

THE 2022 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

CURRENT ISSUES





INTRODUCTION



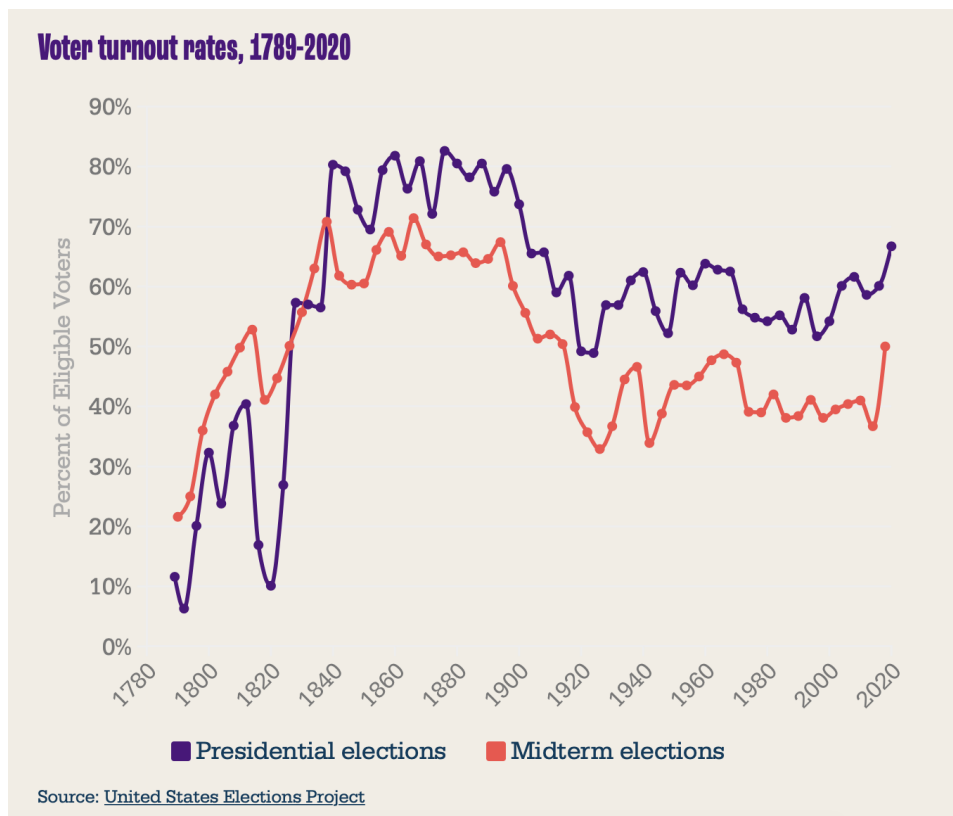
On November 8, 2022, Americans will go to the polls to vote in the **midterm elections**, the first since President Joe Biden assumed office. These elections will decide who holds every seat in the House of Representatives, 35 seats in the Senate, and 36 governorships, and have the potential to influence major policy decisions at the federal, state, and local levels. In this *Close Up Current Issue*, we will study the significance of midterm elections and explore some of the most important issues at play.

BACKGROUND



What Are Midterm Elections? Midterm elections are federal, state, and local elections that take place at the halfway point of a president's four-year term. In midterm elections, voters in every state and every district elect all 435 members of the House, who serve two-year terms. One-third of senators, who serve six-year terms, are also up for election. And depending on state and local election cycles, voters in some areas cast ballots to elect governors, mayors, and other officials, or to approve or reject **ballot initiatives**.

Although each midterm cycle occurs in a unique political climate, there are trends that these elections have historically followed. Midterm elections consistently have lower rates of voter turnout than presidential elections. Still, the sitting president has the power to influence voter turnout and election results. An extremely popular president may motivate his or her supporters to show up at the polls. Yet by the time midterm elections come around, presidents have often suffered losses in their popularity, thus motivating the opposition to vote in larger numbers.¹ In fact, in 36 of the 39 midterm elections since the end of the Civil War, the president's party has lost seats in the House. In 19 of the 27 elections since the direct election of senators began in 1913, the president's party has lost seats in the Senate.²



The last century saw several instances of dramatic midterm losses for the president's party, including:

