

The Challenge of Direct Democracy: The History of Ballot Measures in Maine

Michael Franz

PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

(Ch. 1, Constitutional Resolution of 1979)

"Shall the Constitution of Maine be amended to remove the literacy requirements for eligibility to vote?"

INTENT AND CONTENT

This amendment to the Constitution would repeal a provision which requires that a person be able to read the Constitution in English and write his or her name in order to vote.

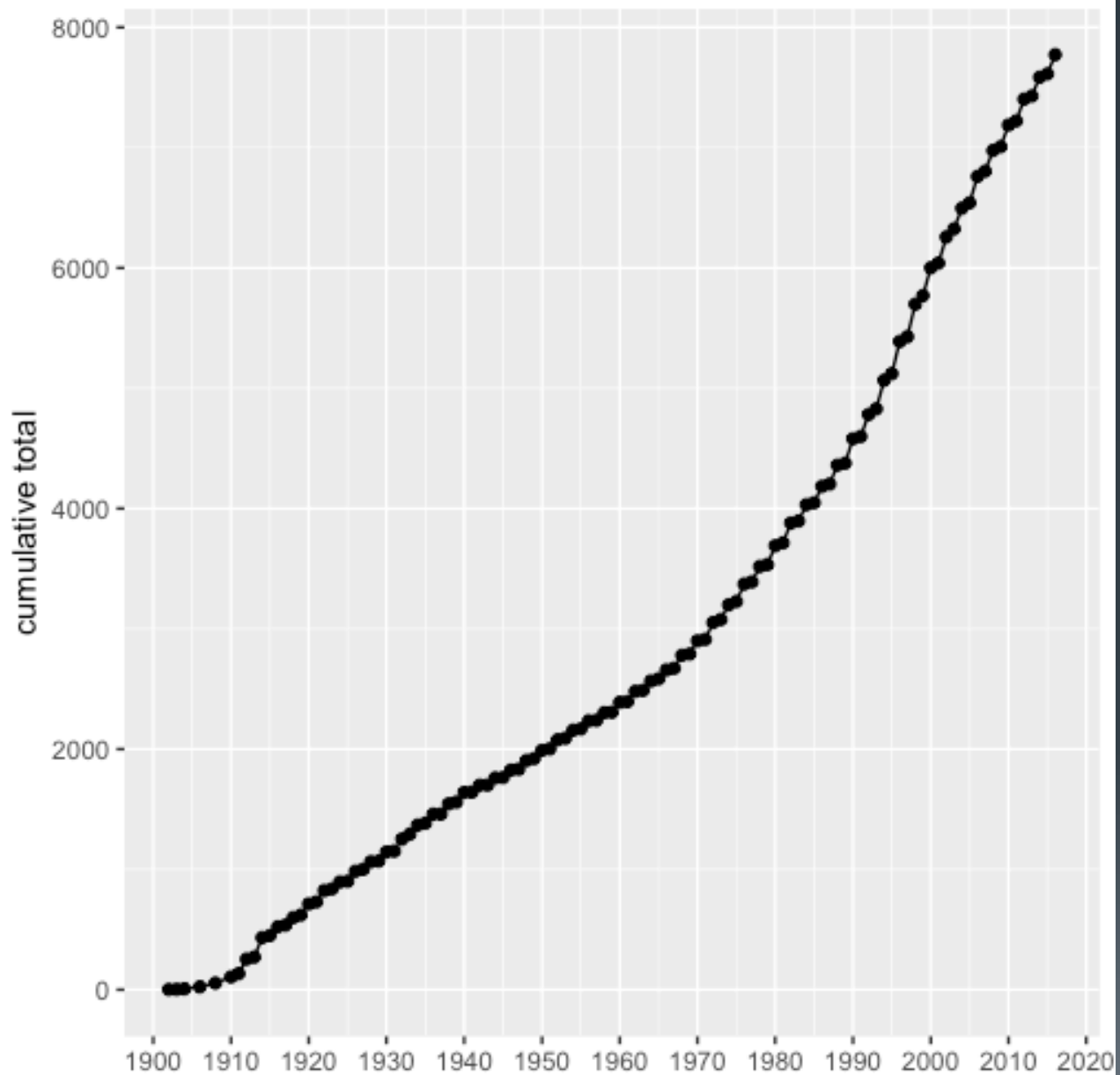
A "yes" vote favors the repeal of this provision relating to the literacy requirements for eligibility to vote.

