ARIZONA'S VOTER CRISIS

JULY 2018

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Citizens Clean Elections Commission

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To the Citizens of Arizona:

The Arizona Citizens Clean Elections Commission is an independent, non-partisan body committed to administrating and enforcing the Clean Elections Act passed by voters in 1998. As part of its mission, the Commission is committed to ensure that voters have reliable information so they can become educated on the issues important to them, connect with the candidates and cast an informed vote.

As shown by the *Arizona's Voter Crisis* report, authored by Arizona State University's Morrison Institute for Public Policy, too many potential voters are not participating in Arizona elections. By way of example, 45 percent of registered and other voting-age individuals did not cast ballots in the last election. As a result, these eligible potential voters who do not vote often dictate the results of elections in Arizona.

To address this voter crisis, Clean Elections commissioned this report, the first in a series, to identify the reasons why only a little more than half of eligible voters actually are casting ballots in Arizona, as well as a first-of-its-kind knowledge bank of information on Arizona government to ensure that voters can vote in an informed manner.

Potential voters do not participate for a variety of reasons. As an example, one obstacle for potential voters has been the absence of a single place where they can learn how Arizona's complicated state and local government operates and what issues each office addresses. The Commission and Morrison Institute found that while many potential voters care deeply about local and state issues, this obstacle has limited voter turnout.

Lack of voter participation can lead to any number of negative consequences in a democratic republic, from increased risks of corruption to ignoring key issues that otherwise should be part of the public debate. When voters passed the Clean Elections Act, they created an independent agency whose mission is to promote participation and fight corruption in Arizona elections. This report and the Commission's ongoing work with Morrison Institute are part of making good on that commitment.

We invite you to read the report and join us at one of three town-hall style forums we will host around the state this election in response to the voter crisis. We also ask you to visit the Clean Elections website, azcleanelections.gov – the only comprehensive, voter-driven resource in Arizona. Together we can promote greater participation and ensure that all voters have the opportunity to learn about the candidates and connect with the issues that matter most to Arizonans and vote informed.

Sincerely,

Damien R. Meyer
Chair

Thomas M. Collins
Executive Director

Morrison Institute for Public Policy
Arizona State University

Arizona's Voter Crisis

July 2018

By David Daugherty and Joseph Garcia

"Government of the people, for the people, by the people, shall not perish from the Earth."
- President Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg address, Nov. 19, 1863

Arizona, like much of the nation, is in the midst of a crisis that has nothing to do with man-made dangers, natural disasters or even addiction. Our current crisis is the voter crisis.

Thus far the voter crisis has failed to capture the collective awareness required to prompt a concerted response of, say, the opioid epidemic but the threat to our civic health is no less real. If President Lincoln's words do match our actions, the potential consequences go well beyond a diminished democracy. Without an engaged electorate and educated citizenry, self-government cannot be expected to survive, let alone thrive.

This crisis didn't happen overnight. In fact, voter participation has been eroding for years. Perhaps this explains why no full alarm has been sounded, even though it could be argued that today, "voters don't determine elections, non-voters do." Such a harsh assessment of our democracy is supported by the fact that while 2.6 million votes were cast in the 2016 Arizona general election, there were 2.1 million "potential voters" who did not exercise their fundamental right. In other words, close to half (45 percent) of otherwise eligible voters sat out the election. That equation mirrors the national participation rate.

"Potential voters" are our democracy's great, untapped resource. They are individuals who are either registered to vote but often do not cast a ballot, or those U.S. citizens who are age 18 or over but do not register and therefore cannot vote. These people are our friends, our neighbors, our family members, our coworkers – and perhaps, on occasion, even ourselves.

To understand and address the crisis undermining our democracy, it's important to examine who votes today and why; who doesn't vote today and why; the impact of low voter turnout, especially in primaries; and how to get involved and learn more about the direct connection between elections, government and our daily lives.

The first step to responding to a crisis is to first admit there is a crisis. Arizona's voter crisis is no different. The next step is to address the crisis from many angles in a focused and sustained effort. As a representative government, our very democracy is in the balance.

'A Flawed Democracy'

The right to vote, the right to choose our decision-makers and to help set public policy is the very foundation of a democratic society. These essential elements are what separate democracy from all other forms of government – such as a dictatorship or oligarchy – by allowing a people to self-govern. The right for representation was the primary reason American colonists chose to stage a revolt against England in the late 18th century, a historic conflict waged to establish self-determination.