- In 1938, during the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Democrats lost 72 House seats as voters expressed anxiety about unemployment and the New Deal.
- In 2006, as President George W. Bush's job approval rating tumbled in the midst of the Iraq War, Republicans lost 30 House seats along with control of the chamber.
- In 2010, after Congress and President Barack Obama oversaw passage of the Affordable Care Act, Democrats lost 63 House seats as well as control of the chamber.³
- In 2018, after the first two years of President Donald Trump's term, Republicans lost 40 House seats, flipping control of the chamber to Democrats.⁴

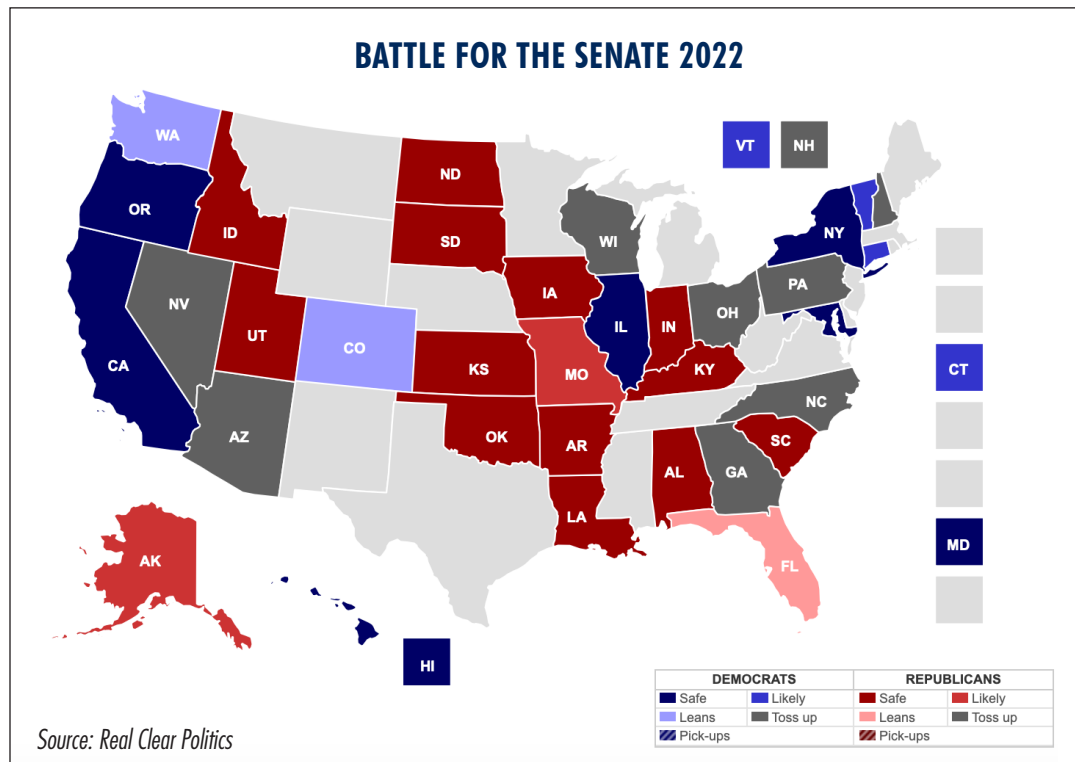
There have been exceptions to this trend as well. In 1998, amid a backlash to the **impeachment** of President Bill Clinton, Democrats gained seats in the House and Senate. And in 2002 during the Bush administration, Republicans gained seats in both chambers 14 months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.⁵

In general, since 1974, the average midterm loss for the president's party has been 23 House seats. Since 1946, presidents with a job approval rating below 50 percent have seen their party lose an average of 37 House seats.⁶ President Biden's job approval rating stood at 44 percent in August 2022.⁷



Why does the president's party often do poorly in midterm elections?

However, the popularity of the president is hardly the only factor that affects midterm election results. Much depends on which seats are up for election, the quality of the **incumbents** and candidates running for office, local political circumstances, and voting patterns of individual states and districts.⁸



The Senate. In 2022, 35 of the 100 seats in the Senate are up for election. This includes 34 seats up for regular election and one seat up for **special election** to fill the last four years of retiring Senator Jim Inhofe's, R-Okla., term. (*There is another special election for the final weeks of the term previously held by Vice President Kamala Harris, but that California seat is also up for regular election the same day.)