A "no" vote opposes the action.

September 28, 1979

October 30, 1979

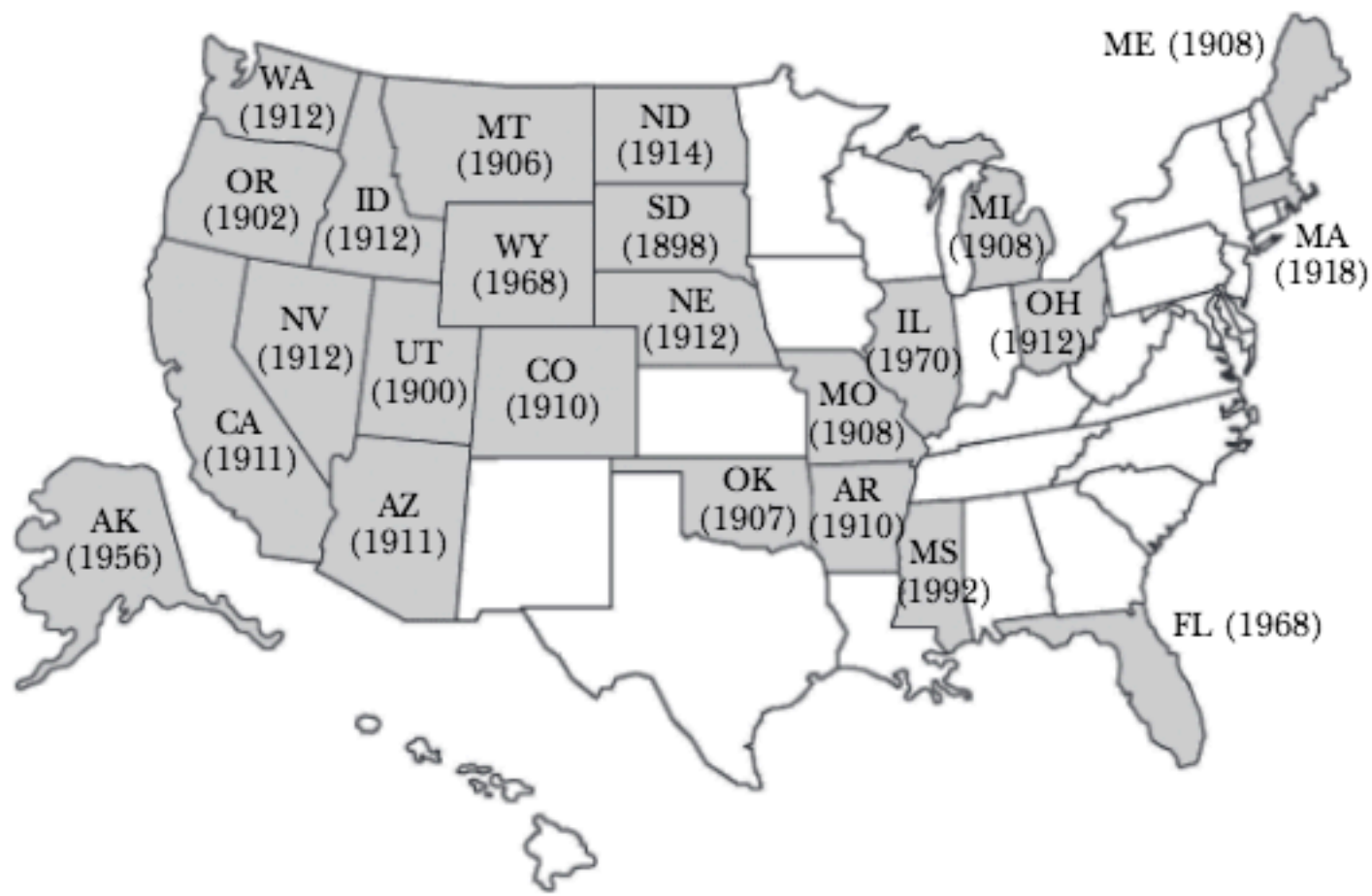
Ballot Questions in all States



