

Daniel R. Biggers. *Morality at the Ballot Box*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014. vii, 245pp. (\$95.00 Hardcover).

Morality at the Ballot Box provides a unique insight into the role of ballot measures (particularly those of a moral nature) to increase attention and turnout in elections. Scholars have often debated the power of ballot measures to influence turnout, particularly in hotly contested up-ticket races. Biggers' book evaluates the power of moral measures to influence engagement and participation in elections in three connected areas: awareness, importance and mobilization. The book as a whole answers important questions about the role moral ballot measures have in influencing election outcomes of up ticket races and determining overall voter turnout.

Moral ballot measures have seized the American political landscape and appear on ballots across the country. Numerous ballot propositions (particularly those on moral issues) are considered wedge topics, used to divide and mobilize the public, but Biggers addresses how successful they have been at targeting voters in the contribution to the literature. Biggers broadly defines moral issues as those involving abortion, death penalty, drug legalization, homosexual rights, stem cell research, and obscenity. This definition includes issues from both sides of the ideological perspective.

Biggers walks readers through a timely history of direct democracy and wedge issues in the United States and provides a thorough understanding of the current literature. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework for the book, arguing the role of moral issues in electoral politics. In Chapter 3, Biggers provides an understanding of moral issues and the role that they have played in the electoral process. Chapter 4 discusses which voters might be more influenced by these measures (namely peripheral voters). The impact on periphery voters is one of the big stories of this book, indicating that moral issues can engage voters who are not otherwise engaged in the process by ballot measures on issues of consequence, like taxation – where they are more likely to know, care about and vote on the issue.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine the impact of moral ballot measures at different election levels and with different methodologies, making this book useful not only on the subject but also for methodological studies. Chapter 5 includes a large-N study of statewide ballot measures and turnout levels, finding that the mere presence of a moral ballot measure increases turnout more so than other policy areas and that there is longer term repercussions on turnout from these measures than just one election. Focusing on the difference between tax measures and moral issues, Biggers demonstrates that there is clearly less interest on taxes but these two policy areas are closer than one might think in terms of driving short-term mobilization and interest in the political process. Chapter 6 includes local level elections and Biggers provides case studies on Cleveland Heights, Kalamazoo, Sarasota City and Hamtramck. This chapter demonstrates the various issues and the significance these moral issue measures play at the local level. While there seems to be disparity in the impact on this level, the distinction in the cases and issues demonstrate how moral issues are used at the local levels to varying success.

Chapter 7 includes a landmark study, where moral issue voters are more deeply investigated– by looking at partisanship, income level, age and religiosity to determine just who is influenced by these moral issues. While the focus of moral ballot measures has often been on

the religious right and conservatism, this chapter demonstrates that different moral issues are likely to engage and mobilize different groups of voters. There is no clear benefit to one party by using moral measures, as other voters may show up to support the opposing side. Further, two groups that Biggers includes in his analysis that have been understudied on the issue of moral ballot measures are lower class whites and youth. Moral issues mobilize both of these groups (with a few minor exceptions) more so than the expected ideological or religious groups. One critical distinction that Biggers provides in his analysis is that moral issues can be a function of two different agendas. Essentially, that there are measures that focus on the more conservative issues (abortion, gay marriage) but also those that focus on more liberal issues (stem cell, marijuana and euthanasia issues). This dichotomy in the partisan connection of moral issues demonstrates why the literature has been divided about whether moral issues mobilize and engage voters; Biggers clarifies and develops this argument with solid theoretical development and evidence.

The impact of this book is unquestionable, solving not only the question of the role of moral ballot measures, which voters these measures effect and under what circumstances are moral measures used, gain attention, and successfully mobilize voters. Also by providing a comparison of the moral measures in the context of different types of elections and with different topics, Biggers' analysis is clearly successful and groundbreaking. Further, his multi-method approach demonstrates that the examination of this topic has been conducted thoroughly and on multiple levels – providing evidence that this is a well-developed and researched piece.

It is possible to take Biggers' analysis further to look at issues that are not typically considered moral issues (for example, that of immigration) that has ties to both parties and could be considered a moral issue because of the well-being of many of these people. As this issue continues to dominate the political agenda, it may behoove state and local officials to recognize the role that moral issues have in the ballot booth and determine whether to move forward with anti-immigration/immigrant measures.

Overall, Biggers has provided a well-documented and timely study demonstrating the importance of context and voters in moral ballot measure usage. Practitioners and scholars alike will be informed on whom these measures influence, in what jurisdiction, and in what context. Biggers has demonstrated the role that moral ballot measures have in driving awareness of these and connected elections, providing an excellent study that scholars of direct democracy must read.

Shauna Reilly
Northern Kentucky University