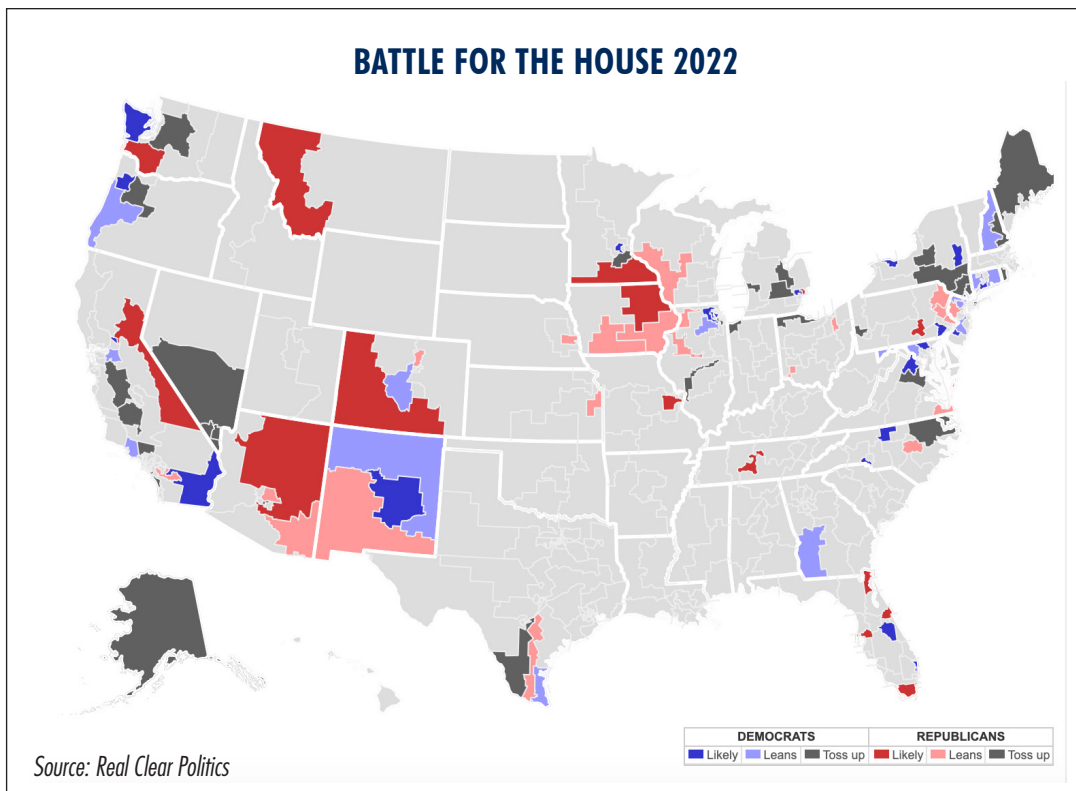
Ahead of the midterm elections, Democrats hold a slim majority in the Senate. Democrats occupy 48 seats, independents who **caucus** with Democrats hold two seats, and Republicans control 50 seats. This counts as a majority for Democrats because Vice President Harris casts any tiebreaking vote when necessary. In order to win control of the Senate, Republicans must gain a net total of one seat.⁹

However, the 2022 election map presents a few difficulties for Republicans in the Senate.

- Republicans are defending 21 Senate seats while Democrats are defending only 14.
- Republicans must defend Senate seats in two states that supported President Joe Biden over President Trump in 2020 (Pennsylvania and Wisconsin). Democrats are not defending any Senate seats in states carried by President Trump in 2020.¹⁰



Which are the Senate races to watch in 2022?



The House of Representatives. In 2022, all 435 seats in the House are up for election. Ahead of the midterm elections, Democrats hold a majority of 221 seats to Republicans' 212 seats. Two seats (one formerly held by a Republican, one formerly held by a Democrat) are vacant due to a member's death or resignation.¹¹ In order to win control of the House, Republicans must gain a net total of five seats.

