Does direct democracy hurt immigrant minorities?: evidence from naturalization decisions in Switzerland

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passed similar measures even in the absence of the direct democratic vote. As Matsusaka (2005, 201) concludes in a recent review,

Legislatures have harmed minorities, too—almost all Jim Crow laws throughout the South were brought about by legislatures—and elected representatives, not direct democracy, interned Japanese-American citizens during World War II. There is no convincing evidence—anecdotal or statistical—that minority rights are undermined by direct democracy with a greater regularity than by legislatures.

The reason for the absence of "convincing evidence" on the effects of direct democracy on minority outcomes is that identifying the causal effect of direct democracy in a challenging empirical setting. Quasi-experimental evidence also shows that naturalization propels the political and social integration of immigrants (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Pietrantuono 2015, 2017).

In Switzerland, citizenship applications of immigrants are decided by the municipality in which the immigrant resides. Municipalities use two main types of regimes to vote on naturalization applications: direct democracy, in which citizens vote on the applications using referendums, and representative democracy, in which elected legislators vote on the applications in the municipality council. This configuration has generated a wealth of data that enable us to examine whether immigrant minorities fare better or worse if their naturalization requests are decided by the people or by legislatures. We