Source: National Conference of State Legislatures

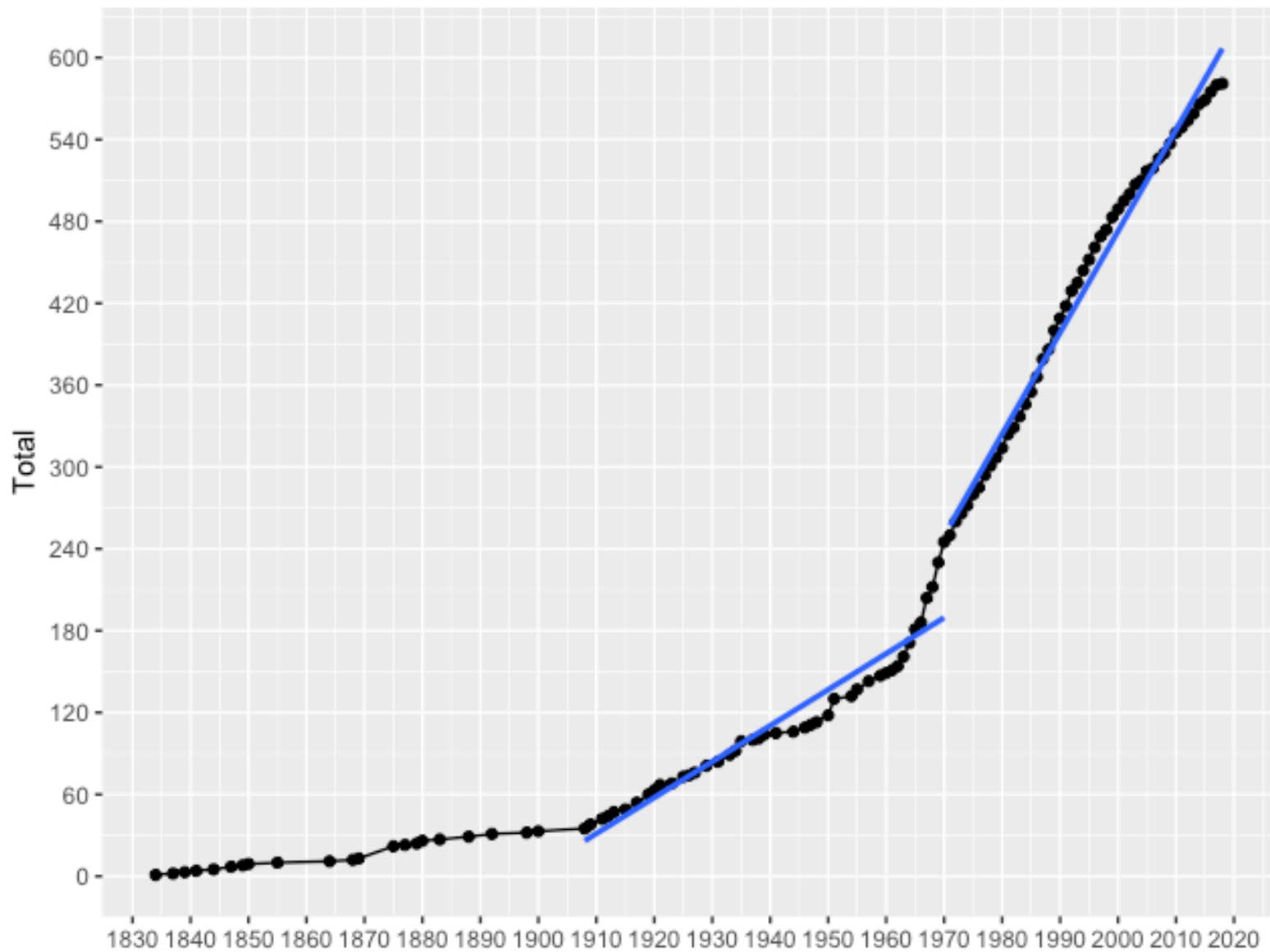
States with Initiative in 2004

(adoption year in parentheses)



