In less than eight weeks, some Midwestern voters will be asked to decide more than just who will sit in which legislative seats. Depending on their location, they’ll be asked about redistricting, legalizing marijuana, ethics reform, Medicaid expansion, and more.

As of early September, nationwide, 166 statewide ballot measures had been certified, equaling the total number of such measures that were put on the general election ballot in 2016, according to Ballotpedia.

“The trends are interesting,” Josh Altic, director of Ballotpedia’s Ballot Measures Project, says of this year’s subject areas. “Marijuana has been a trend forever. I think it started with the ‘low hanging fruit’ [states], but now there are more efforts to move into some of the more conservative states.”

“To me, the story line this year is elections issues; we identified 12 states that have initiatives for redistricting, ethics commissions and voter access.”

**Redistricting, amendments & ethics**

Michigan, North Dakota and South Dakota are among those 12 states. Michigan’s Proposal 2 would shift redistricting from the Legislature to a 13-member independent citizens’ commission that would be comprised of four Democrats, four Republicans, and five non-affiliated voters. (Current and former partisan elected officials, lobbyists, party officers and their employees would be excluded from serving on the commission.)

Proposal 3 would enshrine myriad voting rights in the state Constitution including the rights to a secret ballot and a straight-party ticket option, automatic voter registration, auditing of election results, no-excuse absentee voting during the 40 days before an election, in-person voter registration within 14 days of an election and on Election Day, registration by mail up to 15 days before an election, and that Michigan residents serving in the military or living overseas get an absentee ballot at least 45 days before an election.

In North Dakota, meanwhile, a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment would establish a five-member ethics commission with members selected through agreement by the governor and the leaders of both parties in the state Senate.

It also would ban political contributions from foreign government entities, foreign individuals and foreign corporations; create restrictions on lobbyists; create provisions designed to prevent conflicts of interest for government officials; and require campaign finance information to be publicly accessible.

Another citizen-initiated constitutional amendment in North Dakota, Measure 2, would clarify that only citizens can vote in federal, state or local elections by changing current wording that “every citizen” of the United States and a North Dakota resident is a qualified elector to “only a citizen” of the U.S. (and state resident) is a qualified elector.

South Dakota voters will be asked to approve or reject three constitutional amendments — one of them also ethics-related — and two citizen-initiated laws (also known as “initiated measures”).

Amendment W is a citizen-initiated proposal that would:

- create campaign finance and lobbying restrictions;
- create a seven-member government accountability board (it would have authority over legislators);
- require voter approval for any substantive changes to a voter-approved initiative or referendum or the state’s initiative and referendum process; and
• enshrine the simple-majority requirement for the approval of initiatives and referendums at the ballot.

Constitutional proposals originating from South Dakota’s Legislature include Amendment X [7], which would require a 55 percent “supermajority” vote to approve constitutional amendments; and Amendment Z [8], which would limit proposed amendments to one subject and require multiple proposed amendments to be voted upon separately.

Initiated Measure 24 [9] proposes to ban out-of-state donations for ballot questions. Initiated Measure 25 [10] would raise the state’s tobacco tax by about a dollar per pack of cigarettes and hike the tax on wholesale tobacco products from 35 percent of the purchase price to 55 percent.

**Marijuana legalization**

Michigan voters will also be asked whether to legalize recreational marijuana for those 21 and older (via a citizen-initiated law).

The "Marijuana Legalization Initiative [11]“ would allow people to grow up to 12 plants at their homes; create a 10 percent excise sales tax to be levied on marijuana sales at retailers and microbusinesses; and legalize the cultivation, processing, distribution and sale of industrial hemp. Sales tax revenue would go to local governments, K-12 education, and road and bridge maintenance.

Voters previously approved the legalization of medical marijuana in Michigan— in 2008, by a 63 percent to 37 percent margin.

North Dakota has a recreational marijuana question [12] on the November ballot as well. This citizen-initiated law also would expunge criminal convictions related to a controlled substance that has subsequently been legalized.

**Medicaid, etc.**

Here are other measures of note on the November ballot around the Midwest:

• A referendum [13] asking whether to expand Nebraska’s Medicaid program. (A lawsuit alleging the referendum was unconstitutional because it includes more than one subject was tossed out by a Lancaster County District judge on Aug. 28.)

• Indiana’s Public Question 1 [14], also known as the Balanced Budget Amendment. If approved, it will require the legislature to pass a balanced budget for each biennium and require public pension funds to be actuarially funded in each biennium. Only a two-thirds “supermajority” vote in each chamber could override either provision.

• Ohio voters will vote on Issue 1 [9], a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment that would make possession, obtainment and use of drugs misdemeanors, as well as prohibit courts from ordering that persons on probation for felonies be sent to prison for non-criminal probation violations.

It would also create a sentence-credits program for inmates’ participation in rehabilitative, work or educational programs; and require the state to spend savings due to a reduction of inmates resulting from Issue 1 on drug treatment, crime victim and rehabilitation programs.

By:

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