



Direct Democracy: The Politics of Initiative, Referendum, and Recall

Thomas E. Cronin

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A decade ago, as we celebrated the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution's ratification, we were mindful that the founding fathers were fearful of direct democracy; virtuous representatives were to be at the center of the new political experiment. Ballot democracy, populist democracy, democracy by initiative, referendum, and recall—however one labels it—is only one hundred years old in the United States and has been in and out of fashion during that time. At the writing of this book there was a resurgence of interest in new kinds of forces trying to overturn legislative and executive fiat by direct ballot. In this book Thomas Cronin suggests why this is so, how it is working, and what should be done. Cronin examines the use of the initiative and referendum offered in twenty-six states over the years—including some very difficult issues such as tax caps on spending, the death penalty, pornography, prayer in schools, abortion and homosexual rights—and he makes sense out of the sponsors' motives and the voters' reactions. Through the analysis of hundreds of reports, studies, hearings, polls, and interviews that cover the country from Maine to California, he provides evidence to assess the state of participatory democracy—what happens when people decide to take charge after they perceive that their elected officials have failed to understand them.

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