

Direct Democracy and Political Equality in the American States*

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Abstract

Objectives

This study investigates the relationship between direct democracy and the equality of opinion-policy representation in the American states.

Methods

Using public opinion measures from the National Annenberg Election Surveys and data on state policy outputs, I generate an index of the equality of political representation (based on citizens' incomes) that is comparable across the states. I then evaluate the relationship between different measures of direct democracy and political equality.

Results

States with the ballot initiative process are no more politically equal than states without the process. However, among those that have the ballot initiative process, states where it is easier to place a measure on the ballot for popular vote and states where the ballot initiative is more frequently used tend to weigh citizens' opinions more equally in the policymaking process.

Conclusions

These findings suggest that having and frequently using direct democracy leads to more egalitarian policy outcomes. More generally, this study underscores the importance of laws and institutional design in promoting political equality in the United States.

Any evaluation of the quality of a democracy must also be concerned with “e”quality. As Robert Dahl (2006, ix) states, “The existence of political equality is a fundamental premise of democracy.” In the context of political representation, “political equality refers to the extent to which citizens have an equal voice in governmental decisions. One of the bedrock principles in a democracy is the equal consideration of the preferences and interests of all citizens” (Verba 2003, 663). In short, political equality – the equal weighting of citizens’ opinions when elected officials make important policy decisions – is central to any assessment of democratic performance.¹ However, a series of recent studies have uncovered evidence of significant political inequality, finding that affluent citizens are more likely to have their opinions reflected in the public policy decisions made by elected officials compared to disadvantaged citizens (Bartels 2008; Rigby and Wright 2011; Ellis 2012; Flavin 2012; Gilens 2012).

The existence of unequal political representation presents scholars a question with very concrete policy implications: What sort of laws and institutional arrangements can help promote a more equal consideration of citizens’ opinions in the policymaking process? For example, do certain campaign finance reforms like stricter disclosure or contribution limits laws lead to a more equal weighting of citizens’ opinions? What about the use of voting and registration reforms like early and absentee voting or Election Day registration? By studying how certain institutional arrangements lead to more or less political equality, scholars can shed light on an important normative question for American democracy.

This paper uses the variation across the American states to study the impact of direct democracy laws on the equality of political representation for the rich and poor. I first find that states with the ballot initiative process are no more or less politically equal compared to states without the initiative process. However, when the analysis is confined only to states with the

initiative, public policies are more equally representative of all citizens' opinions in states where it is easier to place a measure on the ballot for popular vote and states where the initiative process is heavily used. These results suggest that having and frequently using the initiative process may be a viable avenue for ensuring that the opinions of disadvantaged citizens are represented in the political arena. More broadly, these findings underscore the importance of laws and institutional design in promoting political equality in the United States.

Theoretical Expectations

Amidst growing evidence of political inequality at the national level (Bartels 2008; Ellis 2012; Gilens 2012), scholars are beginning to identify and investigate unequal political representation at the state level as well. For example, Rigby and Wright (2011) uncover evidence that the general ideological tone of state economic policies tends to be most responsive to the opinions of the rich and hardly at all to the poor, and that this is particularly true in poorer states. Similarly, Flavin (2012) finds that citizens with low incomes tend to have little influence on state policy outputs measured both as general policy liberalism and specific social policies like the death penalty, abortion, and gun control.

Despite the growing literature on “unequal democracy” in the United States, our understanding of the factors that lead to more or less political equality remain limited. Fortunately, the fifty states provide rich variation in laws and institutions that allow researchers to investigate what conditions might promote greater political equality. For example, besides indirectly influencing public policy through the election and monitoring of public officials, citizens in some states can exert direct influence on policy decisions through the ballot initiative process. Currently, twenty-four states allow citizens to present a petition to place a measure on

the ballot for popular vote at election time, generally with the requirement that a certain number of signatures accompany the petition.² This paper uses the variation across the states to investigate if direct democracy promotes more egalitarian political representation.