Despite the importance of voting as a staple of our democracy, over the past 2½ centuries, tens of millions of U.S. citizens who could have voted did not. Many choose not to register while others simply fail to register by the set deadline, which in Arizona's case is nearly a month before each election, thereby nullifying any last-minute decision to cast a ballot.

Consequently, our national, statewide and local leaders, legislative representatives, as well as numerous local government officials, are often elected to office by merely a sliver of those eligible to vote. Our elected officials wield great power that is disproportionate to their overall voter endorsement. Ballot propositions and initiatives, many of which help set public policy, attract even fewer voters than do candidate-driven elections.

Election and Registration Dates

2018 primary election date: Aug. 28
Voter registration deadline: July 30

2018 general election date: Nov. 6
Voter registration deadline: Oct. 9

The Economist Intelligence Unit, a research unit of The Economist magazine, annually releases its Democracy Index rankings for nations across the globe. An 8.0 to 10.0 score is deemed a "full democracy" by EIU. For the second year in a row, the United States – once the undisputed champion of democracy and a shining example to the world – is deemed a "flawed democracy," due in large part to its lack of citizen participation, including voting. The United States is tied with Italy with an overall 7.8 score, and ranks just behind South Korea in the Democracy Index.

For "functioning of government," the United States had a 7.14 score in the 2017 rankings, while "political participation" was 7.22. Political polarization and lack of voter participation – with each affecting the other – were cited as chief reasons for the United States' latest low scores.

With the United States' global ranking for democracy on the decline, the question arises: What can we do about waning citizen participation?

Where We Rank at the Ballot Box

The financial news and opinion website, 24/7 Wall St., ranked the 50 "States with the Highest (and Lowest) Voter Turnout," and Arizona came in 43rd place.

24/7 Wall St. reviewed each state's average voter turnout rate over the last four presidential election cycles. Minnesota ranked highest in the nation for voter participation with three-quarters of all eligible residents voting, while Hawaii ranked last, with only half of its eligible voters casting ballots.

Many factors were cited as affecting voter turnout, including high-profile presidential primaries such as in New Hampshire and whether races were deemed by voters as closely contested, or essentially predetermind, such as in heavily red (Republican) or blue (Democrat) states.

Ratios of adults with bachelor's degrees versus poverty rates also was a factor. As 24/7 Wall St. noted: "The level of education of state residents also appears to be a relatively strong predictor of voter turnout. While there are a number of exceptions, states with higher college attainment rates tend to have greater voter participation. Of the 20 states with the lowest voter turnout, 16 have a bachelor's attainment rate below the national share of 30.6 percent of adults." Arizonans have a bachelor's attainment rate of 27.7 percent.

By and large, Arizona is considered a "red," conservative state. According to 24/7 Wall St.: "With the exception of (Bill) Clinton in 1996, a majority of Arizona voters have preferred the Republican candidate in every presidential election since 1952. In the last four presidential elections, voters in the state preferred the Republican nominee over the Democratic candidate by at least 6.3 percentage points."

Arizona Voter Turnout Average

Rank: 43rd

Voter turnout: 58.4%

2012 Presidential delegates winner: Republican

Percent of voters with bachelor's degree: 27.7%

Percent of workers paid hourly: 55.0%

Source: 24/7 Wall St., average voter turnout rate over previous four presidential election cycles

24/7 Wall St. also noted: "Voter turnout among younger residents has improved in both Arizona and the country overall since 2000. In the Bush/Gore election, just 25.6 percent of eligible 18- to 24-year-olds in Arizona went to the polls. In the most recent election, that figure was 43.0 percent. Nationally, youth voter turnout in presidential elections has increased from 36.1 percent in 2000, to 41.2 percent in 2012."

FairVote, a nonpartisan electoral reform group, used United States Elections Project data to rank states voting turnout, and Arizona came in at 43rd. Voter turnout in Arizona's 2016 presidential election was at 56.2 percent. That's up from the 2012 presidential race, when Arizona ranked 45th in the nation with 53 percent turnout.

When viewed internationally, voter turnout in the United States trails most peers in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which has highly developed, democratic nations as its members.