Ballot Questions in Maine

cumulative total

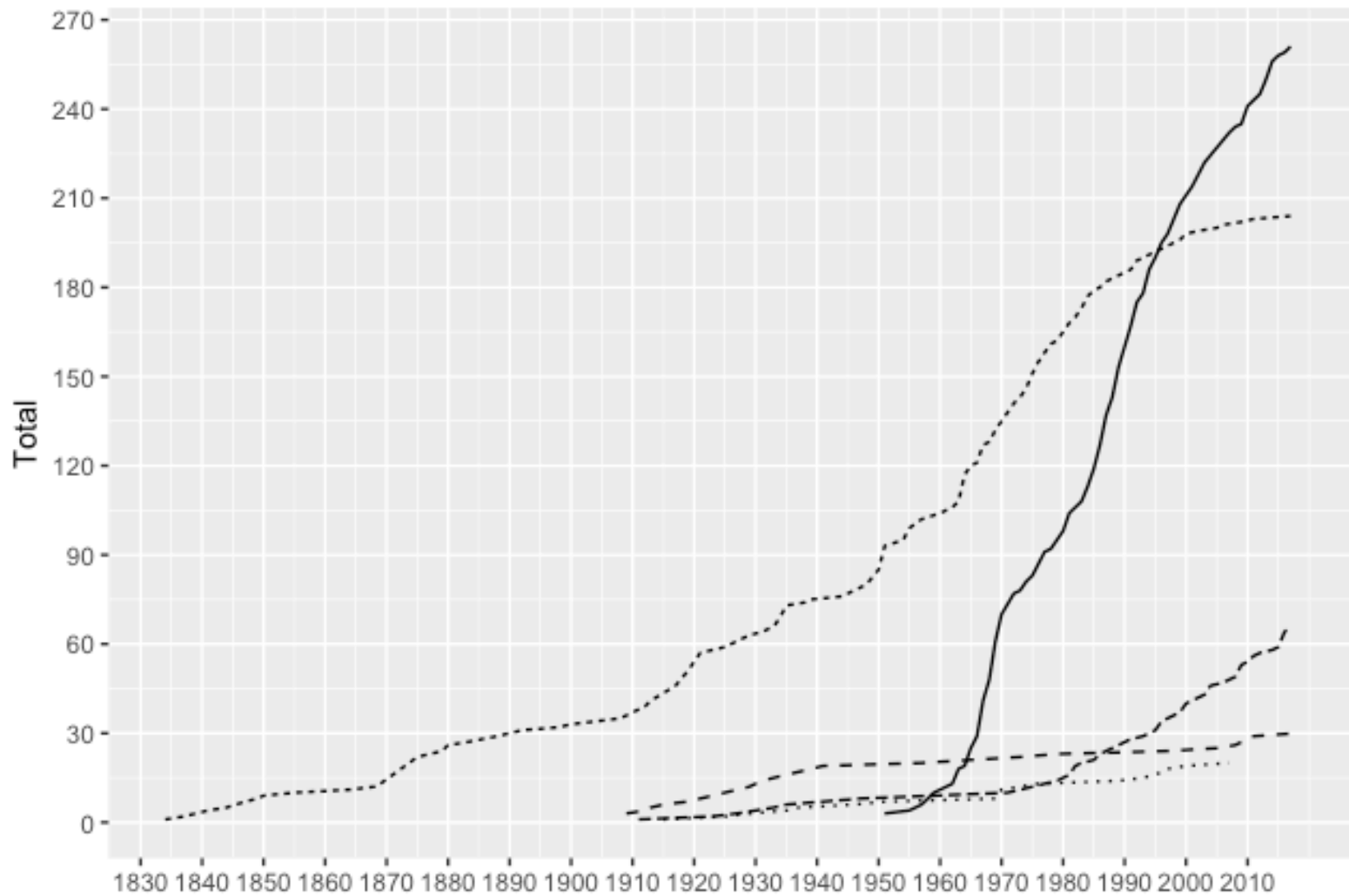


Source: Maine.gov, author coding

Ballot Questions in Maine

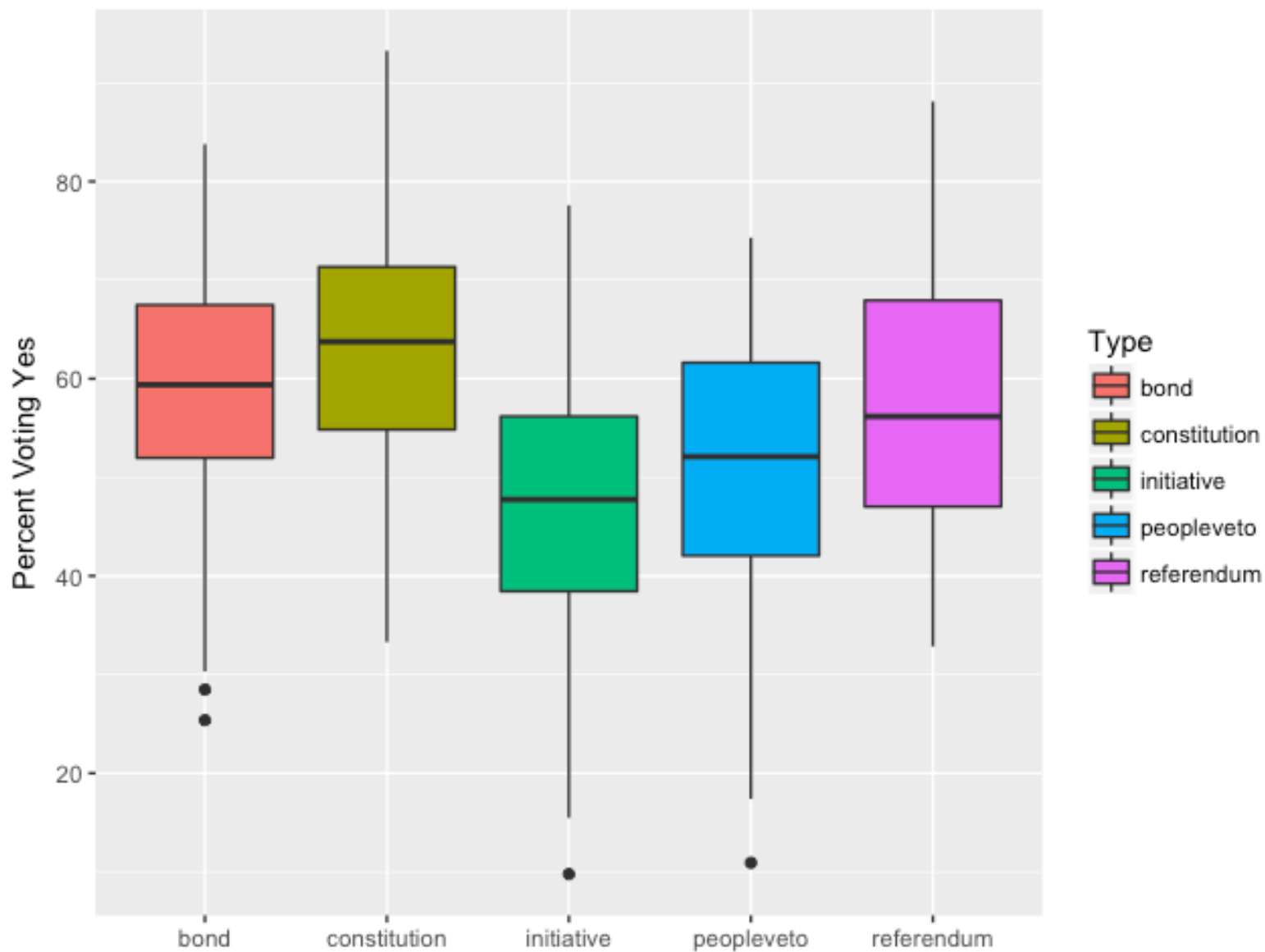
cumulative total

Type — bond constitution - - - initiative - - - people veto referendum



Source: Maine.gov, author coding

Range of Outcomes



Source: maine.gov, with author coding

Big Topics



Constitution	Bonds
Gov't finances (25)	Transportation (63)
Legislature (17)	Education (51)
Direct democracy (13)	Environment (27)
Suffrage (13)	Water (20)
Transportation (12)	Development (14)

Referendum	Initiative	Veto
Transportation (5)	Taxes (10)	Taxes (6)
Education (2)	Gambling (8)	Elections (4)
Energy (2)	Elections (7)	Alcohol (3)
Environment (2)	Nuclear (4)	Civil rights (3)
Nuclear (2)	*5 tied w/3	

Close Votes

<u>1911</u> Constitutional Amendment to overturn an 1884 prohibition amendment	Failed by 754 votes of 121,000 cast	Eventually passed in 1934
<u>1977</u> Bond issue for \$6m renovation of Univ of Maine	Failed by 940 votes of 214,000 cast	7 bond issues that year. 5 passed.
<u>1985</u> Constitutional amendment on appointments for civil offices	Failed by 580 votes of 185,000 cast	
<u>1940</u> People's Veto measure on elections in Biddeford	Passed by 190 votes of 140,000 cast	?
<u>2016</u> Initiative on legalizing marijuana	Passed by 4,000 votes of 760,000 cast (50.3%)	