The primary theoretical reason why direct democracy is expected to promote greater political equality is that it shifts the power in the policymaking process away from political and economic elites and towards ordinary voters (Gerber 1999). As Matsusaka (2004, 71) writes, “Without the initiative, voters are forced to accept the policy choices of the legislature. With the initiative, voters are given choices.” The initiative process allows citizens with limited resources a greater voice in the political process because they get a direct say on proposed policy changes and all citizens, no matter how rich or poor, only get to cast a single vote. This is in contrast to the regular policymaking process in state legislatures, where the opinions of wealthier citizens likely exert greater influence on legislators because of the time and resources usually required to successfully lobby government officials (Hall and Wayman 1990; Powell 2012).

Previous research has also shown that the initiative process can have an educative effect on citizens by increasing levels of political knowledge (Tolbert, McNeal, and Smith 2003; Biggers 2012). This educative effect is likely the strongest among disadvantaged citizens who tend to have low levels of political knowledge to begin with. Moreover, the presence of the initiative process can boost voter turnout (Smith and Tolbert 2004), especially among disadvantaged citizens (Tolbert, Bowen, and Donovan 2009). Therefore, it is expected that citizens with low incomes in states that have and use the initiative process will be more politically informed, more likely to turn out to vote, and (by extension) more likely to have their political preferences reflected in the policy decisions made by their state elected officials.

To date, however, no study has directly evaluated the relationship between direct democracy laws and the equality of political representation. This shortcoming in our understanding is unfortunate given that direct democracy could potentially be an important institution for ensuring that citizens' opinions are more equally represented in the political arena. To further our understanding of the effects of laws and institutional design, I investigate whether the presence and usage of the ballot initiative process (measured in various ways) in the states leads to greater political equality.

Evaluating the Equality of Political Representation in the American States

In this study, policy representation is measured using a proximity technique that places public opinion and policy on the same linear scale and compares the distance between the two (Achen 1978). Using this method, as the ideological distance between a citizen's opinion and policy grows (i.e. policy is ideologically "further" from a citizen's preferences), that citizen is not well represented.³ In practical terms, this proximity technique allows a researcher to evaluate whether a conservative (liberal) citizen lives in a state that, compared to other states, implements conservative (liberal) policies and is "well" represented, implements liberal (conservative) policies and is "poorly" represented, or gradations in between.

Measuring ideological proximity requires two pieces of data: (1) a measure of citizens' opinions and (2) a measure of state policy. To measure public opinion, I combine data from the 2000, 2004, and 2008 National Annenberg Election Surveys (NAES), three random digit dialing rolling cross sectional surveys conducted in the months leading up to that year's presidential election. The major advantage of pooling these three NAES surveys is their sheer sample size which allows a large enough sample without having to aggregate across a long time period or

simulate state opinion (Carsey and Harden 2010). This large sample size is especially important because this paper later evaluates the relationship between income and ideological proximity within individual states.⁴

Citizens' general political ideology is measured using the following item from the NAES: "Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?" The measure is coded such that it runs from -2 (very conservative) to +2 (very liberal). Data on citizens' self-reported political ideology have been commonly used to measure public opinion in previous studies of political representation (e.g., Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Griffin and Flavin 2007; Bartels 2008; Flavin 2012) and there is reason to be confident that self-reported ideology is an accurate measure of citizens' aggregated policy-specific opinions.⁵

To measure public policy, I require a general measure of the "liberalism" (Klingman and Lammers 1984) of state policy outputs that comports with the survey item that asks citizens their general political ideology. In their seminal book on state opinion and policy, Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) developed a composite index of state policy liberalism using eight policy areas for which liberals and conservatives typically disagree. Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and McAtee (2004) updated this policy liberalism measure for 2000 using the following five policy items: (1) state regulation of firearms as measured by state gun laws; (2) scorecard of state abortion laws in 2000; (3) an index of welfare stringency that accounts for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) rules of eligibility and work requirements for 1997-99; (4) a dummy measure of state right-to-work laws in 2001; and (5) a measure of tax progressivity calculated as a ratio of the average tax burden of the highest five percent of a state's earners to the average tax burden of the lowest forty percent of a state's earners.⁶ These five components are then

standardized and summed in an additive index such that more liberal state policies are coded higher. I use this index as my first measure of the general ideological tone of state policy.

