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THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY

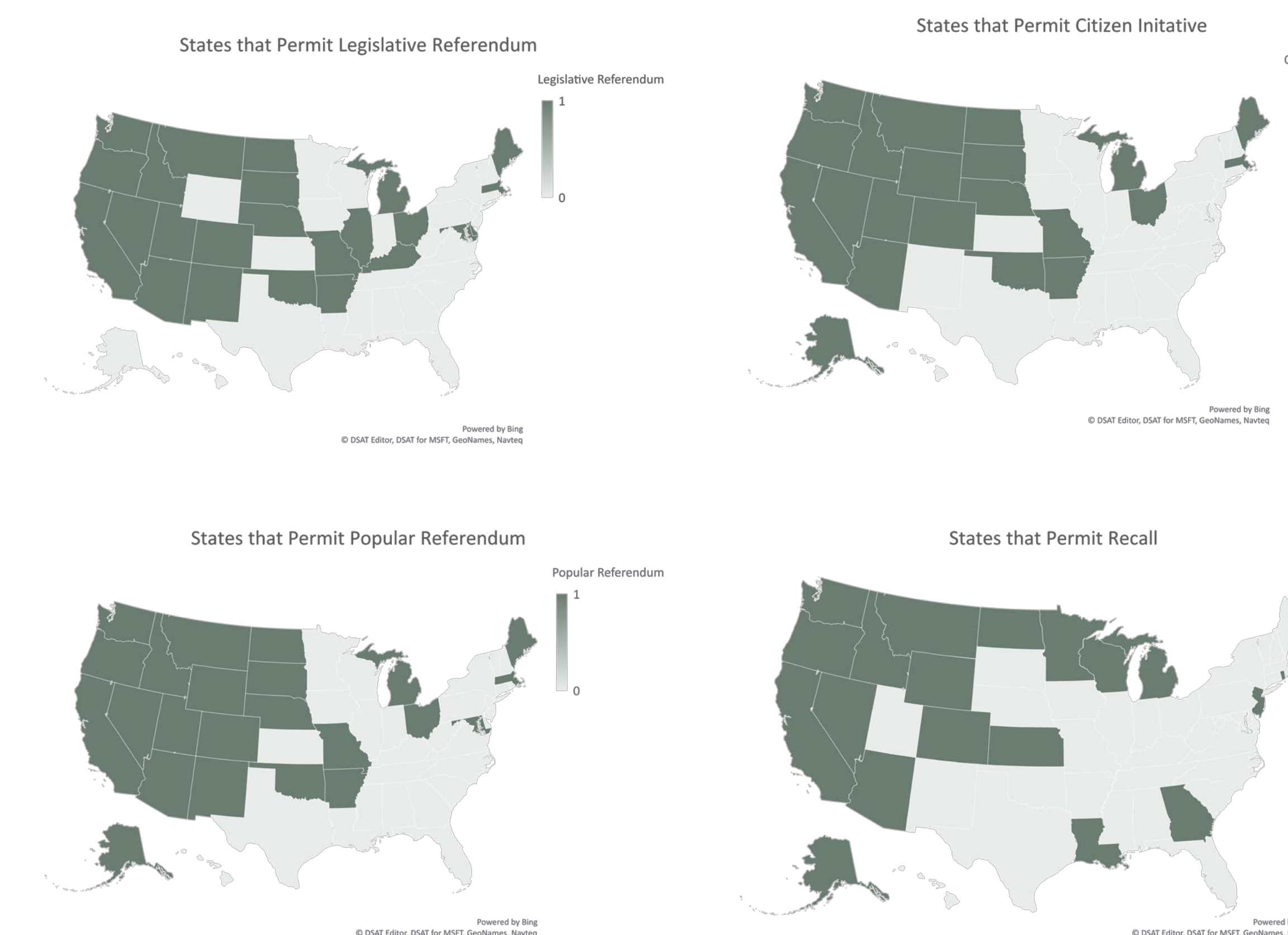
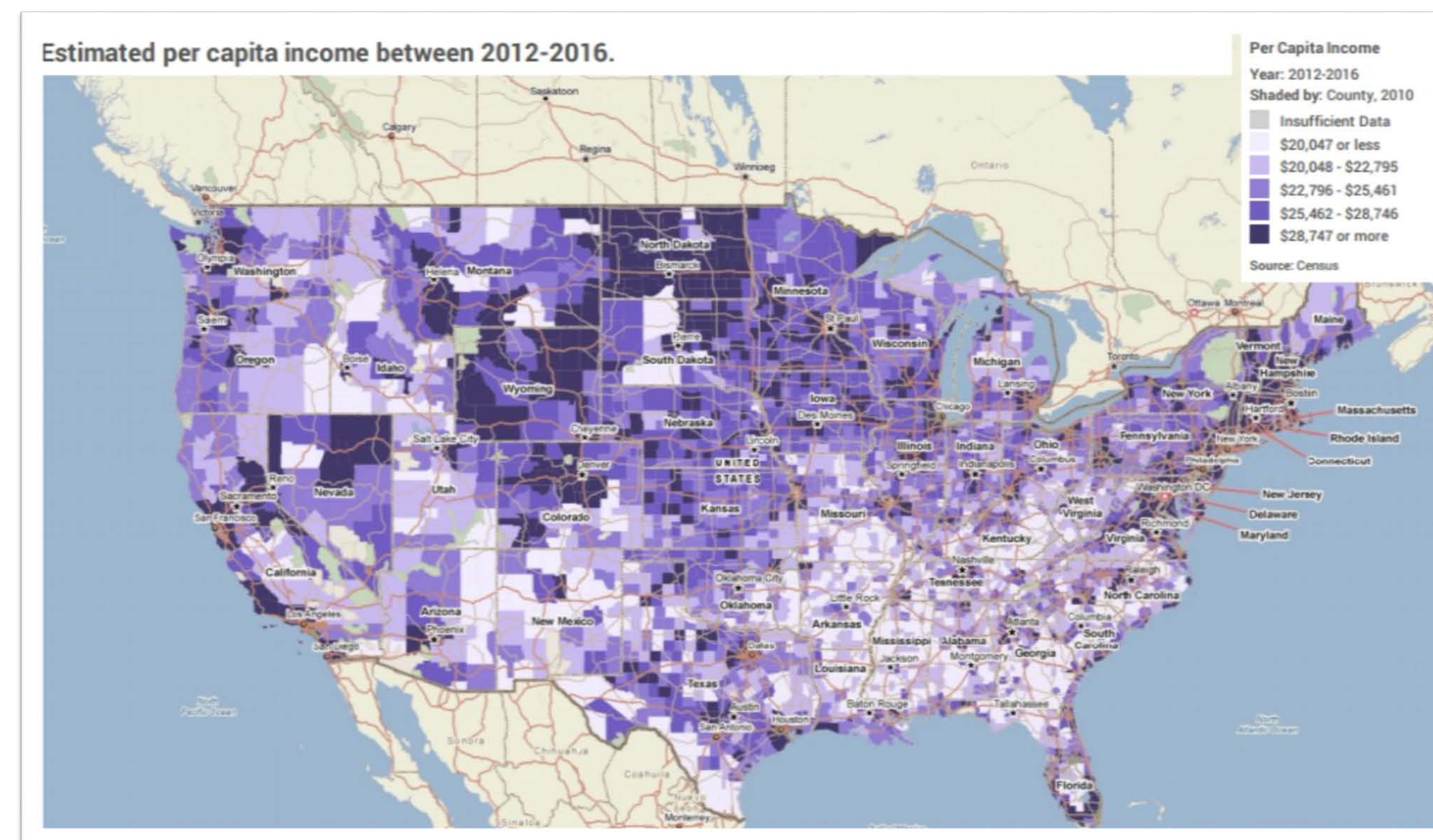