According to Pew Research Center, the United States had a 55.7 percent voting-age population (VAP) turnout for the 2016 presidential election, placing the U.S. 26th out of 32 OECD nations in voter turnout – right behind the recent elections of Estonia (2015) but just ahead of Luxembourg (2013). There are, of course, many differences among nations in terms of registration and voting itself (including compulsory-voting laws abroad, even though such laws are seldom enforced). But the VAP turnout shows that upwards of half of the United States eligible voters are not voting, despite its international reputation for being a top democracy.

As the Pew Research Center report notes: "No matter how they're measured, U.S. turnout rates have been

fairly consistent over the past several decades, despite some election-to-election variation. Since 1976, voting-age turnout has remained within an 8.5-percentage-point range - from just under 50 percent in 1996, when Bill Clinton was re-elected, to just over 58 percent in 2008, when Barack Obama won the White House. However, turnout varies considerably among different racial, ethnic and age groups."

Pew noted that a record 137.5 million Americans voted in the 2016 presidential election, with overall voter turnout - defined as the share of adult U.S. citizens who cast ballots - at 61.4 percent. That's up a bit from 2012 (60 percent), but below 2008 (63.6 percent) and 2004 (63.8 percent) of people who said they voted, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Although there were no major changes in the overall percentage of people who said they voted in the 2016 election, Pew cited some noteworthy facts regarding race and generational voter turnout:

- Whites made up 73.3 percent of voters, virtually unchanged from 2012 (73.7 percent).
- Black voter turnout declined (for the first time in 20 years in a presidential election), falling to 59.6 percent after a record-high 66.6 percent in 2012.
- Latino voter turnout remained about the same at 47.6 percent, compared with 48 percent in 2012.
- Millennials (those ages 18 to 35 in 2016) had a 49.4 percent voter turnout rate, up from 46.4 percent in 2012 (when they were ages 18 to 31).
- Generation X (those ages 36 to 51 in 2016) had a 62.6 percent turnout, up from 61 percent in 2012.
- Baby Boomers (those ages 52 to 70) had a 68.7 percent turnout, about the same as 2012 (68.9 percent).
- Silent and Greatest generations (those ages 71 and older) had a 70.1 percent turnout, also about the same as in 2012 (71.8 percent).

In summary, while most age and racial groups turned out in similar percentages as previous elections, Blacks did not show up in large numbers as the previous election, while Millennials had a slight uptick in turnout, suggesting they may be a factor at the ballot box going forward.

Who Votes and Who Doesn't

Voting by the Numbers

Presidential elections traditionally attract many more voters to the polls than off-year elections. However, during the 2016 general election, one quarter of registered voters in Arizona did not to vote even though it was one of the most contentious elections in recent memory.

Table 1 shows Arizona voter turnout over the past two decades among registered voters for the general and primary elections.

The table underlines two salient points:

First, as the table illustrates, voter turnout during presidential election years (every four years, with 2016 being the most recent example) is significantly higher than "off-year" elections (elections that do not include a presidential race, with 2014 the latest example). During a typical presidential election year, voter turnout among Arizona registered voters in the general election is in the mid-70 percent range, while turnout for non-presidential elections is between 46 percent and 60 percent.

Second, turnout for primary elections is significantly smaller than turnout for general elections. Between 20 percent and 30 percent of voters participate in primary elections in Arizona.

This is important because primary elections often determine who will be representing voters in Congress and in state legislatures, because many districts predominately favoring one political party over the other, which can make the general election a mere formality.

Table 1. Arizona Voter Turnout by Year

(Among Registered Voters)		
Year	**General Election**	**Primary Election**
2016	74.17%	29.10%
2014	47.52%	27.02%
2012	74.36%	28.09%
2010	55.65%	30.09%
2008	77.69%	22.80%
2006	60.47%	23.07%
2004	77.10%	24.71%
2002	56.33%	25.25%
2000	71.76%	23.84%
1998	45.82%	19.66%

Source: Arizona Secretary of State's office, table compiled by Morrison Institute for Public Policy, ASU

Voting Participation by Party/No Party

Actual turnout figures in Arizona (the total number of people who vote) in the 2016 primary and general elections show stark contrasts. For example, as Table 2 indicates, voter turnout differs markedly by political party/political affiliation.

