



DECEMBER 2022

2022: YEAR END REPORT

President's Message

When I founded Open Primaries in 2009, challenging the partisan control of the first round of elections was not considered a legitimate enterprise. One national reform leader marched into my office and said the issue was “toxic.” But I believed then, as I believe now, that giving independent voters more options, more opportunities, and more power could impact the downward spiral of American politics.

I’ve come to appreciate just how controversial it is to advocate for independent voters.

You’d think that in a country whose origin story is deeply intertwined with the concept of independence and whose founding fathers warned about the corrupting influence of parties and factions that political independence would be celebrated, elevated, encouraged. But that’s not the case. It turns out that our apple pie motto - “no American should be required to join a private organization in order to vote” - is a direct affront to the status quo. Who knew apple pie was so edgy!

I talked about this with Chris Cuomo before the midterms and with the American Enterprise Institute after the midterms. Independents are not just free agents. They are change agents. They are a growing constituency of voters who are working to change the game, not just switch out the players. But many beltway players prefer to keep independents on the sidelines because they want to control the game, not change it.

We made two important breakthroughs in 2022. First, primary reform is accelerating. We won round one in Nevada, passed legislation in Maine, and garnered unprecedented national media. There has been an explosion of activity at the local and state level.

The movement is on track to place referendums on the ballot in 5-8 states in 2024 and pass bills in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania. There is a growing discussion in New York for the first time in a decade. Rocky Bleier became our spokesperson in Pennsylvania!

The second breakthrough is the changing narrative about independent voters. Despite the fact that independents have decided the outcome of every presidential election since 2000, pundits have insisted that “true” independent voters are rare and that 95% of Americans are blue or red. The 2022 midterm elections changed that.

For the past 40 years, every time a sitting president’s party has suffered large losses in the midterms, independents have voted by a double-digit margin for candidates from the other party. This time they swung 49%-47% in favor of Democratic candidates. Even those numbers obscure how far they swung in individual state races. Independents comprised 24% of the electorate and broke 57-39% for John Fetterman in Pennsylvania; 40% of the electorate and broke 55-39% for Mark Kelly in Arizona; and 24% of the electorate and broke 53-42% for Raphael Warnock in Georgia. Across the country, independents asserted their “country before party” politic in a big way. They rejected election denialism but they did not become Democrats. And the media took notice.

Partisan politics is big business. It is growing every year in size and sophistication. But so too is the independent reform movement. Independent voters are surging and are making themselves heard. Reformers are challenging the partisan control of primaries and redistricting and winning. Scholars are asking questions about why boards of elections and Secretaries of State are partisan at all. We have a beachhead from which to operate and expand.

How we do in 2024 will be a direct result of how creative and committed we are in 2023. Next year is not an election year. It’s a building and organizing year: laying foundations, fundraising, recruiting and developing leadership, playing “defense to offense,” putting petitioning operations in place and developing new legal initiatives. We are in growth mode. We are hiring more staff, recruiting more volunteers and interns, expanding our media operation, convening more conversations, creating new tactics (including some wild ones!) and building new partnerships with academics, activists and philanthropists.

I’m most excited by all the new leadership emerging around the country. Margaret Kobos, Joe Kirby, De Knudson, Eric Bronner, Yaitin Chu, Cesar Marquez, Dariel Cruz, David Holt, Danny Ortega, Thomas Kennedy, Gabe Hart, Sal Albanese, Jenn Lowe, Bob Perls, Michael Calcagno, Josh Moenning, Steve Westly, David Thornburgh to name a few. People are stepping up and providing strong and effective leadership. This is the metric that matters most to me - leadership. And we have it.

Happy Holidays and thank you for all of your hard work, support, and involvement this year.

John Opdycke
President



INDEPENDENT VOTERS BREAK OUT IN MIDTERMS

As the dust settles on the 2022 midterms one thing is clear: Everyone is talking about the independent vote. From [The Wall Street Journal](#) to [Vox](#) to the [LA Times](#), and [The Hill](#)- in race after race across the country independents overwhelmingly decided election outcomes.

Historically, independents have voted by a double-digit margin for candidates from the party out of power. This time they swung 49%-47% in favor of the Democratic Party. Even those numbers obscure how far they swung in individual state races.

WARNING: This doesn't mean that independents are now in the Democratic Party camp. Far from it. They broke 49-48 for Kemp in Georgia and 52-46 for DeSantis in Florida.

Independents do not vote for parties, they vote for people. It's the number one reason independents say they are independents.

