

## Our View: Amendments news mixed

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Louisiana voters are getting sick and tired of constitutional amendments.

That's one possible conclusion from the Nov. 4 election results, which decided the fate of seven proposed amendments to the state constitution.

Of the seven proposed amendments, voters approved only three — perhaps not coincidentally, the first three on the ballot. The three approved amendments impose term limits for members of certain state boards and commissions, require extra notice in advance of a special legislative session and allow temporary successors to be appointed for legislators deployed to active military duty.

“The result is somewhat surprising considering that voters have approved all but one of the 30 amendment proposals in the five elections since 2004,” said Jim Brandt, president of the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group that studies state issues.

The results might suggest a newfound reluctance among voters to amend the state constitution. But the results also show that voters might be pretty apathetic about their role in voting on the amendments.

“The number of people casting votes on each of the seven proposals shows a steady decline from the first to the last,” PAR noted in a post-election commentary. “More than 100,000 additional voters weighed in on Amendment No. 1 than on Amendment No. 7.”

It's as if many voters just threw up their hands and gave up on completing a ballot as they worked their way down the list of amendments in the voting booth. Such behavior is perplexing, to say the least, since casting a vote on all seven amendments required little time.

However, we do believe that too many proposed amendments to the state constitution make their way onto Louisiana's ballot. Louisiana has been among the most prolific states in adopting amendments, PAR has noted before. Most of the amendments have dealt with relatively minor matters best handled by state statutes. Placing these issues in the constitution clutters the document and diminishes its stature as a relatively permanent statement of basic law.

Some states make the amendment process more difficult by requiring a three-fourths super-majority vote of the Legislature, limiting the number of amendments that can be on a single ballot, requiring passage of proposed amendments in two consecutive legislative sessions, or even requiring adoption by a certain percentage of voters.

As we've noted before, making Louisiana's state constitutional amendment process more stringent would, of course, require amending the state constitution. We hope that when or if such proposed amendments make it onto the ballot, they'll be placed at the top of the list, and not the bottom.