



OPEN PRIMARIES JUNE 2023 NEWSLETTER

Campaign Launches to Open Idaho's Primaries

BREAKING: A coalition has come together in Idaho-Idahoans for Open Primaries- to put a "top four" open primary initiative on the 2024 ballot.

Idaho had open primaries until 2010, when a faction of the Republican Party sued to close the primaries. Politics in the state has become increasingly dogmatic/partisan ever since. Debbie Reid-Oleson, a fourth-generation Idaho rancher from Blackfoot who added her name as one of the first 20 signers of the Open Primaries Initiative, said in the release:

"There are 200,000 voters in Idaho who are independent like me, and we're blocked from voting in Idaho's most important primary elections. It's wrong that we're forced to join a political party just to exercise our right to vote."

The paperwork was filed last month, and the campaign expects to be able to start collecting signatures soon. Already, we've seen supportive voices from Idahoans who hold many different political beliefs in the media-who can agree on one thing: Idaho's primaries should represent Idaho voters.

The Idaho GOP is already pushing back. We'll keep you posted as this campaign develops.

Students Join the Fight to Repeal Closed Primaries in PA

The fight to open PA's primaries to ALL voters is heating up in PA.

Last week Pennsylvania held primary elections, but over 1 million voters were shut out and a disproportionate number of them were young voters. Two of those voters: Harry Hou and Danika Grieser, Swarthmore College students who also serve on the leadership team of Students for Ballot PA just wrote an op-ed for the Pennsylvania Capital-Star laying out why this matters so much to young people:



"Our generation has grown up with a political discourse that resembles a hurricane of voices. Practically any issue brings a thousand viewpoints in discord. It should not come as a surprise that many young voters do not affiliate themselves with either of our two major political parties...Pennsylvania is the birthplace of democracy, and we should strive to always be at the forefront of reforms that improve our democratic process."

With over 50% of Millennial and Gen Z voters identifying as politically independent, this growing block of voters is proving to be a powerful voice of reform—Students for Ballot PA has already expanded beyond Swarthmore College to include members attending Haverford College, Cairn University, Pitt, McGill and Widener. They are organizing young people all over the Keystone State to talk to legislators and speak out for change.

ICYMI: Ballot PA Chair David Thornburgh and OP President John Opdycke latest piece in RealClear Politics gives some important context on why PA is finally ready for primary reform.

Effort to Close the Primaries Defeated in Texas!

Last summer, the Texas GOP amended their party platform to support closing the state's primary elections. Almost immediately, some leaders began threatening potential legal action to implement it. But in a session marked by significant anti-voter legislative actions we were able to stop HB 239, legislation to close Texas' primary elections, dead in its tracks.

A great deal of credit goes to the Texas Election Reform Coalition (TERC), which Open Primaries joined in the Fall of last year. Led by Katya Ehresman, the Voting Rights Program Manager with Common Cause Texas, TERC coordinated hundreds of statewide partners, mobilizing testimony, digital organizing, and legislative strategy to oppose closing the primaries.

Independents Speak Out

As you may have seen, [Gallup polling recently found](#) that 49% of Americans identify as independent-the highest they've ever polled.

Independent voters may be the growing majority but many political professionals and academics continue to offer up out of date notions on who independent voters actually are- locking them into narrow partisan boxes (i.e. Democratic or Republican "leaners").

Florida Fair and Open Primaries Director Steve Hough [recently wrote an op-ed](#) for the Orlando Sentinel that unpacks what independent voters, like himself, are really all about:

"We have a situation where the majority of our representatives win their seats in low-turnout, closed partisan primaries. In instances where primaries would otherwise be open to all voters, both parties have enlisted bogus write-in candidates to keep their primaries closed. While some are certainly satisfied with the status quo, more and more voters are showing their disapproval by becoming independents. We are not simply closet Democrats or Republicans. Just ask us. Then show us the respect we deserve!"

OP President John Opdycke also [appeared on Paul Rieckhoff's Independent Americans podcast](#) to discuss the rise in independent voters but is cautioning folks from getting too cocky:

"The amount of pushback and coercion that's going on politically that's targeting independents is very significant and we cannot underestimate that."

Research Shows Top Two Has Had a Significant Impact

On the one year anniversary of groundbreaking [research that came out](#) from the Rose Institute of State & Local Government at Claremont McKenna College, we'd like to re-share their findings on the significant impact top two open primaries are having in California.

Here are the topline:

- Voters overwhelmingly like the top two system
- Approval of the legislature has risen from 10% to 50% in 10 years
- The inclusion of independent voters in both rounds has been very positive.
- California has the most competitive general elections of any state in the union.
- Studying the "moderating" impact on elected officials is tricky, but more and more studies are demonstrating significant moderating effects of top two.

Our interest is not in prioritizing a California narrative, but in challenging the notion that different forms of primary reform are in competition with one another. We'll keep pushing for more study at all levels, because demonstrating the positive effects of every state's efforts to open their primaries will help support growth of primary reform at all levels.