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Ballot Measures in the Tri-state: An Examination of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky

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Abstract

This article examines the use and quality of ballot measure elections in Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio and the repercussions of their ballot language on participation rates. Looking at a 20-year dataset, we evaluate ballot language, topics, frequency, and passage. Mechanisms for the measure to be placed upon the ballot rise as an important difference among the states. Using the Flesch-Kincaid grade level measurements consistent with the literature (Reilly 2010; Reilly and Richey 2011) to examine readability of the measures presented across the Tri-State. I find that despite the lowest average education level, Kentucky's ballot measures register as the most difficult to understand impacting participation on these measures. Ohio, on the other hand, has a higher literacy rate and yet, their ballot readability was the lowest of these three states. Indiana falls in the middle of these states with both their literacy rate and readability scores. This demonstrates an inverse relationship of accessibility and literacy rates. So while policy diffusion may occur in these states in a number of areas (including the use of direct democracy), their education levels vary as well as the accessibility of their elections. These findings may be useful in shaping future attempts in Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio at ballot initiatives, measures, and referendum.