Table 2. Number of People Who Voted in the 2016 Elections

2016 Elections	Independent /PND	Democrat	Republican	Total
Voted in 2016 Primary Election ONLY	2,357	6,096	7,157	**15,610**
Voted in 2016 General Election ONLY	620,773	501,677	499,301	**1,621,751**
Voted in BOTH Primary and General	115,303	323,714	511,951	**950,968**
Did not vote in either Primary or General	457,592	229,021	191,417	**878,030**
Total	**1,196,025**	**1,060,508**	**1,209,826**	**3,466,359**

Source: Arizona Secretary of State's office, table compiled by Morrison Institute for Public Policy, ASU

Historically, Republicans are more likely to vote than Democrats, particularly in primary elections. In 2016, for example, 519,108 Republicans voted in the Arizona primary election compared with 329,810 Democrats, a difference of 189,298 voters. Similarly, while 825,391 Democrats voted in the 2016 general election, 1,011,252 Republicans did so, a difference of 185,861 voters. So, while the actual number of registered Democrats (1,060,508) is only 149,318 fewer than the number of registered Republicans (1,209,826), Republican voters are more likely to cast their ballot, which gives them an added advantage in elections.

Those who are not affiliated with either of the major parties – sometimes identified as independents or PND (Party Not Designated) – are least likely to vote. While there were nearly as many independents as registered Republicans during the 2016 election, independent voter turnout was significantly lower than for either major party. Nearly four in 10 registered independents, or 38.3 percent, did not cast a ballot in the 2016 Arizona election, compared with 21.6 percent of registered Democrats and 15.8 percent of registered Republicans.

There are many reasons independents vote in such low numbers including the fact there is no organized political party supporting independent voters and, consequently, no common platform defining positions on issues and candidates. As a result, independents do not vote as a bloc as do Republicans and Democrats.

There also is no get-out-the-vote effort in Arizona by an independent party targeting independents. In addition, as noted in research interviews in the Morrison Institute for Public Policy 2015 report, *Who Is Arizona's Independent Voter?*, many independents did not know they are eligible to vote in all primaries (the Party Presidential Preference Primary being the lone exception). Other independents said that by not belonging to an organized political party, they do not feel comfortable voting in primaries with party-specific ballots (either Republican or Democratic candidates), so they choose to wait for the general election, even though many outcomes essentially are determined in the primary election.

Table 3 shows the percentages of voters by political party who voted in the primary election, the general election, both, or did not vote. As the percentages clearly indicate, independents are far less likely to vote than Democrats or Republicans. Furthermore, a significantly higher percentage of Republicans voted in the primary election (42.9 percent) than either Democrats (31.1 percent) or independents (9.8 percent).

Table 3. Percent of People Who Voted in the 2016 Elections by Party Registration

2016 Elections	Independent /PND	Democrat	Republican	Total
Voted in 2016 Primary Election ONLY	0.2%	0.6%	0.6%	**0.5%**
Voted in 2016 General Election ONLY	51.9%	47.3%	41.3%	**46.8%**
Voted in BOTH Primary and General	9.6%	30.5%	42.3%	**27.4%**
Did not vote in either Primary or General	38.3%	21.6%	15.8%	**25.3%**

Source: Arizona Secretary of State's office, table compiled by Morrison Institute for Public Policy, ASU

Voting Participation by Age

Table 4 shows that age plays a major factor in voter participation. The median age of Arizona's 5.3 million adults (those 18 years of age and older) is 47. In other words, half adults are age 46 or younger and half are age 47 or older. Voters, particularly Republicans, are significantly older (median age is 56) than the overall adult population, a startling contrast when compared to the overall statewide median adult age (47).

Table 4. Median Age of Arizona Voters in 2016 Elections by Party Registration

2016 Elections	Independent /PND	Democrat	Republican	Total
Voted in 2016 Primary Election ONLY	50	56	58	**56**
Voted in 2016 General Election ONLY	47	47	50	**48**
Voted in BOTH Primary and General	64	64	65	**64**
Did not vote in either Primary or General	37	41	56	**39**
Total	**45**	**52**	**56**	**51**

Source: Arizona Secretary of State's office, table compiled by Morrison Institute for Public Policy, ASU

The median age of all registered voters in Arizona is 51. Among parties, it's 56 for Republicans, 52 for Democrats and 45 for independents. Of particular note is the fact that the median age of those who voted in both the primary and general elections in 2016 is 64. That means half of those who voted in both elections (950,968 Arizona voters) were 64 years of age or older. In short, that means Arizona's low voter turnout is largely due to low turnout among the youngest adults.

