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Democratic Innovations for Representative Governments

Democracy does not exist in a static state, but rather in a constant state of flux. When representative government ceases to function as expected and there is a demand for change, two (non–mutually exclusive) paths for improvement are open that would allow democracies to retain their polyarchical foundations of freedom and equity among citizens. The first involves adjusting existing institutions (such as the electoral system), which tends to preserve political power in the hands of ambitious politicians. The second involves introducing innovative mechanisms of governance, whereby new actors are included, to some degree, in the decision-making process. *Citizenship and Contemporary Direct Democracy* focuses on the latter, arguing that by maintaining democracies' normative foundations, citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy constitute an important, viable way forward among the menu of democratic innovations that have been proposed to reinvigorate current democratic regimes, particularly in the context of highly unequal societies. While acknowledging that citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy can be hijacked by populist leaders or appropriated by extremist members of society, this book further explains how, when properly designed, such risks can be minimized and possibilities multiplied, as these mechanisms empower citizens, re-enchant them with politics, des-encapsulate political parties, defuse social violence, and break down some of the institutionalized barriers to accountability that arise in representative systems.

There are innumerable perspectives on how to reform or improve current democracies. In fact, the reform of existing representative institutions is (arguably) at least as important as adopting direct democracy. Thus, the argument that follows is not meant to suggest that demands for change must be limited to new forms of civic involvement through direct democracy. There is still an amazingly long "to-do list" where representative regimes are concerned. For

example, how should we control the influence of money in politics? Or improve representation? Or enhance participation? Or maximize competition? Fully addressing each of these (and many other) concerns could have an enormous impact on the way citizens experience democracy, but that is beyond the scope of this work. Still, *Citizenship and Contemporary Direct Democracy* claims that direct democracy, particularly when it is in the hands of citizens, offers much more than a simple, pragmatic, safety valve in critical moments when representative democracy seems to be not working as expected.

This introductory chapter proceeds as follows. The next section outlines and assesses some of the multitudinous proposals for democratic innovation that have been offered in response to contemporary democratic fatigue. It argues that there are two clear paths toward reform: either adjusting current representative institutions, or adopting new forms of citizen engagement. Proposals of the latter variety can be subdivided into two groups: those that advocate moving toward deliberative/participative forums, or, as this book suggests, incorporating institutions of direct democracy. The following section defines what direct democracy is and what it is not. The third section then unpacks some of the most commonly cited concerns about the relationship between representative government and direct democracy. This chapter finishes with an overview of the structure of the book and the contents of each chapter.

1.1 DEMOCRATIC FATIGUE AND OPTIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION

Many electoral democracies are currently facing problems of social unrest and a perceived loss of legitimacy. Although these democratic governments were – by definition – elected in free and fair elections, leaders from Brasilia to Madrid and Athens to Santiago de Chile struggle with increasing requests for more participative features within the existing representative democratic framework. Whether we are talking about corruption in Moldova, the price of public transportation in Brazil, or higher education in Chile, the key challenge is the same: We must ask not only how every vote can be counted, but also how every voice can be heard and have influence. In Moldova, Brazil, and Chile, different sides of the various conflicts have called for better democratic performance, but the fact remains that regardless of the contents of these particular proposals, a varied menu of potential (and often contradictory) alternatives is available.

A brief overview of popular mobilizations in recent years provides evidence that something is not working as expected. In Spain, the 15-M movement against the political establishment (*movimiento de los indignados*) has been motivated by economic crisis. Student demonstrations in Chile, the likes of which have not been seen in decades, have targeted the perverse higher education model. Greeks have flooded the streets protesting against the adjustment

policies imposed by the "troika."[1] Israelis have inundated avenues in Tel Aviv, outraged by the high cost of renting or buying real estate. The list goes on. For some pundits, this effervescence is symptomatic of a global dissatisfaction with politics as usual; for others, these isolated cases of unrest are too context-specific to be indicative of a larger pattern.[2] Yet, these movements have at least one common leitmotiv: all demand more democracy, though precisely what is meant by "democracy" is quite different in each context.

As some citizens take to the streets to protest their dissatisfaction with the status quo, others express a similar sentiment by staying home. Alongside the aforementioned unrest and mobilization, another segment of the citizenry has experienced the opposite reaction, becoming disaffected and demobilized to such a degree that they no longer show up at the polls on election day (Streeck and Schäfer 2013). Though not universal, "western citizens are becoming more skeptical about their democracies, more detached from parties, less trustful of political leaders, and less supportive of their system of government and political institutions" (Newton 2012: 4). Yet mobilization and disaffection are two sides of the same coin; two symptoms of the same underlying malaise.[3]

Many explanations have been offered for this trend. Some suggest that it reflects the fact that globalized capitalism has transformed "the tax state into a debt state" (Streeck 2014), resulting in a situation that leaves political elites with less room to maneuver and react to civic demands (Mair 2013), and which detaches the "self-referential political class" from political programs (Crouch 2004).[4] The quest for an answer lies beyond the objective of this research, but virtually no one would disagree that much of the motive behind the unrest and disaffection "lies with governments and politics themselves" (Pharr and Putnam 2000). What we see emerging, in the words of Mair, "is a notion of democracy that is being steadily stripped of its popular component – democracy without a demos" (2006: 25).

The literature is divided on how to achieve more and better democracy. Regardless, in the current discussion about what democracy is, two broad lines of thought are identifiable, though both are animated by a very tangible disaffection, disenchantment, and frustration with current democracies.[5] On the one hand, a significant group of scholars has engaged in a fertile discussion about

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[1] The troika refers to a group of institutions – the European Union, International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank – with whom Greece had to negotiate for a cash bailout during the crisis of 2011.

[2] These trends transcend the OECD countries, which are the subjects of more robust literature on the subject of democratic dissatisfaction (Dalton et al. 2001).

[3] See also, Alonso et al. (2011) and Keane (2009).

[4] See also, Streeck and Schäfer (2013).

[5] With the election of Trump to the presidency of the United States in 2016, American pundits and academicians entered into a terse argument about whether democracy is changing into something called "illiberal democracy." While most scholars fear that democracy is in real danger (Isaac 2016; Mounk and Foa 2016), others maintain that support for democracy is not "a major

reforming existing institutions. Most of this literature pivots around the question of which combination of institutions produces higher levels of democracy, subjective well-being, human development, and the like. Topics dealt with in that literature include governing regime type (e.g., parliamentarism versus presidentialism), electoral families (roughly divided between majoritarian or PR systems), federalism, and compulsory voting, among others.[6] On the other hand, a second body of literature tends to offer new institutional arrangements from scratch (e.g., mini-publics, popular assemblies, crowdsourcing, direct legislation). The former literature would retain a modified version of the status quo, since it does not alter the monopoly on power held by the ambitious politicians – regardless how diverse, independent, or new these politicians are. By contrast, the latter tends to be more change-oriented, seeking to break from the status quo by explicitly incorporating new actors and democratic mediums.[7] Though they differ in many respects, perhaps the most crucial difference between these views centers around how the players are selected to start with, if indeed they are selected at all. Figure 1.1 presents a simplified scheme of the larger approaches to democratic innovation.

