

Open Primaries September 2023 Newsletter

INDEPENDENT VOTERS SKYROCKET:

Independents Become Largest Group of Voters in 3 States in the Past Year

Just this week, independent voters surpassed Republicans as the [largest group of registered voters in Arizona](#). Earlier this summer, [independents surpassed Democrats](#) as the largest group of registered voters in Nevada and less than a year ago [independents surpassed Democrats as the largest group of registered voters in Oregon](#)—now comprising 35% of all voters in the state. Independents voters in six more states—from Colorado and Alaska to Connecticut and Rhode Island are already the largest group of voters in the state and the second largest group of voters in a dozen more states. America is officially going independent.

Read our [report on Independent voters](#) and our [Law Review Article](#) on their legal status.

Across the country, independents are rejecting the politics of extreme partisanship, election denial, and disinformation. They are voting for candidates not parties. They are standing up for leadership, action over rhetoric, and democratic values.

Independent voters [surprised pundits](#) in the 2022 midterms. Rather than following the traditional pattern of voting against the sitting president's party, independents broke decisively for Democratic candidates in high profile races where the GOP fielded election denying candidates. Once again, they are poised to determine the outcome of the 2024 election season. The big question is—will the political class finally start listening to independent voters?

SIX FORMER GOVERNORS JOIN THE FIGHT FOR OPEN PRIMARIES



As former Pennsylvania Governors, we are writing today in full support of current legislation in both the House and Senate that would repeal closed primaries and bring 1.2 million independent voters back into the primary election process. Representing both major political parties, we come together in our firm belief that it is long past time for Pennsylvania to join the 43 other states that in some way allow independent voters to vote in every election.

When we were elected Governor, we pledged to govern on behalf of all Pennsylvanians – Democrats, Republicans, independents, those who voted for us, and those who voted against us. But our political system has changed over the last decade or two. Primary elections are often decided by a few more extreme voters. Candidates elected by those more extreme voters don't have as much incentive to engage in the compromise and give and take that is so essential to effective governing. Adding independent voters to the primary mix will help.

Nothing is more fundamental to our democratic republic than the right to vote. Over the years, people have marched, protested, petitioned their elected officials, and even laid down their lives to make sure that voting is free, fair, and secure for all citizens. Plus, it is what the voters want. Repealing closed primaries enjoys remarkable support, with 74% of all Pennsylvania voters in favor. That includes strong majorities from across the political spectrum.

We also believe that opening primary elections will help build both political parties. By inviting independent voters into party primary elections, it's giving them a chance to "try before you buy." Both political parties have seen dramatic declines over the past 20 years, while independent voters are the fastest growing segment of the voting population. Why wouldn't we want to invite them in?

Pennsylvania's independent voters aren't looking for favors, just fairness. As taxpayers, these independent voters help pay the roughly \$50 million it costs to run a primary election – and yet they are denied the right to cast a vote. This is surely taxation without representation.

There is one more critical reason we believe that this is the right issue – at the right time – for Pennsylvania. It should come as no surprise that half of all veterans identify as independents. When members of our armed services take the oath to defend our country, it's not to serve the red team or blue team. They serve the red, white, and blue team. How can we ask them to put their lives on the line for our country but deny them their right to vote when they come home?

We are proud to join together in our support for repealing closed primaries. It's the right thing and the smart thing to do.

Gov. Tom Ridge (1995-2001)
Gov. Mark Schweiker (2001-2003)
Gov. Ed Rendell (2003-2011)
Gov. Tom Corbett (2011-2015)
Gov. Tom Wolf (2015-2023)

Speaking of listening—open primary campaigns in both Pennsylvania and Idaho received major endorsements from prominent, former Governors this week.

Pennsylvania—in an unprecedented show of bipartisanship, **five former governors** [issued a letter](#) backing proposed legislation to get rid of the state's closed primary system. The letter was signed by former Govs. Tom Ridge, Mark Schweiker, Ed Rendell, Tom Corbett and Tom Wolf:

"Representing both major political parties, we come together in our firm belief that it is long past time for Pennsylvania to join the other 43 states that in some way allow independent voters to vote in every election."

In Idaho—Former Idaho Gov. Buch Otter [endorsed the state's](#)

[open primary ballot initiative](#) on Wednesday, becoming the highest profile member of a group of more than 100 Republicans who support the initiative. Otter spoke at a press conference this week stating:

“The right to vote is one of the most precious rights that Americans have. Every registered voter should have the right to weigh in on choosing our leaders. Independents, including a lot of military veterans, have been excluded from having their say because of the closed GOP primary.