Historically, younger people don't vote in high numbers. For many older adults, voting is an engrained behavior that began when they first turned 18. For many of today's young adults, voting is the exception, not the rule.

Composition of Voters by Party

Members of both major political parties, as well as those defining themselves or defined as independents, differ in their composition. Table 5 identifies some of these demographic differences. This includes the fact that Republicans are older than Democrats and much older than independents. In fact, only 19 percent of registered Republicans are 40 or younger, compared with 29 percent of Democrats and 33 percent of independents.

Further, 86 percent of Republicans are non-Latino White, compared with 64 percent of Democrats and 76 percent of independents.

Arizona's demographics are changing, and the Latino population is increasing dramatically compared with the non-Latino White population. A 2012 report by the Morrison Institute Latino Public Policy Center, titled

Arizona's Emerging Latino Voter, used population projections to show changes in Arizona's electorate by 2030, due to the large number of young Latinos to turn 18 by that time.

The Morrison Institute projection factors in traditionally low voter registration and low voter turnout among Latinos – but also includes the fact that Latinos are a growing and younger population. Because virtually all young Latinos in Arizona are U.S. citizens, they will become eligible to vote at age 18, with Arizona to expect a sea change to its political landscape in the near future as a result of the changing demographics.

As the report notes: There will be "a 178 percent increase in the number of Latino citizens aged 20 and older from 2010 to 2030. In contrast, the number of adult non-Latino Arizona citizens is expected to increase by only 42 percent during this period." Historically, Latinos have been more likely to be registered as Democrats (19 percent of Arizona Democrats are Latino, compared with 11 percent of independents and just 4 percent of registered Republicans).

Table 5. Demographic Breakdown by Political Party Registration in Arizona

2016 Elections	Independent /PND	Democrat	Republican
Age			
Under 40	33%	29%	19%
40-59	26%	31%	29%
60+	38%	39%	50%
Education			
High school graduate or less	15%	17%	12%
Some post HS education/training	30%	25%	30%
4 year college graduate (only)	35%	32%	39%
Post grad education/degree	20%	25%	19%
Ethnicity			
African-American	2%	6%	1%
White/Caucasian	76%	64%	86%
Hispanic/Latino	11%	19%	4%
Native American	1%	3%	1%

Source: Arizona's Independent Voter, Morrison Institute for Public Policy, ASU

Millennials vs. Baby Boomers

Age is a critical issue when addressing voting and voter turnout – maybe *the* critical issue. As noted, older adults are much more likely to vote than younger adults. But to what extent?

Researchers are fond of dividing the population into "generations" – 15- to 18-year age spans. The two generations most often cited are Baby Boomers and Millennials because they offer important insights into Arizonans' voting patterns and provide a peek into Arizona's future. Baby Boomers, (those born during the 18 years immediately following the end of the World War II), were between 54 and 70 years of age during the 2016 election cycle. Millennials, (born between 1981 and 1996) are two generations younger than Baby Boomers and often are the children of Baby Boomers.

As Table 6 illustrates, Arizona had more Millennials living in the state during the 2016 election than Baby Boomers – approximately 170,000 more. Based on their incidence in Arizona's adult population (those 18 years of age and older), Millennials represented 32 percent of the adult population during the 2016 election, while Baby Boomers represented 29 percent. Yet, there were 273,560 more Baby Boomers registered to vote than Millennials (1,141,082 Baby Boomers compared with 867,522 Millennials). That translates into Millennials representing only 25 percent of registered voters, compared with Baby Boomers at 33 percent.