The incongruous items on the menu of potential innovations available to current democracies do, however, share some common characteristics. Most of this catalog is filled with what might once have been called, "democracy with a human face." The idea behind this motto is that the democratic system needs to be sensitive to all of the demands of the common citizens and not just a façade behind which elected plutocrats can hide, using the "corridors of power" for their own benefit. Contemporary democracies must provide tools for controlling these behaviors both horizontally (by other institutions) and vertically (by citizens). Democracy needs to be returned to the citizens. Moreover, within the menu of options, many voices argue that returning governance to the people can only be done if democracy takes to the streets, the neighborhoods, the municipalities, and even to civic and private interest groups. Few question this assumption, and it seems that these voices agree that "small is beautiful," particularly in regard to democracy. Elsewhere I have called this an "Athenian bias" (Altman 2011: 78).

Of course, "democrats want citizens to reason together" (Goodin 2008). Nonetheless, as it is virtually impossible for all citizens to participate, deliberate, and reason together, most (if not all) democratic innovations have mini-publics as their focal point, whether this is crowdsourced policymaking (Aitamurto 2016), deliberative polls (Fishkin 1997), participatory budgeting

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problem in well-established Western democracies. Or at the very least, it's not a bigger problem than it was 20 years ago" (Voeten 2016).

[6] Nearly every scholar has staked out a position on their preferred constellation of democratic institutions; see, for example, Lijphart (2012), Przeworski (2010), Cheibub (2007), Colomer (2001), Przeworski et al. (2000), Held (1996), Hadenius (1992), Sartori (1987), Dahl (1971).

[7] This differentiation is strongly related to what Unger calls "conservative" versus "transformative" strategies (1998: 10–12).
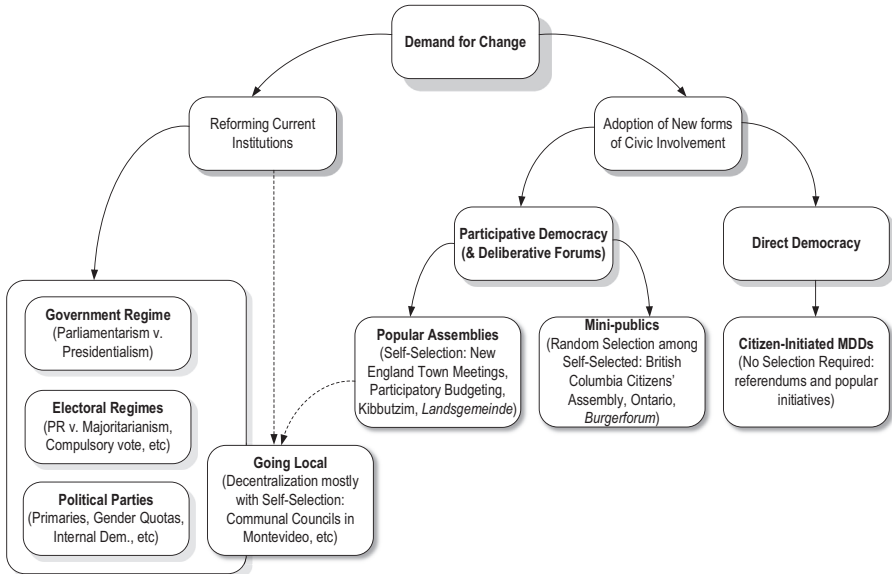
FIGURE 1.1 Simplified alternatives for democratic improvement

(Cabannes 2004), e-democracy (Lee et al. 2011),[8] "Navajo" democracy (Etzioni 1996), or even a more pure and abstract deliberative ideal. Yet these innovations, aimed at strengthening the relationship between democratic decision-making processes and the demos, are also quite demanding in terms of the resources they require of citizens. Factors such as citizens' time, cognitive abilities, rhetorical skill, etc. all play a role. I return to these innovations in Chapter 6.

Although democratic innovations do not occur in a vacuum, the literature routinely ignores the context in which these innovations are most urgently needed. At most, these studies assume the best-case scenario for their implementation. Despite the enormous differences within the democratic world in terms of social inequalities, the fact remains that most democracies are not succeeding at reducing the gaps among their citizens (Corak 2013; Fredriksen 2012). Not every innovation that works in a context of relative social equity (e.g., Norway) will also work in a context of high social segregation (e.g., Peru); to the contrary, such an innovation might even deepen existing inequalities. Yet, if an innovation can be shown to work well in a context of social inequality, it will also most likely work in a context of relative equity. From this point of view, democratic innovations are not easily transplanted.

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[8] See also, Kneuer (2016) and Netchaeva (2002). For a study on the relationship between e-Government and democracy, see Maerz (2016).

1.2 DEFINING DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Unlike other common concepts in political science, such as "political parties" or "elections," definitions of direct democracy lack a common connotation. Indeed, direct democracy is a rather polysemic concept. What we understand as direct democracy has different meanings in different places, and the different institutional components of this concept (popular initiatives, referendums, or plebiscites) have diverse normative undertones. For instance, what is referred to as a referendum in one country may be called a plebiscite or even a popular initiative in another. Essentially, "there exists no universal referendum terminology" (Suksi 1993: 10). To complicate things further, in certain countries concepts such as "initiatives," "plebiscites," and "referendums" are often used as synonyms, even within the very same piece of legislation!

To avoid confusion, I begin by clarifying these concepts. I define a *mechanism of direct democracy* as a publicly recognized, institutionalized process by which citizens of a region or country register their choice or opinion on specific issues through a ballot with universal and secret suffrage.[9] This definition is intended to embrace initiatives, referendums, and plebiscites, as those terms are usually understood in the literature. It does not encompass deliberative assemblies or other settings in which the vote is not secret, nor does it apply to elections for authorities (representatives or executive officials), nor even their potential revocation of mandate through *recall*.[10]

This definition attributes special consideration to the secrecy of the vote and its universal character. The secret vote is a magnificent early democratic invention, used as early as in classical Athens and the Roman Republic, which broadened personal freedom – limiting the risk of intimidation or pernicious influences – to previously unknown horizons. Nowadays, the secret vote is virtually unchallenged. The universality of the vote, however, is more complex,

[9] As a popular vote is a sine qua non condition for defining a mechanism of direct democracy, this research does not consider petitions or legislative popular initiatives. These institutions do not require citizens to vote at any stage. A legislative popular initiative exists when the citizenry forces the legislature to consider a proposed action or a bill (though the legislature will not necessarily accept it), which represents control over the agenda rather than a tool for political decision.

[10] This book does not consider *recalls*, which are designed to remove elected officials from office. The focus of a recall is usually a local or national representative or executive officer, ranging from governors to presidents. The literature is evenly divided between those who consider these institutions to be a subgroup of the direct democratic world (e.g., Tuesta Soldevilla 2014), and those who consider them to be a completely different species (e.g., Kaufmann et al. 2010). The recall as an institution, as Bobbio mentions, has its origins in an understanding of representation as a delegation rather than as a fiduciary relationship (Bobbio 1987: see chapter II).

as even some contemporary voices argue against it (e.g., Brennan 2011), yet it remains generally accepted.[11]

Following academic consensus, in this text I use a purely procedural definition of the phenomenon in question and try to avoid the normative implications usually seen in the literature on this topic. Note that this definition of mechanism of direct democracy embraces such diverse cases as California's Proposition 13 in 1978, the Uruguayan referendum against the privatization of public companies in 1992, the Swiss popular initiative against the construction of new minarets in 2009, or the rejection of the Colombian peace deal with the FARC in 2016, among literally thousands of examples.[12]

Elaborating on this definition, I further differentiate between those mechanisms of direct democracy (MDDs) that are "citizen-initiated" (through the gathering of signatures) versus those that are "top-down" (triggered by the sitting legislative assembly, the executive's power, or by constitutional mandate). The first group – citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy (CI-MDDs) – is composed of those mechanisms of direct democracy that are initiated by signature gathering among ordinary citizens: popular initiatives and referendums.[13] The distinction between popular initiatives and referendums is crucial, as popular initiatives are designed to alter the status quo, whereas referendums are created to prevent change.[14] In a popular initiative, citizens are allowed to place matters of concern directly on the ballot, without necessarily receiving the prior consent of the country's main political offices, thereby acting as *proactive* players on certain topics. In a referendum, citizens are also allowed to decide matters of concern directly on the ballot, without necessarily receiving the consent of the country's main political offices, but in these cases citizens are limited to a *reactive* or *veto player* role on certain topics. In the words of Magleby, popular initiatives are a reaction to "sins of omission," while referendums a reaction to "sins of commission" (Magleby 1994).

