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February 27, 2024

How Do You Find Independents? They're Everywhere!

How do you find independents? This was a question that Reverend Reuben Dockery, founder of Tennessee Coalition of Independent Voters, posed to Independent Voting president Jackie Salit during Independent Voting's Spokesperson Training, held February 13 on Zoom.

The training, a signature program of IndependentVoting.org, attracts hundreds of independents. Some are leaders with experience in speaking publicly, and others are private citizens who want to talk with their friends and colleagues about what it means to be an independent. Participants view a powerpoint presentation with key facts and talking points, have a Q&A session with Salit, and get performance training from top-notch professionals Cathy Salit and Maureen Kelly.



Top Left to Right: Wanda Hall (New Jersey); Kristine Scozzari (Florida); Amy Brown (Iowa); MJ Hall (North Carolina); Charlie Kotan (Arizona). **Second Row from Top:** Robert Colucci (South Carolina); Lisa Rice (Washington, DC); Mark S. Askew Sr. (Virginia); Judy Depenau (California); Tonia Fulford (New York). **Third Row from top:** Margaret Kobos (Oklahoma); Jonathan Saucedo (New York); Catherine North (Colorado); Guy Alberghini (Massachusetts); Mike Bell (California). **Bottom Row:** Christopher Jerome (Arizona); Reuben Dockery (Tennessee); Brady Wilkerson (Maryland); Jack Reneo (North Carolina); Chris Carpenter (North Dakota).

So, how do you find independents?

Salit's response: "We're everywhere . . . when you talk to an American who is an independent, they often think that they're alone . . . But it's now the case that almost half the country identify as independent, so we are everywhere."



Jackie Salit, Gwen Mandell (organizer and host), Reuben Dockery

Here are a few short excerpts from some of the statements by participants:

Mark Askew, Sr., Norfolk, Virginia

"Independent to me means it doesn't matter how [another] votes, it matters how I vote. Independent means that if I have concerns with issues and matters that are specific to me, if I exercise my independence and others exercise their independence, let's see what the vote tally is as we express our true independence."



Kristine Scozzari, Clearwater, Florida

"I grew up in a house where we thrived on debate as a family...I believe the greatest barrier to a healthy democratic society is this two-party system. They're taking issues that are incredibly nuanced and making them black and white, yes or no, this or that, and I think the best thing we can do is be independent voters. We've got to break this two-party system up. It's destroying us."

Robert Colucci, Summerville, South Carolina

"Do you feel free? Do you feel the two parties are actually working for you? We have numbers now that 43% who are independents do not have a voice. We need to have some grassroots venue for us to come together to make changes that can be made -- just because one party doesn't want it because another may get it -- nobody wants to make changes that are good for people."



Jonathan Saucedo, Bronx, New York

I'm an independent because looking at the United States and where we're headed to, and all these wars, it's not what we want for ourselves and for our future.

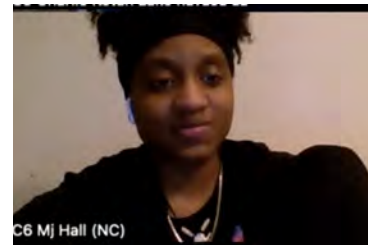
This training was fun and unique. We definitely need more of these in the future!

And Check out these two testimonials submitted after the training:

MJ Hall, Durham, North Carolina

Co-leader of North Carolina Forward Party

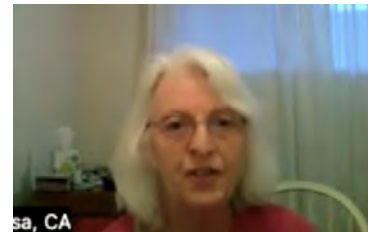
Independent voters are often silenced in America, which is a shame since we are the majority in a lot of places. If only we could get more of us at the forefront, maybe we could help this county and its democracy to represent its citizens better



Judy Depenau, Santa Rosa, California

retired Public Health Department employee and activist in California Independent Voters in Conversation

I experienced the training as empowering, reassuring, energizing, and inspiring. I enjoyed meeting and hearing from engaged independent thinkers from all over the country, and am heartened by knowing who I'm in this movement with. The role-plays were skillfully set up and the coaching was very helpful. Emerging leaders at all levels of involvement will find this training enlivening and well worth their time.



