Teaching in Public Choice Courses How Direct Democracy Can Influence Voting Behavior

Richard J. Cebula and Luther D. Lawson

Abstract

This study seeks to expand the scope of that portion of Public Choice courses that involves voting behavior. The study broadens the interpretation of the “rational voter model” so as to include the potential effects of “direct democracy” on the voter participation rate. Direct democracy is assumed here to take three forms: statewide initiatives, statewide popular referenda, and statewide legislative referenda. This study presents the hypothesis that greater numbers of such initiatives and/or referenda may increase voter turnout because they may elevate the expected gross (and hence net) benefits of voting by empowering voters, despite any accompanying information costs that may tend to elevate the expected gross costs of voting. The empirical evidence to address the net overall effect of these forms of direct democracy on voter turnout is provided.

1 Richard J. Cebula, Department of Economics, Armstrong Atlantic State University, Savannah, GA 31419. 912-921-3781. cebulari@mail.armstrong.edu. Luther D. Lawson, Department of Economics and Finance, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC 28409. 910-962-3524. lawson@uncw.edu.