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[11] In reality, the universality of the vote is less complete than the secrecy of the ballot, as many contemporary societies contain significant populations of disenfranchised residents. For instance, as much as 25% of the Swiss population has no voting rights (see Nguyen 2016). Shockingly, that figure even includes many third-generation immigrants! https://goo.gl/k8Qofi [Last accessed, April 16, 2017]. Some cantons and municipal governments do, however, provide some electoral rights to these nationally disenfranchised people. See https://goo.gl/t1rRrI [Last accessed, April 16, 2017].

[12] As observed, this definition is not regime-contingent; it also embraces cases such as the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938, Pinochet's constitutional reforms of 1980, or the 1994 vote for the extension of President Niyazov's term until 2002 in Turkmenistan.

[13] While there is neither "universal referendum terminology" (Suksi 1993: 10), nor a unique typology (see Hug 2002; Svensson 2011; Vatter 2009), here I employ the terminology used by the National Conference of State Legislatures (www.ncsl.org/) [Last accessed, April 16, 2017], the Initiative and Referendum Institute of the University of Southern California (www.iandrinstitute.org/) [Last accessed, April 16, 2017], and the Centre for Research on Direct Democracy of the University of Zurich (www.c2d.ch/) [Last accessed, April 16, 2017].

[14] There are some exceptions to this norm; they will be dealt with in due course.
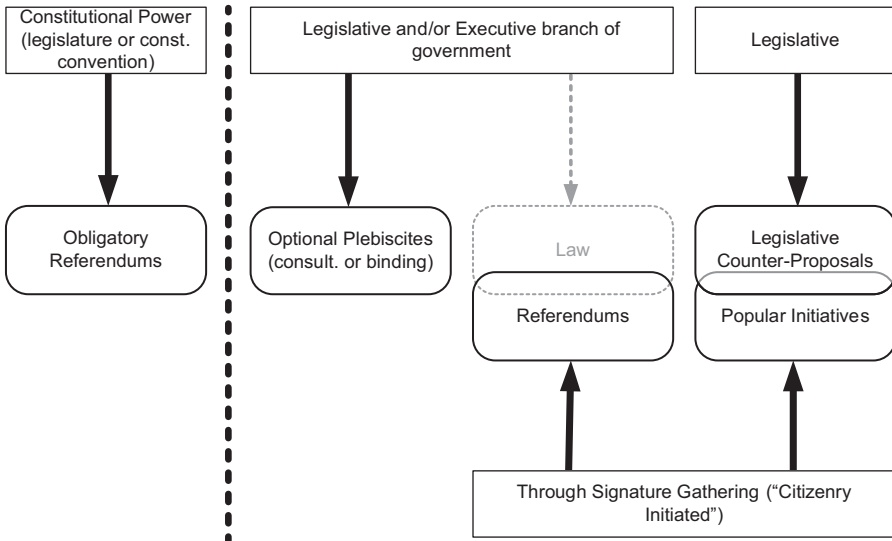
FIGURE 1.2 Simplified typology of mechanisms of direct democracy

The second group is composed of those top-down MDDs (TD-MDDs) that are (directly or indirectly) initiated by authorities: mandatory referendums and plebiscites.[15] Their distinction is also crucial because plebiscites typically represent either the bypassing of one representative institution by another (usually the executive bypassing the legislative branch), the renunciation of responsibility for tough policies, or they are simply used as a tool for the legitimization of extant policies.

Therefore, unless otherwise stated, in this research I use quite a simple typology that recognizes five main subtypes of MDDs: (a) those MDDs that are citizen-initiated with the intention of altering the status quo (citizen-initiatives), (b) those that are also citizen-initiated but aim to defend the status quo (referendums), (c) those that are triggered by authorities (plebiscites), (d) those that are legally mandated (obligatory or mandatory referendums), and finally, (e) legislative counter-initiatives. Figure 1.2 illustrates the different types of MDDs dealt with in this book.

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[15] The demarcation between CI-MDDs and TD-MDDs is something of an analytical artifact, as MDDs may well have a mixed origin. The fact that we observe TD-MDDs in a particular context does not necessarily mean that societal actors view the process antagonistically. Although rare, collective actors (such as unions, NGOs, and business associations) may press authorities to trigger a popular vote on a given matter. The crucial points here are the origin of the initiative and whether or not it legally needs the consent of a country's authorities to be put on the ballot.

To clarify the key concepts this research uses, let me describe them even further:

(a) Obligatory Referendums: These are, in most cases, limited to certain specific topics in the constitution, or – as in the case in Switzerland, Uruguay, and all but one of the American states (Delaware) – to an amendment of the constitution. Strictly speaking, however, an obligatory referendum is not a right the population exercises in any active way. Rather, it is a defensive right or a veto right.

(b) Optional Plebiscites (sometimes called authorities' plebiscites, or simply "plebiscites"): TD-MDD plebiscites are direct democratic mechanisms that allow authorities to pose a question to the citizenry for them to answer. These institutions are not necessarily related to popular sovereignty in the traditional sense, which is why some scholars claim that they cannot be characterized as belonging to the direct democratic world (Kaufmann and Waters 2004). Although leaders can use plebiscites perversely, during the vote itself citizens exercise their sovereignty and are thus still fulfilling the defining function of an MDD, as provided previously.[16]

(c) Optional Referendums (sometimes called popular vetoes, or abrogative referendums): Unlike a popular initiative, an optional referendum allows citizens to reject a law passed by the legislature (the "people's veto" in American jargon). Thus, citizens vote reactively – or "defensively" – in that they respond to a previous move by the authorities. Though referendums are less powerful than popular initiatives, they are powerful institutions nonetheless, as referendums open up the possibility of rejecting an act, constitutional amendment, financial decision, etc.

(d) Popular Initiatives: A popular initiative is a bill, statute, or constitutional amendment supported by a group of citizens that offers an alternative to the status quo. Citizens are allowed to decide directly at the ballot box on matters of concern to them, without the consent of the country's main political officials. Popular initiatives therefore allow citizens to play a proactive role on certain topics. This includes an active role for the electorate, and, depending on how this instrument is designed, it can also include amendments to the constitution or ordinary laws.

