News

People celebrate the defeat of Issue 1, a Republican-backed measure that would have made i

People celebrate the defeat of Issue 1, a Republican-backed measure that would have made it harder to amend the state constitution, an initiative aimed at helping defeat a November referendum that would protect abortion access in the state, after early results were announced during an election night party at the Columbus Fire Fighters Local 67 in Columbus, Ohio, U.S. August 8, 2023. (OSV News photo/Adam Cairns, USA Today Network via Reuters)

Kate Scanlon

View Author Profile



OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

August 10, 2023

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Ohio voters Aug. 8 rejected a measure that proposed raising the threshold to make changes to the state's constitution, according to projections by The Associated Press and the elections reporting firm Decision Desk HQ.

If passed, the measure known as Issue 1 would have raised the threshold for amending the state's constitution from 50% plus one vote to 60%.

The measure was supported by some pro-life groups as it likely would have had a significant impact on a November ballot measure that would in effect enshrine access to abortion in the state's constitution. That measure, which will be considered

Nov. 7, is supported by Ohioans United for Reproductive Rights, which was formed by Ohioans for Reproductive Freedom and Ohio Physicians for Reproductive Rights in February 2023.

The November measure would legalize abortion up to the point of viability unless a physician decided an abortion after that point was necessary for the sake of the mother's life or health.

Although Ohio lawmakers enacted a six-week abortion ban, that measure is tied up in state court, meaning abortion is currently legal in Ohio up to 22 weeks of pregnancy. If passed, the November measure would slightly increase that limit. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020 data, 90% of Ohio's 20,600 abortions in 2020 took place within 13 weeks gestation; just 113 abortions were reported at or above 21 weeks gestation.

With about 97% of votes counted Aug. 9, projections showed Issue 1 on track to fail 57%-43%.

In a statement, President Joe Biden said Ohio voters "rejected an effort by Republican lawmakers and special interests to change the state's constitutional amendment process."

"This measure was a blatant attempt to weaken voters' voices and further erode the freedom of women to make their own health care decisions. Ohioans spoke loud and clear, and tonight democracy won," Biden said.

Advertisement

Supporters of the measure argued raising the threshold would bring Ohio's constitution more in line with the process for amending the U.S. Constitution, which requires a two-thirds vote of both chambers of Congress or two-thirds of states in convention to propose an amendment. To take effect, the amendment must then be ratified by three-fourths of the state legislatures or three-fourths of conventions called in each state for ratification.

Opponents of changing the Ohio amendment process -- which also included pro-life Republican leaders like former Ohio Gov. John Kasich -- argued the measure would disenfranchise majorities of voters on key issues and would mark a significant break

with long-standing precedent for amending the state constitution. Opponents also argued supporters tailored Issue 1 so that the abortion ballot measure would fail in November.

While Issue 1 did not directly relate to abortion, the upcoming November measure colored debate over the special election.

In the November 2022 elections following the U.S. Supreme Court's June 2022 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* that overturned prior precedent finding abortion access a constitutional right, voters in states across the U.S. either rejected ballot measures meant to restrict abortion, or voted to codify measures protecting the procedure.

Similar efforts are likely in other states, with abortion activists eyeing a similar push in Arizona next year.