Democrats are facing several headwinds in their efforts to retain control of the House.

- Of the 49 representatives not seeking reelection in 2022, 31 are Democrats and 18 are Republicans.¹² This is important because a race without an incumbent is more likely to be competitive.
- Of the 27 representatives who won election in 2020 with less than 52 percent of the vote, 24 are Democrats and only three are Republicans.¹³
- As the party in power, Democrats could be more vulnerable to voters' anxiety about the nationwide state of affairs. In June 2022, 85 percent of respondents told an Associated Press poll that the country is on the wrong track, with 79 percent classifying the economy as "poor."¹⁴



Which are the House races to watch in 2022?

The Major Issues at Play. The midterm elections are taking place at an unsettled time for the United States, with several issues weighing heavily on the minds of voters.

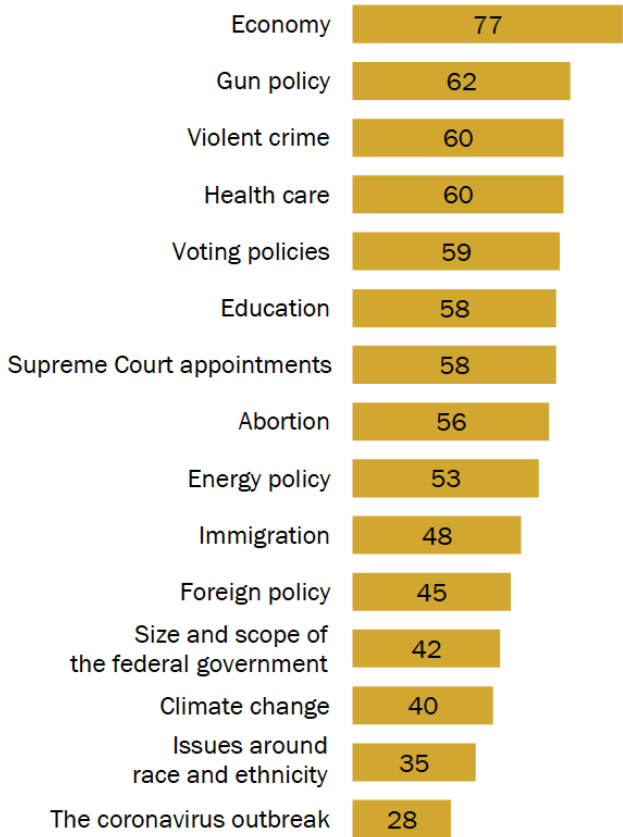
- **Inflation** has been stubbornly high since mid-2021, reaching a level not seen in 40 years in June 2022.¹⁵ As recently as September, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that costs were up 8.3 percent from 2021, sending the stock market tumbling into its biggest one-day decline since 2020.¹⁶
- In June 2022, the Supreme Court jolted the midterm election landscape by overturning *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and returning the power to set abortion policy to the states. A Pew Research Center poll found that 57 percent of adults disapprove of the Court’s decision (including 43 percent who strongly disapprove) while 41 percent approve.¹⁷ It remains to be seen how much the issue will motivate voters, especially Democrats and independents upset by the ruling.

If Democrats were to hold onto their majorities in Congress, they would retain the power to pass bills that advance their agenda and have those bills signed into law by President Biden. Various analysts have predicted that Democrats could push to **codify** abortion rights, pass voting reforms, implement such programs as universal preschool, and/or raise the federal minimum wage. Democrats would also retain the power to approve President Biden’s judicial nominees with a majority vote.

If Republicans were to take control of one or both chambers of Congress, they would gain the power to block Democrats’ legislative agenda (although their own priorities would remain subject to President Biden’s veto). By flipping either the House or Senate, Republicans would secure the ability to **subpoena** documents and witnesses and to investigate the Biden administration. By flipping the Senate, they would have the power to reject President Biden’s nominees to federal courts.

THE ECONOMY VIEWED AS TOP VOTING ISSUE IN MIDTERM ELECTIONS

*% of registered voters saying each is **very important** to their vote in the 2022 congressional election*



Note: Based on registered voters.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 1-14, 2022.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Find one Senate or House race that is important to you this year. Who is running? Who do you support? Why do you support that candidate?
2. Which party would you like to see win control of the House? Which party would you like to see win control of the Senate? Why?
3. In your opinion, what is the most important issue at play in the midterm elections? Explain.