Second, a recent article by Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger (2008) provides a rich source of data on state policies in twenty different areas ranging from public assistance spending to gun control to health insurance regulations.⁷ In addition to specific statutes and spending data, the authors provide a summary index of policy liberalism for each state that they derive by factor analyzing their entire range of policies. I use this composite score as a second measure of general policy liberalism.⁸ Together, the two policy liberalism measures represent the uni-dimensional liberal/conservative ideology of state policy decisions that correspond well to the measure of citizens' general political ideologies described above.

Measuring ideological proximity requires a method of placing citizens' opinions and state policy on a common scale for comparison. Drawing on previous studies that have also used a proximity technique to measure political representation (Achen 1978; Burden 2004; Blais and Bodet 2006; Gershtenson and Plane 2007; Griffin and Flavin 2007; Griffin and Newman 2008; Jessee 2009; Golder and Stramski 2010; Ellis 2012; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012), this paper approaches this task in three different ways. If all three measurement techniques point to the same conclusion, then we can be more confident in the robustness of the results.⁹

First, all ideological opinions are standardized to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one and the two recent measures of general state policy liberalism described above (Gray et al. 2004; Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger 2008) are then standardized as well. After standardizing both opinion and policy, they are now on a common (standardized) metric, similar to the strategy used by Wright (1978). Proximity is measured as the absolute value of the difference between a respondent's ideology score and the policy liberalism score for his/her state using both of the

measures of policy. This creates the first measure of ideological distance for each respondent in the NAES sample which is labeled the *Standardized* measure.

Second, the two measures of state policy are rescaled to the same scale (-2 to +2) as citizens' self-reported ideology. This technique is similar to that used in early studies of congressional representation (Miller 1964; Achen 1978) and one that is still advocated by representation scholars today (Burden 2004; Griffin and Newman 2008). The absolute value of the distance between a respondent's ideology score and the policy liberalism score for his/her state is again computed and labeled the *Same Scale* measure.

Third, policy is rescaled to a tighter range (-1 to +1) than citizens' ideologies. This procedure is used because we can expect citizens' ideological opinions to have a wider range and take on more extreme values compared to actual state policy outputs. This transformation to a tighter scale is suggested and implemented by Powell (1982, 1989) in her studies of congressional representation. Again, the absolute value of the distance between a respondent's ideology score and the state policy liberalism score for his/her state is computed and labeled the *Restricted Scale* measure.

Together, there are three different measurement techniques and two different measurements of state policy liberalism, for a total of six different measures of ideological proximity between citizens' opinions and state policy. I am then interested in whether there are systematic differences in proximity between opinion and policy across citizens; specifically, whether there is a link between a citizen's income and the ideological distance between opinion and policy. Because I am interested in unequal political representation within each state and state populations can vary widely in terms of their income distribution, it would be unwise to simply compare the incomes of citizens in one state to the incomes of citizens in another state.

Simply put, we might expect someone making \$100,000 per year living in West Virginia to exert comparatively greater political influence than someone making \$100,000 per year living in Connecticut. To account for differences in the income distribution across states, I generate a measure of state relative income that compares a respondent's income with the average income for a resident in his or her state.

Armed with this measure of state relative income, I then assess whether there is a systematic relationship between citizens' incomes and the ideological distance between their opinion and state policy by regressing the measure of ideological distance on income for every respondent in the sample using the six different measures of ideological proximity described above.¹⁰ The results of these six regression estimations are reported in Table 1. Reading across the six columns reveals strong evidence of unequal political representation. Specifically, all six coefficients for income are negative and bounded below zero which indicates that as a respondent's income increases, the distance between their ideology and state policy decreases and they are better represented. Put another way, the lower a respondent's income, the greater the distance between opinion and policy and the worse that respondent's general political ideology is represented in the general liberalism of his or her state's public policies.

Substantively, the larger opinion-policy distance for a respondent at the 10th percentile for income compared to a respondent at the 90th percentile is about the same as the difference between a respondent at the 10th percentile for (state relative) level of education compared to the 90th percentile (Gilens 2005) and larger than the difference between an African American respondent compared to a white respondent (Griffin and Newman 2008). These findings comport with the small but growing set of studies (Rigby and Wright 2011; Flavin 2012) that

have found that citizens with low incomes are systematically underrepresented in the policymaking process in the American states.

