings is associated with their subsequent
participation in parliamentary elections.

It is also important to note that the minutes do not provide the full list of attendees
in a given meeting. The minutes primarily consist of summaries of agendas covered
during each meeting and the final decisions made by the attendees. Thus, the names

\[ As \text{ this measure is operationalized as the share of female participants, the value of this measure is largely determined by the overall participation. Thus, it is possible that a municipality with low overall participation had a higher value of this measure, because of a higher proportion of female attendees.}\]
of attendees appear when 1) they were selected to a certain position (e.g., board members, committee chair/deputies/members), 2) they made important remarks regarding the agenda discussed such as providing significant factual information or presenting a strong opinion on the issue, or 3) they were directly involved in an item on the agenda. Given that female attendees were less likely to fall under these three cases than male attendees, the actual share of female attendees was likely to be greater than the value of the measure based on the minutes. This in turn implies that the spillover effect using this measure is likely to be underestimated.

Figure 2.7 and Figure 2.8 show us some patterns regarding Women's Participation in Direct Democracy measure. The data is heavily positive skewed, suggesting that women’s presence in direct democratic procedures was extremely low in many municipalities. Yet, the extent to which women participated in direct democracy varied considerably across time and municipalities.

Table 2.4 reports the results from the OLS models analyzing how this variation in women’s participation in direct democracy is associated with women’s participation in parliamentary elections in subsequent years. The models include years in direct democracy, the total number of municipal meetings held in that year, the number of female voters (logged), and left party’s vote share as controls. Fixed effects for years and county are included to control for time-specific trends and unobservable geographical features at the county level.
Table 2.4: The Effect of Women’s Participation in Direct Democracy on Women’s Subsequent Electoral Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome variable:</th>
<th>% Votes Women Cast&lt;sub&gt;t&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>Women’s Turnout&lt;sub&gt;t&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>Men’s Turnout&lt;sub&gt;t&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Participation in DD&lt;sub&gt;t−1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>-0.079 (0.066)</td>
<td>-0.290 (0.190)</td>
<td>-0.307 (0.143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Participation in DD&lt;sub&gt;t−2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.140 (0.050)</td>
<td>0.328 (0.141)</td>
<td>0.183 (0.106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariates</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>0.554</td>
<td>0.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>0.226</td>
<td>0.523</td>
<td>0.539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
As seen in the first row, Women’s Participation in Direct Democracy in the year before the election year does not have significant effects on women’s participation in elections. Yet, the second row shows that Women’s Participation in Direct Democracy in two years before the election is positively associated with women’s participation in elections. For example, one unit increase in the share of women’s direct democratic participation at $t - 2$ boosts women’s turnout by 0.328 percentage points. This indicates that one standard deviation (4.99 percentage points) increase in this measure leads to 1.64 percentage points increase in women’s turnout.

As a comparison, I report the result using Men’s Turnout as the outcome variable. Column (3) shows that Women’s Participation in Direct Democracy in the year before the election year is negatively associated with Men’s Turnout, and Women’s participation in direct democracy two years before the election does not have significant effect on men’s electoral participation. This suggests that a lower share of male attendees in municipal meetings has a short-term negative effect on men’s electoral participation.

The results in Table 2.4 provide some evidence for the spillover mechanism of direct democracy. However, the results are not consistent across different model specifications. While the results from Analysis I show us strong and robust effects of direct democracy on women’s participation, Analysis II reveals somewhat weak spillover effects of direct democracy. This finding suggests that even when women’s actual participation in direct democracy has only limited effects on their subsequent behavior, the presence of
direct democracy itself can stimulate women’s participation through its signaling and informational mechanisms.

2.6 Conclusion

Equal political participation of different social groups is essential in democracies, yet rarely achieved. In particular, there has been persistent gender disparities in political participation across the globe, posing an important challenge to democratic representation. In this paper, I theorize that participatory opportunities at the mass level can ameliorate this problem. Specifically, I propose that the presence of direct democracy stimulates women’s engagement in politics by signaling the system’s openness to their voice, confirming their political competency, highlighting their stake in political decisions, and empowering them with political skills and resources.

Using municipal-level data on newly-enfranchised women in Sweden, I find evidence that direct democracy indeed promotes women’s participation in politics. Specifically, women’s turnout in parliamentary elections was higher in municipalities using direct democracy than in similarly sized municipalities that only had representative institutions. Moreover, women’s share in the voting population was higher where direct democracy was present, indicating a positive effect of direct democracy on women’s political inclusion.

This research makes important contributions to two distinct literatures. First, it broadens our understanding of women’s political attitudes and participation. My find-
ings suggest that direct democratic procedures may change women’s views about the political system as well as their role in decision-making processes, and this in turn, leads to more active participation in politics. The findings complement the existing literature by showing that the availability of participatory opportunities to citizens can have equally important impacts on women’s political participation as electing more women to political offices. Second, this research extends the literature on behavioral impacts of direct democracy. Beyond its overall impact on individuals’ political knowledge and interest, I show that direct democracy has a meaningful effect on political equality and political integration of marginalized groups.

More generally, my findings carry implications for our understanding of political equality, democratic representation, and institutional designs. This paper is the first to empirically assess the relationship between direct democratic institutions and political engagement of marginalized groups. I find that the presence of direct democracy stimulates participation of politically marginalized groups. The findings have significant real-world implications, especially in the context of developing countries where direct democratic reforms are designed to incorporate voices of politically inactive groups—such as women—in policy-making.

Future research can extend this study in several ways. First, while this study only addresses the effect of direct democracy on electoral participation, my theoretical argument can be tested on a broader range of political participation. For example, it would be interesting to examine the influence of direct democracy on women’s participation
in more active forms of political activities, such as running for political office. Second, though I have focused on direct democracy in the form of town meetings, the most common forms of direct democracy today are ballot initiatives or referendums, where citizens vote on specific policy matters. On one hand, these institutions should have the same effect on women’s participation, because they share the key elements of direct democracy, which I theorize as main factors generating the causal effect. On the other hand, we may not be able to detect the same effect, given that these institutions take place less frequently and address a smaller subset of political matters than town meetings. Taken together, this is an open empirical question that I hope to explore in future work.

Finally, an important direction for future studies will be to consider what conditions reinforce or undermine the effects of direct democracy on women. I have argued and shown that the use of direct democracy leads women to become more confident about their political influence, thereby stimulating their political activism. However, certain procedural, social, or cultural contexts may modify the anticipated effects of direct democracy on women. For example, the type of decision rules in direct democratic processes (for example, unanimous vs. majority rule) may condition the extent to which women express their voice and influence the final policy decisions (Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014). Also, the prevalence of social norms against women’s political participation may undermine the effect of direct democracy on women. For example, in a society that has particularly strong norms against women’s participation in the public
sphere, the use of direct democracy may lead men to build a new barrier to women’s participation as a form of backlash (Gottlieb, 2016). Going forward, it will be important to examine what circumstances lead direct democracy to fail to boost women’s political engagement, and to identify the preconditions for promoting political equality through direct democracy.
2.7 Appendix

2.7.1 Distribution around the Population Threshold

In Figure 2.9, I present the raw data of observations around the population threshold. Since the assignment rule was binding only on one side of the cutoff, we cannot derive the precise causal effect of direct democracy just by looking at the raw data. Yet, an examination of the raw data gives us some sense about the relationships between the running variable and the outcome variables of our interest. In each plot, each dot represents a data point ($Y_{it}$). Blue solid lines represent predicted values of a local linear smoother that is estimated on each side of the cutoff, while the dashed lines show their 95% confidence intervals.