(e) Legislative Counterproposals: In some countries, such as Switzerland, the legislature has the right to react to a popular initiative, offering an alternative to it. This vote is held concurrently with the original

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[16] Institutionally speaking, this is probably the most heterogeneous type of MDDs. Some studies go further, subdividing these TD-MDDs into categories based on who is behind the vote (e.g., executive, legislative majority, legislative minority). See for example, International IDEA (2008).

initiative and implies multiple (at least three) choices for citizens: the citizens' original proposal, the legislative counterproposal, and the status quo.[17]

In order to trigger a CI-MDD, most countries (or "polities," to use a more generic word) require the participation of a certain minimum fraction of registered voters (e.g., Uruguay, Nebraska); others base their calculation on the proportion of registered voters that actually voted in a preceding election (e.g., Bulgaria, most US states); while still others require the participation of a fixed number of citizens (e.g., Switzerland). In addition, many polities employ a distribution requirement, ensuring that the required signatures must be collected from across the breadth of the polity and not concentrated in a single area (e.g., Bolivia, Alaska). Beyond these overarching requirements, many states regulate the timeline for collecting signatures, which typically varies from a few weeks to no time limit whatsoever. Some polities have adopted restrictions and regulations that limit the allowable scope and content of citizen-initiated proposals (such as limiting CI-MDDs to the subject of taxes). These regulations usually restrict the range of acceptable topics, ranging from notably lax criteria, as in Switzerland, to highly restrictive conditions, as in Hungary. Such regulations may also affect the plausibility of judicial review.

Indeed, ballot measures face additional challenges beyond qualifying for the ballot and receiving a majority of the vote. Some polities require that popular initiatives receive more than a simple majority to "pass," while others set quorums (such as participation, approval, or administrative criteria), and still others demand a combination of these requirements. Moreover, if a popular vote fails, some polities limit how much time must pass before that initiative can be revisited.

Among the many democratic innovations that have been proposed to reinvigorate democracies, mechanisms of direct democracy allow citizens the greatest opportunity to maximize their freedom through secret and universal votes. As Rousseau once claimed (hyperbolically, perhaps, but not entirely incorrectly), "the people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free *only* during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing" (Rousseau 1995 [1762], italics are mine). Mechanisms of direct democracy – particularly if they

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[17] In Switzerland, legislative counterproposals have been frequently used as an instrument to derail popular initiatives. These counterproposals often incorporate some of the elements proposed by the popular initiative but typically present only minor changes to the status quo, with the aim of placing the counterproposal closer to the median voter than the popular initiative itself. Therefore, counterproposals have a greater chance of being approved than the original initiatives. However, in the absence of a popular initiative, it seems unlikely that the legislature would make an attempt to change the status quo using this strategy, given that they could simply legislate on the matter instead. From this perspective, legislative counterproposals can be understood as a mild defense of the status quo by the legislature.

are citizen-initiated – are the institutions that best embody the concept of popular sovereignty, where citizens are all equal and free.

At this point in the discussion, readers are likely thinking of several recent, high-profile popular votes, such as Brexit, the Colombian Peace Deal, the Italian constitutional reforms, Hungarian anti-EU migration policies, etc. Given these examples, readers may rightly ask how we can justify the existence of mechanisms of direct democracy at all, given the apparently regressive, xenophobic, and illiberal policies and attitudes that have been crystallized by these votes. In response to these natural objections, three points must be raised.

First, reducing the world of direct democracy down to the results of the popular votes is a myopic approach that does not consider the full spectrum of positive and negative externalities that result from the overlap between direct democracy and representative institutions. Hence, the dynamic nature of the interaction between legislatures and MDDs is a central focus of this book.

Second, as shown by the literature, direct democracy constitutes a complex set of political institutions with rather dissimilar characteristics and political effects (e.g., Kriesi 2005). Indeed, all of the examples just cited are from the same family of MDDs (optional plebiscites), which is just one of many shapes that MDDs can take. Problems that may be typical of one category do not necessarily apply equally to the others.

Third, despite widespread skepticism about the "quality" of these decisions, it does not follow that we ought to discount an entire set of institutions simply because their use has not produced the anticipated or "desired" results. A vote can hardly be described as democratic if the outcome is a foregone conclusion, and "cherry picking" from a small but high-profile minority of cases risks undermining the very architecture of contemporary democratic regimes. Followed to its logical conclusion, such an argument might also require that we eliminate general elections because our preferred candidate tends to lose.[18] To be sure, the aforementioned cases are discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters – alongside many other, even more controversial examples. Yet despite the risk that MDDs can be instrumentalized and exploited by those with illiberal or regressive intentions, they remain a valuable democratic tool.

1.3 DIRECT DEMOCRACY AND REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

This chapter began by stating that there has been growing demand for change because representative government is no longer functioning as expected, but it has yet to show why this is the case. The following paragraphs are dedicated to explaining the need to modify representative government, and why mechanisms of direct democracy are especially suited to dealing with current problems.

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[18] On the intrinsic value of choice see Sen (1988) and Przeworski (2010), particularly Chapter 4.

They provide an overview of the major advances in the literature regarding the relationship between direct democracy and representative institutions.

Representative regimes have certain common limitations that stem from their very nature as representative. Irrespective of their long-term goals, office-seeking political parties are incentivized to appeal to the median voter on most major societal cleavages. "The result is that the alternatives presented in elections are meager: Choices are few and the range of decisions they offer is paltry" (Przeworski 2010: 99).[19] Notably, Przeworski adds, "not all conceivable and not even all feasible options become subject to collective choice. The choices presented to voters in elections do not include the ideal points, the alternatives they like most, of all citizens" (ibid.). Thus, even when voters find themselves on the winning side of an electoral competition, there are probably some policies pushed by elected officials that they profoundly dislike – or some policies they would prefer, but which remain ignored by the relevant authorities, to say nothing of those times when voters find themselves on the losing side.[20]

Furthermore, even the most democratic representative institutions create "corridors of power" that tend to incentivize perverse interests and behaviors (Pettit 2003). Politicians may fall prey to narrow lobbies (Greenwood and Thomas 1998; Kollman 1997), candidates sometimes manipulate citizens to get elected (Maravall 1999), representatives may betray the principles on which they were elected (Stokes 1996, 2001; Weyland 1998), and lawmakers may be forced to sacrifice their preferred policies in logrolling or compromise-building politics (Carrubba and Volden 2000; Cooter and Gilbert 2010).

Of course, citizens can voice their discontent with such behavior. They can write op-eds in newspapers or demonstrate in the street; such are their rights in any robust democracy. But if the authorities persist, then citizens have no other option besides waiting impatiently until the next election arrives. For those whose preferences are systematically overlooked, the time that elapses between elections may be agonizingly long, and these inter-election spaces constitute the weakest link in current democracies. While I would not go as far as Lord Hailsham (1978), who claimed to be living in an "elective dictatorship" (as he thus characterized the United Kingdom in the 1970s), it seems that Dunn's warning is more acute than ever: "[O]ne day's rule every four years has very much the air of a placebo" (1979: 16).

Contemporary democracies are essentially pluralistic (Bobbio 1987: 58), which means they are divided by multiple sets of crosscutting cleavages (Miller 1983), where the agreement of all members is unattainable. But even assuming that Rousseau's *general will* could be realized, it is only attainable, as Rousseau himself claimed, in small, homogenous, and extremely simple communities

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[19] See also, Somer-Topcu (2015).

[20] This effect is likely to be more profound among marginalized groups, who have lower levels of political interest and fewer resources to invest in political knowledge (Kim 2017).