[Table 1 about here]

As discussed above, the primary rationale for examining unequal political representation at the state level is to understand and explain variation in political equality across the states. To assess in which states political influence is strongly tied to income compared to those states that weight opinions more equally, I run a separate regression for each state and compare the coefficient for (state relative) income. Similar to the nationwide regression reported in Table 1, a more steeply negative slope coefficient indicates a stronger relationship between income and ideological distance and, accordingly, less political equality. For example, consider the two hypothetical states presented in Figure 1. For each state, the line represents the slope of the relationship between income and ideological distance. As the figure illustrates, the relationship between income and distance is rather weak in State A, indicating that citizens' opinions are weighted roughly equally regardless of their income. In contrast, the slope of the relationship between income and ideological distance is quite steeply negative for State B, indicating that there is a strong degree of political inequality in state policymaking.

[Figure 1 about here]

A separate regression is run for each state using each of the six different measures of ideological proximity described above (three measurement techniques x two measures of state policy liberalism).¹¹ When the six regression coefficients (for state relative income) are compared within the states, they have a Cronbach's alpha of .96, indicating that all six measures appear to be measuring the same concept. To create a single summary score of political equality that is directly comparable across states, I conduct a principal components analysis on the six

slope coefficients and generate a single factor score for each state.¹² Because a more steeply negative slope coefficient indicates more unequal representation (i.e. a stronger relationship between income and ideological distance), a more positive factor score indicates greater political equality (i.e. a more equal weighting of citizens' opinions). I label this new measure the "Political Equality Index."

[Table 2 about here]

The factor scores generated using this procedure are reported in Table 2 where the states are ranked from the most to least equal in terms of political representation. It is important to note that the index is not simply an alternative measure of the liberalism of state policy (with the expectation that lower income citizens support more liberal policies). The Political Equality Index correlates with the Gray et al. (2004) policy liberalism measure at .47 and with the Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger (2008) policy liberalism measure at only .37. Most importantly, however, is the fact that there is significant variation in political equality across the states. In the following section, I use this variation to evaluate whether states with direct democracy tend to display more egalitarian patterns of political representation.

Does the Ballot Initiative Promote More Egalitarian Political Representation?

To evaluate the relationship between direct democracy and political equality, I examine several different measures of initiative use. To begin, I generate a simple dummy variable that is coded one if a state has the initiative process and zero if it does not (Boehmke 2002 and Matsusaka 2004 also uses this technique). Fully 24 of the 50 states have the process, but only 23 of the states in the models I subsequently present do because Alaska drops out due to no public opinion data (and consequently no measure of the equality of political representation). I regress

the Political Equality Index (where greater equality is coded higher) on this dummy variable for presence of the initiative process. I also account for two economic variables that are likely related to political inequality. First, I include a measure of a state's median income (measured in \$1000s) with the expectation that richer and poorer states may differ in the way economic inequality is reproduced in politics and in terms of the issue cleavages that define political conflict for both voters and elites. This expectation builds on Rigby and Wright's (2011) finding that political representation is most unequal on economic issues in poorer states (where it is the main axis of political conflict), suggesting that the degree of political inequality is conditioned by a state's wealth.

Second, I include a measure of income inequality for each state using the Gini coefficient for 1999 provided by the United States Census Bureau. The Gini coefficient is a commonly used measure of income inequality that runs from zero to one, with higher values indicating the income distribution is more unequal and concentrated in the hands of a small group of citizens. Bartels' (2008) recent work on the "political economy of the new gilded age" posits a close relationship between political and economic inequality. Moreover, in a cross-national analysis, Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer (2012) find that political parties are especially unresponsive to the opinions of poor citizens in countries with higher levels of economic inequality.

The results from this first ordinary least squares regression estimation are reported in Column 1 of Table 3. The coefficient for the presence of the initiative process is positive, but not statistically different from zero. This suggests that states with the initiative process do not systematically differ in their level of political equality compared to states that do not have the initiative process. Looking to the other covariates in the model, I also find that, as expected,

states with lower levels of income inequality tend to weigh citizens opinions more equally than states with wider income differences.