Two panels at the top plot distributions of women’s political participation—% Votes Women Cast and Women’s Turnout, respectively. In these plots, we can see a clear discontinuity around the cutoff. The top-left panel shows that the predicted value of % Votes Women Cast in observations right below the cutoff (i.e., observations that were free to choose between direct democracy and representative democracy) is about 2 percentage point higher than those right above the cutoff (i.e., observations that had representative democracy). Women’s Turnout shows a similar pattern: the predicted women’s turnout at the cutoff is 4.5 percentage points higher when it is estimated using observations below the cutoff than when using observations above the cutoff.
Figure 2.9.: Raw Data Plots around the Population Threshold

Note: The horizontal axis indicate normalized score of the running variable (population_{t-1} – 1,500)
In contrast, the distribution of *Men’s Turnout* does not show a clear discontinuity around the cutoff, as seen in the bottom-left panel of SI Figure 1. Yet, the scatterplot of the *Gender Gap in Turnout* (i.e., Men’s - Women’s Turnout) in the bottom-right panel reveals a visible discontinuity at the cutoff. It shows that the predicted gender gap in turnout is about 3 percentage point smaller when it is estimated on the left side of the cutoff, than when estimated on the right side. Together, the raw data suggests that there is a seemingly significant association between having (or not having) direct democracy and women’s political participation as well as the gender gap in participation. However, its association with men’s political participation is less clear.

### 2.7.2 Balance Tests on Predetermined Covariates

A potential threat to any identification with RD designs is the possibility of imbalance at the threshold in pretreatment covariates (Caughey and Sekhon, 2011; Eggers et al., 2015; Lee and Lemieuxa, 2010). To investigate this possibility, I examine whether Swedish municipalities on each side of the population threshold were comparable in political, economic, and demographic characteristics prior to the institutional reform in 1918.

Figure 2.10 plots distributions of political covariates that might have affected Swedish women’s political behavior in the period of investigation. First, I examine the distribution of partisan support, measured as vote shares that leftist parties (the Social Democratic Party and the Swedish Social Democratic Left Party) received, and turnout of
eligible voters—male citizens above the age of 23, who had taxpaying abilities—in the 1917 general election. I also investigate the number of competing parties in the 1921 election, since patterns of political competition might have affected women’s participation in elections (Corder and Wolbrecht, 2016; Skorge, 2017).\(^4\) Finally, since preexisting levels of political mobilization might have also affected women’s political participation, I compare the share of organized citizens across municipalities.\(^5\) As shown in the plots, municipalities on each side of the population threshold were comparable in terms of the political culture and electoral context prior to the reform.

It is also important to examine patterns of women’s political participation prior to 1918 across municipalities near the population threshold. Although Swedish women could not vote in parliamentary elections until 1921, Swedish women who had taxpaying ability were allowed participate in municipal decision-making processes (Sjögren, 2006; Sjögren and Lindström, 2011). Given that women’s prior exposure to political processes may stimulate their subsequent political activism (Carpenter and Moore, 2014), I need to evaluate whether women from each side of the threshold had similar levels of political interactions prior to the institutional reform. To do this, I created a measure of women’s participation in municipal politics based on the minutes data described in the main text. More specifically, women’s participation in municipal politics prior to the re-

---

\(^4\) The number of competing parties is operationalized as effective number of electoral parties (EENP). The measure is based on the formula by Laakso and Taagepera’s (1979) (\(\text{EENP} = \frac{1}{\sum v_i^2}\), where \(v_i\) is the vote share received by the party \(i\)).

\(^5\) This measure is operationalized as the share of citizens, who joined at least one of the following organizations—labor union, political parties, free church movement organizations, or temperance movement organizations. The data come from ‘Popular movement archive, 1881-1950’ available upon request at The Swedish National Data Service website.
Figure 2.10.: Balance Test (1) Political Characteristics

Note: Solid lines in each panel represent predicted values of a local linear smoother estimated on each side of the threshold. Dotted lines show 95% prediction intervals.
Figure 2.11.: Balance Test (2) Women’s Prior Participation in Municipal Politics
Figure 2.12.: Balance Test (3) Socioeconomic Characteristics

Note: Solid lines in each panel represent predicted values of a local linear smoother estimated on each side of the threshold. Dotted lines show 95% prediction intervals.

form is operationalized as the share of female attendees in municipal meetings in 1917. Figure 2.11 compares this measure around the threshold with predicted values of local smoothers and 95% prediction intervals. There is no visible discontinuity around the cutoff, confirming that women on each side of the cutoff had a similar rate of political interactions prior to the reform.
Finally, Figure 2.12 compares municipalities on each side of population threshold on four socioeconomic pretreatment covariates—tax base income, share of agriculture in the economy, the size of land area, the number of poor relief recipients in 1917. The number of poor relief recipients is a particularly relevant covariate, because of the political context in Sweden during this period. Prior to 1921, the right to vote in parliamentary elections was restricted to male citizens over the age of 23 with certain levels of income or property. In particular, recipients of poverty relief or those who owed taxes were not allowed to vote. In 1921, this financial requirement was relaxed, enhancing the number of eligible male voters, not just female voters who gained the voting rights in that election (Särlvik, 2002). To investigate whether the increase in male voters was disproportionate across municipality around the population threshold, I use the number of poor relief recipients as a proxy of the increase in the number of eligible male voters in 1921. While the precise number of male voters, who did not have the right to vote until 1921 election is unavailable, it is highly likely that men in the group received poor relief assistance in 1917. The bottom-right panel of SI Figure 4 shows no discontinuity around the population threshold in the number of poor relief recipients in 1917.

Plots in Figure 2.12 do not show any clear evidence of discontinuity around the population cutoff across pretreatment covariates. Together, the results of balance tests suggest that observations on each side of the threshold are comparable in terms of key political or socioeconomic characteristics, validating the use of RD design.
2.7.3 Robustness Check: Placebo Cutoffs

As a robustness check, I report results of placebo tests, where I estimate the main RD effect at “fake” cutoffs. In Table 2.5 and Table 2.6, I show that the coefficient estimate for Direct Democracy is not statistically reliable in models estimated at two placebo cutoffs. This confirms that we can observe a significant effect of Direct Democracy only at the true population threshold, and not at other values, where the treatment status does not change.

Table 2.5: Placebo Test of Direct Democracy on Women’s Turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Placebo Cutoff: 1,000</th>
<th>Placebo Cutoff: 2,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandwidth [1500 ± ...]</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Democracy</td>
<td>86.652</td>
<td>112.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(113.976)</td>
<td>(116.773)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariates</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Municipalities</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>3237</td>
<td>3251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The bandwidths chosen are MSE-optimal. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard error clustered at the municipality level in parentheses. The outcome variable is Women’s Turnout.
Table 2.6: Placebo Test of Direct Democracy on % Votes Women Cast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Placebo Cutoff: 1,000</th>
<th>Placebo Cutoff: 2,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandwidth [1500 ± ...]</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Democracy</td>
<td>70.416</td>
<td>58.379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(85.492)</td>
<td>(163.612)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariates</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Municipalities</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>3105</td>
<td>5466</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The bandwidths chosen are MSE-optimal. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard error clustered at the municipality level in parentheses. The outcome variable is % Votes Women Cast.
2.7.4 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2.7: Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Votes Women Cast</td>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>45.04</td>
<td>45.20</td>
<td>72.65</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Turnout</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>59.66</td>
<td>61.75</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>14.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Turnout</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>71.25</td>
<td>73.11</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>11.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Party Vote Share</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Women Voters</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>842.78</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>24816</td>
<td>6227.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>1689.60</td>
<td>1084</td>
<td>26310</td>
<td>1999.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENEP</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Organized Citizens</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>9.48</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Poor Relief Recipients (1917)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>56.83</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1714</td>
<td>99.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax base Income in SEK (1918)</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>451494</td>
<td>160195</td>
<td>14694392</td>
<td>1015834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land area1918</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>17018.54</td>
<td>4861</td>
<td>1814364</td>
<td>75511.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Agriculture in the economy (1917)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>49.84</td>
<td>53.29</td>
<td>98.52</td>
<td>21.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.7.5 Comparison of 6-County Sample and Population

In Figure 2.13, I show that the 6-county sample that is used in the Analysis II and the population are comparable in several demographic covariates (population size, urbanization rate, the share of women, immigration).\(^6\)

\(^6\)Data Source: Historical Statistics Archive, Statistics Sweden
Figure 2.13.: Comparison of 6-County Sample and Population (24 counties)

Note: T-tests of the sample and population indicate that these two groups are not statistically different in all four demographic variables.
Chapter 3

Direct Democracy and the Gender Gap in Political Efficacy

3.1 Introduction

In recent decades, there has been growing concern over gender inequality in political decision-making with politicians, scholars, and commentators alike acknowledging the need to bring more women into political processes. Political parties and legislatures in a number of countries have sought to remedy this problem by having more women in political bodies. Specifically, they introduced legal quotas to select female candidates for political office, which has led to a substantial increase in women’s presence in elite political positions worldwide (Krook, 2009; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009).