(1995 [1762]). With each day that passes we move farther away from that idyllic (and seemingly quite oppressive and dystopian) type of society. Thus, if we agree that unforced consensus is impossible to attain in a complex society, then the question of which institution best fulfills the democratic ideal remains significant. In searching for an answer, McGann's (2006) deductive approach is instructive, asking which institutions best promote the basic backbones of democracy (i.e., political equity and popular sovereignty). As McGann himself says:

Popular sovereignty is satisfied if the people are the final arbiter over every matter, should they choose to be. Thus the people may delegate control over many (indeed most) matters but are always the ultimate authority. Political equality is satisfied when all citizens have equal say on such binding decisions. This is operationalized as everyone's vote being equal, a condition that is harder to meet than it might at first appear. It is not sufficient that everyone has a vote and these votes are equally weighted ("one person, one vote"). It is also necessary that the institutions be so constructed so as not to be biased in favor of any voter (or group of voters) or in favor of any alternative (2006: 6).

And this is exactly where citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy come into play. CI-MDDs are the institutions where the four principles of democracy – freedom, equality, sovereignty, and control – are maximized. Przeworski is explicit in this regard: "Nevertheless, *other than referendums*, our representative systems have no institutional mechanisms to guarantee that the opposition be heard, still less that it would prevail, however intense it might be" (Przeworski 2010: 116, emphasis added).

   To be clear from the outset, direct democratic institutions should serve as a complement to representative government rather than an alternative to it, as some radical activists advocate. As I have argued in my previous work, I understand mechanisms of direct democracy as a set of innovations designed "to serve as intermittent safety valves against the perverse or unresponsive behavior of representative institutions and politicians" (Altman 2011: 2), not as a replacement for representative government. In this regard, Bobbio claims,

As for the referendum, which is the only mechanism of direct democracy which can be applied concretely and effectively in most advanced democracies, *this is an extraordinary expedient suited only for extraordinary circumstances*. No one can imagine a state that can be governed via continuous appeals to the people: taking into account the approximate number of laws which are drafted in Italy every year, we would have to call a referendum on average once a day (1987: 54, emphasis added).

Indeed, direct democracy cannot replace representative government for two key reasons. First, representative government has notable and positive externalities for social life, irrespective of whether this is considered a necessary evil, a technical necessity, or a positive good. Second, a purely direct democratic regime "requires that the public agenda be broken down into discrete issues that are voted on separately. This further undermines reasonable democratic deliberation" (McGann 2006: 128). The predictable political costs of doing so

TABLE 1.1 *Eleven voters and eleven questions*

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Total votes	Result
Questions	**1**	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	6	Approved
	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	6	Approved
	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	6	Approved
	4	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	Approved
	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	Approved
	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	Approved
	7	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	Approved
	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	6	Approved
	9	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	6	Approved
	10	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	6	Approved
	11	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	6	Approved
	Winner?	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	9	9	9	10		

The column headers "Voters" spans A–K.

> 55% of voters voted in 64% of decisions in the minority

> 64% of voters voted in 55% of decisions in the minority

Source: Based on Anscombe (1976: 161).

are substantial, and the hypothetical improvements are distant and indeterminate. "Even if voters make reasonable choices about each issue individually, the overall package of policies taken as a whole may make no sense" (ibid.). To illustrate this point, imagine a situation where eleven voters (A–K), are asked to vote on eleven questions (1–11), see Table 1.1. All of these questions are approved by a 6–5 margin – all of them. Nonetheless, it might readily happen that a majority of voters vote in the minority on a majority of questions, as Anscombe neatly described in 1976.[21] In the example in Table 1.1, the group composed of voters A to G (seven out of eleven voters, or 64 percent), voted in the minority of the decisions in six out of eleven questions. A second group comprised of voters A to F, representing 55 percent of this electorate, voted within the minority on 64 percent of questions! In short, it is perfectly possible that through a series of direct decisions, a majority of the citizens will be on the losing side despite the fact that each decision is adopted by majority rule. Obviously, this is problematic to say the least.

Although the scenario in Table 1.1 is an obvious simplification, the fundamental problem it depicts is not implausible. This is because there are polities

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[21] This problem has been reexamined several times, see Saari and Sieberg (2001), and Niou and Lacy (2000).

where decisions taken directly by the citizenry have a constitutionally superior status in relation to decisions made by elected representatives. This difference in status means that any decision that has been made through a popular vote cannot be changed unless the same type of procedure is used again. For example, the Constitution of Armenia of 2015 explicitly states that "Laws adopted through a referendum may be amended only through a referendum" (Article 204).[22] Over time, as more votes occur on different topics, the scope of the political area in which lawmakers can act decreases, limiting the range of policy solutions available to representatives. This is a case of something roughly equivalent to political autophagy, as the very same politicians who initially proposed these rules come to find themselves increasingly constrained by them.

In my 2011 work, I challenged the common assumption that models of direct democracy and representative democracy are necessarily at odds. I also demonstrated how practices of direct and representative democracy interact under different institutional settings, trying to uncover the conditions that allow them to coexist in a mutually reinforcing manner. This has led to another important distinction between CI-MDDs and other forms of direct democracy. Whereas citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy can spur productive relationships between citizens and political parties, other mechanisms of direct democracy often help leaders bypass other representative institutions, undermining republican checks and balances. That research also demonstrated that the embrace of direct democracy is costly, may generate uncertainties and inconsistencies, and in some cases, is easily manipulated. Nevertheless, the promise of direct democracy, I claimed, should not be dismissed.

When authorities do not control the uses of mechanisms of direct democracy, they have stronger incentives to if not follow, at least not ignore, citizens' preferences than if these mechanisms did not exist; this is because citizens have a powerful institutional platform from which they can force a higher degree of accountability. From this perspective, *Citizenship and Contemporary Direct Democracy* is not just a book about direct democracy; it is a book about democracy at large, its functioning, its institutions, and its innovations. Of course, the main interest of the book is direct democracy, particularly when it is beyond the control of authorities. But the book also uses the discussion of direct democracy to delve into issues of citizenship, representation, public policy, and decision-making. Underpinning everything that follows is a common leitmotiv: the quality of democracy.[23]

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[22] A similar clause is included in the constitutions of Belarus (Constitution of 2004, Art. 77), South Sudan (Constitution of 2013, Art. 195.3), Tajikistan (Constitutional Law on Referendum of 1995), and Turkmenistan (Constitution of 2008, Art. 94).

[23] The quality of democracy entails the extent to which a given polyarchy actualizes its potential as a political regime. Note that there is a substantial difference between addressing the quality of democracy and the level of democratization of a political regime. Every analysis of the quality of democracy should assume a minimum degree of democratization. When we compare

1.3.1 Open Questions about Direct Democracy

In recent years, the literature has made notable advances in the knowledge of how direct and representative democracies interact. Like any institution, direct democracy is complex, dynamic, and imperfect. Despite being a quintessentially democratic procedure, paradoxically it sometimes encourages anti-democratic political fluxes. Although many of the problems of direct democracy will be analyzed in due course, it is worth stating here that direct and representative rules can coexist without undue difficulty.

