"Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want and deserve to get it good and hard."

-- journalist and satirist H. L. Mencken (1880-1956)
The Initiative, Referendum, and Recall

Three kinds of legislation can appear on the ballot:

- Initiative
- Popular referendum
- Legislative referendum

States have enacted many important policies through initiatives and referenda.
Washington initiatives in 2016

Initiative 732: carbon tax on fossil fuels
Initiative 735: urges a constitutional amendment limiting constitutional rights to people, not corporations
Initiative 1433: raise minimum wage to $13.50 by 2020
Initiative 1464: new campaign finance system allowing citizens to direct state funds to qualifying candidates
Initiative 1491: gives courts the power to deny a person access to firearms
Initiative 1501: stronger penalties on consumer fraud against seniors and caregiver exemptions from disclosure

Voters pamphlet; Ballotpedia
Which states allow initiatives and popular referenda?
Why those states?

Constitutional changes are easier early in a state’s history. During the progressive era, which included the push to allow initiatives and referenda, the Western states were young or newly forming.
### Initiative Usage, 1898-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>State</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. California</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>14. South Dakota</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Colorado</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>15. Maine</td>
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<td>12. Massachusetts</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>24. Illinois</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What explains these differences in initiative usage?

- Historically (before 1980s): how participatory a state’s culture is
- Historically and today: ease of getting initiatives onto the ballot
Ongoing debates:

Should we extend the initiative process to new states and to the federal level?

Should we reform the initiative process in the states that already have it?
Competing perspectives on the initiative process
1. Effects on whether the people get what they want

Supporters: Initiatives make policy more responsive to public opinion

- Direct effects
- Indirect effects

Opponents: Initiatives make policy less responsive to the people’s interests

- Defense of representative government
2. Effects on the power of special interests

- **Supporters:** Initiatives reduce the power of special interests

- **Opponents:** Initiatives simply provide one more way for special interests to influence policy
3. Effects on democratic citizenship

- Supporters: Initiatives create citizens who participate, care, and know more about politics

- Opponents: Initiatives alienate as many citizens as they energize
4. Effects on the quality of public policy

• Supporters: Initiatives lead to better policies

• Opponents: Initiatives lead to worse policies
How to test these competing perspectives