[Table 3 about here]

The splitting of states into those with the initiative process and those without does not tell the whole story about the relationship between direct democracy and political inequality, for several reasons. First, states that have the ballot initiative process may qualitatively differ in several aspects (many of them unobservable) from states that do not.¹³ Second, among states with the process, some may routinely have multiple policy proposals on the ballot for voters to decide on while others may rarely, if ever, use the initiative process. Third, the rules that decide how a proposal makes it onto the ballot vary considerably across the states. As Bowler and Donovan (2004, 348) point out, “Although the initiative process follows a very similar sequence across the states (titling, qualification through petition, vote), there are critical differences among the states’ rules for its implementation that structure the cost and difficulty of qualifying a measure for the ballot.” These differences provide a more nuanced picture of the initiative process and allow me to examine whether, across only the states that have the initiative process, legal processes and frequency of use predicts the extent of unequal political representation.

To quantify this variation, I use two variables developed by Bowler and Donovan (2004) that measure the institutional constraints on the initiative process across the states. The first is a Qualification Difficulty Index, measured as “the sum of the number of formal provisions that increase the difficulty of qualifying a measure for the ballot, giving special weight to a state’s petition signature requirements” (320). The second is a Legislative Insulation Index, measured as “the sum of the number of provisions that constrain how a legislature can change an initiative that has been approved by voters” (320). The variables are coded such that a higher value

indicates that access to the ballot is *more difficult* or that the state legislature has a *greater ability to modify* the content of successfully petitioned ballot proposals.

The Political Equality Index is regressed (separately) on each of these two institutional indices only among the 23 states that have a legal initiative process. The results of these estimations are reported in Columns 2 (Qualification Difficulty Index) and 3 (Legislative Insulation Index) of Table 3. The coefficients for both institutional indices are negative, but only the coefficient for Qualification Difficulty Index is bounded below zero. This indicates that states where it is more difficult to actually place an initiative on the ballot tend to weigh citizens' opinions less equally. The magnitude of this relationship is substantively large: moving from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard above on the Qualification Difficulty Index leads to a .78 standard deviation decrease in the Political Equality Index. In short, these findings suggest that states that limit the impact of the initiative process are also more politically unequal.

As another way to evaluate the relationship between the ballot initiative and political equality, I construct two measures of actual initiative usage using data from the Initiative and Referendum Institute at the University of Southern California: (1) the number of ballot initiatives *proposed* (i.e. placed on the ballot for voters to decide on) from 1990 to 2008 and (2) the number of ballot initiatives actually *approved* by voters during that same time period.¹⁴ These measures that encompass an eighteen year period are intended to give a general indication of how often (or not) the initiative process is used in a particular state. The Political Equality Index is regressed (separately) on the number of ballot initiatives proposed and approved and the same controls for state median income and level of income inequality used in the previous models.

The results of these estimations are reported in Columns 4 (number of initiatives proposed) and 5 (number of initiatives approved) of Table 3. Both coefficients for actual initiative usage are positive and bounded above zero. This suggests that states that use the ballot initiative process more often tend to be more politically equal, and the magnitude of this relationship is substantively large. Specifically, moving from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above for the number of ballot initiatives *proposed* predicts a .88 standard deviation increase in the Political Equality Index. Similarly, moving from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above for the number of ballot initiatives *approved* predicts over a full standard deviation (1.08) increase in the Political Equality Index. In sum, when the analysis is confined only to states with the initiative process and actual usage is considered, states that make more frequent use of the ballot initiative process tend to have more equal political representation.¹⁵

Conclusion

The correspondence between citizens' opinions and public policy is the "bottom line" for American democracy. This paper extends a growing literature on unequal political representation at the national level to the American states and uncovers similar results (also see Rigby and Wright 2011; Flavin 2012). When assessing the relationship between citizens' general political ideology and state policy liberalism, citizens with higher incomes are consistently better represented compared to citizens with lower incomes (see Table 1). If "a key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals" (Dahl 1971, 1), the democratic process in the American states appears to fall short of this standard.