Several well-established "old questions," posed by Lupia and Matsusaka (2004), have received extensive treatment elsewhere. Without dwelling too long on these questions, they are worthy of at least some brief discussion here. The first relates to citizens' capacity to make a choice when facing a complex ballot; the second is the role of money in shaping both the process itself and its results. To the first point, there is quite an impressive literature showing that citizens do understand complex problems and can in fact decide from among a variety of choices using heuristics, very much as legislators do (Bowler and Donovan 1998; Lupia 1992, 1994). As to the second point, empirical research indicates that economic resources definitely play a role in the game of direct democracy, albeit a rather nuanced one, as is also the case in regular politics. The literature also suggests that money matters most when spent by opponents – but not proponents – of the initiative in question (Garrett and Gerber 2001; Gerber 1999).[24] In sum, money matters in direct democracy as much as it matters in a typical representative government.

Nonetheless, several questions remain unanswered. When direct popular decision-making occurs alongside representative government, what happens to democratic goods such as participation and satisfaction with democracy as a whole? Is it accurate that citizens will support the status quo when voting directly on public policies? Is it true that radical sectors of society would benefit the most from the use of direct ballots? Beyond a few very particular policy

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the quality of democracy among countries we are not comparing which countries are more democratic. Rather, we are analyzing in which countries democracy performs better given some normative standards, such as Dahl's classic coordinates of contestation and participation (1971), or popular sovereignty (Altman 2013a). Indeed, much of the debate about the quality of democracy is about the identification of these normative standards. See Munck (2016) for an updated and comprehensive review of the literature on the quality of democracy and its measurement. See also, Munck (2009), Coppedge (2004), Diamond and Morlino (2004), Munck and Verkuilen (2002), and Altman and Pérez-Liñán (2002).

[24] To mention just a few problems: (1) citizens proposing public policies "with enormous potential fiscal consequences but without any financing scheme built into the proposal" (Frickey 1998: 431); (2) the well-known role of money in DD campaigns (Garrett 1997); and (3) the well-known weaknesses of the American experience, where, as several scholars have described, the process is dominated not by ordinary citizens but by politicians, professional activists, wealthy interests, and well-oiled machines (Ellis 2002). See also, de Figueiredo (2005) Stratmann (2005).

areas, we are still lacking enough evidence to answer these questions. This probably reflects the fact that the comparative literature around direct democracy is still in its infancy. The most developed knowledge on the subject to date is based on single-country studies (or collections of single cases), and few scholars have aimed to build theory from a truly comparative perspective.

One could certainly bypass most of these questions by arguing that every direct democratic vote is unique, and that it is therefore impossible to build theory. It could be argued that mechanisms of direct democracy, in general, are highly idiosyncratic, distinctive events. If this is true, then generalizing across such events would be quite a different matter than, say, generalizing about the internal dynamics of political parties or the legislative process in different polities. It might also be argued that besides the Swiss experience, direct-democratic procedures are sufficiently few and far between such that we could develop tools to code each instance individually. These considerations notwithstanding, this book aims to demonstrate that such concerns are overstated. We *must* move beyond the safe, traditional, case-based approach to direct democracy and jump into the murky waters of "big" comparative politics.

Due to the uneven use of direct democracy worldwide, some cases necessarily exert greater leverage in shaping our view of these institutions as a whole. Without a doubt, Switzerland (at all its administrative levels, whether federal, cantonal, or municipal) and some American states are impossible to ignore, since much of the literature on the topic is guided by these cases. This is not without good reason, as Switzerland accounts for almost 45 percent of all decisions made through direct democracy in the world at the national level, since historic records of such occurrences began. At the same time, American states have been notably active, with Oregon acting as the virtual flagship of the Union (despite being less well known than its Californian counterpart). Nonetheless, this research is also sensitive to other, lesser known yet incredibly rich experiences of direct democracy: from Slovenia to Bolivia, Ghana to New Zealand, and Latvia to Uruguay.

The existing literature seems quite divided on two related yet still very distinct questions. The first refers to the contrast between the process and the results of direct democracy (e.g., the collection of signatures rather than the result of the vote), and asks whether the process itself can have some positive externalities for democratic life in general. The second considers whether the decisions made through these mechanisms of direct democracy are consistent with the spirit of the extension of civil, social, and political rights. To use Christiano's (2003) nomenclature, the first type of question emphasizes the *intrinsic* worth of direct democracy; the second tends to see it from an *instrumental-consequentialist* perspective. In very broad strokes, advocates of direct democracy tend to underline the former, highlighting the pedagogical externalities of mechanisms of direct democracy such as citizen awareness, while opponents of direct democracy tend to underscore the latter dimension, pointing to several controversial decisions that have been made through these

mechanisms. Conveniently for both critics and defenders, there are so many types of MDDs that have produced so many different results, and it is always possible to find an example in support of whatever narrow argument one wants to make.

Swiss Social Democrat Eurodeputy Andreas Gross exemplifies the view shared by the first group:

I think that the question of how to address the usefulness of direct democracy is less a matter of whether it favors conservative or progressive politics, or whether the citizens favor more or less change, but whether it is able to contribute to creating better-informed citizens, whether it empowers citizens to enhance their self-determination, and whether it reduces their feeling of alienation and powerlessness (2007: 64).

Taking the opposite view, opponents of direct democracy tend to dwell on the consequences of the votes and how frequently these votes fail to devolve power to the masses. The initiative process, in the words of Goebel, "has not empowered ordinary citizens, it has not increased political awareness or participation ... and it has not reduced the power of special interests" (Goebel 2002: 198). Moreover, studying the decisions made in what they call crypto-initiatives, which are initiatives that use direct democracy as an instrument to achieve non-policy–related goals, Kousser and McCubbins support the idea that "initiatives will only infrequently improve the public's welfare" (2005).[25] In short, "despite the hopes and rhetoric of many direct democracy champions ... there is little evidence that contemporary initiatives are galvanizing public engagement and revolutionizing political participation" (Pratchett 2012: 117).

In the US literature there is a friction between those who agree that direct democracy has many positive implications for democratic life, particularly in terms of civic engagement, awareness (Donovan and Karp 2006; Smith and Tolbert 2004), and the way citizens relate to the democratic process as a whole, and those who support the opposite view (Dyck 2009; Dyck and Lascher 2009). Even if we accept the view that citizens are the winners of the direct democratic game, there is robust evidence that they are not the only winners. Some of the sclerotic institutions that were the very objects that motivated the embrace of direct democracy (e.g., political parties, lobbies) have shown a notable elasticity in adjusting to the process itself. Several have succeeded in preserving and even expanding their established and privileged position. From this viewpoint, the very same institutions and practices that direct democracy was intended to correct have shown great adaptability in playing in the new direct democracy game, sometimes even using it to expand their influence. In

[25] For other scholars with strongly anti-direct democracy views, see Bell (1978), Frickey (1998), Hill (2003), Stearns (2012).

that sense, direct democracy seems to have opened new avenues for all, including the "bad guys."

