

State initiatives on gun control and the minimum wage mean that a Trump presidency may not be as bad as some fear

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*As half of the country ponders how they underestimated Trump's advantage, it is important to remember the state level propositions that passed across the United States last night. **Sierra Smucker** writes that victories of state ballot initiatives highlight the fact that a Trump victory is not necessarily a sign that American citizens are moving toward a conservative platform. Victories for gun violence prevention policies and minimum wage increases even in states that voted for Trump suggest that Americans are looking for ways to change their immediate circumstance and increase public safety. Shaking up Washington is part of that but that does not mean citizens have rejected the policies that Clinton ran on.*



Donald Trump has won the election for the United States Presidency. He beat Hillary Clinton, a highly qualified candidate who would also have made history as the first woman to occupy the oval office. To an outside observer, it may have seemed like Hillary had the full package. While many people didn't trust her and others people were not inspired by her, the fact that her opponent had no political experience, bragged about sexually assaulting women and refused to reveal any financial details about himself would surely be more important than misgivings about a candidate who had about the same amount of baggage as any other.

But Trump won, upsetting expectations from pollsters and coastal communities. While the choice of Trump for President might be seen as a victory for the conservatives, it is also important to note the liberal victories that peppered the United States last night. These victories imply that while conservatives have taken possession of Congress and the Executive Branch, state level politics (which often impact citizens most directly) has continued to support policies that Hillary campaigned on.

First: Gun Control

In an unprecedented success for firearm safety, California, Washington, and Nevada passed new laws that restrict access to firearms. This election was also notable for what it lacked: pro-gun initiatives on any ballots. In California, 67% of voters voted yes on Proposition 63 which would ban high-capacity magazines, and creates a court procedure to restrict prohibited individuals from procuring firearms. This proposition follows a new focus on the gun violence prevention movement that seeks to ensure laws that are already in place, like laws that prohibit domestic abusers from possessing firearms, are actually implemented effectively.

In Nevada, Question 1 just barely passed with a little over 50% of the vote. This is unsurprising as Nevada is generally a 'pro-gun' state. However, the victory of Question 1 closes an important background check loophole by requiring that all gun transfers go through a licensed gun dealer who will perform a background check on the sale. This type of policy also reflects the gun violence prevention movement's focus on policies that ensure existing laws are being implemented effectively. Building policy incrementally on existing measures is a tactic the gun lobby has used for years to great effect. The success of the NV measure suggests that both sides can play that game.

Finally, Washington's Initiative 1491 won in a landslide (79%). This initiative allows judges to issue orders banning particular individual from accessing guns. This law mirrors existing Washington and federal legislation that prohibits individuals who have been served with a domestic violence restraining order from purchasing, possessing, or owning firearms. Initiative 1491 creates a similar restraining order system but relaxes the requirement that the relationship between the victim and the defendant be a current or former romantic partner.

Second: Minimum Wage

The fact that minimum wage laws were on the ballot in 5 states, including some that went for Trump, provides evidence that this election cannot be easily characterized as a victory for one party or another. Instead, we need to think about the results as a rejection of the status quo, particularly the growing income inequality between Americans. Working class white voters (who came out in droves for Trump) did not necessarily vote solely on ideological grounds but for a person they thought could actually shake up the system that has failed them regardless of party. As state ballot initiatives suggest, these voters also supported traditionally democratic initiatives like gun control and minimum wage increases.

In Arizona, voters supported Proposition 206 which will raise the state minimum wage to \$12/hr by 2020 and guaranteeing paid sick time off from a job. In Colorado, Amendment 20 will raise the state minimum wage to \$12/hr by 2020. The amendment won 55 percent to 45 percent. Maine's Question 4 proposes raising the state minimum wage to \$12/hr by 2020, and subsequently keeping the rate tied to the consumer price index of inflation. It also won by about 55 percent to 45 percent. Citizens of South Dakota rejected a law that would decrease the minimum wage from \$8.50/hr to \$7.50/hr for anyone under the age of 18 with 71% of voters voting no. Once again, in Washington State, Initiative 1433 will raise the state minimum wage to \$13.50/hr by 2020 and guaranteeing paid sick time off from a job.

What to Watch

Focusing on the states not only gives hope to those who do not support Trump's economic or social policies, but it also gives us a more nuanced view of where the American people are in terms of politics. We should watch for more citizen-led ballot measures on these important issues, especially as citizens continue to demand attention from politicians to deal with specific issues like public safety, income inequality, housing prices, and health care.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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Sierra Smucker is a PhD student at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, and a Visiting Research Student the LSE US Centre. Her research, work, and teaching explore the ways in which less-advantaged groups gain access to political power and influence in important policy debates. Focusing on the role of social movements and the political feedback effects of policy making, Smucker looks at the politics of the policy process and how the state can influence who has access to power. She has particular expertise in the politics of gun reform in the United States and policy addressing violence against women.



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