Moreover, there is significant variation in the equality of political representation across the states (see Table 2). Using this variation, I evaluate the relationship between direct democracy and political equality and first find that states with the ballot initiative process are no more or less politically equal compared to states without the initiative process. However, when the analysis is confined only to states with the initiative, public policy outputs are more equally representative of all citizens' opinions in states where it is easier to place a measure on the ballot for popular vote and states where the initiative process is more often used (see Table 3). These results suggest that having and frequently using the initiative process may be a viable avenue for ensuring that the opinions of disadvantaged citizens are represented in the political arena.

More generally, the wide variation in laws, institutions, and public policy regimes across the states provides a unique research opportunity to examine the causes of, and possible remedies for, unequal political influence. Recent studies of unequal political representation document consistent disparities in influence between the rich and the poor (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012) but stop short of fully investigating and prescribing possible solutions to the problem. Although political scientists and pundits have speculated for decades about possible remedies for unequal political influence, empirical examination of this topic remains limited. To further our understanding, future studies should incorporate additional institutional features in the states to investigate what conditions and arrangements might help lead to greater political equality.

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**Table 1: As Citizens' Incomes Increase
the Ideological Distance Between Opinion and Policy gets Smaller**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Distance Measure	Standardized	Standardized	Same Scale	Same Scale	Restricted Scale	Restricted Scale
Policy Data	Gray et al.	SMR	Gray et al.	SMR	Gray et al.	SMR
Respondent's Income (State Relative)	-0.010*** [0.002]	-0.011*** [0.003]	-0.012*** [0.002]	-0.014*** [0.003]	-0.008*** [0.002]	-0.010*** [0.002]
Constant	1.148*** [0.115]	1.164*** [0.117]	1.194*** [0.103]	1.213*** [0.074]	0.906*** [0.032]	0.905*** [0.025]
N	177,043	177,043	177,043	177,043	177,043	177,043

Dependent variable: Linear distance between a citizen's ideology and state policy (method used to measure distance listed above each column). Cell entries are ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors clustered by state reported beneath in brackets. * denotes $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ using a two-tailed test. Gray et al. = Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and McAtee (2004). SMR = Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger (2008).

Table 2: Ranking the States by the Equality of Political Representation

Montana	4.51	Virginia	0.22
Minnesota	3.23	Florida	0.22
Oregon	3.19	Massachusetts	0.19
South Dakota	2.60	Connecticut	0.08
Vermont	2.19	Texas	0.01
California	2.18	Nevada	-0.06
New Mexico	2.12	North Carolina	-0.18
Michigan	1.94	Kansas	-0.25
Washington	1.82	Maryland	-0.50
Wisconsin	1.64	Kentucky	-0.68
Ohio	1.54	New York	-1.07
Nebraska	1.29	Indiana	-1.27
Iowa	1.24	Louisiana	-1.46
Pennsylvania	1.23	Tennessee	-1.53
West Virginia	1.20	South Carolina	-1.79
Arizona	1.15	Delaware	-1.85

Missouri	1.14	North Dakota	-2.02
Idaho	1.10	New Hampshire	-2.36
Rhode Island	1.06	Arkansas	-2.47
New Jersey	1.03	Oklahoma	-2.52
Maine	0.57	Wyoming	-2.91
Colorado	0.55	Georgia	-3.56
Illinois	0.40	Alabama	-5.06
Utah	0.34	Mississippi	-8.44