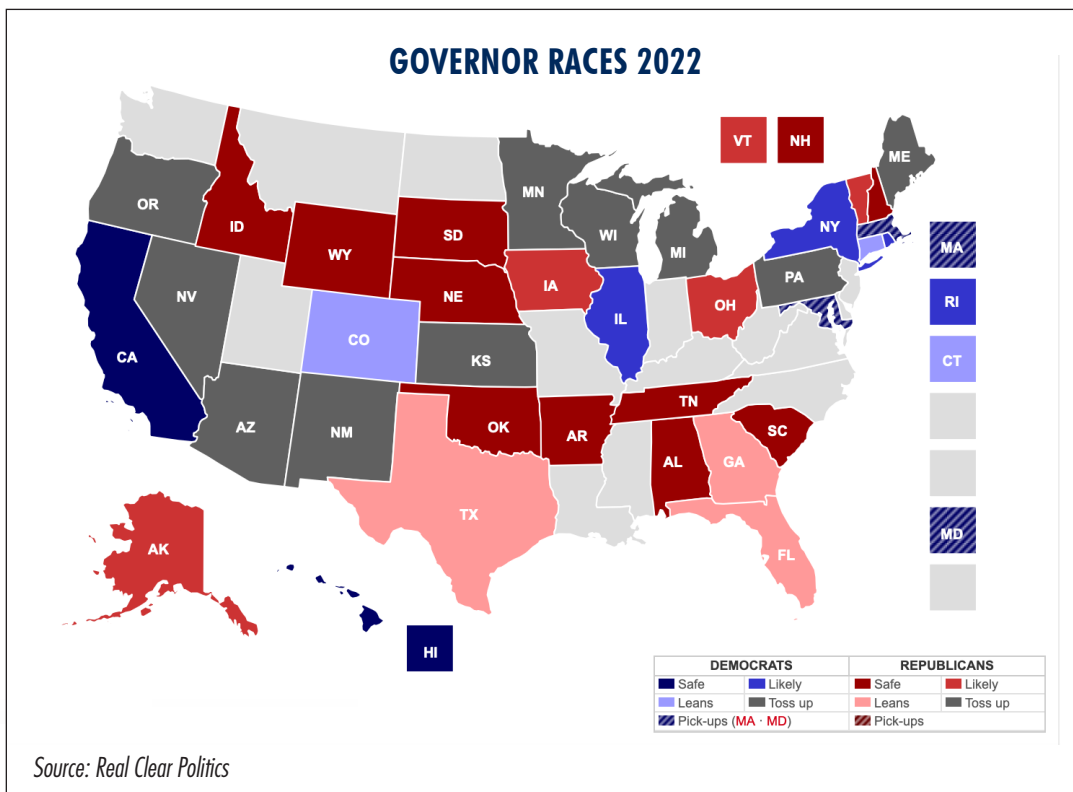
WHAT IS AT STAKE IN THE STATES?



Governors and State Legislatures. Ahead of the midterm elections, the nation's 50 governors include 28 Republicans and 22 Democrats. In 2022, 36 of these governorships will be up for election, 20 of which are held by Republicans and 16 of which are held by Democrats.

- Of the 36 gubernatorial races in 2022, 28 will feature an incumbent running for reelection (15 Republicans and 13 Democrats). This is important to note because incumbents have certain advantages, such as name recognition, a record to run on, and the power to raise money.
- This year, Republicans will be defending six governorships in states that President Biden won in 2020 (Arizona, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont). Democrats will be defending only one governorship in a state won by President Trump in 2020 (Kansas).¹⁸

Some gubernatorial elections will take on new significance this year, as many Americans are newly aware of the powers held by their governor. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many governors played a leading role in implementing or rejecting stay-at-home orders, school closures, and mandates for vaccination and mask-wearing. Furthermore, in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, voters are more conscious of how their chosen governor and state legislature can directly impact the setting of abortion policy.