**Next Spokesperson Training will be
Tuesday, June 11 6:30pm ET**

Apply for the next spokesperson training here!

Not Invited to the Party Primary: Study Looks at the Exclusion of independent Voters from the 2024 primaries

Unite America Institute released a significant report this month which sheds light on how independents are excluded from participating in the election process.



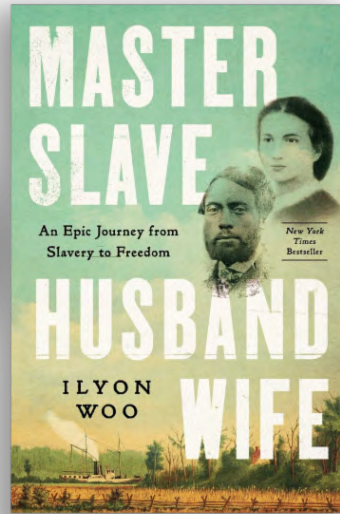
Here are some highlights of the report, entitled "**Not Invited to the Party Primary: Independent Voters and the Problem with Closed Primaries.**"

- In 2024, 22 states will hold closed presidential primaries or caucuses, denying over 27 million voters not registered with a major party the right to participate in the election process.
- These independent voters excluded from primaries hold a diversity of political beliefs from across the ideological spectrum, calling into question long-held beliefs that most independents are merely weak partisans.
- Independents believe their exclusion from primaries is unfair, support reforming the primary system and would participate in primaries if allowed to do so.
- Excluded independents hold unfavorable views of both major parties' presidential candidates.

The report also outlines three paths that can be taken to remedy this problem -- to ensure all eligible voters can participate in every taxpayer-funded election.

[Read the full report here](#)

Politics for the People Looks at An Epic Journey from Slavery to Freedom



Cathy Stewart, Independent Voting Vice-President for National Development, was joined by *New York Times* best selling author Ilyon Woo, for a virtual discussion on Zoom about Woo's book, *Master Slave Husband Wife*.

The book, this month's selection of the **Politics for the People Book Club** founded by Stewart, tells the story of Ellen and William Craft, who escape slavery in 1848 hiding in plain sight, traveling from Macon, Georgia to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They become active on the abolitionist circuit, and are never safe until they flee the U.S. (after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850) and live in England for 20 years. The book is a profound love story, an American story of racism, slavery, courage and freedom in the moments before the Civil War. It is a story that is not as widely known as some others.

In writing the book, Woo said: "I wanted to continue to remind myself that each person was a living, breathing human being who made choices, I think very often, especially when we have the distance of the past, it's easy to create a fairy tale or a caricature."

One of the themes of the conversation was echoed in remarks Stewart made in the course of her questions to Woo:

"You end with a call to action to all of us when you write, "the lack of a definitive, happy ending to their story represents not so much a gap or absence as potentially a space, or an opening in the story of America whose reckonings with the past have the power to transform present and future. This space is ours to enter. That was very meaningful to me as a longtime political activist."

[Watch the full discussion here \(which includes questions from Politics for the People Book Club members\).](#)

League of Women Voters of Northern Arizona Hosts Forum on the Independent Voter

The northern Arizona chapter of the League of Women Voters held a public forum in Sedona, and invited Jackie Salit and Thom Reilly, the two co-directors of **Arizona State University's Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy** to speak about independent voters as part of its voter education program.



Reilly shared a series of slides to provide a snapshot of who independent voters are. He said: "We looked at the numbers and over half of the country are not part of the parties. Analyzing the elections from a Republican-Democratic Party lens is problematic. We know how Democrats and Republicans vote. Our point is that we really don't know how independents vote because they encompass a broad range of individuals. So one important thing is that the media now, when they talk about elections, is beginning to look at it from an independent lens, and that's good."