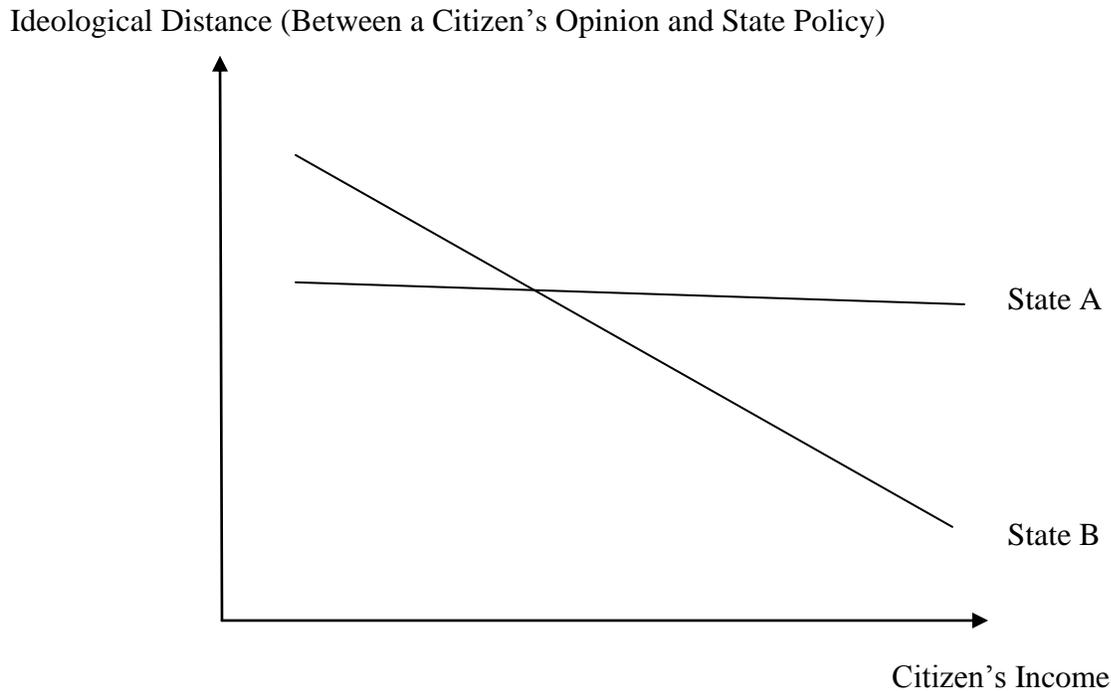
Cell entries are principal component scores (for the first dimension) from combining six coefficients for state specific regressions. Larger positive values indicate greater political equality (i.e. a weaker relationship between income and opinion-policy distance).

Table 3: The Ballot Initiative and the Equality of Political Representation

	(1) Initiative process? (1=Yes, 0=No)	(2) Qualification Difficulty Index	(3) Legislative Insulation Index	(4) Number of Initiatives Proposed	(5) Number of Initiatives Approved
Initiative Variable	0.437 [0.646]	-0.732** [0.334]	-0.335 [0.249]	0.037** [0.016]	0.122*** [0.041]
State Median Income	0.071 [0.053]	0.150* [0.084]	0.169* [0.089]	0.094 [0.092]	0.090 [0.083]
State Income Inequality	-29.073* [15.893]	-48.506* [26.949]	-55.640* [28.843]	-65.278** [27.405]	-76.351*** [26.069]
Constant	9.886 [7.940]	17.831 [12.494]	19.780 [13.586]	24.305* [12.941]	28.954** [12.266]
R ²	.14	.42	.33	.42	.50
N	48	23	23	23	23

Dependent variable for all columns: Political Equality Index (higher values indicate a more equal weighting of political opinions). Independent variable used to measure initiative presence/laws/usage listed above each column. Cell entries are ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors reported beneath in brackets. * denotes $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ using a two-tailed test.

Figure 1: Computing the Relationship Between Income and Ideological Distance, by State



State A has more equal political representation than State B because the relationship (regression slope coefficient) between income and opinion-policy distance is weaker in State A compared to State B.

Endnotes

¹ Verba and Orren (1985, 8) add that “democracy implies a certain degree of political equality – if not full equality of political representation among citizens, at least some limit to political inequality.”

² Three states only allow citizens to propose constitutional amendments, six states only allow citizens to propose regular statutes, and fifteen states allow citizens to propose both.

³ The identical measurement technique has been used in several recent studies to evaluate the ideological distance between citizens and Member of Congress (Griffin and Flavin 2007; Griffin and Newman 2008; Ellis 2012), Senators (Gershtenson and Plane 2007), and presidential candidates (Burden 2004; Jessee 2009) in the United States as well as the ideological distance between citizens and political parties in Europe (Blais and Bodet 2006; Golder and Stramski 2010; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012).

