

Time to rewrite the Michigan Constitution? Voters will decide 2026 ballot proposal



Mayor and Council –

A ballot question that will appear before voters in 2026. I've heard rumblings about this scenario, and this article confirms what I've been hearing. Just an FYI.

- Victor

Ahead of a 1961 vote to convene a constitutional convention, a coalition of civic groups including the League of Women Voters led a campaign to overhaul Michigan's foundational government document. (Courtesy of the State of Michigan)

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Time to rewrite the Michigan Constitution? Voters will decide 2026 ballot proposal

- Every 16 years Michiganders vote on whether to revise the state constitution in a convention of elected delegates
- The question will again go before voters on the November 2026 ballot
- Michigan's current constitution, ratified in 1963, is the state's oldest. If a convention is held, voters would still have to approve changes

Want to rewrite the Michigan Constitution? Your chance may be coming up.

Michigan voters in November 2026 will decide whether to convene the state's first constitutional convention since the 1960s. The question will appear as Proposal 1 on the ballot under a provision in the current constitution that gives voters the option every 16 years.

While Michigan voters rejected calls for convention rewrites by wide margins in 1978, 1994 and 2010, next year's proposal already has a prominent champion: House Speaker Matt Hall, who last week publicly endorsed the concept.

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The Richland Township Republican noted that Michigan voters have approved individual amendments to the current constitution by ballot proposal, which lawmakers cannot unilaterally revise even if there are acknowledged flaws.

"Some of those proposals sounded good, but then had intentions that the public is frustrated about," Hall said in a panel discussion at the recent Mackinac Policy Conference.

Hall did not specify which amendments he'd want to revise at a convention, and his staff declined to make him available for an interview to discuss the prospect further, but there have been many provisions that critics could target.

In the 62 years since the current constitution was ratified in 1963, voters have approved 39 of 85 amendments put on the ballot through petition drives or legislative action.



In 1961, groups like the Save Michigan Roads Committee were concerned a constitutional rewrite could damage funding for their cause. (Courtesy of Eugene G Wanger Collection, Archives of Michigan)

Seven of those amendments came between 2018 and 2022, nearly all of them backed by liberal-leaning groups, including measures that enshrined abortion rights, no-reason absentee voting and created an independent redistricting commission.

Hall noted the current constitution also requires a high threshold — 3/4 majority support in both chambers of the Legislature — for lawmakers to amend initiated legislation approved at the ballot, including a 2018 measure that legalized recreational marijuana.

Next year's vote, though, could be even more impactful. If approved, constitutional convention delegates would have the discretion to make any number of amendments — or even rewrite the document entirely.

"When you open up a constitution, you open up everything," said Patrick Wright, vice president for legal affairs at the Mackinac Center, a conservative think tank.

While there is not yet any organized support or opposition for the 2026 proposal, critics of the 2010 measure warned of the possibility of a "runaway" or "hijacked" convention that could lead to wholesale and radical changes given "extreme political polarization," according to a [nonpartisan summary](#) prepared at the time.

"The abortion issue, gay rights, environmental issues, there's just a whole host of things that you can add into the state constitution" this time around, said Adrian Hemond, a Democratic strategist with the bipartisan Grassroots Midwest firm in Lansing.

Hemond predicted approval of the next year's convention proposal could create a "license to print money" for political consultants like himself.

"All of these national interest groups, in addition to the parties who want to control the convention, will all descend on Michigan and just pump our state full of money because of those elections," he told Bridge Michigan.

How it works

It'd take three elections to give Michigan a new constitution: one to hold a convention, a second to elect the delegates that would do the revising and a third for Michigan voters to decide whether to adopt their changes.

If voters do approve a constitutional convention in 2026, the delegate election would happen within the following six months. Representation would mirror the state Legislature: one delegate for every House and Senate district, 148 in total.

Those constitutional delegates would then convene for a convention and work without a deadline on revisions. They could simply offer one or more amendments to the existing constitution, or they could start over from scratch and rewrite the whole thing.



In the last convention between 1961 and 1962, delegates made more than 800 proposals, some of which could've drastically changed Michigan's government from how it's known today. Failed ideas included a unicameral legislature, giving state Supreme Court justices geographic districts and banning absentee voters from participating in state elections.

144 Delegates convened for nearly six months to draft a new edition of Michigan's constitution between October 1961 and August 1962. (Courtesy of Eugene G Wanger Collection, Archives of Michigan)

Still, the changes that were approved by delegates had far-reaching effects: The state's highway commissioner, treasurer and auditor all ceased to exist as statewide elected offices. Delegates also established the Civil Rights Commission, which investigates discrimination complaints, and granted the governor the power to reorganize the executive branch at will, among other changes.

Finally, after all the deliberations and revisions, voters would then vote on whether to adopt the new proposed constitution. Without a majority in favor of the changes, all their work would be tossed — with another shot at revision in 2042.