Table 6. Voter Registration and Turnout by Generation

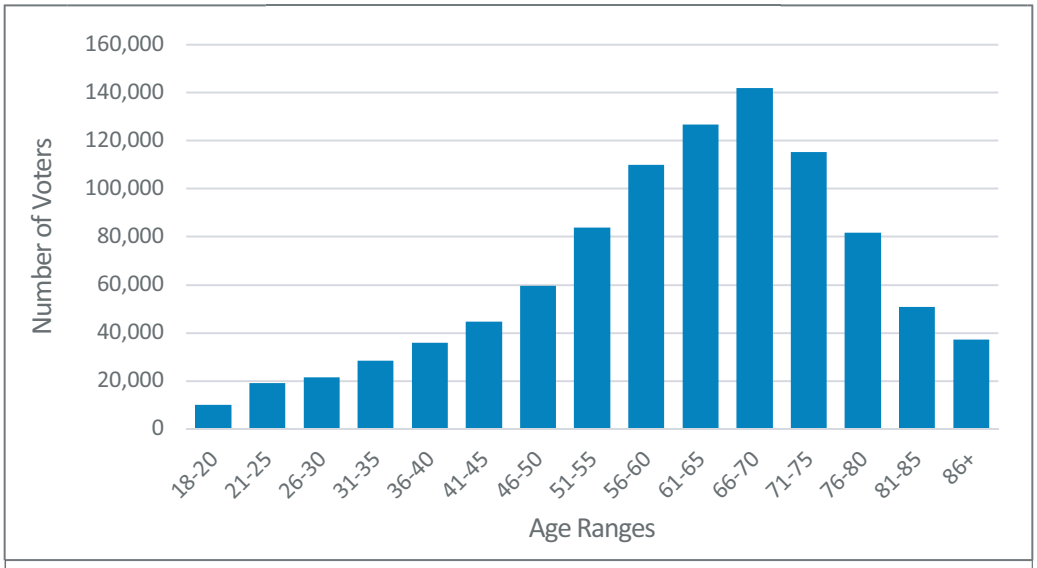
	Millennials	Boomers	Others	Total
Population	1,709,056	1,537,973	2,055,722	5,302,751
Non-registered voting age population	841,534 49%	396,891 26%	597,967 29%	1,836,392 35%
Registered Voters	867,522 51%	1,141,082 74%	1,457,755 71%	3,466,359 65%
Registered, but didn't vote	364,006 21%	180,394 12%	333,630 16%	878,030 17%
Voted in Both Primary and General	69,449 4%	448,284 29%	438,235 21%	950,968 18%
Voted in 2016 Primary Only	3,279 0.2%	5,204 0.3%	7,127 0.3%	15,610 0.3%
Voted in 2016 General Only	430,788 25%	512,200 33%	678,763 33%	1,621,751 31%
All Votes	503,516	960,688	1,124,125	2,588,329

Source: Arizona Secretary of State's office, table compiled by Morrison Institute for Public Policy, ASU

The Millennial voice becomes even smaller when calculating the percentage of Millennials and percentage of Baby Boomers who not only are registered to vote but who actually vote. In the 2016 election, only 19 percent of votes cast were by Millennials, while 37 percent were cast by Baby Boomers. Only 29 percent of all Millennials living in Arizona during the 2016 election voted, compared with 62 percent of Baby Boomers.

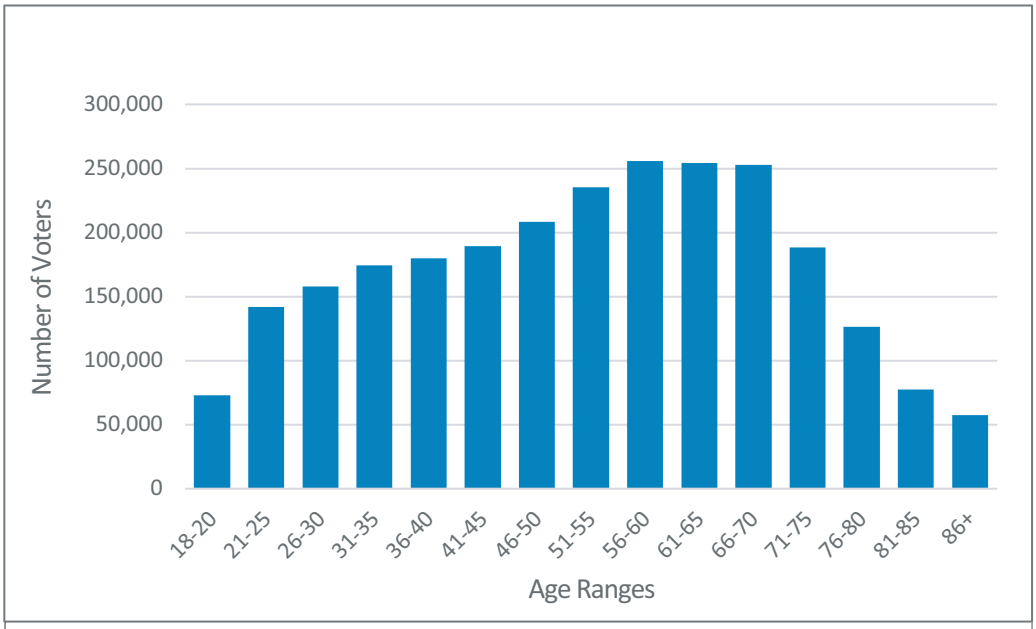
Graphs 1 and 2 show the actual number of registered Arizona voters who voted in the 2016 primary and general elections, broken down by age. While the number of voters who voted in the primary election age 50 and younger is very low, it increases markedly for those 56 to 70 years of age. The general election graph shows a gradual increase in voting as age increases (with predictable declines after age 70).