Now that independents just saved the Democratic party, OP President John Opdycke and OP Senior VP Jeremy Gruber are calling on national Democrats to return the favor:

"While the Republican Party is often (rightfully) criticized for backing various forms of voter suppression, it's the Democratic Party that has taken the lead in opposing primary reform. Democratic leadership has refused to move legislation in Maryland and New Mexico despite wide public support. In Oregon and New York, Democrats have squashed every effort over the past 20 years to allow independent voters to participate in the primaries...The Democratic Party should do something simple but powerful. Recognize that the largest group of voters in the country don't want to join a political party. They want leadership, not partisanship, results not rhetoric, cooperation not grandstanding. And they want to be able to vote in every election. Let them."

The drumbeat for reform from within the Democratic Party is also taking off. Read [DNC leader Thomas Kennedy's piece](#) on why Florida Democrats need to open their primaries and former NY City Councilman Sal Albanese's [new piece with OP's John Opdycke](#) on why NY Democrats need to do the same.

Now a new Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy at ASU from Co-Directors Jackie Salit and Thom Reilly has launched to study this emerging community of voters. Salit and Reilly have also written a new book *The Independent Voter*—check it out [here](#).

Whatever happens next in American politics, one thing is certain—independents are finally having their moment.

Nevadans take one big step closer to open, nonpartisan primaries!



Voters in Nevada just passed Measure 3—a nonpartisan, top five open primary/ranked choice voting initiative **-52% to 48%**-- despite opposition from both major parties - this moves them one step closer to joining California, Washington, Nebraska and Alaska as the 5th state in the U.S. to fully empower independents by adopting nonpartisan, open primaries.

It's also the second state, ***just this year***, to open its primaries to independent voters—after the Maine legislature [voted in large bipartisan](#)

numbers to adopt primary reform in June. Nevada requires that constitutional amendments pass twice in order to be enacted. Independents are 30% of the electorate in Nevada—they are the second largest and fastest-growing group of voters in the state—if passed on the second vote in 2024, Measure 3 will allow the state's independent voters to play an even bigger role in the state's political future.

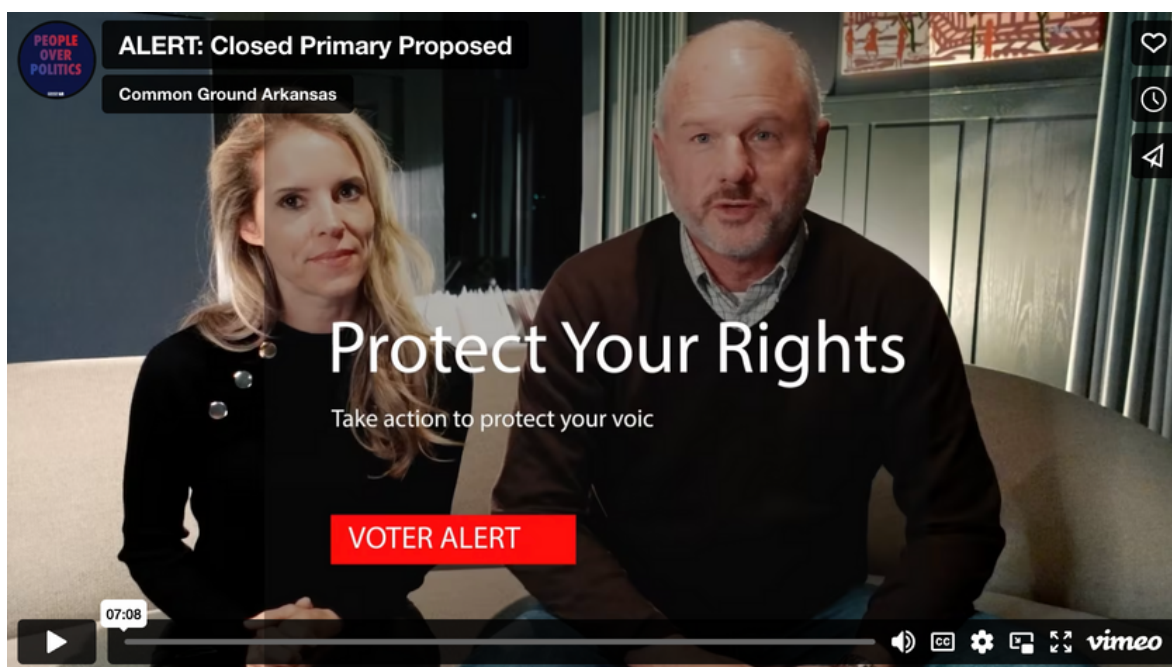
We congratulate the incredible teams at [Nevada Voters First](#) and the [Institute for Political Innovation](#) - and all the dedicated activists-Republicans, Democrats and independents- across Nevada for their tireless work on behalf of equal voting rights!