NPR TAKES ON PRIMARY REFORM



This past week NPR was all about primary reform as they ran nationally and syndicated across the country multiple pieces on the negative effects partisan primaries are having on American Democracy.

Several prominent experts were featured, including Open Primaries Senior VP Jeremy Gruber, Claremont McKenna Professor Andrew Sinclair and Kevin Kosar, a Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Check them out:

- [Why Some States Are Turning to Nonpartisan Primaries](#)
- [The US has a Primary Problem](#)

OPEN, NONPARTISAN PRIMARIES PROPOSED FOR THE ARIZONA BALLOT

Some good news out of Arizona! [Paperwork has been filed](#) and things are in motion to get open, nonpartisan primaries on the 2024 Arizona ballot for voters to weigh in on.

As we shared earlier, Independent voters are now the largest bloc of voters in Arizona and moving to a new nonpartisan system would mean that 1/3 of Arizona voters could now freely participate without having to register with a party ahead of the primaries.

In the current partisan system, often winning your partisan primary means you're a shoo-in for the general election—a nonpartisan top five (or two, or four) system which is being proposed in Arizona would create a chance for more choices and hopefully better candidates who are less dependent on gaming a partisan system.

Backers need to gather 500,000 Arizona signatures by July 3rd in order to qualify for the ballot—a daunting task that will require lots of effort and financial support.

If you're in Arizona or have friends or family in Arizona, we encourage you to [get involved and support the campaign](#)!

PENNSYLVANIA'S TWO LARGEST PAPERS CALL FOR OPEN PRIMARIES

123 Anywhere St., Any City

PENNSYLVANIA NEWS


www.openprimaries.org

PENNSYLVANIA

CAPITAL-STAR

The Philadelphia Inquirer

PA'S BIGGEST PAPERS CALL FOR OPEN PRIMARIES



**PENNSYLVANIA
VOTERS WOULD
BENEFIT FROM AN
OPEN PRIMARY
SYSTEM | EDITORIAL**

**IT'S TIME FOR
PENNSYLVANIA
TO OPEN ITS
PRIMARY
ELECTIONS TO
ALL VOTERS|
OPINION**

The Pennsylvania legislature is only scheduled to be in session for three days in September, but among the pressing issues it needs to take up is changing the date of the 2024 primary election.

The current primary date is April 23, which conflicts with the Jewish holiday of Passover. A state Senate government committee voted last month to move the primary to March 19, while a competing bill in the House would move the primary to April 2. A date should be selected soon to secure voting locations, schedule poll workers, and allow candidates to plan their campaigns.

Moving the primary to a different date makes sense so as not to effectively disenfranchise voters because of their religion. While lawmakers are at it, a similar argument could be made for Pennsylvania to also move from a closed to an open primary.

The number of independent voters has grown in recent years across the country and in Pennsylvania. Nationwide, the percentage of voters who identify as independent is much larger than the percentage of registered Democrats or Republicans.

More than 13 million Pennsylvanians are registered as independents, nonaffiliated to any party or to a third party. That's about 14.5% of voters in the state who are shut out from participating in the primary.

Pennsylvania's top two newspapers added their voices to the growing chorus of supporters calling to open Pennsylvania's primaries to all voters!

The [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) and the [Pennsylvania Capital-Star](#) both released editorials within the last week calling for the PA Legislature to address the crisis with the current primary system and look at finally passing legislation that's been introduced to open the primaries to the 1.3 million Pennsylvanians who are currently barred from participating.

The Philadelphia Inquirer: *"At a time of deep political division, open primaries could reduce partisanship and boost voter participation. Pennsylvania lawmakers must act to allow all voters to participate in the electoral process."*

Pennsylvania Capital-Star: *"Thirty states have chosen to include unaffiliated voters in their primary elections in some form or fashion. It's time for Pennsylvania to join them, and ensure every voter has equal access to participate in our democracy."*

Hats off to David Thornburgh and the entire [BallotPA campaign](#) for their impressive organizing work! We'll make sure to keep you updated as pressure builds for change in PA.

VIDEO: OKLAHOMANS RALLY IN SUPPORT OF REPEALING CLOSED PRIMARIES

Last month [Oklahoma United](#) hosted a packed town hall in Oklahoma City to discuss the campaign to repeal closed primaries and finally open Oklahoma's primaries to ALL Oklahomans. Over a hundred Oklahomans from all walks of life attended the event.

