

insights

TYPES NOT MAPPED YET November 07, 2022 | TTR not mapped yet | Christopher T. Murray

Referendum

A direct vote by the electorate on a single proposal, law, or issue.

Stronger

Referendums (or citizen initiatives) have a long history in American politics and even pre-date the founding of the Republic. In 1775, Thomas Jefferson [proposed](#) the inclusion a mechanism for referendums in the Virginia state constitution, which was ultimately rejected. The concept then languished until the rise of the early Populist movement in the late 19th century.

In 1897, [Nebraska](#) became the first state to allow cities to place initiatives and referendums in their charters. South Dakota followed suit only a year later, going a step further by adopting a statewide initiative and popular referendum process. Today, twenty-six states have initiative or referendum procedures, and every state has at least one form of securing a referendum through the state legislative process. Nevertheless, on the federal level and unlike many other nations, the United States lacks a national referendum process, aside from a [constitutional convention](#).

Changes

In recent decades, major issues have found their way into statewide referendums, including [same-sex marriage](#), [background checks for firearms sales](#), and abortion, to name just a few. During the 2012 election cycle, Colorado voters approved [Amendment 64](#), and Washington State voters approved [Initiative 502](#), which made them the first states to legalize the recreational use of cannabis.

California has a long history of direct democracy through referendums. The frequency and scope of statewide referendums in California have sometimes created unintended budgetary complications. For example, in 1978, Californians lowered their taxes via [Proposition 13](#), which led to a hole in the state budget and left schools underfunded.

Go Your Own Way

In 2022, voters are facing the most referendums since the 2014 election cycle. Five states will be considering ballot measures related to abortion. California, Michigan, and Vermont are hoping to enshrine reproductive rights in their state constitutions, while Kentucky and Montana hope to make clear that there is no right to abortion in their states. Nevadans will decide whether or not to join Maine and Alaska in using ranked-choice voting, while Connecticut, one of the five states without any form of early voting, will decide on an amendment that would allow no-excuse early voting across the state. Other issues, like immigration and [campaign finance](#), are also on ballots this year. The prerogative of voters on these issues will become clear with the results of the 2022 general election referendums this week.

If you haven't already done so, please go vote. Happy Election Day!



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