[View the video of the full discussion.](#)

Who is the Independent Voter
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NORTHERN ARIZONA

Watch later Share

Who is the Independent Voter?

with **Thom Reilly and Jacqueline Salit**
co-directors of the Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy at Arizona State University and co-authors of ***The Independent Voter*** Routledge, 2022

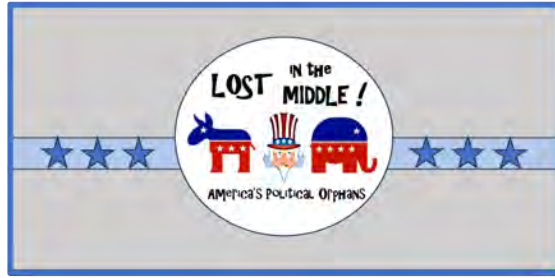
Co-hosted and co-facilitated by Paul Friedman & Jon Thompson for the League of Women Voters of Northern Arizona

Voter Ed Program
Jan 20, 2024

Watch on YouTube

[New Podcast Series Zeros in on Independents](#)

A new podcast, "Lost in the Middle" zeros in on independents, and in Episode 7, host Scott Klug focuses on the Southwest. The podcast features interviews and soundbites from Jessie Ventura, Tim Penney, Mike Murphy, Jackie Salit and Thom Reilly. Salit and Reilly emphasize how the pundits and political scientists are underestimating the growth and staying power of independents. Listen to [Episode 7 here](#) and read more about the "Lost in the Middle" story [here](#).



Let Us Vote!

Our partners at Open Primaries have launched "Let Us Vote" ([LetUsVote](#)), a new initiative aimed at capturing and sharing the stories of independents as the 2024 presidential election heats up.

LetUsVote is inviting independents to record a 60-second video or write your story about why you are an independent. Each week, Open Primaries will highlight a few of these stories on their blog, on social media and elsewhere.



The [LetUsVote](#) campaign has also launched a petition drive aimed at both major parties. The petition says:

"I'm an independent voter. There are millions of us. But in many states, we are not allowed to vote in taxpayer-funded primary elections. That's unfair and unAmerican. Nobody should be required to join a private organization in order to vote.

"Primaries today are the most meaningful elections in the country, and everyone deserves a voice in who will represent them.

"We are tired of being ignored, dismissed and subject to second-class status. We have one simple request: Let Us Vote!"

Jeremy Gruber, Senior Vice President at Open Primaries and a founder of the campaign, said: "Millions of independents are shut out of voting in state and federal primary elections. Meanwhile, state laws across the country prohibit independent voters from serving as poll workers, watchers, inspectors or registrars. They are barred from serving as election judges and on Boards of Elections. Independents are

alternatively ignored or dismissed by politicians, the media and the leadership of both the Democratic and Republican Parties. **LetUsVote** is dedicated to ending the war on independent voters."

Sign the petition, record or write your own statement and check out the video below.



Coalition to Protect Initiative and Referendum is formed

Independent Voting has joined a national coalition of pro-democracy organizations to protect voters' right to use the citizen ballot initiative process. **Respect Voters** was initiated by Katie Fahey and the Missouri-based group, **Show Me Integrity**. Katie is Executive Director of **The People** and was a leader of the successful grassroots campaign to ban partisan gerrymandering in Michigan.



The coalition is initiating an open letter to governors and legislators which says:

"The citizen ballot initiative is a sacred Constitutional right. For over 150 years, Americans have fought for the right to vote. For a century, voters have used the initiative process to keep taxes reasonable, limit corruption, and more. But now politicians are trying to take away our fundamental freedoms. Sign the open letter: stop politicians from taking away your voice."

Fahey shared her thoughts on the importance of independents and Independent Voting participating in the coalition.

"Independents have been and continue to be at the center of pushing for a stronger democracy, Independent Voting's participation in the Respect Voters Coalition is critical in making sure independents remain at the forefront of driving political change in our country and protecting the right to use the ballot initiative and referendum process. We are thrilled to have their leadership as part of the only coalition fighting to defend, strengthen, and expand the initiative and referendum process."

Cathy Stewart, Independent Voting's Vice President for National Development explained:

"The Citizen Initiative and Referendum (I & R) process is a vital direct democracy tool, and has been a key to reform, to bringing the voices of ordinary Americans into the policy-making process, and to providing a check and balance on our state legislatures. We are proud to join the Respect Voters Coalition to defend direct democracy in the states where it is increasingly under attack and to work to expand the initiative and referendum process to the 24 states that do not allow I & R.

"This has long been an issue that I have felt strongly about, and one that is more critical than ever. Independent Voting applauds Katie Fahey and our colleagues at Show Me Integrity for initiating this important national coalition."

[Sign the open letter to support voters' right to Initiative and Referendum here.](#)



[Independents Successfully Defend Open Primaries in](#)

Virginia

Here's a firsthand report from Steve Richardson, Director, Virginia Independent Voters Association about the successful effort to keep open primaries in Virginia.

