

Measure 56

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BlueOregon

Title: Provides that May and November property tax elections are decided by majority of voters voting. Provides that May and November property tax elections are decided by majority of voters voting.

Sponsor: Oregon Legislature

Type: Constitutional

What it Does: Repeals the double-majority rule on all primary and general elections; double-majority rule would still be in place for other elections

What it Costs: \$0

Discussion

Back in 1996, when he still had a little juice, Bill Sizemore had one of his big ideas: since governments regularly go to voters and ask them to approve tax hikes, why not make it harder? His solution was to disallow any vote in which fewer than 50% of registered voters cast a ballot. The effect has been to empower non-voters and kill many local levies and bonds. According to the [League of Oregon Cities](#) (.pdf), the double-majority law killed 17% of voter-passed bond measures, and 27% of levies.

The current legislation would exempt primary and general elections from the double-majority law. It would still apply in special elections. According to the *Oregonian*, one of the only valid justifications for the law was to circumvent the practice by local governments of "passing tax increases in minor elections when voters aren't paying attention." But as they point out, this tactic has been blocked by law revisions and vote-by-mail balloting and so the remedy is [no longer needed](#).

Measure 56 really poses a philosophical question to voters: who should have the right to make law in Oregon--those who vote or those who can't be bothered? Sizemore is fairly transparent about his motivations here. He thinks that not voting is the same as expressing disapproval. But that's not how it works in a democracy. You actually have to go out and cast your ballot to register your opinion. Measure 56 just restores this basic principle to voting.