Given the strong claims on either side of this contentious debate, unpacking the reasons why some people shift their opinions regarding direct democracy seems more captivating than studying the entrenched positions of its advocates or detractors. For example, President Woodrow Wilson's perspective on the initiative process notably evolved over time. While a younger Wilson claimed that "where it [the initiative process] has been employed, it has not promised either progress or enlightenment, leading rather to doubtful experiments and to reactionary displays of prejudice than to really useful legislation" (Wilson (1898) cited by Smith and Tolbert 2004: 1), years later he claimed that citizen lawmaking was a "gun behind the door – for use only in case of emergency, but a mighty good persuader, nevertheless" (2001: 2).[26]

Most studies of direct democracy tend to include these popular votes as an independent variable, as they are typically concerned with the effect they have on a particular policy area.[27] Interestingly enough, most of these studies assume that the impact of direct democracy is somehow cumulative, e.g., the more it is used, the more the dependent variable of interest emerges (e.g., accountability) (McGrath 2011). Very few studies, however, attempt to go beyond the boundaries of a particular policy area to pay attention to why MDDs are accepted to start with. By analyzing *all* of the cases of mechanisms of direct democracy (referendums, popular initiatives, plebiscites, legislative counterproposals, and mandatory referendums) held worldwide at the national level since 1980, this research expands on previous work on direct democracy. This topic has been under-studied from a general comparative perspective, and the aim of this research is to alter this state of affairs.

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[26] The degree to which the threat of a ballot measure has an effect on the political attitudes of government is still a debated topic. On this point, see Gerber (1999) and Altman (2016), who argue strongly in this regard, or Lascher et al. (1996), who claim that the effect is rather marginal.

[27] See, for example, the following studies: on policy making (Wagschal 1997), on fiscal policies and taxation (Blomberg et al. 2001; Matsusaka 2004; Phillips 2008), on the size of government (Funk and Gathmann 2011), on sovereignty (Suksi 1993; Sussman 2012), on redistribution (Berry 2009; Flavin 2015), on turnout in general elections (Binder and Childers 2012; Everson 1981; Lacey 2005), on popular mobilization and protests (Fatke and Freitag 2013; Tolbert et al. 2009), on political distrust (Dyck 2010), on accountability (Lupia and Matsusaka 2004), on political financing (Pippen et al. 2002), on citizens' enlightenment (Smith and Tolbert 2004), on abortion (Arceneaux 2002; Gerber 1996), on minority rights (Christmann and Danaci 2012; Lewis 2013; Marxer 2012), on gay rights (Gamble 1997; Haider-Markel et al. 2007), on same-sex marriage (Lewis 2011b; Smith et al. 2006), on official languages (Preuhs 2005; Schildkraut 2001; Tatalovich 1995), on ethnic conflict (Qvortrup 2014b), on ethnic minorities (Bochsler and Hug 2015; Dyck 2012; Hajnal et al. 2002), on immigration and naturalization of foreign residents (Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013), and so on and so forth.
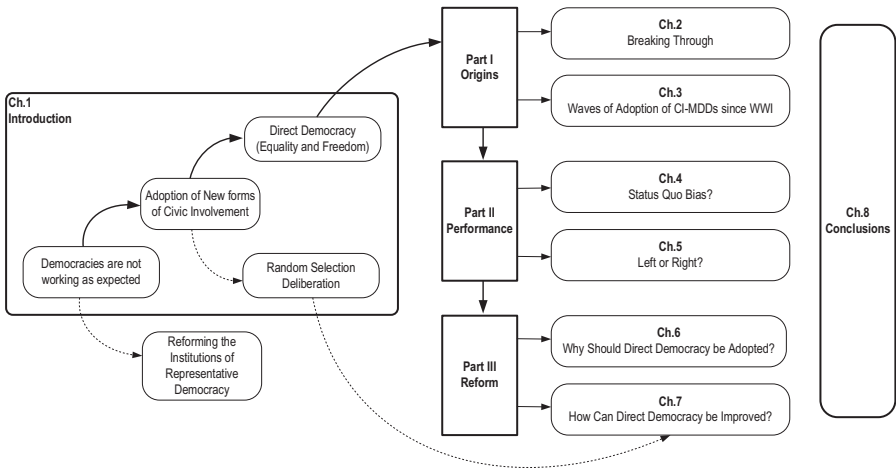
FIGURE 1.3 Book structure

1.4 ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Citizenship and Contemporary Direct Democracy concentrates on the relationship between direct democracy and representative government, as the former is often touted as an alternative therapy for the latter. To understand this relationship, we need to know more about direct democracy's contemporary origins, how it works, the effects it produces (its performance), and, eventually, how to improve it (reform). Thus, the *origins*, *performance*, and *reform* constitute the backbone of this book. Each broad concept is explored in a separate section of the book, each of which is subdivided into two chapters. A broad picture of the book's structure is represented in Figure 1.3.

The three sections of the book address questions scholars and activists systematically pose when discussing direct democracy: how MDDs came to be, whether MDDs are truly neutral tools (in the sense of not favoring particular sides), and – due to their imperfections – whether there are ways to improve them. Studying the origins of direct democracy is crucial because there is no theory on why direct democracy, particularly of the citizen-initiated variety, is adopted in different polities. Many explanations of its adoption do not go beyond voluntaristic approaches. However, the adoption of direct democracy transcends the simple will of some political leaders. Likewise, it is also fundamental to analyze the performance of direct democracy because current common knowledge paradoxically suggests that either democracy is a tool for of the extremes of the ideological divide, or that direct democracy does not change anything at all. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these seemingly contradictory claims are typically supported by evidence that is essentially anecdotal and rarely approaches a systematic comparative effort. In order to offer a more reliable answer, this book uses a database composed of all MDDs held in the

world at the national level since 1980.[28] Finally, in studying the reform of direct democracy, I show that there is room for institutional improvement and innovation. The contents of the remaining chapters proceed as follows.

The first section of the book – Chapters 2 and 3 – pivots on the adoption of citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy within the current institutional architecture of democracies. When studying citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy, in particular, there is an ever-present paradox: If CI-MDDs are truly such powerful tools for diluting the power of authorities, why did these same power-seeking authorities ever accept such institutions in the first place? It seems improbable that rational political actors would adopt CI-MDDs unless the alternative to accepting these measures appeared much worse. The problem is obvious: Direct democracy (at least in the hands of the citizens) abolishes the monopoly of power held by professional politicians. Since no politician wants to decrease his or her power without reason (especially if that power is monopolistic), we should expect authorities to categorically reject any reforms in that direction.

Yet citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy exist in a wide variety of countries. If direct democracy is one of the potential innovations available to current democracies, then it is helpful to understand where and how CI-MDDs first came into existence, in Switzerland, the United States, and Germany. Thus, Chapter 2 answers the question of why authorities in these cases accepted such a threat to their interests. The analysis considers the rational calculus politicians made in choosing to accept the new institutions, and the political environments that conditioned their choices. Examining historical records, two critical moments are identifiable in the adoption of MDDs: The first period stretches from the late eighteenth century (when the very first MDDs were adopted by nation-states) up to the end of World War I; the second coincides with the end of World War I, specifically with the constitution of the Weimar Republic in Germany. This second moment is the object of analysis in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 3 studies when and why countries adopt citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy. The chapter examines all countries in the world up to the present day, and unpacks the local and international conditions at the time of CI-MDD adoption. At the beginning of the twentieth century, only one country allowed for national CI-MDDs (Switzerland). A century later, at the time this book was written, fifty countries (representing one-quarter of the countries currently in existence) permitted CI-MDDs, at least in a formal sense. Though the particular political environment surrounding adoption is unique in every case, statistical analysis reveals that both local conditions as well as international diffusion have clearly driven the spread of citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy around the world.

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[28] To improve readability, this book tries to maximize the use of visual aids and minimize the presentation of statistical tables and technical language as much as possible. Readers with a more technical eye will find substantive material is developed in the chapter appendices.

