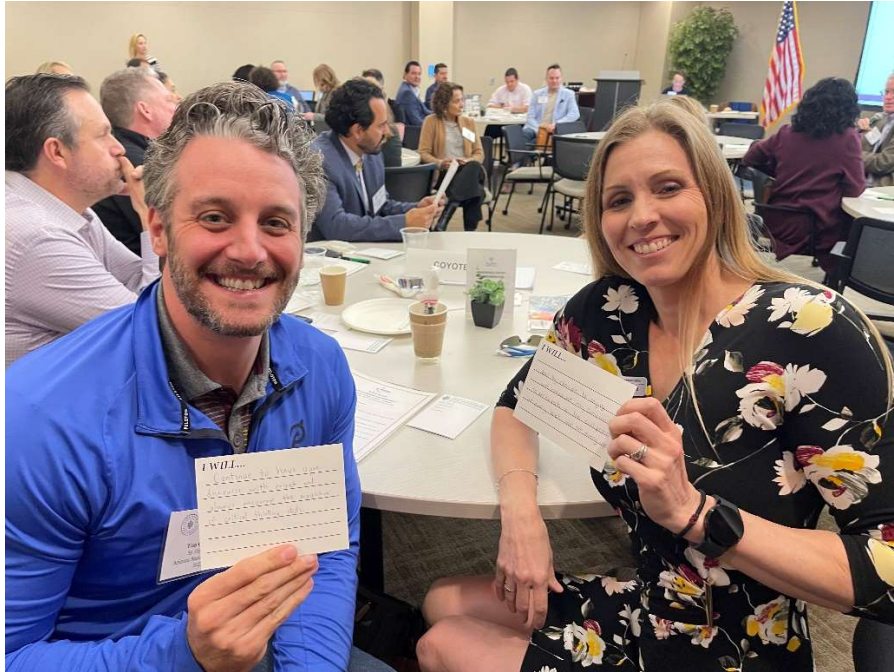


Voting and Elections in Arizona

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC LEADERSHIP IN ARIZONA

February 14, 2024 – Phoenix, AZ



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ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE DEMOCRACY

A healthy, strong, effective democracy is one that is built on the fundamental foundation of civics education. If someone lacks a basic civics education, it will be hard for them to know what a democracy is, let alone an effective one. Knowledge and understanding as to how a democracy works is vital. An effective democracy allows for easy access to participation in the voting process, free speech, free press, and open dialogue. It is far more than politics, and requires inclusiveness and transparency, with proper safeguards in place, such as an independent judiciary. An effective democracy should be based on trust, knowledge, confidence, inclusivity, and transparency.

Elected leaders in a democracy should listen to and represent their entire constituency, irrespective as to how engaged they are in the political process.

When there is disorganization and extreme partisanship, our democracy breaks down. It is important to ensure voters believe that their votes matter and that they have faith in the process. An effective democracy also includes citizens having confidence in the outcomes of an election, and candidates accepting the results of an election.

Our elected leaders need to work together to resolve issues that affect citizens. Too much focus is placed on party-affiliation and partisan politics and not on actual representation. Further, an effective democracy needs to allow for a more diverse candidate base; should encourage qualified individuals to run for political office; and provide for greater educational opportunities for its citizens.

CURRENT POLITICAL AND CIVIC SYSTEMS

Generally, our current political and civic systems support an effective democracy, but it is the use, and at times, manipulation of these systems, which causes distrust and disillusionment among citizens, resulting in distrust in our democracy. A favorable element of Arizona's current election system is that it allows citizens to physically observe the elections process, including observing polling places, the counting of ballots and the tabulation process. The current system also encourages its citizens to serve as election volunteers. However, with the current divisiveness and vitriol, many are too afraid to participate in these volunteer roles.

Primarily, our elections systems are strong and robust, but these systems are under attack, and many of the systems' weaknesses are to be attributed to the use of the system, and not its structures. Gerrymandering, voter restrictions, and voter disenfranchisement do exist, but there have been significant efforts to promote inclusive, effective voting opportunities, such as early voting, online voter registration and weekend voting. Nonetheless, more work can be done.

The treatment of election officials, which includes serious threats and intimidation, at the local, county and state levels, has caused many veteran election officials to leave their profession, which has in turn, sowed further distrust in the electoral process.

There is an active, ongoing movement to sow distrust in elections, and to discourage individuals from voting, and while such activity is not inherent in the "systems," it may constitute an attack on these systems.