Republican Party Efforts to Close Primaries in Arkansas is DEFEATED

Our partners at [Common Ground AR](#) have [successfully defeated](#) an attempt by the Arkansas Republican Party to adopt rules to close the primaries!

In July, delegates to the GOP's state convention voted to declare their support for closed primaries as part of the state party's platform.

93% of AR voters are not registered to a party and would've been barred from voting in the Republican primary-Common Ground AR took swift action and organized a campaign to make the peoples' voice heard and IT WORKED.



This past Saturday, the Republican state committee voted on the proposal and found itself 18 votes short of moving forward. Congrats to Common Ground for a job well done!

Still, efforts to close the primaries are accelerating across the South. Three states-Tennessee, Missouri and Alabama-have already adopted Republican Party rules in favor of closed primaries and we're expecting at least half a dozen states to introduce legislation to such effect next month.

Learn more about our campaign to stop closed primaries and [get involved HERE](#).

Which States Will Be Next to Consider Open Primaries?

After a major year of progress where we saw Maine adopt open primaries and Nevada vote to enact fully open, nonpartisan primaries, we're already looking at 2023 and 2024. [Read SVP Jeremy Gruber's interview on what is next on the horizon.](#)

2 states are already moving forward with petition drives for 2024:

South Dakota:

[South Dakota Open Primaries](#) has [filed a proposed constitutional amendment](#) for a top two open primary system. This is the first step towards placing an initiative on the November 2024 ballot. Current law prevents large numbers of independent South Dakota voters from participating in the primary process. To qualify for the November 2024 ballot, the sponsors must collect valid signatures from 35,017 registered South Dakota voters and submit the petitions to the state by November 5, 2023.



Oregon:

The [All Oregon Votes team](#) collected the initial slate of signatures needed for the "Free and Equal Elections" initiative, a groundbreaking proposed constitutional amendment calling for all voters to be free to vote in every publicly funded election. The ballot title certification process will begin soon, after which new rounds of signature gathering will resume. Independents are the largest bloc of voters in the state—with over 1 million people opting out of the two major parties—and this is an exciting campaign to pay attention to as they organize towards a 2024 vote.

Open Primaries President John Opdycke— Now a Regular on Newsnation



Now that all eyes are on primary reform and the rights of independent voters, OP President John Opdycke has been in high demand as a key voice of authority, and he's become a regular on Chris Cuomo's new show on Newsnation.

He first appeared in October to talk about who independents are and what they care about and later joined Cuomo live in Chicago for primetime election night coverage for the 2022 midterms. Look for new appearances in the upcoming months.

New Survey: Why Young Voters Stood Up for American Democracy in Midterms

Young voters showed up in big numbers and decided election outcomes in the 2022 midterms. About 27% of voters between the ages of 18-29 cast a ballot in the midterm election this year, according to an early estimate. It was the second-highest voter turnout among voters under 30 in at least the past three decades.

A new survey from Students for Open Primaries takes the pulse of American millennials and GenZ voters with some startling findings about their political loyalties and prioritization of democracy reform.

SOP surveyed 1,000 young people across the country and asked them a series of questions about how they view the current state of American elections, political affiliation, and their support for change.

Key Survey Findings:

- A supermajority of young people (**65%**) consider themselves independent.
- **69%** of young people feel neither the Republican or Democratic Parties represent them.
- **80%** of young voters believe elected leaders are more loyal to their party than their constituents.
- **80%** of young people believe closed primaries are a problem impacting young voters.
- **85%** of young voters think we need to reform the way we elect our leaders in America today and support a move to nonpartisan open primaries.
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The full survey can be found [HERE](#).

Students for Open Primaries Co-Founder Dariel Cruz Rodriguez on what people need to know about young voters:

"Gen Z and millennials are now the largest group of voters in the country. We are turning out in big numbers and deciding elections. But there are two things you need to know about us. We're independent, and we want an election system that allows us to fully express our views. Both the Democratic and Republican parties should be on notice. We're not going to let you put us in a box."

Students for Open Primaries and their survey are starting to get recognition-[you can watch their conversation with the Forward Party here](#) and [read more coverage in the Fulcrum](#).