Ballot Initiatives. In addition to casting ballots for public officials, voters in 37 states will have the opportunity to vote on 137 statewide ballot initiatives on November 8.¹⁹ If approved by voters, these ballot initiatives would enact new statewide policies on a variety of issues. For example:

- Voters in five states will consider abortion-related ballot initiatives. Voters in California, Kentucky, Michigan, and Vermont will consider adding abortion protections to their state constitutions while voters in Montana will decide on a measure stating that infants born alive at any stage of development are legal persons.
- Voters in five states (Arkansas, Maryland, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota) will decide on measures to legalize marijuana for recreational use.

- Voters in five states (Alabama, Louisiana, Oregon, Tennessee, Vermont) will consider **repealing** state constitutional language that allows enslavement and/or servitude as criminal punishment or debt payment.
- Voters in four states (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, South Dakota) will consider proposals to change the process of citizen-led ballot initiatives.²⁰



What measures are on the ballot in your state?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER



1. Find one local or statewide race that is important to you this year. Who is running? Who do you support? Why do you support that candidate?
2. Visit [Ballotpedia](#) to find out if there are any initiatives on your state ballot this year. Choose one and explain why you support or oppose it. (If there are no initiatives in your state, please choose one from another state.)
3. Consider the pros and cons of using ballot initiatives to enact statewide policy, and outline one benefit and one drawback. Do you support the use of ballot initiatives? Why or why not?

**Midterm elections**

Federal, state, and local elections that take place at the halfway point of a president's four-year term

Ballot initiative

A means by which citizens may propose to create, amend, or repeal a state law or state constitutional provision by collecting a certain number of signatures from registered voters. In a direct ballot initiative, the measure is put directly to a vote after enough signatures are submitted. In an indirect ballot initiative, the measure is first referred to the state legislature and only put to a vote if not enacted by the legislature.

Impeachment

The bringing of charges against the holder of a public office

Incumbent

The holder of an office or post

Special election

An election used to fill a public office that has become vacant between general elections

Caucus

To formally meet and work together with members of a political party for a shared goal

Inflation

A rise in prices and a decline in purchasing power

Codify

To arrange laws or rules into a systematic code

Subpoena

A written order to compel an individual to give testimony

Repeal

To revoke or annul



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- ² Cook, Charles. "Will the 2018 Midterms Follow Historic Patterns?" Cook Political Report. 18 Aug. 2017. Web. 12 Sep. 2022.
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- ⁸ Cook, Charles. "Will the 2018 Midterms Follow Historic Patterns?" Cook Political Report. 18 Aug. 2017. Web. 12 Sep. 2022.
- ⁹ Ballotpedia. "United States Senate Elections, 2022." Web. 12 Sep. 2022.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ U.S. House of Representatives Press Gallery. "Party Breakdown." Web. 15 Sep. 2022.
- ¹² Ballotpedia. "List of U.S. Congress Incumbents Who Are Not Running for Reelection in 2022." Web. 12 Sep. 2022.
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- ¹⁴ Boak, Josh, and Emily Swanson. "Most Say Nation on Wrong Track, Including Dems: AP-NORC Poll." Associated Press. 29 Jun. 2022. Web. 15 Sep. 2022.
- ¹⁵ Bayly, Lucy, and Alicia Wallace. "U.S. Inflation Hit 40-Year High in June, Driven by Record Gas Prices." CNN. 13 Jul. 2022. Web. 15 Sep. 2022. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Consumer Price Index Unchanged Over the Month, Up 8.5 Percent Over the Year, in July 2022." 15 Aug. 2022. Web. 15 Sep. 2022.
- ¹⁶ Siegel, Rachel. "Stocks Sink After Inflation Report Shows Unexpected Price Climb in August." *Washington Post*. 13 Sep. 2022. Web. 15 Sep. 2022.
- ¹⁷ Pew Research Center. "Majority of Public Disapproves of Supreme Court's Decision to Overturn *Roe v. Wade*." 6 Jul. 2022. Web. 15 Sep. 2022.
- ¹⁸ Ballotpedia. "Gubernatorial Elections, 2022." Web. 15 Sep. 2022.
- ¹⁹ Ballotpedia. "2022 Ballot Measures." Web. 15 Sep. 2022.
- ²⁰ Ibid.