Will it happen?

History is not in favor of a rewrite.

Michigan is one of 14 states that have a periodic referendum on whether to rewrite their state constitution, and in recent decades voters have trended away from change. No state constitution has been rewritten in nearly 40 years, after Rhode Island approved a convention in 1984. Hawaiian voters narrowly approved a ballot proposal in 1996, but that state's supreme court ruled against a convention after many voters left the question blank.

Michigan's last convention almost didn't happen: The 1961 ballot proposal was narrowly approved by 51% of voters.

Since the Michigan constitution was last ratified in 1963, Michiganders have had another three chances at wholesale revision. They rejected each measure by wide margins — 77% to 23% in 1978, 72% to 28% in 1994 and 67% to 22% in 2010.

Even if a convention was held, the delegates would also have to produce a new constitution that Michiganders would be willing to ratify.

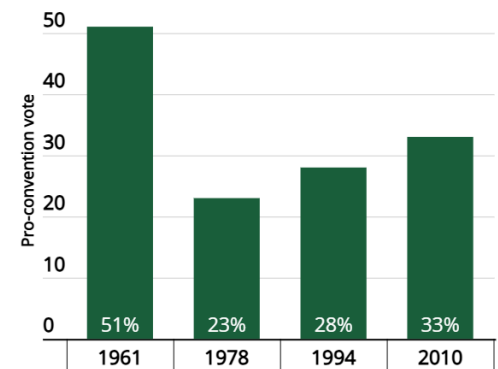
In 1962, after seven months of deliberations, the draft constitution the delegates put to voters became the new state constitution by the slimmest of margins. Just 50.2% of voters — a 7,424-vote margin — were in favor.



Delegates made major changes to state government, including abolishing the office of state highway commissioner and banning the death penalty, in Michigan's 1961-62 convention. (Courtesy of Eugene G Wanger Collection, Archives of Michigan)

Recent constitutional convention support

Since approving a constitutional convention in 1961, Michigan voters have shown little appetite for broadly revising the state's foundational government document, despite approving 39 amendments.



Source: Michigan Manuals

Bridge

— Simon D. Schuster

At the time, “there was a feeling that the state government was just a mess” and needed an overhaul, said Richard McClellan, an attorney with more than 50 years of experience in state government who led a pro-”con con” student group while studying at Michigan State University.

That sentiment isn’t quite as pervasive today, but McClellan, who at 83 has been integral to some of the current constitution’s amendments — he said he wrote the 2008 [stem cell proposal](#) approved by voters, for instance — said he’ll likely vote to see it overhauled again.

“The Constitution should be fairly stable, and if every 50 years we revise it, that’s not too often,” he told Bridge in an interview. “It would be an opportunity for the people in the early 21st century to look at it.”

The stakes

Whether the professional advocates and policy wonks behind some of the state’s most consequential policy changes want a con-con to happen, though, is a complicated question.

“It’s not really a ‘yes, we absolutely want it to happen’ or ‘no, we don’t want it to happen,’” Wright, of the Mackinac Center, said. “More of just prepping to be prepared in case it does.”

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The Mackinac Center would push to restore the state’s so-called “right-to-work” law that Democrats recently repealed, Wright said, and would advocate for “school choice” reforms that would allow the government to use taxpayer funding for private schools.

State Senate Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt, a Porter Township Republican now running for governor, has said he’d be open to having another constitutional convention. Democratic leaders in the state Legislature, meanwhile, have so far been noncommittal or not taken positions.

Since 2018 Michigan has held a series of constitution-amending statewide ballot proposals that have proved popular with liberals: they include, protecting access to abortion services and moving statewide redistricting to an independent citizen-led commission.

At a constitutional convention, there’s no guarantee those would survive.



Stephen Nisbet, the president of Michigan's last constitutional convention, after signing the new draft constitution Aug. 1, 1962. Convention secretary Fred Chase is about to sign. (Courtesy of Eugene G Wanger Collection, Archives of Michigan)

Voters Not Politicians, the group credited with crafting the amendment for an independent redistricting commission and subsequent amendments expanding voting access, had no comment on whether they'd support a convention.

But at the same time, more conservative alterations like the 2004 constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage in Michigan could also face the chopping block, a bulwark should the US Supreme Court reverse its prior ruling, like it did for abortion.

The Michigan League For Public Policy, a progressive think tank, also declined to comment on their stance on a constitutional convention.

For the most part, stakeholders are in "wait-and-see" mode. That's in part because the national political climate will have a lot to do with voters' appetite to overhaul state government, Hemond argued.

In 1963, there was a broad movement from civic groups to overhaul the state government's founding document, as dysfunction among 120 state agencies and stringent government borrowing limits caused issues like [payless paydays](#). Without that momentum this time around, it may be an uphill battle.