

Off-year US election shows mass popular support for defending democratic rights

Jacob Crosse
8 November 2023

On Tuesday, several US states held off-year elections for statewide offices and ballot referendums. While there is broad disgust with the presumptive presidential candidates of the two big business parties and with the corporate-controlled two-party system as a whole, voters registered their support for referendums that sought to broaden, not diminish, democratic rights, and the candidates who claimed to support them.

The most significant result was tallied in Ohio where “Issue One,” a citizen-led ballot initiative to put the right to an abortion into the state constitution, and therefore beyond the reach of the Republican-controlled legislature, garnered the support of over 2.1 million people, or 57 percent of the vote.

In Franklin County (Columbus), the most populous in Ohio, nearly three quarters of the over 414,000 votes were in favor of the ballot initiative. Some 20 out of the 23 most populous counties voted for Issue One, which secures “an individual right to one’s own reproductive medical treatment,” including decisions on abortion, contraception and fertility treatment. The ballot measure takes effect within 30 days.

Despite Ohio’s vote, “nearly one in three women ages 15 to 44 live in states where abortion is banned or mostly banned” according to the *Washington Post*. Abortion is effectively banned throughout the Southern states where the Christian right has inordinate influence, including Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia.

However, since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* last year, in every state where voters have been given to the option to vote to protect this basic democratic right, including in so-called “red states” like Kansas, they have overwhelmingly voted in favor.

Tuesday’s vote in Ohio on Issue One is virtually the same split that occurred on August 8 of this year, when Republicans sought to block the initiative through a referendum proposal, put on the ballot by the state

legislature, that would have made it more difficult to amend the state constitution. While the 57-43 percent margin is similar, over 800,000 more people voted in Tuesday’s election compared to August.

Similar results were reported on “Issue Two” in Ohio, which aims to legalize cannabis in Ohio. Both the abortion and cannabis referendums were citizen-led drives that required organizers gathering hundreds of thousand of signatures that needed to be deemed valid by the Ohio secretary of state, Republican Frank LaRose.

The decriminalization of recreational use and sale of cannabis could take longer or be forestalled, as it was not an amendment to the constitution, just the Ohio criminal code. The Ohio legislature can also modify, or repeal the law if they choose.

The overwhelming vote in favor of Issue Two is rebuke to the bipartisan “war on drugs” and to right-wing politicians and police organizations that campaigned against legalization, including Ohio Governor Mike DeWine.

While both measures were overwhelmingly popular among Ohioans, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, a hardcore Catholic reactionary, fumed on Newsmax Tuesday night against “democracies” after the results were tabulated.

“You put very sexy things like abortion and marijuana on the ballot, and a lot of young people come out and vote. It was a secret sauce for disaster in Ohio,” Santorum groveled on Newsmax.

“Thank goodness that most of the states in this country don’t allow you to put everything on the ballot, because pure democracies are not the way to run a country,” he added.

Santorum’s comments are an expression of the authoritarian tendencies that are flourishing in the Republican Party and ruling class as whole. His disdain for “pure democracies”

underscores that Trump's plans for dictatorship in 2025 are not an isolated phenomena, but the dominant opinion in the increasingly fascistic Republican Party.

However, the defense of democratic rights cannot be entrusted to the Democratic Party, a party of war and the CIA no less than the Republicans which is currently overseeing the genocide in Gaza.

Seeking to cynically use voters egalitarian leanings for their own political benefit, Democrats in several state races used their support for abortion to posture as defenders of democratic rights and beat back MAGA-style Republicans.

In Virginia, where all 140 legislative seats were up for grabs, voters handed Democrats majorities in both chambers, preventing Republican Governor Glenn Youngkin from carrying out his anti-abortion agenda. Youngkin campaigned heavily in the weeks leading up to the election on the issue, promising to enact a ban on abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy if the Republicans gained majorities in the state legislature. Instead, the Republicans lost control of the lower house while Democrats retained their majority in the state senate.

Youngkin's political action committee donated at least \$2.3 million to Republican candidates and gave another \$2.35 million to the state party. The *New York Times* reported that Youngkins' political actions committee, Spirit of Virginia, has raised more than \$18 million this year, "anchored by six-and seven-figure contributions from a few Republican billionaires, including Kenneth G. Langone, Ronald S. Lauder, Bernie Marcus, Thomas Peterffy, Stephen Ross, Stephen Wynn and Jeff Yass."

Youngkin, "a former chief executive of the Carlyle Group," the *Times* added, "also donated \$500,000 of his own money last month."

In Kentucky, Democratic Governor Andy Beshear, 45, beat back a challenge from current Attorney General Daniel Cameron, an African-American endorsed enthusiastically by Donald Trump. Beshear, who ran on a platform of defending abortion rights, actually lost 10,000 votes compared to his 2019 victory, garnering just over 694,000 in 2023, compared to nearly 710,000 four years ago.

In contrast, Cameron only received roughly 627,000 votes in 2023, some 77,000 less than Republican Matt Bevin garnered in 2019. Beshear dominated Cameron in the major urban centers of Louisville and Lexington, while Cameron achieved double-digit percentage victories in many small rural counties.

Kentucky Republicans swept every other state race held on Tuesday including secretary of state, where Michael Adams was re-elected with 783,695 votes, the most of any candidate on the ballot. Adams has repudiated Trump's claims of a "stolen election" and campaigned as an incumbent that wanted to expand ballot access and early voting in the state.

While Democrats outperformed in several races, Tuesday's results follow a devastating poll released by the *New York Times* that shows Trump beating Biden in five of the six "battleground" states, including Nevada, Michigan, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Arizona, by an average 48-44 percent. Wisconsin was the only state polled in which Biden was beating Trump, by a margin of 2 percent.

The same poll showed that only 2 percent of voters agreed with the statement that the economy was "excellent" under Biden. This fell to less than 1 percent of respondents under 30, with zero poll respondents among younger people agreeing to that statement in Arizona, Nevada and Wisconsin.

In addition to skyrocketing inflation, Biden's fulsome support for Israel's genocidal war in Gaza is cratering his support among broad layers of the population, including young people, Arab-Americans and Muslim-Americans. A John Zogby Strategies survey of 500 Arab-Americans conducted between October 23 and 27 found that support for Biden had plummeted from 59 percent in 2020 to 17 percent last month, a 42-percent drop.

While some commentators in the corporate media have bemoaned Biden's falling behind Trump as an indication of the population's disdain for "democracy," nothing could be farther from the truth, as Tuesday's results show.

The vast majority of American working people and youth hate both candidates and parties and defend their democratic rights. Yet this broad discontent is not allowed to express itself within the rotten political framework of two capitalist parties, both controlled from top to bottom by corporate interests.



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