



THE OKLAHOMAN

Guest: Oklahomans have been forced into a binary ballot choice that caters to extremism

Yvonne Galvan Guest columnist

Published 9:01 a.m. CT Sept. 29, 2023 | Updated 9:01 a.m. CT Sept. 29, 2023

[View Comments](#)



For many young people who do not align with one side of political views against another, the current system of closed primaries results in having a small percentage of voters choose who will represent all of us. *Getty Images/Stockphoto*

Registering to vote in the state of Oklahoma is easier now thanks to an [online portal](#) that serves all Oklahomans. Until recently, a voter registration form had to be physically filled out and mailed to a county or state election board.

It's been reported that despite the surge of people who register to vote in the United States in 2020, voter turnout is still at record lows throughout the country. Our particular part of the country, Oklahoma, had the lowest voter turnout (about 55%) of all the states for the 2020 presidential election. This means that a very small percentage of Oklahomans are deciding the outcomes for 100% of us. A representative democracy is designed to represent the needs and values of all citizens, not a handful.

A major reason Oklahomans don't think their votes count is because closed primaries make it impossible for them to participate in selecting which candidates end up on the ballot for the general elections. The most obvious solution that would optimize the electoral processes and instantly increase the available voter pool is to repeal closed primaries that keep us from being able to make meaningful choices in Oklahoma. In 2022 many candidates for public office in Oklahoma were unopposed, which indicates a lack of interest in voting and civic engagement. Open primaries would put choices in front of all Oklahomans to select candidates that represent us while revitalizing interest in voting.

It's interesting that in 1925 our innovative Oklahoma Legislature passed a form of ranked choice voting, but it was never put into practice. Ironically, our brief and abandoned effort for primary reform was intended to reduce extremism. For too long, almost a hundred years, Oklahomans have been forced into a binary ballot choice that caters to extremism.

We all deserve the opportunity to choose from a variety of candidates that includes people who know how to work together to strengthen our Legislature. Our general election laws allow Oklahomans to vote for candidates of any party, but by then the closed primaries system has ensured a very limited number of candidates chosen by a partisan process marked by voter apathy. The decisions have really already been made. With low voter turnout, candidates succeed by appealing only to a very small population of regular voters.

More voters mean better representation. The "UnmuteOK" campaign launched by Oklahoma United for Progress points out that 94% of Oklahoma elections are decided in the primary, not the general election. Oklahomans of various political affiliations still have shared values and should be permitted to vote accordingly.

Oklahoma already has a secure form of voting, so some form of nonpartisan open primaries would simply create a system proven to make all of our votes meaningful. My message is:

1. Use the new voter portal to register and to check details about elections and polling places.
2. Vote in every election you can.
3. Join me in working to make primary elections in Oklahoma open to every lawfully registered voter.

For many young people like me who do not align with one side of political views against another, the current system of closed primaries results in having a small percentage of voters choose who will represent all of us.

Growing up in an immigrant household and knowing many people with resident status who do not have the power to vote motivates me to go into the polls, something I did as soon as I turned 18. I still vote in each election with my family in mind, and I want open primaries for myself and for all Oklahomans so we may vote regularly — not for the party, but for the person.

Yvonne Galvan is an Oklahoma native, a recent University of Oklahoma graduate, and a political researcher who lives and works in Oklahoma City.



Yvonne Galvan *PROVIDED*