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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this prospectus is to examine county-level contextual factors that impact direct democracy mechanisms and voter turnout. The prospectus contains two essays that build upon each other with fitting theoretical frameworks. The first essay investigates the impact of contextual factors on a county government's decision to permit citizen initiatives. This essay applies new institutionalism theory to understand the current connections between government structure and direct democracy mechanisms within U.S. counties. County governments play a vital role in American democracy, yet little is known about why some counties permit direct democracy mechanisms while others do not. I address a gap in the literature that focuses on policy outcomes that can vary at the county-level due to election laws. Election laws that permit direct democracy mechanisms often benefit voters by initiating or repealing legislation that more closely reflects the citizenry. Given the dearth of research on direct democracy mechanisms at the county-level, I examine the 1) citizen initiative, 2) legislative referendum, 3) popular referendum, and 4) provision for recall. To investigate counties that permit direct democracy mechanisms, I focus on contextual factors that include form of government, socioeconomic, and demographics. I apply a series of cross-sectional logit regressions by using micro-level county data from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) 2014 County Government Survey, American Community Survey (ACS), U.S. Census Bureau, and CDFI fund. Subsequently, I use the models to detect and explain variations of direct democracy that exist in the 3,031 county governments surveyed with populations between 10,000 and 500,000.

KEY VARIABLES



KEY HYPOTHESES

- H₁**: There is a higher probability of direct democracy mechanisms available in counties that have commission governments relative to reformed governments
- H₂**: There is a higher probability of direct democracy mechanisms available in counties with a higher educated population.
- H₃**: There is a higher probability of direct democracy mechanisms available in counties with a higher income population.
- H₄**: There is a higher probability of direct democracy mechanisms available in counties with a higher population density.