Scholars have argued that an increase in women’s presence at the elite level makes meaningful changes in the ways political systems address women’s interests (Carroll, 2001; Jones, 1997) and this in turn modifies women’s attitudes towards their government.
at the citizen level. Further, some scholars highlight that the presence of female representa-
tives has symbolic effects. They argue that women’s presence in political offices signals
government’s openness to women’s voices, and this in turn, enhances women’s political
engagement (Atkeson, 2003; Atkeson and Carrillo, 2007; Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006;
Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). The underlying logic of this top-down approach
is that inclusion of women in the political decision-making processes should enhance
women’s perceptions of their political influence, thereby increasing their engagement in
politics. Empirical studies, however, show mixed findings on the relationship between
women’s inclusion in higher political offices and women’s political engagement at the
citizen level (Barnes and Burchard, 2013; Clayton, 2015; Lawless, 2004; Zetterberg, 2009).

Focusing exclusively on this top-town approach, however, may lead scholars of women
in politics to overlook a potential bottom-up mechanism, where increased participatory
opportunities for citizens strengthen women’s political influence. In this paper, I illu-
minate this alternative mechanism by focusing on the role of direct democracy in mod-
ifying women’s political perceptions. Direct democracy enhances women’s inclusion in
political decision-making at the citizen level, because it ensures that men and women
have equal opportunities to participate in legislation, regardless of their presence in
legislative bodies.

In this paper, I examine whether this inclusive effect of direct democracy translates
into meaningful changes in women’s political orientations. Specifically, I investigate how
women update their political beliefs after having opportunities to participate in direct
legislation, focusing on perceptions of their political influence (i.e., political efficacy). Political efficacy is considered an important psychological underpinning of citizen engagement in politics (Finkel, 1985, 1987; Pollock III, 1983). Studies have found that women are less likely to report that they feel efficacious in politics than men, affecting the psychology of engagement (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001; Lawless, 2004; Verba, Burns and Schlozman, 1997). This persistent gender gap in political efficacy might explain why women’s political engagement lags behind that of men.

Research on direct democracy has demonstrated that it has positive effects on citizens’ attitudes about their capacity to influence what government does. Scholars find that this leads citizens to have greater belief in their ability to understand politics and participate in political activities (Bowler and Donovan, 2002; Hero and Tolbert, 2004; Smith and Tolbert, 2004). I theorize that direct democracy’s effects on political efficacy will be particularly salient among women than men for two reasons. First, direct democracy increases the supply of political information, which will have a greater impact on women’s political knowledge than men, because women’s baseline for political knowledge is generally lower. Second, by providing opportunities to have inputs on policy issues that have practical importance to them, direct democracy leads women to enhance their belief about government’s responsiveness to their voice.

To test this theoretical expectation, I use the Swiss Household Panel (SHP), a yearly panel study of a nationally representative sample of households in Switzerland. The findings from this analysis indicate that increased exposure to direct democracy en-
hances Swiss women’s feelings of political efficacy, while it has no significant effect among men. This suggests that the use of direct democracy might close the preexisting gender gap in political efficacy.

This study makes important contributions to the literature. First, it adds to the growing literature on the relationship between political institutions and gender equality in political engagement (Barnes and Burchard, 2013; Clayton, 2015; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). My finding suggests that providing equal opportunities to participate in political decision-making process can attenuate women’s feelings of political marginalization, and thus, may contribute to closing the existing gender gap in political engagement and participation. Second, this study contributes to the existing literature on direct democracy by examining how direct democracy brings historically marginalized groups to politics. Specifically, while previous research has focused on direct democracy’s overall effect on citizens’ political efficacy, this study shows that it has different implications for men and women. My findings further suggest that the use of direct democracy may encourage political equality in democratic systems.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the literature on behavioral implications of political efficacy with a focus on women’s sense of political efficacy, followed by a section outlining my theory of the gendered effect of direct democracy on political efficacy. Section 4 introduces the SHP data, and describe the primary measures. Section 5 reports the findings of multilevel mixed models. I conclude with a discussion of the paper’s implications.
3.2 Political Efficacy and Political Equality in Democratic Systems

Political efficacy is broadly defined as the belief that an individual has, or can have, an impact on the political process (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954). The concept of political efficacy includes two dimensions: (1) external political efficacy, which refers to the belief that government is responsive to citizens’ demands; (2) internal political efficacy, which is the belief that an individual is competent enough to understand and participate in politics (Niemi, Craig and Mattei, 1991).

A long tradition within political science has highlighted the importance of political efficacy to the health of democracy. Individuals are more likely to participate in political activities when they believe they can make a meaningful impact and that the government will respond to their input. Based on this belief, scholars considered political efficacy to be a strong predictor of both electoral and non-electoral participation (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Shaffer, 1981). Abramson and Aldrich (1982), for example, attributed the sudden decline of voter turnout in the United States to the erosion of perceived political efficacy among American citizens. Relatedly, previous studies suggest that feelings of political efficacy enhance citizens’ trust in government and perceived legitimacy of political systems, thereby promoting the stability of democratic governance (Citrin and Green, 1986; Erber and Lau, 1990; Pollock III,
1983). Together, these studies underscore the significance of studying political efficacy as an outcome variable.

Moreover, political efficacy has important implications for political equality in democratic systems. The ways in which individuals view their government and their political influence vary substantively across different groups in society, and this variation may account for the disparity in political participation across these groups. Notably, scholars suggest that women’s lower sense of political efficacy is an important factor that explains the gender gap in political engagement. Studies have found that women have lower levels of internal and external political efficacy than men in general (Bennett and Bennett, 1989; Karp and Banducci, 2008; Verba, Burns and Schlozman, 1997). They also participate at lower rates than men in political activities other than voting at both the mass and elite levels (Atkeson, 2003; Fox and Lawless, 2011; Verba, Burns and Schlozman, 1997). Given the high correlation between political efficacy and participation, the gender disparity in political efficacy might explain this unequal participation between men and women. As more women opt out of political activities, they become less knowledgeable and feel less efficacious in politics, creating what Preece (2016) describes as “a negative feedback loop (p. 202)”. Furthermore, studies find that women are more likely to answer “don’t know,” when they are not sure about the answer on questions of political knowledge, while men are more likely to guess the answer (Lizotte and Sidman, 2009; Mondak and Anderson, 2004). This suggests that the gender gap in political knowledge
might be a product of women’s lower confidence in their political competency on the subject.

Why do women exhibit a lower sense of political efficacy than men? One potential cause could be women’s relative disadvantages with respect to income, occupational status, and educational attainment. These socioeconomic characteristics are particularly relevant to internal political efficacy, as they provide resources and opportunities to develop political knowledge and civic skills that are strongly associated with the belief about political efficacy (Verba et al., 1993).

Another explanation for women’s lower sense of political efficacy relates to experience with and position in the political system. Scholars argued that racial minorities’ self-perceptions about social and political deprivations account for their lower sense of efficacy (Abramson, 1972; Pantoja and Segura, 2003; Rodgers Jr, 1974) In this vein, the gender and politics literature suggests that women’s traditional exclusion from and marginalization in the political processes have led them to believe they are not suited to politics (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001; Gidengil, Giles and Thomas, 2008). In short, minorities and women are aware of their marginalized position in society and in government and therefore they feel less efficacious in politics.

Previous studies have argued that having more women in political offices enhances women’s feelings of political efficacy by modifying their belief about their role in the political arena (Atkeson, 2003; Barnes and Burchard, 2013; Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006). Verba, Burns and Schlozman (1997) show that while men generally demonstrate higher
levels of political efficacy than women, women from states with female representa-
tives scored higher in political efficacy than those living in states with no female represen-
tatives. Similarly, Atkeson and Carrillo (2007) demonstrate that an increase in female
descriptive representation enhances women’s belief about government responsiveness.
The authors argue that upon observing more fellow women engaging in politics, women
will perceive a political atmosphere more accommodating and more responsive to their
voice.