Graph 1. Voter Age in 2016 Primary Election



Source: Arizona Secretary of State's office, table compiled by Morrison Institute for Public Policy, ASU

Graph 2. Voter Age in 2016 General Election



Source: Arizona Secretary of State's office, table compiled by Morrison Institute for Public Policy, ASU

National Research Reflects Arizona Trends

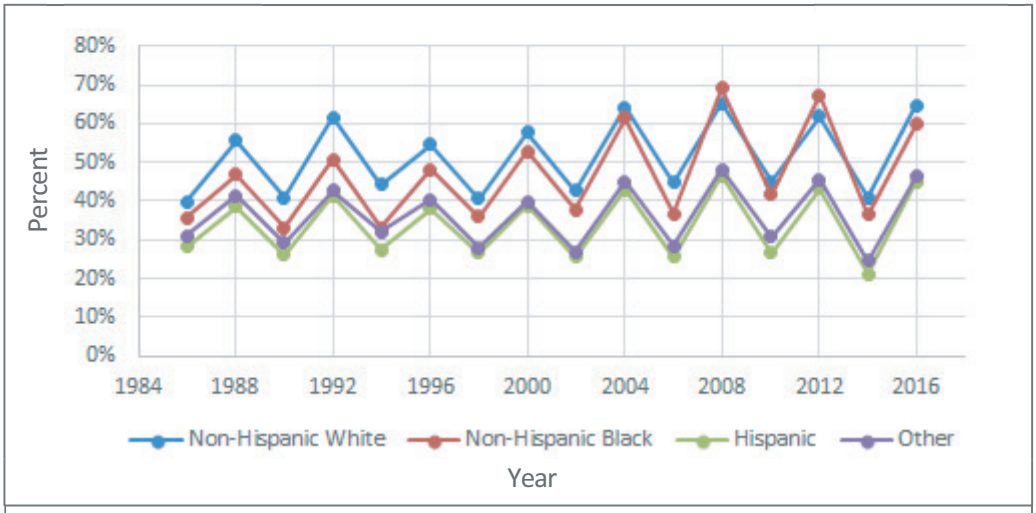
The United States Elections Project is a non-profit, non-partisan information source for the United States electoral system and headed by Michael P. McDonald, associate professor of political science at the University of Florida. Its stated mission is to provide timely and accurate election statistics, electoral laws, research reports and other useful information regarding the United States electoral system to increase voter education and voter participation.

The Elections Project used data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey to create a comprehensive snapshot of national voter participation among various demographic groups between 1984 and 2016.

The findings, shown below, reinforce voter turnout patterns seen in Arizona, including the glaring differences by race/ethnicity; non-Hispanic Whites as a decreasing share of the voting public; the oft-cited voting disparity by age; and the large voter turnout differences by educational attainment.

As Graph 3 indicates, voting among most ethnic groups has increased slightly since 1984 with voter turnout among non-Hispanic Blacks and Whites showing the largest increase. However, the turnout pattern has stayed constant.