⁴ A total of 177,043 NAES respondents across the three survey waves answered the ideological self-placement and income items. All states except North Dakota (N=475) and Wyoming (N=414) have a sample size of over 500 respondents. Alaska and Hawaii were not surveyed, so all analyses in this paper report results from the remaining 48 states.

⁵ For example, only 38% of respondents who place themselves in the “very conservative” category believe that “Government should reduce income differences between the rich and poor” while fully 77% of respondents who place themselves in the “very liberal” category support that policy proposal. Similarly, fully 81% of respondents who place themselves in the “very liberal” category oppose “Laws making it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion” while only 28% of respondents who place themselves in the “very conservative” category oppose that policy proposal.

⁶ Gray et al. (2004) argue that using these policy items, as opposed to a measure of per capita expenditures for different policy areas, precludes the possibility that policy liberalism is simply a proxy for a state’s wealth. The five measures produce a Cronbach's alpha of .63.

⁷ The state policy data can be accessed online at www.statepolicyindex.com.

⁸ The Gray et al. (2004) and Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger (2008) policy liberalism measures correlate across the states at .79.

⁹ One common critique of using the proximity method to evaluate political representation is that, regardless of the statistical technique used to match up the two, opinion and policy are not on the same scale. However, whatever the flaws of each of the three different measures of ideological proximity in matching up opinion and policy, they are likely *equally flawed* for all citizens regardless of their income. Therefore, the proximity measures are appropriate for evaluating how ideologically proximate opinion and policy are for a poor person *in comparison to* a rich person (also see Ellis 2012).

¹⁰ Because respondents are clustered within states and experience the same state policy, I report standard errors clustered by state for all regressions in Table 1. The results are substantively identical if a multi-level model (with respondents nested within states) is used instead.

¹¹ One potential concern with running a regression separately for each state with opinion-policy distance as the dependent variable is that every respondent has the same value for state policy, effectively making the policy term a constant. However, consider a state where income and ideological conservatism

correlate perfectly (i.e. as income increases, so does ideological conservatism). If the state's policy position is more conservative than all citizens' ideology positions, the regression coefficient for income would be *negative* (indicating that as income increases, ideological distance between opinion and policy decreases). But, if the state's policy position is more liberal than all citizens' ideology positions, the coefficient for income would be *positive* (indicating that as income increases, ideological distance between opinion and policy also increases). Even though the distribution of citizens' opinions is identical under both scenarios, the regression coefficients are very different depending on where state policy is located in the ideological space (relative to citizens' opinions). Therefore, the coefficient for respondents' income for single state regressions does not simply indicate the relationship between income and ideology within a state but instead indicates (as intended) the sign and strength of the relationship between income and opinion-policy distance.

¹² The eigenvalue for the lone retained factor is 5.15 and explains 86% of the total variance.

¹³ For example, Western states are far more likely to have the ballot initiative process than states in other regions of the United States. So, analyses that uncover differences between initiative and non-initiative states may instead be picking up on regional differences in political culture or history.

¹⁴ The number of initiatives proposed ranges from 0 (Illinois) to 124 (California) with a mean of 31.17 and a standard deviation of 30.78. The number of initiatives approved ranges from 0 (Illinois and Mississippi) to 44 (California) with a mean of 13.04 and a standard deviation of 11.47. The correlation between these two usage measures (the number of initiatives proposed and approved) and the two institutional measures (the Qualification Difficulty Index and the Legislative Insulation Index) never exceeds -.60 (the correlations are negative because more restrictions are related to less usage), which indicates that the measures are related but not identical.

¹⁵ The models reported in Columns 4 and 5 of Table 3 include Illinois as a state that has the initiative process even though no initiatives were proposed or approved in that state from 1990 to 2008. To make sure that inclusion of Illinois is not driving the results, the same models were estimated without Illinois included in the analysis. The results are substantively identical. I also regressed (separately) the Political Equality Index on the logged values of number of ballot initiatives proposed/approved and again found substantively identical results.