More recently, some experimental studies suggest several ways to reduce political
alienation among women. Preece (2016), for example, argues that women score lower
in political interest and knowledge than men because they tend to rely heavily on gen-
dered self-perceptions about political competency. Her study finds that providing pos-
itive feedback and accurate information about their political knowledge can effectively
weaken women’s negative self-perceptions, and it further reduces the gender disparity
in political efficacy. Others find that gender-inclusive political science curriculums lead
female students to feel more competent running for political office (Greenlee, Holman
and VanSickle-Ward, 2014; Rios, Stewart and Winter, 2010). Together, these experimen-
tal findings indicate that psychological empowerment can strengthen women’s sense of
political efficacy through improving their self-perceptions. The findings further under-
score the need to identify the macro conditions that facilitate such empowerment among
women.
3.3 Direct Democracy and the Gender Gap in Political Efficacy

I theorize that direct democracy boosts women’s sense of political efficacy through two channels. First, direct democracy increases the supply of political information, and this leads women to feel more competent in making meaningful impacts on the political process as they are more knowledgeable. Second, by providing opportunities to have inputs on policy issues that have practical importance to them, direct democracy leads women to enhance their belief about government’s responsiveness to their voice. I discuss these channels in greater detail below.

The Gendered Effect of Direct Democracy on Internal Political Efficacy

Direct democracy in the form of referenda, citizen initiatives, and local plebiscites increases the supply of political information available to citizens while reducing the cost of acquiring political information (Benz and Stutzer, 2004; Mendelsohn and Cutler, 2000; Smith and Tolbert, 2004). Popular votes, such as referenda and initiatives usually involve intense campaigns and extensive media coverage of the issue, and stimulate informal conversations about politics among citizens. Both media coverage and informal discussions together can substantially increase one’s exposure to political information, thus enhancing political knowledge and sophistication. Moreover, opportunities for direct legislation incentivize citizens to acquire more political information, as they hope
their vote will have a meaningful, positive outcome. In turn, direct democracy leads citizens to better absorb the political information they encounter from media and discussions with others (Smith, 2002).

I expect that this increase in the supply of political information will have a more salient influence on women than men. Research has shown that increased exposure to political information affects men and women differently. Previous studies on political knowledge, for example, shows that the knowledge gained in an “information-rich environment” is more plentiful among women than men (Fraile, 2014; Jerit and Barabas, 2017; Ondercin, Garand and Crapanzano, 2011). These studies argue that when exposed to the same amount of information women gain more knowledge relative to men because they have lower baseline levels of political knowledge. That is, more information is new to women and thus, there is more for them to learn than men, whose political knowledge is subject to a ceiling effect. Following this, I expect that while direct democracy will enhance the aggregate level of political knowledge, such effect will be greater among women than men.

Direct democracy is likely to increase women’s political knowledge at a greater rate than men, not just because direct democracy increases the overall supply of political information, but also because women are more receptive to the type of increasing information. Scholars have argued that women might be interested in different aspects of politics than men, rather than being less interested in politics in general. Specifically, they suggest that women tend to be more interested in politics when it has a direct ef-
fect upon their own lives. Using a sample from the U.K., Campbell and Winters (2008) find that women are more interested in specific policy issues in domestic politics than men, who are generally more interested in electoral and partisan politics. They argue further that gender-based differences in socialization and psychological traits account for this pattern, promoting a higher sense of communion that values connection with others among women than men, who are more likely to have a high sense of agency that focuses on the self.¹

Relatedly, while research has consistently found that women generally know and care less about politics than men (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Verba, Burns and Schlozman, 1997), some scholars attribute this finding to the ways in which political attitudes have been conceptualized and measured in the literature (Dolan, 2011; Mondak and Anderson, 2004; Smiley, 1999; Stolle and Gidengil, 2010). Stolle and Gidengil (2010), for example, suggest that conventional measures of political knowledge underestimate women’s political knowledge because their assessments are limited to the traditional arenas of electoral and legislative politics, such as

¹Other studies suggest that women tend to be more interested in local politics than national or international politics. In their survey using a sample from Virginia, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1997, 148) find that while women tend to score lower in national and partisan politics than men, there was no significant relationship between the respondents’ gender and knowledge of local politics. The authors argue that this finding indicates that women find local issues more relevant to them than national politics. A study by Coffé (2013) supports this claim by showing that women generally exhibit greater interest in local issues than men whereas men are more interested in national and international issues. This finding is particularly relevant to the discussion of direct democracy as many direct democratic procedures take place at the local level and address local concerns, and thus, provide substantive amount of information on local issues. In the case of the United States, for example, there were 5,342 state-level direct democratic decisions from 1904 to 2008, and many more county-level votes (Altman, 2010). Matsusaka (2003) notes that around 70% of Americans live in cities where local-level initiatives are available. These local initiatives address specific policy issues in the area including transportation, local taxes, land use, and governance (Gordon, 2004).
the rules and procedures or the names of political figures. They find that while women score considerably lower than men when they are asked about conventional knowledge in electoral and legislative politics, the gender gap disappears or even reverses when respondents are asked about government programs and services. A study by Norris et al. (2004, 44) adds to this research by demonstrating that women generally scored lower than men in knowledge about political institutions, while they often knew more about social issues.

Together, these studies suggest that women are generally more interested in acquiring political information when they find that information practically important to their lives. This implies that women will be more receptive to the political information that becomes available due to direct democracy than men. Direct democratic votes primarily concern specific policy issues that have immediate impacts on citizens’ lives. In Switzerland, for example, the issues that have most frequently appeared on referenda and initiatives in recent years include local taxation, public education, immigration policy, and health insurance.2

How do direct democratic votes lead women to update their perceptions of political influence? Women are as or more willing than men to learn from the increased supply of political information, which enhances women’s level of political knowledge, suggesting that they will feel more confident about their ability to influence politics (i.e., increase their sense of internal political efficacy). Such effect will be smaller among men, who

already have high levels of political knowledge and whose internal sense of political efficacy cannot increase beyond a certain ceiling.

The Gendered Effect of Direct Democracy on External Political Efficacy

I further argue that direct democracy may also strengthen women’s external political efficacy because it ensures that their voices are heard when policy decisions are made. Scholars argue that the visibility of female politicians in office suggests to women that government is getting things done (Atkeson and Carrillo, 2007), because they expect female politicians to deliver their own policy preferences (Carroll, 2001; Thomas, 1994; Wängnerud, 2005). Popular votes and town meetings might have a similar or even stronger effect on women’s perceptions about government, because they provide women opportunities to have direct input on the decision-making process in policy areas about which they care. Having these opportunities will lead women to perceive the political atmosphere as open to their voices and concerns that are inadequately addressed under a purely representative systems. In this way, direct democracy can strengthen women’s belief about government responsiveness (e.g., external political efficacy).

3.4 Empirical Analysis

Data and Methods

To explore (1) how direct democratic instruments influence individuals’ political attitudes and (2) whether they affect men and women differently, I needed a representative
sample of men and women who were exposed to varying degrees of direct democratic practices during the same time period. For this reason, I use individual-level data from Switzerland to test my hypotheses.

Figure 3.1.: Number of cantonal-level direct democratic votes (1999-2015).

In Switzerland, various forms of direct democratic procedures, such as citizen initiatives, referenda, and citizen assemblies take place more frequently than anywhere else in the world. More importantly, as Switzerland’s subnational units, cantons, have substantial decision-making autonomy, the frequency of direct democratic procedures varies considerably across them. Figure 3.1 illustrates this geographical variation in the number of direct democratic votes during the time of investigation.

Switzerland’s recent history of expanding women’s political rights also makes it an interesting case for the current study. Women could not vote at the national level in Switzerland until 1971, which made it one of the last countries in Europe to grant women
Figure 3.2.: Distribution of Political Influence and Political Interest in SHP data
this right, and every canton extended women’s right to vote on cantonal matters separately between 1959 and 1990. These changes occurred only with the majority approval of voters in separate referenda. While the Swiss system’s emphasis on direct democracy delayed women’s political rights, it has also helped women achieve measures that reduce gender inequality in socioeconomic domains since they gained the right to vote. Voters in Switzerland regularly vote on several referenda in a single election. Among them, has been a federal referendum in 1985 that granted women equal rights with men within the family life. In 2005, another referendum provided 14 weeks of federally funded paid maternity leave. This suggests that, the delayed suffrage tied to direct democracy notwithstanding, women still view and use direct democratic institutions as opportunities to advocate for their policy interests.