METHODS

The hypotheses are estimated using a cross-sectional logit model to estimate the existence of county level direct democracy mechanisms. That is, the binary dependent variable for each direct democracy mechanism is coded as zero for when a mechanism is not permitted, and one for when it is permitted. I analyze the logit model for each form of direct democracy to include: 1) citizen initiative, 2) popular referendum, 3) recall initiative, and 4) legislative referendum. This strategy accounts for differences in state constitutions that either permit or do not permit each form of direct democracy at the county-level. Similar to Coan & Holman (2008), to account for the non-linear relationship between income and the existence of direct democracy, I square the income variable. I also report robust standard errors associated with each coefficient, which corrects for heteroscedasticity by using a variance matrix more robust than that of ordinary least squares (Farmer, 2017).

RESULTS

Logistic Estimates Table	Initiative	Initiative	Leg. Ref	Leg. Ref	Pop Ref	Pop Ref	Recall	Recall
Independent Variables	Coef.	P > z	Coef.	P > z	Coef.	P > z	Coef.	P > z
Council Manager	-0.47	0.04	0.48	0.02	-0.51	0.02	0.25	0.20
Population Density	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.13
Median Household Income	0.91	0.15	-0.37	0.54	-0.17	0.78	-0.87	0.18
Education Attainment	-0.04	0.06	0.00	0.83	-0.06	0.01	0.04	0.15
State Home Rule	0.63	0.00	0.57	0.01	0.03	0.88	-0.26	0.28
Median Property Tax	0.00	0.19	0.00	0.52	0.00	0.95	0.00	0.32
Population Diversity	0.00	0.89	0.00	0.92	-0.01	0.18	0.00	0.84
Log Population Total	-0.07	0.40	0.18	0.01	-0.04	0.61	-0.15	0.05
Northcentral Region	0.57	0.02	-0.03	0.88	0.45	0.05	1.22	0.00
Northeast Region	0.63	0.14	-0.11	0.77	0.35	0.40	-0.13	0.76
West Region	1.71	0.00	0.43	0.09	1.58	0.00	2.32	0.00
Constant	-1.24	0.23	-1.07	0.25	0.37	0.72	1.25	0.20
Number of Observations	645.00		657.00		637.00		633.00	
Wald Chi Square Statistic	73.91		31.73		59.08		90.17	
LR chi-square	0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	
Pseudo R-squared	0.10		0.04		0.07		0.13	

Notes: DV: Initiative, Legislative Refendum, Popular Referendum, Recall
p < .05 in bold

CONCLUSIONS

I anticipate the findings of this study will contribute to local government policy literature in several ways. While controlling for institutional and demographic characteristics, I outline the findings below based on the data describing policy choices in all 750 American counties. First, the citizen initiative and popular referendum are more likely to exist with the commission form of government, and the legislative referendum is more likely to exist with the council manager form of government. This result would indicate that elected officials are more inclined to meet median voter demands, at least with respect to the initiative and popular referendum. Second, I expect that a higher population density will increase the likelihood of the popular referendum and decrease the likelihood of the legislative referendum. This implies that community networks have an impact on the use of a referendum, but not necessarily the recall or citizen initiative. Third, I expect that home rule will have a positive impact on the existence of both the citizen initiative and legislative referendum. This finding would reveal that local governments are more likely to use home rule powers to afford citizens the benefits of direct democracy. In sum, this study will provide public policymakers with key insights regarding the relation between form of government and direct democracy mechanisms. This relationship is an increasingly important policy tool to study since scholars argue direct democracy is central to improving individuals' quality of life (Matsusaka, 2005)

BACKGROUND

- Issue**
- Direct democracy mechanisms allow citizens to participate in the lawmaking process, often bypassing their state legislator with the intent of improving government performance (Matsusaka, 2005). But does government have any bearing on allowing citizen access to direct democracy mechanisms? This essay explores the relation between government structure and direct democracy mechanisms in American counties. The issue at hand is determining whether commission governments make institutional decisions that result in different outcomes relative to reformed governments.
- Known**
- In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the United States witnessed the rise of populist and progressive movements that called for a direct democracy reform (Givel, 2009; Lawrence, Donovan, & Bowler, 2009). This history led to many changes that currently inform the modern institutional arrangement between local government and direct democracy. About half of American states have a mix of three forms of direct democracy: the initiative, popular referendum, recall (Todd, 2014); and all but one state has the legislative referendum available (Damore, Bowler, & Nicholson, 2012). As Matsusaka (2005) notes, direct democracy has been driving policy change on a number of topics that include affirmative action, municipal debt, and minimum wage laws. Along these lines, many scholars have argued that direct democracy enables citizens to counteract special interest groups that can be harmful to public policy (Boehmke, 2005; Matsusaka, 2005; Tolbert, McNeal, & Smith, 2003).
- Unknown**
- State rules permit counties to decide on which direct democracy mechanisms to incorporate (Arceneaux, 2002), but it is currently unknown which counties decide to enact these policies at the local level. Therefore, a wide variation of direct democracy mechanisms exists at the county-level within the American states. Furthermore, it is currently unknown which county governments decide to incorporate direct democracy mechanisms as a political institution. Likewise, little research has delved into the theoretical nature of examining institutional arrangements at the county-level. As a result, despite the increasing demands of county governments, there is limited research on their role in direct democracy mechanisms.