Voters in Colorado, Michigan, Missouri, and Utah Endorse Independent Redistricting with Big Implications for the Next Round of Redistricting

Christian R. Grose  Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Southern California Academic Director, USC Schwarzenegger Institute
Executive summary

• Voters in four states – Colorado, Michigan, Missouri, and Utah – favored political reforms to change redistricting and reduce partisan gerrymandering.

• Almost one-third of U.S. House districts will now be drawn by redistricting commissions, and this will have a significant impact on the upcoming 2022 redistricting cycle.

• There was widespread voter support for redistricting reform ballot propositions. Particularly in Colorado, Michigan, and Missouri, voters in rural and urban areas supported the propositions. Democratic and Republican-leaning areas also supported redistricting reform.

• Many of these new redistricting reforms were inspired by California’s independent redistricting commission passed by voters and pushed by then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger a decade ago.
Voters in four states on November 6, 2018 endorsed independent redistricting commissions or nonpartisan redistricting processes in order to reduce partisan gerrymandering. With these states passing these ballot propositions, almost one-third of U.S. House districts will be drawn by redistricting commissions. The 2018 electoral success of these ballot propositions will have a significant impact on how district lines are drawn in these states. In 2022, fewer state legislators will have the authority to draw congressional and state legislative district lines to protect their party or legislative incumbents than ever before.

What Happened on Election Day 2018?

**Michigan.** In Michigan, the state’s voters overwhelmingly adopted Proposition 2. This ballot proposition creates a California-style redistricting commission. Legislative districts will be drawn by 13 commissioners: 4 Democrats, 4 Republicans, and 5 independents. These commissioners will be randomly drawn from thousands of applicants from Michigan citizens; and this is a process very similar to the one used in California. Michigan’s current congressional and state legislative plans are partisan gerrymanders based on the partisan efficiency test. The state is evenly split between Democrats and Republicans in its popular vote, but lopsidedly favors one party in its current districts. The passage of this proposition by about 60% of Michigan’s voters will make partisan fairness and competition more central to the redistricting process than the current maps.¹

**Colorado.** Amendments Y and Z on the November 6 ballot required an independent commission for congressional and state legislative districts, respectively. A 12-person commission will be established to redraw the lines. Four Democrats, four Republicans, and four independents not affiliated with a party will serve on the Commission, and judges will choose the redistricting commissioners. For redistricting maps to be approved, at least eight commissioners will need to support, including at least two independent commissioners. These two propositions each received about 71% support from Colorado voters.²

**Missouri.** In Missouri, voters approved an amendment requiring a nonpartisan state demographer to draw legislative redistricting maps. The nonpartisan demographer must rely on a number of redistricting criteria such as electoral and partisan competitiveness, including the partisan efficiency gap measure designed by Public Policy Institute of California’s Eric McGhee and the University of Chicago’s Nicholas Stephanopolous. These maps could be amended, but any changes to the nonpartisan demographer’s maps would need 70% approval from a commission equally composed of Democrats and Republicans.³

**Utah.** Of the four ballot initiatives before voters on November 6, Utah’s had the closest vote margin. In preliminary returns, a slight majority of voters supported Utah’s proposition 4.

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³ Bailey, J.J. “Voters Approve Missouri Amendment 1, Overhauling Redistricting Process and Campaign Finance.” *KMOV4.*
The proposition creates a seven-person independent redistricting commission, which would be appointed by the governor and legislative leaders.4

**The Impact of these Ballot Initiatives on the 2022 Redistricting Cycle**

These ballot initiatives passed on Tuesday in four states will have a significant impact on the 2022 redistricting cycle. Following the 2000 census and before the 2022 elections, states will redraw their congressional and state legislative district lines. These ballot initiatives double the number of states using redistricting commissions to redraw congressional lines, and substantially increases the number of states using commissions to redraw state legislative lines.

