

BALLOTWATCH

Important Facts

- 162 ballot propositions
- 34 states with measures
- 62 initiatives/referendums
- Most: 16 in California
- Most popular topics: marriage (13 states), gambling (13 measures)

ELECTION 2004 PREVIEW

OVERVIEW

In November voters will decide 162 state ballot measures in 34 states. The total number of measures is far below the 202 that were decided in the 2002 general election.

One reason for the fall in activity is a drop off in tax and bond measures, with 24 fewer such measures on the ballot this year than two years ago. "Most states have emerged from the fiscal crises of two years ago and their legislatures are no longer turning to the voters for new revenue," observes IRI President John Matsusaka.

Of the measures in November, 62 are initiatives or referendums—measures qualified for the ballot by citizen petitions. The number of initiatives is up from the 53 that appeared in 2002, but far before the record high of 93 in 1996, or the 89 that appeared in 1914.

California leads the states this year with 16 measures on the ballot, 12 of which were placed there by petition. Rhode Island is second, with 14 legislative measures. As usual, the measures cover a wide range of issues ranging in importance from minor to major.

ISSUES AND STATES

The most popular topic this fall is **marriage**, with 13 states asking voters to decide if marriage should be defined as being between a man and a woman. The states are Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah. Missouri voters approved their measure in August with 71% in favor, and Louisiana voters approved theirs in September with 78% in favor. In most cases, these measures were placed on the ballot by legislatures not by initiatives (the exceptions being Arkansas, Michigan, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, and Oregon).

Gambling is the second most popular topic, with six states deciding 13 measures. Oklahoma voters will decide whether to establish a state lottery. California, Oklahoma, and Washington will consider Indian gaming. Florida voters will consider slot machines in Miami-Dade and Broward counties. Nebraska voters will consider authorizing casinos. A measure in Michigan would require popular approval for new gaming. Missouri rejected an expansion of river gambling in August.

Other popular topics include **Education**: Four measures would increase education spending (in Arkansas, Nevada, and Washington), and one would repeal a controversial charter school law (Washington). **Hunting** opponents and enthusiasts are battling it out in Alaska, Louisiana, Maine, and Montana, with measures to limit bear baiting on the ballot in Alaska and Maine, and measures guaranteeing the right to hunt and fish in the other two states. Medical **marijuana** is on the ballot in Montana and Oregon, and Alaska will decide whether to legalize marijuana entirely.

California continues to struggle with a budget imbalance and the aftermath of the recall. Shortly before the recall, Gov. Davis approved a law requiring employers to provide health insurance for their employees. A referendum (Prop. 72) is on the ballot seeking to repeal the law. The possibility of capturing revenue from Indian gambling for the state has fueled two competing measures, Prop. 68 that would authorize non-Indian gaming if the tribes do not contribute more, and Prop. 70 that would grant Indians a monopoly on gambling if they agreed to pay a profits tax. There are also measures authorizing a \$3 billion bond for stem cell research (Prop. 71), weakening the state's 3-strikes law (Prop. 66), adding an income tax surcharge for millionaires to fund mental health services (Prop. 62), and dueling open primary measures (Props. 60, 62).

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