As expected, elected representatives do not, by their own volition, give up their exclusive domain over the legislative agenda without a strong reason to do so. The adoption of citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy tends to occur in times of political instability: times when, for one reason or another, lawmakers believed that a new page in a nation's history is being turned. History also matters in the sense that prior experience with mechanisms of direct democracy (regardless of their type or success at the ballot box) is a strong predictor of future adoption of CI-MDDs, as is a higher level of democracy overall. Going beyond national borders, the analysis also tests, with strongly positive results, how other countries' use of CI-MDDs around the world affects a state's probability of adopting CI-MDDs, taking into consideration relative geographic proximity as well as democratic reputation. The theoretical and empirical contributions of this chapter constitute the very first truly cross-national, exhaustive, comparative analysis of the origins of CI-MDDs on a global scale.

The second section of the book (Chapters 4 and 5) tackles some of the challenges and apprehensions common in the literature on direct democracy. Specifically, it addresses the consequences of having citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy. Of course, as it is impossible to tackle each and every concern, the primary focus remains on those arguments that appear to be most critical but have not yet been addressed in a systematic and comparative way, namely: whether MDDs show a systematic status quo bias, and whether MDDs are mainly used by extremist elements within society.

To avoid serious biases and, therefore, invalid inferences, Chapters 4 and 5 use an original database that includes all national uses of MDDs (whatever their type) on an annual basis in all countries in the world from 1980 to 2016 (approximately 1,150 cases in all). The foci of study at this stage are the tools of direct democracy used at the national level only; the database does not consider non-official or subnational MDDs. Also, these chapters are restricted to actual uses of MDDs, rather than the legal (but unrealized) possibility of their use (as in Chapter 3.)

Chapter 4 asks to what degree can these institutions be considered successful in terms of their results for their promoters (authorities or citizens)? Is it true that naysayers systematically win? This chapter finds that, in the context of democratic regimes, citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy succeed in about one-quarter of all attempts. This success is strongly contingent upon whether the vote is concurrent with a general election, how demanding the quorums for participation and approval are, and the economic conditions of the society in which they transpire. Concomitantly, this chapter also tests whether ballots initiated by elected officials systematically tend to favor their preferred outcome. The evidence is mixed in this regard. Generally, policy change is more likely to occur when the executive recommends it, when lower quorums are required for approval, where a polity shows lower levels of democracy, and where society is less diverse.

Chapter 5 challenges another serious concern regarding direct democracy, one that has become particularly salient in light of recent popular votes: Is direct democracy exploited by extremist forces in society? If so, what are those

forces? These questions tackle one of the most compelling apprehensions regarding direct democracy – yet, at the same time, they are among the least studied in the literature, at least from a cross-national perspective. To uncover the location of CI-MDD instigators on the ideological continuum, the analysis estimates their Gravitational Ideological Center (GIC), which is a weighted average of their ideological locations and representation in parliament. This is then compared with a similar measure indicating the ideological locations of governments, which allows for the estimation of the absolute and relative location of promoters of CI-MDDs.

This research finds that CI-MDDs, as a group of institutions, are neither statistically biased toward the left nor the right, as some elements within the literature have insinuated. In regard to the winners, two alternative hypotheses are tested. The first relates to the idea that those who trigger MDDs are sincere in that they really seek to win the popular vote. The second alternative, however, assumes that campaigners instrumentalize CI-MDDs as a means to achieve some other, larger goal, and therefore the actual success or failure of the ballot measure is not necessarily important, per se. I call this the degree of capitalization. While results show that proponents' ideological location (GIC) is not statistically relevant for the approval of a CI-MDD, this location is clearly related to CI-MDD capitalization: The farther to the right instigators are, the more likely they are to capitalize on the use of a CI-MDD.

The third and last section of the book deals with a more normative perspective on direct democracy. In doing so, this section asks why citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy should be adopted and how existing institutions can be improved. For this purpose, this book suggests a new institutional mechanism aimed at augmenting the options citizens have on a given contentious topic when a popular vote is on the table, offering an alternative to both sides of the policy under scrutiny.

Chapter 6 asks why citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy should be embraced by contemporary representative regimes. It argues that citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy have important spillover effects on the overall democratic life of a polity, even if the results do not reflect the original goals of the promoters. These spillover effects occur in two major arenas: the political game itself (by generating incentives for political consensus, moderating circumstantial majorities, and expanding the political playing field), and the relationship between representative institutions and the citizenry (by augmenting policy congruence, women's empowerment, civic participation, satisfaction with democracy, and broadening the topics subject to popular consideration). This chapter continues the discussion around new forms of civic involvement, making the case that CI-MDDs perform better than other democratic alternatives suggested by the literature (decentralization, deliberation, or e-democracy) to deal with the current democratic malaise.

Chapter 7 begins by acknowledging the fact that representative institutions and direct democracy mechanisms are here to stay, and that the expectation that these could eventually be usurped by deliberative bodies is both unrealistic

and futile. This chapter, however, recognizes the strengths of deliberation, and, taking this as a starting point, goes on to propose a mechanism designed to channel these three different views of democracy into a viable institutional tool, notwithstanding the evident tensions among these streams of democratic theory. The objective is to strengthen representative and direct democracy with a new deliberative institution: *Citizens' Commissions* in charge of advancing *Citizens' Counterproposals* any time an initiative or referendum is scheduled. This institutional transformation will benefit the functioning of contemporary democracy at large. It does so by enlarging public views on a contentious topic, offering an alternative to both sides of the popular vote that can be captured by narrow interests, but will also, alongside other institutional transformations – such as compulsory voting – help minimize class bias and negative campaigns.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes by arguing that in the context of unequal societies, CI-MDDs are an important and viable way forward among the menu of democratic innovations that have been proposed to invigorate current democratic regimes. In particular, their strength is derived from the fact that they strongly defend two pillars of democratic thought: freedom and equality among citizens. I do acknowledge, however, that this is not the only viable democratic innovation. That said, I show that other alternatives either build upon naïve expectations about citizens' engagement, or would erode, if indirectly, the principles of freedom and/or equality. Nonetheless, as with any institution, CI-MDDs can be used and abused. And from this perspective, I also understand the fear that opening the door to CI-MDDs has instilled, especially in light of recent developments and misuses of TD-MDDs.

Recent years have shown how some political leaders bet on the perverse use of plebiscites to achieve controversial policy goals (Brexit, Orbán's EU immigration quotas, Colombia's Peace Plan, Catalonian independence, etc.). However, the fact that some leaders have instrumentalized and abused plebiscites cannot and should not lead anyone to infer that CI-MDDs can be equally misused in a similar fashion. Despite a superficial resemblance in terms of their mechanics, these institutions are substantively different.

Moreover, there is the ever-present concern about citizens' capabilities of going beyond basic impulses and populist motivations in order to make complex decisions at the polls. Even in sophisticated and progressive circles, many question the minimal competence of what they consider to be "average citizens." This is a dangerous line of reasoning, which, in some ways, echoes those concerns that were voiced during the extension of suffrage, first to working class men and, later, to women.

A central claim of this book is that CI-MDDs are not necessarily affected by status quo biases, nor are they clearly tilted to systematically favor any particular side of the ideological cleavage. On the contrary, CI-MDDs empower citizens by forcing a harmonization between representatives and voters, thereby making representative democracy more representative of the views of citizens and making democracy work better.