CHANGES TO CONSIDER

We should consider making the following changes to our election processes, civil structures, and democratic institutions to support an effective democracy:

- Enhanced civic education in schools, both primary and secondary schools (K-12 education).
- Open primaries, which would allow for increased voter turnout and would encourage candidates to address the entire electorate. Some suggest that we even eliminate primary elections altogether.
- Ranked choice voting, but also ensuring that the electorate is educated as to how ranked choice voting works.
- Increased pay for elected officials and public employees who work in elections.
- Making voting on election day easier, i.e., more poll workers, more polling places, longer voting hours, etc.
- Greater transparency. For example, implement clean elections at the federal level.
- Review and possibly change candidate requirements.
- Reform of the current political party system.
- Election Day State Holiday, to allow individuals to have the day off to vote on election day and encourage private sector employers to provide increased time off (preferably paid time off) from work to vote.
- Utilize emergency technologies to encourage and educate citizens about the Request to Speak process at the Arizona Legislature. The current system favors metropolitan areas such as Phoenix and Tucson and does not consider more rural areas.
- Provide substantive, but easy to read and understand, information to voters about what is on the ballot, i.e., ballot proposition descriptions, descriptions of what the elected offices substantively do and their areas of responsibility, etc.
- Increase the number of independents voting.
- Greater access to voter files.
- Voter registration reform.
- Campaign finance reform.
- Revamp the process by which independents can qualify for the ballot.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The following actions should be taken to make voting, electing and our democracy more effective:

- Arizonans should be self-empowered to become more educated and more informed about elections and voting.
- Our educational system needs to incorporate civics education into the standard curriculum in a meaningful manner.
- Provide opportunities to youth and adults to engage in civics education and civic programming.
- Pass open primaries constitutional initiative.
- Hold our elected officials accountable.
- Encourage more voter educational forums, with support from both the public and private sector.

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Strengthening Democracy and Civic Leadership in Arizona Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Commit to open and transparent civil discourse and engagement to educate and support an effective democracy with free and fair elections.
- Continue to support, create, and encourage funding of initiatives that promote equity in healthcare outcomes. Health equity = healthier and stronger democracy.
- Accept my responsibility as a leader to promote, encourage, and resource civic engagement in my sphere of influence.
- Encourage my Independent friends to participate and learn more about how they can participate.
- Identify, encourage, and support candidates for our local city council election, and provide support after they are elected.
- Educate and motivate fellow Fellows on the importance of engaging in political systems and elections reform.
- Educate and encourage my family, friends, and colleagues to participate in voting and election processes.
- Continue to host family voting parties.
- Participate in Arizona Town Hall training sessions.
- Share with and educate my network on voting, registering, primaries, and my own ballot.
- Host a "voting party" to encourage others to vote and mail their ballots.
- Continue to bring awareness to civic education and engagement in my role as a city council member.
- Treat all people with kindness and listen to understand.
- Complete my Ph.D. to bring attention to the ways constituents lobby the legislature.
- Talk to my team about AARP hosting a town hall on democracy. AARP is doing an election, voter engagement, and information campaign for 2024.
- Commit to pursuing alternative options for our election processes to encourage more informed voting by a larger percentage of the electorate.
- Leverage funding and organize funders to build and strengthen civic health in Arizona.
- Request more information and understanding when my GOP PC's say, "We're moving into Civil War", join militia, or make threats to Democrats rather than my usual just changing the subject or trying to escape.
- Continue to be engaged in my community and push for the access and inclusivity of people who are not at the table.
- Continue to have open discourse with respect and always encourage the acquisition of critical thinking skills.
- Pass the Open Primaries constitutional initiative.
- Share that Flinn-Brown and Arizona Town Hall are the best-equipped groups in the state to pursue this topic.

- Vote!
- Encourage others to vote and volunteer in every election possible.
- Look for opportunities to host community forums to educate on candidates, issues, and ballot measures.
- Help Arizona Town Hall to facilitate as many community town halls on the 2024 topic of improving democracy for Arizonans.
- Commit to promote inter-dialogue and working together to promote effective democracy, encourage education, participation, critical thinking, and inclusion.
- Share the discussion today and town hall summaries.
- Advocate for short-term improvements such as same-day voter registration and state funding to access mail early voting option for non-party.
- Lead by example to engage and empower my community to participate in the civil process at every level and every age.