*23 measures in total decided by 49.0 to 50.9%

Some to Ponder

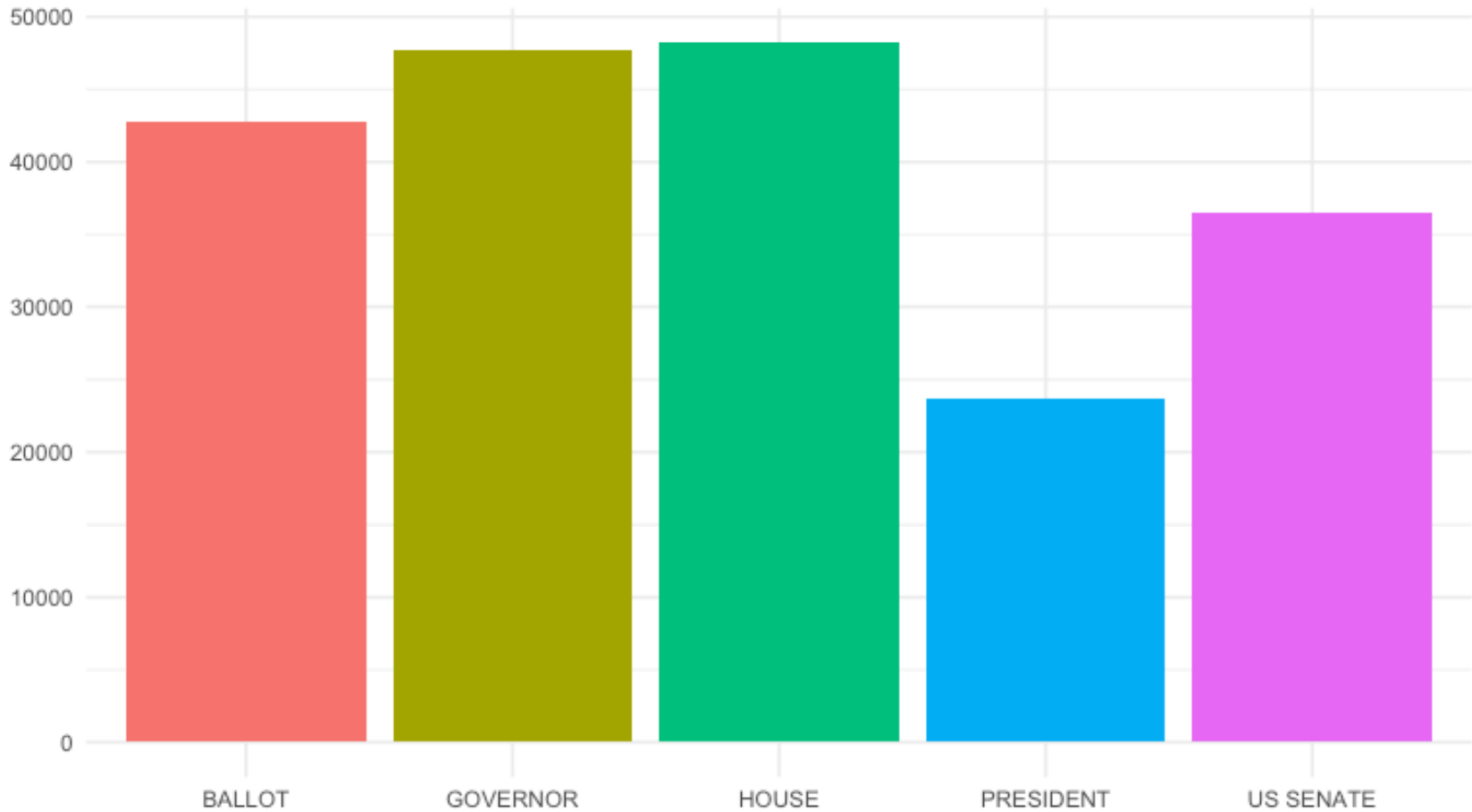
People's Veto in 1925	To preserve Maine on Eastern Standard Time	Vote in December 1925, 34,000 votes "yes" to 28,000 "no"
Referendum in 1946	To give WWII veterans in Maine a bonus	Voted down by 61,000 to 109,000
Referendum in 1995	To require use of seat belts	Close vote: 208,000 "yes" to 204,000 "no"
Initiatives in 2003 and 2004	To require the state to pay 55% of town/city education costs	"Passed" in 2003 and 2004; 2004 vote had 38 percent of turnout in '04
Constitutional amendment in 1979	To overturn 1892 amendment imposing a literacy test for voting	Failed 2:1, with 80,000 voting "yes" to 170,000 "no"

*Passed bonds total \$7.5 billion since 1951 (adjusted for inflation); rejected bonds total \$1.35 billion

TV Ads aired in Maine

2010-2016

type ■ BALLOT ■ GOVERNOR ■ HOUSE ■ PRESIDENT ■ US SENATE



Source: Wesleyan Media Project (for races with >5000 ads)

Good or Bad for Maine?



- Out of state money
- Impact of spending
- “Will of the people”
- Evidence for direct democracy
- Concerns/Reforms?