I use data from the Swiss Household Panel (SHP), a yearly panel study of a nationally representative sample of households in Switzerland. Figure 3.2 shows comparisons of some measures of political attitudes between men and women. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it reveals that female SHP respondents on average have lower levels of perceived political influence and political interest than their male counterparts.

For this analysis, I use Perception of Political Influence as the primary outcome variable. This measure is based on respondents’ self-reports of their perceived political influence, which is a commonly accepted measure of political efficacy. The variable ranges from 0 to 11.

Table 3.1: Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Political Influence</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Direct Democracy</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>42.20</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>21.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (in years)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>11.69</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (in 1,000 CHF)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>59.475</td>
<td>51.430</td>
<td>5502.530</td>
<td>56.503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss Nationality</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The explanatory variable *Exposure to Direct Democracy* is measured as the number of direct democratic votes (i.e., citizen initiatives and referendums) an individual had a chance to cast a ballot in the year before the survey. To create this measure, every participant of SHP was assigned with the number of cantonal-level direct democratic votes that took place in the canton of residence and the number of federal direct democratic votes held in the previous year ($t - 1$). The variable ranges from 0 to 27.

Data on direct democratic votes come from the Direct Democracy Database, collected by the Centre for Research on Direct Democracy. The models control for other individual-level predictors of political engagement—education level, age, $\text{age}^2$, political ideology, Swiss citizenship, marital status, income, and religiosity. Table 3.1 shows summary statistics of the main variables used in this analysis. As the outcome variable is a 11-point scale measure, I choose to estimate OLS regressions with fixed effects for year and canton. Additionally, I estimate multilevel linear models with intercept varying by canton with a fixed effect for year to account for any potential temporal trends.
3.5 Finding

Table 3.2 reports the results of regression analyses with the sample only including female respondents. The results in Table 3.2 show that having a greater exposure to direct democracy increases women’s perception of their political influence. One standard deviation increase in the Exposure to Direct Democracy boosts women’s Perceived level of political influence by 1.52.

Figure 3.3.: Marginal Effect of Direct Democratic Votes at $t−1$ between Genders

Note: The marginal effects are calculated using the model (4) in Table 3.3. The solid lines represent 95% confidence interval.
Table 3.2: The Effect of Exposure to Direct Democracy on Women’s Perception of Political Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Variable: Perception of Political Influence</th>
<th>OLS</th>
<th>Multi-level Linear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Direct Democracy</td>
<td>0.036***</td>
<td>0.010*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss Nationality</td>
<td>1.416***</td>
<td>1.375***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.053)</td>
<td>(0.054)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.083***</td>
<td>0.087***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.012***</td>
<td>−0.012***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age^2</td>
<td>−0.001***</td>
<td>−0.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>−0.004</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.052***</td>
<td>0.047***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.318***</td>
<td>0.313***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Year FE ✓ ✓ ✓
Canton FE ✓

N 37,247 37,247 37,247
N_{panelist} 4475 4475 4475
N_{canton} 26
Adjusted R^2 0.053 0.064
Log Likelihood −86,014.040
AIC. 172,106.100
BIC 172,438.600
RSME 2.444 2.429

Note: Cell entries represent unstandardized coefficient estimates with standard errors in parenthesis.
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001
The primary interest of this analysis is whether direct democracy reduces the existing gender gap in political efficacy. To test this, I turn to examine the gendered effect of Exposure to Direct Democracy, using the full SHP sample. Figure 3.4 illustrates the comparison of the marginal effect of Exposure to Direct Democracy on Perception of Political Influence between men and women. Table 3.3 reports the results of OLS and multilevel-linear models in more detail. Levels of perceived political influence are likely to increase for both men and women, as they had more chances to cast direct democratic votes. However, as shown in Figure 3.4, exposure to direct democracy appears to have greater effects among women than men. This figure even suggests that when there are more than 21 direct democratic votes, women will exhibit greater sense of political efficacy than men.

The findings from the main analysis indicate that increased exposure to direct democracy enhances Swiss women’s feelings of political efficacy, while it has no significant effect on men. This further suggests that the use of direct democracy might decrease the preexisting gender gap in political efficacy.
Table 3.3: The Gendered Effect of Direct Democratic Votes \( t-1 \) on Perception of Political Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Variable: Political Influence</th>
<th>OLS</th>
<th>Multi-level Linear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposition to Direct Democracy</td>
<td>0.010***</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>-0.033</td>
<td>-0.101***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.028)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss Nationality</td>
<td>1.492***</td>
<td>1.491***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.044***</td>
<td>0.044***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age(^2)</td>
<td>-0.001***</td>
<td>-0.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (in years)</td>
<td>0.083***</td>
<td>0.083***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.369***</td>
<td>0.371***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Democracy</td>
<td>0.015**</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Woman</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Year FE: ✓  
Canton FE: ✓  
Observations: 75,617  
R\(^2\): 0.074  
Adjusted R\(^2\): 0.074  
Log Likelihood: \(-176,340.100\)  
AIC: 352,728.200  
BIC: 352,949.800  
RSME: 2.488 (df = 75570)

Note: Cell entries represent unstandardized coefficient estimates with standard errors in parenthesis.  
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001
Figure 3.4.: Predicted levels of *Perception of Political Influence* by *Exposure to Direct Democracy*

Note: Each line represents predicted values that are calculated from the results of the model (4) in Table 3.3, with 95% prediction intervals.
3.6 Discussion

Gender inequalities in levels of political participation persist in democracies around the world. Scholars have argued that a lack of sense of political efficacy among women is an important source of such inequality. In an observational analysis, I found that greater exposure to direct democracy increases women’s sense of political efficacy to a greater extent than men’s. The findings demonstrate that institutional opportunities to participate directly in the political decision-making process can lessen women’s feelings of political marginalization. This further suggests that a more extensive use of direct democracy may contribute to closing the existing gender gap in political engagement and participation.

This study makes several important contributions to the literature. First, it introduces a new dimension of conceptualizing women’s political inclusion. Previous work in women and politics scholarship has almost exclusively conceptualized women’s political inclusion in terms of electing more women in elite political positions. Moving beyond this top-down approach, my findings demonstrate that providing inclusive opportunities at the citizen level can effectively support women’s engagement in politics on a psychological level. Second, it complements the existing scholarship on direct democracy by investigating and demonstrating the different implications of direct democracy between men and women. Despite a widely held belief in the literature that direct democracy increases political efficacy of the general population, my findings indicate that such an effect is more salient among women than men. This further suggests that
institutions of direct democracy may have particularly strong psychological implications for social groups who have been historically marginalized in representative democracies, like women.
3.7 Appendix

In Table 3.4 and Table 3.5, I present the results of the same models from the main text, but this time using levels of political interest. Table 3.4 shows that the exposure to direct democracy is also associated with greater interest in politics among women. The effect of direct democracy on political interest is positive and statistically significant in both OLS and multi-level linear models. However, the size of the effect is not large. When the number of direct democratic votes increases from the minimum to maximum and all others held constant, levels of political interest increases by 0.65. Table 3.5 suggests that while women tend to exhibit lower levels of political interest than men, having direct democracy can contribute to reducing such gender gap. These results are in line with the findings from the main text. The increase in women’s political interest as well as the decreasing gender gap in political interest might be a result of women’s enhanced political efficacy.
Table 3.4: The Effect of Exposure to Direct Democracy on Women’s Political Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Variable: Political Interest</th>
<th>OLS</th>
<th>Multi-level Linear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Direct Democracy</td>
<td>0.024***</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss Nationality</td>
<td>0.973***</td>
<td>0.949***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.040***</td>
<td>0.040***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.136***</td>
<td>0.134***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>−0.011**</td>
<td>−0.009*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.322***</td>
<td>0.321***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td>((0.039)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.162***</td>
<td>0.162***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Year FE  ✓  ✓  
Canton FE ✓  
Controls ✓  ✓  

