

Democracy on the Ballot

2020

By
Elena Nuñez
Jay Riestenberg
Becky Timmons



COMMON CAUSE is a nonpartisan grassroots organization dedicated to upholding the core values of American democracy. We work to create open, honest, and accountable government that serves the public interest; promote equal rights, opportunity, and representation for all; and empower all people to make their voices heard in the political process.

This report was written by Elena Nuñez, Jay Riestenberg, and Becky Timmons, and edited by Cynthia Williams, with contributions from Nicolas Heidorn, Paul S. Ryan, and Stephen Spaulding. The report was designed by Kerstin Diehn.

INTRODUCTION

Most of us believe that for democracy to work for all of us, it must include all of us. This election season, we saw voters across the country stand with and for each other, rejecting attempts to divide us based on what we look like, where we come from or where we live.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic and the deliberate barriers set to silence the voices of Black people and people struggling to make ends meet, voters turned out in record numbers to pick new leaders and pass ballot measures that shift power to the people and away from politicians.

Voters in states such as California, Colorado, Oregon, Nevada and Virginia who elected Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden also overwhelmingly supported grassroots, citizen-led ballot measures that expand the right to vote and protect the people's voice in government.

This rides a wave of democracy and political reform in the last five years during which voters approved more than 30 democracy-reform ballot measures that move us forward together toward a more representative and equitable system of government.

Here are quick takes on our top five successful democracy-reform ballot measures from November 2020:

- With a stunning 78% of the vote, **Oregon** voters cleared the way for first-ever campaign finance laws by enabling state and local governments to enact commonsense money in politics reforms. Oregon is one of just a few states that has no limits on what an individual can give to candidates, leading to special interests and big donors have a larger voice in Oregon government.
- **Colorado** voters said that voters should decide the winner of the presidential election. The state joins the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact to ensure the winner of the popular vote actually wins the presidential election.
- A resounding 66% of **Virginia** voters decided to end partisan gerrymandering by approving a constitutional amendment to create the state's first-ever citizen-led redistricting commission. Going forward, people will choose their politicians, not the other way around.
- **California** voters restored the right to vote to people on parole with felony convictions. Californians who have completed their prison term can fully participate in our democracy by restoring their right to vote.
- With 64% of the vote, **Nevada** voters enshrined the right to vote and cast a ballot free from intimidation in the state constitution. They sent a clear message that nothing should stand between a voter and the ballot box.

While there were big wins at the ballot box, there were also some disappointing losses. Cynical, white nationalist efforts to amend the state constitutions to create justification for onerous voting policies prevailed in Alabama, Florida, and Colorado. And voters in Missouri repealed key provisions of the voter-approved Clean Missouri measure.





MONEY IN POLITICS & ETHICS

The following ballot measures focus on creating a more balanced democracy where everyday people's voices are heard and big special interests do not dominate our politics. In **Baltimore County, Maryland**, voters approved the creation of a public financing system for county candidates, similar to programs established in Baltimore City, Montgomery County, Howard County, and Prince George's County. In **Oregon**, voters passed a measure that will open the door to needed campaign finance reform by enabling the legislature and local governments to enact commonsense money in politics reforms and strengthen campaign finance transparency. Oregon is one of just a few states that has no limits on what an individual can give to candidates, leading to special interests and big donors have a larger voice in Oregon government.



Alaska – Amendment 2

Common Cause Position: SUPPORT

If passed, Amendment 2 would strengthen Alaska's campaign finance disclosure laws, replace partisan primaries with a top-four primary system for state and congressional offices, and establish ranked choice voting for all general elections.

[Learn More At Alaskans for Better Elections >>](#)

PASSED



Maryland – Baltimore County – Question A

Common Cause Position: SUPPORT

If passed, Question A would amend the county charter to establish a campaign public financing fund to enable candidates in the county to run for office without relying on large or corporate donors. A similar measure passed in the city of Baltimore in 2018 with 75% of voters voting in support. Howard County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County have also adopted similar programs in recent years.

[Learn More At Baltimore County Fair Elections >>](#)

PASSED



Oregon – Measure 107

Common Cause Position: SUPPORT

If passed, Measure 107 would amend the Oregon's state constitution to authorize the state legislature and local governments to enact laws limiting campaign contributions and expenditures, require disclosure campaign contributions and spending, and increase transparency for political advertisements.

[Learn More At Fair & Honest Elections >>](#)

PASSED



VOTING & ELECTIONS

Unfortunately, three cynical, white nationalist efforts to amend the state constitutions in Alabama, Florida, and Colorado prevailed. Voters supported measures that provide the right to vote to citizens who are 18 years or older. The state constitutions already provide that right to citizens, so at best these measures will do nothing, and at the worst they open an avenue to harass or intimidate immigrants who are eligible to vote. Youths were also disenfranchised by those measures, in addition to a failed attempt in California to extend the right to vote in primaries to people who will turn 18 by the general election.



Alabama – Amendment 1

Common Cause Position: OPPOSE

If passed, Amendment 1 would unnecessarily amend Alabama’s state constitution to state that “only a citizen” of the U.S. who is 18 years old or older can vote in Alabama. The Alabama Constitution already states that “every citizen” in the state who is 18 years old or older can vote in Alabama.

[Learn More At “Ballotpedia: Alabama Amendment 1, Citizenship Requirement for Voting Measure \(2020\)” >>](#)

PASSED



California – Proposition 17

Common Cause Position: SUPPORT

If passed, Proposition 17 would amend the California state constitution to restore the right to vote to people on parole with felony convictions.

[Learn More At Free The Vote CA >>](#)

PASSED



California – Proposition 18

Common Cause Position: SUPPORT

If passed, Proposition 18 would amend the California state constitution to allow 17-year-olds who will be 18 at the time of the next general election to vote in primary elections and special elections.

