



DEC. 2021

2021: YEAR END REPORT

A Message from the President

I have been fired up for the cause of expanding and retooling democracy since I took a semester off from the University of Michigan in 1990 and went to DC to push for the Fair Elections Bill and the Democracy in Presidential Debates Act – “ahead-of-their-time” bills that were opposed by both parties. Back then “democracy reform” was seen as something needed in Eastern Europe and South Africa, not the United States.

That has changed. Quite a bit.

Open Primaries launched in 2009. We expanded in 2014 thanks to generous support from Arnold Ventures. In 2020 we launched the 501 (c) 3 Open Primaries Education Fund and partnered with the Princeton Gerrymandering Project to create the Electoral Innovation Lab at Princeton University.

Our goal over the last decade has been to put primary reform on the map and create an environment for a movement to emerge. Why do we need primary reform? Many reasons. None more pressing than the fact that Americans are leaving the Democratic and Republican parties in droves and our system makes them second class citizens.

We are seeing a flourishing of dynamic forces that makes me very optimistic for the future. And I am proud to say that our hard work over the last 10 years, along with new partners and fellow travelers taking up the cause, is creating significant new opportunities to impact.

2021 was a year of dramatic growth and transformation of the reform landscape. A new national organization - the Institute for Political Innovation - was founded by Katherine Gehl to propel primary reform initiatives in 15 states over the next decade. Unite America began to emphasize the game changing importance of nonpartisan

primaries. The Maine legislature passed open partisan primaries, and the Pennsylvania Senate did too (next stop in 2022 is the House). Andrew Yang bolted the Democratic Party and formed the Forward Party to advance a broad reform agenda, including open primaries, and Farhad Mohit launched the Good Party, a “non-party” digital grassroots movement for political change. Leadership networks like Common Ground Arkansas, Oklahoma United for Change, Veterans for Political Innovation, Unite NY, and the Committee of 70 (partial list) have launched primary reform education and outreach efforts. Leaders in New York City and Rochester, NY have begun questioning the wisdom of using partisan primary elections to elect local leadership. Press coverage skyrocketed in 2021. Even The View featured a 10-minute discussion about independent voters and closed primaries!

The strength of this emerging movement is that it is organic, decentralized, and powered by different players with diverse politics, concerns, and solutions. We have had a chance to sit down with many of these leaders. I love the fire, passion, business and political know how they bring to the cause of greater democracy in America. We were able to use the Open Primaries platform to introduce reformers and leaders to each other, advancing the conversations and deepening the work.

Our focus heading into 2022 is four fold: Connect and support people, organizations and campaigns. Develop new tactics to advance the cause, particularly in the area of litigation. Mobilize coalitions to defeat closed primary efforts wherever they emerge. And insist that primary reform is both a voting rights and a better government concern.

I’m excited about the next few years, while simultaneously cognizant of the challenges ahead. In 2022, there will be legislation introduced in 7-12 states to enact closed, partisan primaries. We have seen time and time again that entrenched interests and partisan insiders will use all their power to derail and defeat campaigns to enact nonpartisan primaries.

For America to grow in new ways, and for Americans to be able to self-organize to determine the health and well-being of their communities, cities, states and our union, we need to breakdown the partisan regulatory capture that has stifled our democracy.

When I look back and see what we have been able to accomplish in the last ten years, I am incredibly optimistic about how we can transform our primary system and the responsiveness of our political system over the next 10 years. We are going to make this happen by doing the hard day-to-day work of standing up to partisan bullying, fighting hard for wins, building this movement, and going to the people.

The American people are where we draw our strength. They understand and support the concept that no American should be required to join a political party in order to vote. We must harness and amplify that support every chance we get.

We have new initiatives rolling out in 2022. Stay tuned. Below are a few of the highlights of what we accomplished in 2021. Thank you for your friendship, support, advice, money and involvement. I look forward to building with you next year and beyond.

John Opdycke
President



2021 Highlights

Independent Voters Can't Be Ignored

There's a shift happening in American politics and as Open Primaries President John Opdycke lays out [in The Hill](#) it's long past time analysts learn *why* more and more Americans are going independent. 45% of Americans now identify themselves as politically independent—[and as a groundbreaking report from The Open Primaries Education Fund demonstrates](#)—this is a trend that's only going up.

Political scientists, analysts and pundits have dismissed the rise of independent voters for years and ignored the myriad ways registered independent voters are treated as second class citizens and submitted to legal, political and administrative bias. Who are independent voters? They're a cross-section of America, but their rates are particularly high among young voters.

Over 50% of millennial and GenZ voters are independent. Which is why we launched Students for Open Primaries—an innovative project run by and for young voters.

And it's not just that the number of independent voters continues to rise but as a piece from U.S. News and World Report lays out: independents are exercising increasing levels of control over American election outcomes—with dozens of states continuing to lock these voters out, American democracy is reaching a boiling point as we move closer to the 2022 primaries.

Passing Open Primaries in 2021

This summer, the Maine legislature passed a historic open primaries bill by wide margins, allowing independent voters- *32% of all Maine voters*-the right to pick a party ballot and vote in primary elections for the first time.