N 46,533 46,533  
N_{panelist} 4823 4823  
Adjusted R² 0.125  
Log Likelihood −106,279.800  
AIC 212,609.700  
BIC 212,828.400  

Note: Cell entries represent unstandardized coefficient estimates with standard errors in parenthesis.  
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001
Table 3.5: Gendered Effect of Direct Democratic Votes $t-1$ on Interest in Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Outcome Variable: Political Interest</th>
<th>OLS</th>
<th>Multi-level Linear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>$-1.020^{***}$</td>
<td>$-1.015^*$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.067)</td>
<td>(0.066)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Direct Democracy</td>
<td>$0.023^{***}$</td>
<td>$0.002$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman*DD</td>
<td>$0.014^{**}$</td>
<td>$0.014^*$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canton FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>52,984</td>
<td>52,984</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N$_{panelist}$</td>
<td>9003</td>
<td>9003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R$^2$</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R$^2$</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td></td>
<td>$-124,313$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td></td>
<td>248,692</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td></td>
<td>248,985</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cell entries represent unstandardized coefficient estimates with standard errors in parenthesis.  
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001
4.1 Introduction

An important concern regarding the expansion of direct democracy is its potential threat to minority rights. Madison, for example, cautioned that the use of direct democracy could potentially cause a majority dictatorship that severely threatens the interests of minorities (Madison, 1961). Others have also argued that in the absence of a body of representatives acting as a buffer against the tyranny of the majority, direct democracy threatens the interests of ethnic and social minorities (Bell Jr, 1978; Gamble, 1997).

In practice, we have witnessed incidents in which majority groups use direct democratic procedures to undermine the interests of minority groups. For example, during the 1990s California frequently used ballot initiatives that explicitly targeted immigrant groups. These include Proposition 187, a measure that sought to deny all public benefits
to undocumented immigrants, followed by Proposition 209 and Proposition 227, which proposed to dismantle affirmative action and bilingual education, respectively. Other states including Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Oklahoma, and Oregon have had similar initiatives on state ballots over the past two decades. They encompass such measures as barring illegal immigrants from collective punitive damages in civil lawsuits (Arizona Proposition 102), curtailing bilingual education (Oregon Proposition 58), and requiring students to prove they are legal permanent residents or citizens in order to receive in-state tuition at state universities (Arizona Proposition 300). Maryland has also used a referendum to grant undocumented immigrants the right to apply pay in-state tuition at state universities (Dream Act Referendum).

A surge of immigration in Europe has also led to a recent proliferation of direct democratic votes targeting immigrant minorities or that involve campaigns centered on immigration. For example, in November 2009, Switzerland passed a federal referendum designed to ban the construction of minarets, the prayer towers of mosques. While the Swiss Constitution has long guaranteed freedom of religion, a clear majority of 57.6% of Swiss voters in 22 out of 26 cantons supported the referendum, reflecting the public’s growing fear of the Muslim community. The referendum was supported by a campaign of public hostility towards Muslims, including bigoted political posters. A side effect of the campaign was that vandalism at mosques increased. More recently, anti-immigrant sentiments were at the core of debates on the EU referendum in the United Kingdom. The Brexit campaign capitalized on the public’s concerns about the influx of immigrants.

from Southern and Eastern European countries, and ideas about harm done by these immigrants dominated the media coverage of the referendum (Moore and Ramsay, 2017).

While a large body of work has explored whether these direct democratic practices produce undesirable outcomes for minorities (Gamble, 1997; Hajnal, 2009; Haider-Markel, Querze and Lindaman, 2007; Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2015), we know relatively little about their potential impacts on political attitudes and behavior of targeted minorities. The current paper addresses this gap in the literature by examining the following questions: how does the dramatic increase in the exposure to public hostility during the campaign affect targeted minority’s perceptions of the political system and their role in the political arena? Does this change motivate political activism of minorities in turn?

In this paper, I theorize that direct democratic votes targeted at ethnic minorities will motivate minorities to be politically active. I argue that as public hostility towards minority groups intensifies, group members’ perceptions of being stigmatized increases, thereby galvanizing them. Following the social psychology literature, I anticipate that perceptions of stigmatization strengthen group identification, and further stimulate political activism among minorities. Using survey data of a nationally representative sample in the United States, combined with information about direct democratic votes, I find that direct democratic votes targeted at ethnic minorities lead to political mobilization among these groups.
This study contributes to our understanding of how different forms of political decision-making procedures affect group behaviors. Importantly, it demonstrates that direct democracy influences groups not just through policy outcomes but also through process. In particular, I show that when the process of direct democracy reveals the society’s stigmatization toward a minority group, it may stimulate the group’s political awareness and activism.

4.2 Theories on Political Mobilization of Immigrants

With the rise of immigration in the United States and Europe, racial or ethnic minorities with immigrant backgrounds have increasing political influence. Today, first and second generation immigrants constitute 17 percent of the U.S. electorate, the vast majority of them being Latinos or Asian American. The immigrant share of the population has grown substantially in many European countries as well. These minority populations tend to have distinct political attitudes (Abrajano and Alvarez, 2010; Maxwell, 2010), partisan orientations (Bergh and Bjørklund, 2011; Cain, Kiewiet and Uhlaner, 1991; De la Garza and Cortina, 2007), and policy preferences (Branton, 2007; Dancygier and Saunders, 2006; Fraga et al., 2011) than the general population. Given their growing presence in the electorate, understanding the political behavior that influences these differences is of scholarly and political importance.

Research to date suggests that for minorities generally and immigrants in particular, in addition to conventional predictors of political participation, such as age and socioeconomic status, factors related to the socialization process, such as the duration of residency in the home country and language proficiency (Cho, 1999), group consciousness (Lien, Conway and Wong, 2004; Stokes, 2003), and the size of the group (Leighley, 2001) play a role, providing a basis for the current study’s specific interests related to the political participation among immigrants and minority populations.

A growing body of literature highlights the influence of local political context and the dominant group’s attitudes towards them on minorities’ political engagement (Cho, Gimpel and Wu, 2006; Just, 2015; Pantoja, Ramirez and Segura, 2001; Ramakrishnan, 2005). It further shows that their vulnerability to unfavorable sociopolitical conditions (Just and Anderson, 2014; Oyserman and Swim, 2001) drives this sensitivity. Evidence also suggests that such awareness of threat has important implications for political mobilization among minority populations. For example, Cho, Gimpel and Wu (2006) find that among Arab-Americans, threatening government policies, heightened discrimination, and violence against their group after 9/11 led to political participation among individuals who had not participated in politics before. Similarly, White (2016) shows that a threat of strict immigration enforcement leads to a greater turnout among Latino voters, many of whom have undocumented family members, friends, and neighbors.

While past studies focus on mobilizing effects of threats on minorities, in this paper, I focus on the effect of hostile political environments that enhance minorities’ perceptions
of being stigmatized. Specifically, I propose that the practice of direct democratic votes targeting a minority group intensifies the existing social stigma of the targeted group, thereby enhancing the group members’ perceptions of being stigmatized. This, in turn, may lead to greater political activism among members of the targeted group in order to fight the given stigma.

Targeted Votes and Perceptions of Social Stigma

Stigma refers to the rejection of individuals with an attribute their societies deeply discredit (Goffman, 1963). The dominant cultures in the United States and Europe have stigmatized ethnic minorities with immigrant backgrounds as a source of social ill. The rapid influx of immigrants naturally causes competition over scarce resources, generating hostility towards immigrants among natives (Dancygier, 2010; Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000; Tolbert and Grummel, 2003). Further, politicians and media have mobilized the public’s negative attitudes towards immigrants by portraying immigrants as social, economic, and security threats (Brader, Valentino and Suhay, 2008; Fetzer, 2000; Simon and Alexander, 1993).

While the public’s negative attitudes towards unpopular minority groups are often hidden or communicated in subtle ways, having a vote on these groups’ rights prompts bigots in the majority to express their opposition (Bell Jr, 1978). Thus intolerance and discrimination of immigrants becomes more ubiquitous. Studies suggest that such ref-
erenda actually increase intolerance among the majority, as well (Donovan and Tolbert, 2013; Wenzel, Donovan and Bowler, 1998).