In states where redistricting is done by state legislators, partisan protection or incumbency protection are common goals.5 State legislators are incentivized to draw districts to help themselves, incumbents, and their political parties.6 In the leadup to 2022, partisan state legislators charged with drawing lines are likely to create partisan maps.

In these four states where redistricting will now be done by new independent commissions or nonpartisan mapmakers, partisan fairness and electoral competition in the state’s congressional and legislative maps will be central to the redistricting process. Thanks to these ballot propositions, incumbent legislators will no longer be able to redraw their own district lines. District maps drawn in states with independent commissions or nonpartisan processes are more likely to consider partisan fairness and other objective redistricting criteria when producing legislative maps.

Prior to these four states’ November 2018 ballot propositions, a few states were leaders in redistricting reform. In California, a decade ago, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, working with a bipartisan coalition, successfully pushed for an independent redistricting commission via ballot initiative. The voters of California approved the California Citizens’ Redistricting Commission in 2008 and 2010. The commission first drew congressional and state legislative district lines in 2012, and these 2012 maps did not consider partisan protection as a criterion. In 2018, Governor Schwarzenegger campaigned in person in East Lansing, Michigan and Denver, Colorado for their states’ successful ballot propositions.

**About 1/3 of U.S. House Districts Will Be Drawn by Commission or Similar Processes**

Adding Michigan, Colorado, Missouri, and Utah to California, Arizona, and other states that have redistricting commissions for congressional districts dramatically reduces the number of state legislatures able to redraw congressional district lines. With the passage of these propositions, 137 U.S. House districts will now be drawn by independent commissions, other types of politician commissions, or similar processes. As can be seen in Table 1, just under one-third of all U.S. House districts are drawn by redistricting commissions following the November

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5 Other factors such as voting rights and district compactness are also important criteria. See Christian R. Grose. 2011. Congress in Black and White. New York: Cambridge University Press.
6, 2018 elections. Less than two decades ago, very few districts were drawn using redistricting commissions. Following the leadership of states like Arizona and California, political reforms to reduce gerrymandering are spreading across the country.

Table 1: States with Redistricting Commissions for U.S. House Districts as of November 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Congressional districts now to be drawn by Redistricting Commissions or Nonpartisan Mapmakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>7 congressional districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>14 congressional districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>8 congressional districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>4 congressional districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio*</td>
<td>16 congressional districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>53 congressional districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other states with commissions for congressional redistricting</td>
<td>35 congressional districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total new districts to be drawn by commission or nonpartisan mapmakers</td>
<td>137 US House districts (31.5% of all 435 districts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ohio added a commission after a 2018 primary proposition. Colorado, Michigan, Missouri, and Utah passed ballot propositions in November 2018 creating new independent commission or nonpartisan redistricting processes.

**Wide Bipartisan Support for these Political Reforms to Reduce Gerrymandering**

In gubernatorial and congressional elections in November 2018, partisanship in voting was a key factor in many states and districts. Democratic voters tended to support Democratic candidates; and Republican voters tended to support Republican candidates. Urban, highly-populated areas and some suburbs leaned toward Democratic candidates; while rural, lower-populated areas leaned toward Republican candidates.

In contrast, these political reform ballot propositions transcended voter partisanship and geography. Particularly in Michigan; Missouri; and Colorado, there was widespread voter support across geography and partisanship of voters. Heavily Democratic Wayne County joined with rural counties in Michigan to support the new redistricting commission. In total, a majority of voters in 66 of Michigan’s 83 counties supported Proposition 2. In Colorado, counties that lean Republican and counties that lean Democratic both supported the new redistricting
commission propositions. A majority of voters in 62 of Colorado’s 64 counties supported the ballot propositions establishing independent redistricting commissions. Similarly, in Missouri, voters in Democratic-leaning cities like St. Louis and Kansas City joined with voters in many Republican-leaning counties to support Missouri Amendment 1 to reform redistricting practices.