Independent Virginians successfully defended their right to vote in primary elections against another attack in the House of Delegates. For the fifth time in the last ten years, Republicans sought to require that voters indicate party affiliation and to grant political parties the right to exclude non-members. Under current law, all voters may participate in what is considered a semi-open primary; any voter may choose either party's primary ballot.



Steve Richardson

This bill was assigned to the House Privileges and Elections committee, and within days members of the Virginia Forward Party, Veterans for All Voters, and the NAACP, with support from Open Primaries, all submitted written public comments in opposition. At the hearing on February 7, committee members were skeptical that their constituents, regardless of party, would benefit from the limitation of their rights. One Democratic delegate noted that many districts are dominated by one party or the other, which means the only election that matters is the majority party's primary. Steve Richardson, an active supporter of Independent Voting since 2007, joined a representative from the League of Women Voters in voicing objections directly to the committee. No one offered comments in support of the bill, so it died without a vote.

This relatively easy win is worth celebrating, but a strong defense is only a step toward being able to mount offensive maneuvers, which promises equally daunting challenges despite the fact that we outnumber party members by large, increasing margins. For context, it is worth mentioning that three times in the last eight years, bills sponsored by a Democratic delegate to create a single nonpartisan primary in Virginia met the same fate (complete lack of support by the committee), even when his own party was in control. The lesson is brilliantly captured by Jon Stewart's remarks in his return to *The Daily Show* on February 12: "The work of making this world resemble one that you would prefer to live in is a lunch pail fucking job day in and day out, where thousands of committed, anonymous, smart and dedicated people bang on closed doors and pick up those that are fallen and grind on issues 'til they get a positive result — and even then have to stay on to make sure that result holds."

Profiles in Independence

Amy Brown

Crescent, Iowa



Amy Brown

I grew up on the western edge of Iowa, worked in banking for 28 years and now focus my efforts on nonpartisan political innovation.

Unfortunately, while building a career and raising children, beyond voting in major elections, I didn't give politics much attention. When I relocated back to Iowa in 2015, I realized the opportunity that Iowa's then first-in-the-nation caucuses status provided and attended many Presidential candidate events, across parties.

Eventually the caucus events led me to Andrew Yang's campaign, which introduced me to Ranked Choice Voting and the book, **The Politics Industry** by Katherine M. Gehl and Michael E. Porter. What an eye-opener. As a registered independent, but not actively engaged, I had no idea the importance of the primary elections, that as an independent I am excluded from them, and the impact of the *way we vote*.

In 2021, along with five fellow Iowans, I helped co-found Better Ballot Iowa to make politics more positive, constructive, and productive. Our mission to build a popular movement in support of non-partisan election reforms is resonating and currently we have over 5,000 Iowans signed up in support.

In the News

Read "**Stop NY's war on independent voters**," a guest essay by Jeremy Gruber, Senior Vice President at Open Primaries. (*Newsday*)

Read "**It's not a democracy when the parties control our elections**," a new piece by Lisa Rice, proposer of Initiative 83, a combination of election reforms to open the primaries to independents and implement ranked choice voting that is gathering signatures to appear on the November ballot in Washington, D.C. (*The Hill*)

Read Brash Tacks: **People Power, not Palace Politics**, by Open Primaries' President John Opdycke. (*The Fulcrum*)

John Opdycke and Paul Rieckhoff, co-wrote "**Will Anyone Listen to Independents After New Hampshire?**" (Smerconish.com)

Judy Depenau, a member of California Independent Voters in Conversation, and also a participant in the recent Independent Voting Spokesperson Training, penned an opinion piece, "**Close to Home: Put an independent stamp on the election.**" (*The Press Democrat*)

Another Independent Voting Spokesperson trainee, Margaret Kobos, the founder of Oklahoma United, appeared on News on 6, her local CBS TV affiliate, with Open Primaries vice president Jeremy Gruber, **speaking about open primaries.** (CBS-Tulsa)

Read Colorado independent Mark Lewis' opinion piece, "**The new silent majority.**" (*VailDaily*)

Read "**Independent State of Mind: The Rise of New York's Unaffiliated Voters,**" a report published in November 2023 by Common Cause. (*Common Cause*)

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