Check out the highlight reel here:



youtube.com

OKUnited Oklahoma City Town Hall & Burger Night...
Weren't able to make our town hall and burger night
in Oklahoma City last month? No problem. Check ...

Open Primaries Senior VP Jeremy Gruber, Potts Family Foundation CEO AJ Griffin, Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum & OK Commissioner of Labor Leslie Osborn were panelists for the event and shared their unique perspectives and insights into why opening the primaries in Oklahoma could be so meaningful.

REFORMERS COME TOGETHER IN NEVADA



[Last week it was announced](#) that nonpartisan voters are officially the largest bloc of voters in Nevada so it's more than appropriate that this past month our team has come together in Nevada not once but twice to celebrate and highlight some of the hard work and recent developments in the reform world.

OP Senior VP Jeremy Gruber joined Sondra Cosgrove of [Vote Nevada](#) to honor the ACLU of Nevada and its critical work for civil rights and social justice for all Nevadans.

And the cast of the fantastic film [The Young Vote](#) including [Students for Open Primaries](#) Co-Founders Dariel Cruz Rodriguez & Elena Ashburn, OP SVP Jeremy Gruber along with the amazing director Diane Robinson gathered for screenings and discussions in Las Vegas & Reno.

We're thankful to the stellar team of leaders in Nevada-Sondra Cosgrove, Cesar Marquez, Doug Goodman, and Kimi Cole for their work to build momentum for reform in the Silver State.

DEMOCRATS IN DC SUE TO KEEP VOTERS LOCKED OUT

The D.C. Democratic Party [filed a lawsuit](#) last month aimed at killing a ballot initiative introduced by our friends at [Make All Votes Count DC](#) that would improve elections in the District, opening city primaries to

independents and implementing ranked-choice voting.

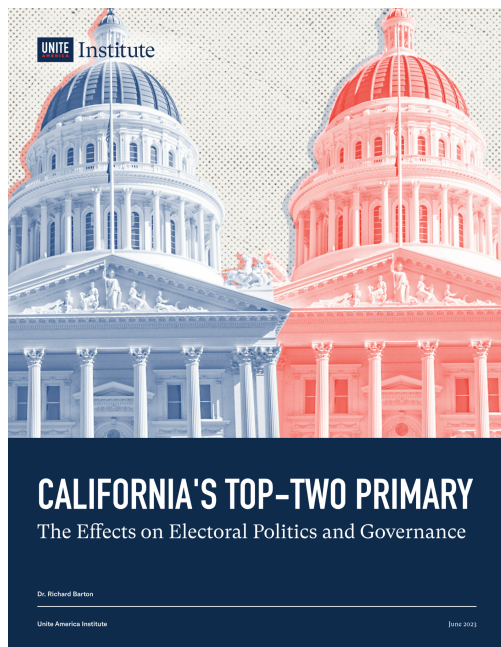
Party leaders stood by their decision saying that changing the primary system could lead to confusing DC voters (i.e. we don't trust voters, so we'll decide for them). The editorial board of the Washington Post was quick to speak up out the voter suppression happening within the DC Democratic party calling the legal action 'decidedly undemocratic':

"The party's legal maneuvering would deny D.C. residents a say over how elections are administered to defend a status quo in which local government is less representative — and therefore less responsive to the majority — than it could be."

We stand with our friends at Make All Votes Count DC and will continue to do what we can to support DC voters and fight to give them a fair and equal playing field.

OUR NEXT VIRTUAL DISCUSSION:

California's Top Two Primary-A Successful Reform



[A new report](#) from the Unite America Institute on top-two nonpartisan primaries in California finds that the reform (enacted in 2010) has had widespread positive impacts on electoral politics and governance.

While the vast majority of states across the country have experienced a decline in electoral competition and a rise in polarization in recent years, California has trended in a different direction since reforming its primaries. Analyzing the state across several criteria, the report presents evidence that the Top Two system in California has decreased polarization, improved voter participation, and increased electoral competition.

This [Thursday September 21st at 2pm ET](#), Open Primaries will welcome the author of this groundbreaking new report—Dr. Richard Barton, to be the featured guest on our next Virtual Discussion: California's Top Two Primary-A Successful Reform.

This discussion will be hosted by Open Primaries President John Opdycke & Christian Grose (Professor & Academic Director of USC Schwarzenegger Institute).

As always, we encourage you to bring your questions for our Q & A! [REGISTER HERE.](#)