Increased stigma of minority groups may reflect the referenda campaigns and the media attention they draw (Donovan and Tolbert, 2013). An NPR report attributed anti-immigrant sentiment in 2009 in part to a 1994 advertisement raising alarm about the cost of illegal immigrant children in public schools.”⁴ A Swiss poster equating minarets to missiles planted on the Swiss flag and showing a woman in a black burka with dark and menacing eyes, likely fanned the flames of prejudice in that campaign.⁴ These campaign efforts can amplify natives’ anxiety and feelings of being threatened, thereby raising their hostility towards immigrants (Brader, Valentino and Suhay, 2008; Hopkins, 2010). In these ways, targeted direct democratic votes can expand immigrants’ exposure to stigma, increasing the sense of discrimination based on their group membership.

**Rejection-Identification and Political Activism**

Do immigrants’ perceptions of stigmatization lead to political activism? Social psychology scholarship has examined how members of a stigmatized group cope with their feelings about unjust treatment. As social identity theory suggests, individuals’ self-esteem partly depends on preserving the positive distinctiveness of the group to which they belong relative to out-groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Thus, feeling that your

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group is devalued causes psychological distress leading to anxiety, depression, and lowered self-esteem (Crocker and Major, 1989; Schmitt, Spears and Branscombe, 2003).

The rejection-identification model first developed by Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey (1999), claims that stigmatized group members cope with their psychological harm by strengthening their identification with their own groups. They reason given that individuals desire to feel accepted and belong (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), the most adaptive response to discrimination and prejudice against their group is to increase identification with one’s own group (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey, 1999, p.137). Later studies further support this model by showing that strengthened group attachment alleviates the negative relationship between perceived discrimination based on category membership, such as racial minorities, women, and senior citizens, and psychological distress (Garstka et al., 2004; Schmitt and Branscombe, 2002; Spencer-Rodgers and Collins, 2006).

As a consequence of strengthened group identification, members of stigmatized groups become more invested in their group. Their vested interest in the group, in turn, may lead them to engage in collective efforts to improve the group’s status from stigmatized to accepted (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje, 1997). Cronin et al. (2012), for example, found that Latino college students’ perceptions of discrimination based on their ethnicity increased their willingness to participate in activities on behalf of their ethnic group, such as voting, demonstration, and signing petitions. Relatedly, in political science research, Pérez (2015a; 2015b) shows that hearing xenophobic rhetoric from
politicians leads Latinos with a strong attachment to their ethnic group to adopt pro-
Latino political attitudes.

Following the insights from these studies, I expect immigrants’ perceptions that they are stigmatized as a consequence of direct democracy targeting their rights to enhance their political activism. Awareness of their society’s stigmatization of their group motivates members of ethnic minorities with immigrant backgrounds to strengthen their identification with their group. The more these individuals become attached to their ethnic group, the more they develop a vested interest in said group. Consequently, they will become more willing to seek out opportunities to bolster the group’s status, and further, to participate in costly political activities to promote their interests.


To test the suggested effect of targeted direct democratic votes on political activism among ethnic minorities with immigrant backgrounds, I use the Comparative Congressional Election Study (CCES) survey data from 2006 to 2012. As the focus of the analysis is on political activism of ethnic minorities with immigrant backgrounds, I only use the sample of Latino, Asian, and Arab Americans. CCES has an advantage over surveys such as the Latino National Survey and the Asian American Survey because it includes
multiple ethnic minority groups. It also has a sufficiently large number of ethnic minorities with immigrant backgrounds to suit the research question, and it was conducted over multiple years, enabling over-time comparison among minority respondents within the same state. Table 4.1 displays the number of respondents by ethnic group in each wave.

Table 4.1: Number of Minority Respondents in CCES by Ethnic Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
<th>Arab American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15,448</td>
<td>2,187</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3,389</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4,460</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>5,599</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The unit of observation is municipality, election year.

Table 4.2: Political Activism by Racial Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Group</th>
<th>Voted in elections</th>
<th>Make donations</th>
<th>Attended local meetings</th>
<th>Worked for campaigns</th>
<th>Put political signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>89.73 %</td>
<td>55.54 %</td>
<td>18.03 %</td>
<td>11.12 %</td>
<td>28.49 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>84.77 %</td>
<td>24.3 %</td>
<td>12.76 %</td>
<td>10.73 %</td>
<td>19.08 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinos</td>
<td>81.11 %</td>
<td>25.7 %</td>
<td>12.41 %</td>
<td>7.69 %</td>
<td>19.49 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>70.2 %</td>
<td>20.7 %</td>
<td>9.83 %</td>
<td>6.54 %</td>
<td>17.23 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>89.72 %</td>
<td>38.54 %</td>
<td>21.19 %</td>
<td>15.25 %</td>
<td>33.90 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each cell entry indicates the percentage of respondents who answered that they participated in each political activities.

The CCES includes several questions about participation in political activities. Respondents indicated if they had voted in the general election; donated to a candidate, campaign, or political organization; attended local political meetings; put up a political sign; or worked for a candidate or campaign. I use responses to these questions as mea-
sures of Political Activism. In Table 4.2, I report the share of respondents by ethnic group who answered that they participated in each of these political activities. Consistent with previous findings about political activism in the United States (Verba et al., 1993; Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995), members of ethnic minorities tend to participate in political activities at lower rates than whites. In particular, Asian Americans show the lowest participation rates in all activities.

The primary explanatory variable, Immigrants-Related Votes, is captured through a measure of the number of direct ballot initiatives related to the rights of immigrants that took place in a given state in a given year, ranging from 0 to 3. Table 4.3 lists the initiatives that took place in the United States during the period of investigation. These include the Maryland In-State Tuition Referendum (i.e., Dream Act Referendum), although it was the negative campaign rather than the positive campaign that revealed the presence of stigma in the state.