This success was the product of a five year collaborative process between Open Primaries, Open Primaries Maine, elected officials, civic groups, party leaders, editorial boards, journalists, and citizens throughout the state to champion the right of all Maine voters to participate in every election.

We took everything we learned and produced a report: *Success Story: What it Took to Bring Open Primaries to Maine*. It's "the real story" of what it actually took to get the bill passed with strong bi-partisan support. We believe it can serve as a tool for activists, reformers, and anyone working to make politics and government more responsive and fair.

READ THE FULL REPORT

And so far the report's been getting a lot of attention! We're getting more and more requests to present our findings from Maine. Recent presentations include:

- Maine State Senator Chloe Maxmin (a critical leader of the Maine campaign) led a presentation in Tampa, FL in November at the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Summit for an audience of legislators from all across the country.
- OP President John Opdycke & Senior VP Jeremy Gruber led a presentation and Q&A for FixUS members last month
- OP Senior VP Jeremy Gruber joined the Oregon Open Primaries team to present to Oregonians working on a 2022 proposition.

Protecting Open Primaries in 2021

Since 2015, we have successfully defeated every bill introduced to enact closed partisan primaries. From South Carolina to Montana, Louisiana to New Hampshire, when politicians want to restrict voter access and mobility and push for closed primaries - we fight back and win.

- When closed primary legislation was introduced in Utah this year, we worked with our partners at the Electoral Innovation Lab at Princeton to debunk the claims made by the bill's sponsors. Our report generated front page news, editorial support for maintaining open primaries, and significant pressure on the bill's sponsor, who ultimately rolled back the legislation.
- In Louisiana, a closed primary bill introduced by insider Republicans and Democrats was defeated this Spring after an effort led by Sen. Bill Cassidy and Open Primaries pressured leadership to withdraw the legislation.
- Campaigns by Open Primaries in Missouri have prevented closed primary legislation from advancing out of the House of Representatives over several sessions. This year alone, we testified against closed primary efforts in Virginia and New Hampshire and monitored efforts in Montana, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Open Primaries is in the lead when it comes to fighting efforts to enact closed partisan primaries.

Partisan insiders prefer closed party primaries. We expect legislative fights in as many as 12 states in 2022. We will be there on the ground mobilizing diverse coalitions to defeat these efforts.



Open Source Conversations

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Open Primaries Education Fund (501c3) has been organizing, cultivating and leading dynamic conversations featuring many of the different leaders/activists/scholars/trouble-makers that make up our current political reform movement with our [Virtual Discussions Series](#).

We've hosted conversations with state campaign leaders working to open primaries, young activists organizing other Gen Z'ers around political reform, civil rights leaders on the connection between political reform and voting rights, and veterans fighting to enfranchise the 49% of US veterans who are politically independent.

These voices are absolutely critical to the future success of the democracy movement. These conversations (like the Americans having them) are diverse, thoughtful, unpredictable, authentic, sometimes difficult but they all share one common goal:

Making our democracy work for EVERY voter. If you've missed any of these conversations, you can watch ALL of them [HERE](#).

Our series returns Wed. January 12th at 3pm EDT with ***"Everything You Want to Know About Andrew Yang & the Forward Party *But the Pundits, Politicians and Parties Hope You Won't Ask"*** where we'll (in collaboration with [Politics for the People](#)) welcome Andrew Yang to the growing independent political reform movement and do a deep dive into all things Andrew Yang, and most importantly take your questions on why now is the time to embrace reform and how he's going to advance the cause.

[REGISTER TODAY](#)

Open Primaries Media Highlights in 2021

This year Open Primaries worked with our partners all across the country to elevate the call for primary reform. Here is a small sample of the best op-eds and articles

- [Taxation, voting and basic fairness: With non-citizen voting, the City Council just made the case for open primaries](#)- John Opdycke in the New York Daily News
- [Andrew Yang says the two-party system fuels extremism: "The people are losing"](#) - CBS News (VIDEO)
- [Ensuring 'free and equal' elections calls for open primary initiative](#) - Kevin Frazier in the Oregonian
- [This Suggests Market Failure in Our Politics](#)-John Avlon on CNN
- [Want to help resolve American political dysfunction? Allow open primary elections.](#) -Former PA Republican and Democratic Party Chairs Alan Novak and TJ Rooney in the Washington Post.
- [Time Magazine: If We're Serious About Saving American Democracy, This Voting System Might Be the Key](#) - Katherine Gehl and Jonathan Haidt
- [Healthy democracy requires competition](#) - Joe Kirby in the Rapid City Journal.
- [Closed primaries disenfranchise millions of young people](#)-Students for Open Primaries founder Elena Ashburn in IVN.
- [Time to end closed primary process in Nevada](#)-Sondra Cosgrove in the Las Vegas Review-Journal.
- [Fear and Retribution](#) -Jolly, Murphy and Opdycke on Smerconish.
- [Open primaries long overdue in NY](#) - OP SVP Jeremy Gruber and John Opdycke in the Albany Times-Union.
- [How an unholy bipartisan alliance would disenfranchise many Black Louisianans](#)- OP SVP Jeremy Gruber & Debbie Hollis in The Fulcrum
- [After Amendment 3 Failure, What's the plan for disenfranchised voters?](#)-Florida Open Primaries, Jeff Solomon in the Orlando Sentinel