[Learn More At Yes on 18 – Vote for Our Future >>](#)

DEFEATED



Colorado – Proposition 113

Common Cause Position: SUPPORT

If passed, Proposition 113 would have Colorado join the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. Once enough states join the compact to create an Electoral College majority (270 electoral votes), Colorado's electoral votes would be allocated to the winner of the national popular vote in the presidential election. The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact is an effort to ensure the winner of the popular vote wins the presidential election.

[Learn More At Yes on National Popular Vote >>](#)



Colorado – Amendment 76

Common Cause Position: OPPOSE

If passed, Amendment 76 would unnecessarily amend Colorado's state constitution to state that "only a citizen" of the U.S. who is 18 years old or older can vote in Colorado. The Colorado Constitution already states that "every citizen" in the state who is 18 years old or older can vote; this measure, if passed, would also block the state law that allows 17 year olds to vote in primary elections.

[Learn More At The Campaign for Real Election Protection >>](#)



Florida – Amendment 1

Common Cause Position: OPPOSE

"If passed, Amendment 1 would unnecessarily amend Florida's state constitution to state that "only a citizen" of the U.S. who is 18 years old or older can vote in Florida."

[Learn More At "Ballotpedia: Florida Amendment 1, Citizen Requirement for Voting Initiative \(2020\)" >>](#)



Florida – Amendment 3

Common Cause Position: NONE

If passed, Amendment 3 would establish a top-two open primary system for primary elections for state legislators, the governor, attorney general, chief financial officer, and commissioner of agriculture in Florida.

[Learn More At "Ballotpedia: Florida Amendment 3, Top-Two Open Primaries for State Offices Initiative \(2020\)" >>](#)





Massachusetts – Question 2

Common Cause Position: SUPPORT

If passed, Question 2 would establish ranked choice voting in primary and general elections in state, federal, and certain county races, beginning in 2022.

[Learn More At Yes on 2: Ranked Choice Voting >>](#)

DEFEATED



Nevada – Question 4

Common Cause Position: SUPPORT

If passed, Question 4 would add Nevada’s declaration of voters’ rights to the state’s constitution, including guaranting Nevada voters a constitutional right to vote without intimidation, threat, or coercion and equal access to the elections system without discrimination, among other important voting rights reforms.

[Learn More At “Ballotpedia: Nevada Question 4, State Constitutional Rights of Voters Amendment \(2020\)” >>](#)

PASSED



REDISTRICTING & REPRESENTATION

Ballot measures on who should draw voting districts — the people or the politicians — had split results. First the good news: In **Virginia**, voters decided to end partisan gerrymandering by approving a constitutional amendment to create Virginia’s first-ever citizen-led redistricting commission. In contrast, **Missouri** voters repealed key portions of the Clean Missouri Amendment and gave politicians the power to draw their own districts once again.



New Jersey – Public Question 3

Common Cause Position: NONE

If passed, Public Question 3 would delay the redrawing of legislative district boundaries if the federal census count of the New Jersey population is delayed. Under this measure, if census data is not received by February 15, 2020, New Jersey will delay its legislative redistricting process and the current voting maps will remain in place until 2023.

[Learn More At “Ballotpedia: New Jersey Public Question 3, Delayed State Legislative Redistricting Amendment \(2020\)” >>](#)



Missouri – Amendment 3

Common Cause Position: OPPOSE

If passed, Amendment 3 would repeal the redistricting reform sections of the Clean Missouri initiative, which was passed by voters in 2018. Instead of using a nonpartisan demographer, Amendment 3 would revert the redistricting process back to a partisan process controlled by the legislature. It could also block Missourians who are not citizens or of voting-age from being counted in the redistricting process.

[Learn More At Clean Missouri >>](#)



Virginia – Question 1

Common Cause Position: SUPPORT

If passed, Question 1 would take the power of congressional and state legislative redistricting out of the hands of the legislature and instead create a bipartisan, citizen-led commission and new rules to control the redistricting process”

[Learn More At FairMaps Virginia >>](#)





DIRECT DEMOCRACY

In big wins for direct democracy, voters in [Arkansas, Florida and North Dakota](#) soundly defeated attempts to make it harder for citizens to either put questions on the ballot or to pass those questions. For some context, in Florida this win is important because in 2018 voters used direct democracy to pass a ballot measure that restored the right to vote to felons who completed their sentences. Some leaders have tried to block implementation of this social justice reform, including running this failed attempt to make it harder for grassroots organizers to mount successful ballot campaigns.



Arkansas – Amendment 3

Common Cause Position: OPPOSE

If passed, Amendment 3 would make it harder for Arkansas voters to collect petition signatures to put initiatives on the ballot. This is a cynical effort to silence the voices of Arkansans and remove a check on the power of state politicians.

[Learn More At Protect AR Voices >>](#)



Florida – Amendment 4

Common Cause Position: OPPOSE

If passed, Amendment 4 would require voter-approved ballot initiatives be approved by voters in a second statewide vote to become effective. Florida law already requires a supermajority vote (60%) for a measure to pass; Amendment 4 would require a second statewide vote, making it far more difficult and expensive to advance constitutional amendments.

[Learn More At Ballotpedia and NoNumber4.org >>](#)
[\(League of Women Voters of Florida website\) >>](#)



North Dakota – Measure 2

Common Cause Position: OPPOSE

If passed, Measure 2 would require any ballot measure passed by voters to be approved by the legislature. If the legislature does not approve the measure, the issue will be placed on the ballot again to become effective if approved by voters a second time.

[Learn More At Protect ND >>](#)





Common Cause

Holding Power Accountable

805 15th Street, NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
202.833.1200