I control for standard demographic variables that might affect political activism: gender, income, education, employment status, party identification, liberal-conservative ideology, religiosity, and marital status. To account for potential difference between first and second generation immigrants, I also include an indicator for the first generation immigrants in the models. Additionally, I include fixed effects for state of residence and year to account for potential specific effects within units.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Proposition No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Arizona Bailable Offenses</td>
<td>Prevents bail for those charged with a serious felony offense and that could not prove their were in the US legally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>Standing in Civil Actions Act</td>
<td>Prohibits illegal immigrants from receiving punitive damages in state lawsuits filed in Arizona.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>Public Program Eligibility Act</td>
<td>Requires verification of citizenship of persons who are applying for state-funded services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Referendum H</td>
<td>Colorado State Business Income Tax Deduction Limit Referendum</td>
<td>Eliminates a state income tax benefit for businesses that pay an unauthorized alien to perform labor services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Referendum K</td>
<td>Colorado Immigration Lawsuit Against Federal Government Referendum</td>
<td>Mandates the Attorney General of Colorado initiate or join other states in a lawsuit against the United States attorney general to demand the enforcement of all existing federal immigration laws by the federal government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Amendment 1</td>
<td>Property Rights and Illegal Aliens Act</td>
<td>Delete provisions authorizing the Legislature to prohibit the ownership, inheritance, disposition, and possession of real property by illegal immigrants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>Stop Illegal Hiring</td>
<td>Prohibits employers from employing an alien who is not authorized under federal law to work in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Measure 58</td>
<td>Public School English Immersion</td>
<td>Prohibits Teaching Public School Student in Language Other Than English for More Than Two Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>State Question 746</td>
<td>Oklahoma Voter Identification Measure Act</td>
<td>Required voters to produce photo identification in order to vote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>MT</td>
<td>LR-121</td>
<td>Montana Proof of Citizenship Question</td>
<td>Requires proof of citizenship in order for a person to receive state services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Question 4</td>
<td>Maryland In-State Tuition Referendum</td>
<td>Allows undocumented immigrants to pay in-state or in-county tuition at Maryland colleges.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4: Immigrants-Related Votes and Political Activism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vote (1)</th>
<th>Donations (2)</th>
<th>Attend local meetings (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants-Related Votes</td>
<td>0.150</td>
<td>0.221***</td>
<td>0.888*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.274)</td>
<td>(0.082)</td>
<td>(0.539)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.709***</td>
<td>0.439***</td>
<td>0.385***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
<td>(0.071)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>0.818***</td>
<td>0.866***</td>
<td>0.760***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.074)</td>
<td>(0.085)</td>
<td>(0.110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.053***</td>
<td>0.096***</td>
<td>0.043***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>−0.005</td>
<td>−0.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td>(0.058)</td>
<td>(0.081)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>−0.199</td>
<td>−0.425***</td>
<td>−0.272***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.104)</td>
<td>(0.113)</td>
<td>(0.136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>0.147*</td>
<td>0.165***</td>
<td>−0.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td>(0.058)</td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>0.442***</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.070)</td>
<td>(0.062)</td>
<td>(0.087)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.035**</td>
<td>0.046***</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.011)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age²</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
<td>0.00001</td>
<td>−0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0002)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0.193***</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.504***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
<td>(0.058)</td>
<td>(0.074)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.171***</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td>(0.056)</td>
<td>(0.076)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>9,429</td>
<td>10,203</td>
<td>7,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>−3,736.142</td>
<td>−4,811.387</td>
<td>−2,862.739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>7,616.283</td>
<td>9,766.774</td>
<td>5,867.478</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cell entries represent unstandardized coefficient estimates with standard errors in parenthesis.
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Table 4.5: Immigrants-Related Votes and Political Activism (cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Work for campaigns (4)</th>
<th>Put political signs (5)</th>
<th>Contact (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants-Related Votes</td>
<td>1.271**</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.640)</td>
<td>(0.466)</td>
<td>(0.088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.180**</td>
<td>0.304***</td>
<td>0.178***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.091)</td>
<td>(0.063)</td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>1.085***</td>
<td>0.474***</td>
<td>0.519***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.164)</td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
<td>(0.584)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.052***</td>
<td>0.054***</td>
<td>0.064***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.011)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>-0.176</td>
<td>-0.110</td>
<td>0.179***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.104)</td>
<td>(0.072)</td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>-0.167</td>
<td>-0.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.159)</td>
<td>(0.114)</td>
<td>(0.070)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>0.276***</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.160***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.100)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
<td>(0.049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.160**</td>
<td>0.198***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.108)</td>
<td>(0.076)</td>
<td>(0.054)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.0001</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age^2</td>
<td>0.0002</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0002)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0.592***</td>
<td>0.323***</td>
<td>0.209***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.094)</td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.141</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
<td>(0.067)</td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>7,945</td>
<td>7,945</td>
<td>10,033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-1,942.225</td>
<td>-3,439.745</td>
<td>-5,984.464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>4,026.451</td>
<td>7,021.489</td>
<td>12,112.930</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cell entries represent unstandardized coefficient estimates with standard errors in parenthesis.
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 show estimates of logit models using binary indicators of political activism as outcome variables. *Immigrants-Related Votes* appears to have positive effects on the measures of *Political Activism*, except for voting and putting political signs. Specifically, these tables show that *Immigrants-Related Votes* in a respondent’s state in a given year increases the probability that the respondent will donate to political organizations, attend local meetings, or works for campaigns. These effects are significant at conventional levels. As seen in the left panel of Figure 4.1, going from the minimum to the maximum value of *Immigrants-Related Votes* increases the predicted probability of making political donations by 0.14. The middle and the right panels demonstrate that the same change in *Immigrants-Related Votes* leads to 0.48 increase in the predicted probability of attending local meetings and 0.70 increase in the predicted probability of a minority member working for political campaigns, yet predictions for higher values do not appear statistically significant.

It should be also noted that *Immigrants-Related Votes* had no significant effect on targeted minorities’ propensity to vote in general elections. Previous research found that ballot initiatives in general tend to increase voter turnout by boosting voters’ interest in the election (Tolbert, Grummel and Smith, 2001; Tolbert, McNeal and Smith, 2003; Smith and Tolbert, 2004). Following this insight, we should expect to see a greater turnout among minorities when popular votes targeting their group’s rights appeared on the ballot. Yet, my finding does not confirm this belief. Instead, Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 sug-
suggest that while targeted votes do not lead to an immediate boost in minorities’ electoral participation, they stimulate more costly forms of political participation.

While these results support the positive effects of targeted votes on minorities’ political activism, there is a concern the mobilizing effect of Immigrants-Related Votes might be conditional on the content of the vote. Specifically, direct democratic votes that are designed to bring a positive outcome to immigrants may not have the same effect as the votes that are intended to undermine immigrants’ rights. In my sample, the Maryland In-State Tuition Referendum was the only vote that could bring positive consequences for immigrants, and the results do not change substantively when excluding this vote.

A plausible alternative mechanism underlying these results could be politicians’ mobilizing efforts towards targeted immigrant groups. I test this possibility using responses to the question, “Did a candidate or political campaign organization contact you during the election?” as the outcome variable. As seen in Model (6) of Table 4.5, having Immigrants-Related Votes on the ballot does not appear to affect the likelihood that a minority respondent will receive a contact from politicians. This disconfirms the possibility that politicians’ mobilizing efforts drove the main finding.

**Conditional Effect of Immigrants-Related Votes by Minority Status**

Next, I examine how Immigrants-Related Votes affect minorities’ political activism relative to the mainstream group. The results of the main analysis show that Immigrants-Related Votes increases minorities’ participation in some political activities.
Figure 4.1.: Predicted Probabilities, Model (2)-(4) in Table 4.4 and Table 4.5
The existing literature on direct democracy has shown that referendums and initiatives can boost citizen engagement in politics through supplying more political information and enhancing their sense of political efficacy (Smith and Tolbert, 2004; Tolbert and Smith, 2005). Given this, Immigrants-Related Votes might have some positive effects on the general population’s political participation as well. Thus, the question whether targeted direct democratic votes bring meaningful changes in minorities’ political behavior relative to other groups remains. To explore this, I employ multilevel models with an interaction term of an indicator of Minority member and Immigrants-Related Votes, where slopes are allowed to vary by state and year.

In Figure 4.2, I plot predicted probabilities of political activism estimated by the models with the interaction terms with 95 % prediction intervals. These plots confirm that Immigrants-Related Votes have meaningful impacts on minorities’ political activism relative to non-minorities. The top-right panel, for example, shows that when respondents experienced three Immigrants-Related Votes in a given year, minority respondents are more likely to donate to political organizations than non-minorities. Bottom panels also confirm that increase in Immigrants-Related Votes leads to greater participation among minority respondents, reducing and even reversing the participation gap with non-minority respondents.
Figure 4.2.: Predicted Probabilities of Political Activism, by Minority Status
4.4 Conclusion

Findings from an observational study suggest that popular votes that target immigrants in the United States boost political participation of minorities with immigrant backgrounds. This is interesting as these groups generally participate in politics less frequently than other groups, all else being equal. I also find that this effect is independent of mobilization efforts by candidates and political parties.

This paper speaks to two distinct literatures. First, it provides a new perspective on understanding the relationship between direct democracy and minority rights. While previous work has almost exclusively focused on whether direct democracy produces unfavorable policy outcomes for minorities (for example, Gamble, 1997; Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2015; Hajnal, 2009), my findings suggest that having a direct democratic vote itself has meaningful impacts on minorities’ political perceptions and behavior.

Second, this paper adds to our knowledge about minority political behavior by delineating mechanisms underlying the political environment and minority mobilization. Specifically, I find that an institutional opportunity that increases minorities’ perceptions of being stigmatized will motivate their political activism.

These findings also open avenues for future work. First, the mechanism of mobilization I suggest consists of multiple steps, and each of these steps merits closer examination. Do minorities perceive an increased sense of social stigma in the aftermath of targeted popular votes? Does this indeed increase a greater group attachment? Finally, does the increased sense of social stigma translate into greater political activism?
Second, it also becomes important to examine the dynamics of mobilization. How long does this mobilizing effect last? Does it reverse in certain contexts? Third, this study points to a need for a more systemic analysis linking the role of political elite. Under what conditions do candidates and parties promote or deter mobilization of ethnic minorities? And how does this affect the implementation of direct democracy? These are the questions I plan to explore in future research.
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