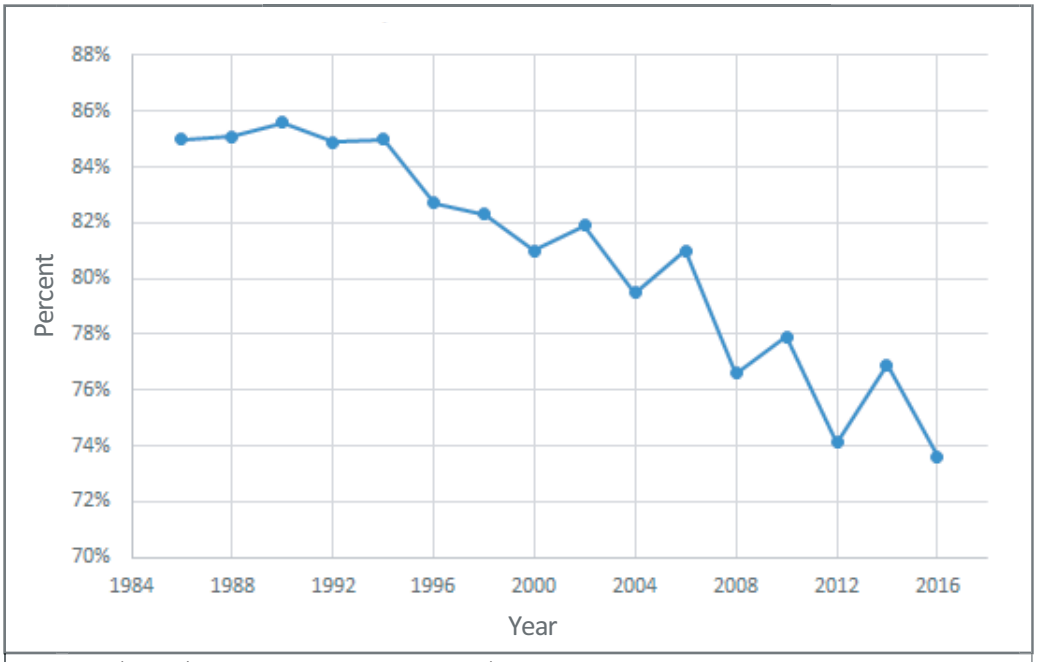
Graph 3. Citizen Voting-Age Population Turnout by Race and Ethnicity



Source: United States Election Project using U.S. Census Bureau data

Graph 4 shows the decreasing proportion of non-Hispanic Whites within the electorate.

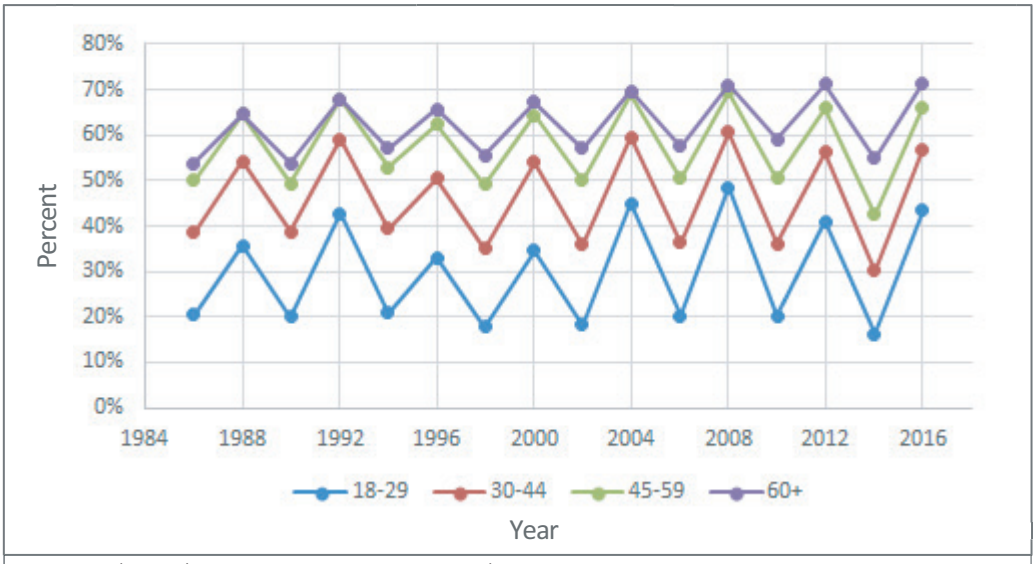
Graph 4. Non-Hispanic White Share of Electorate



Source: United States Election Project using U.S. Census Bureau data

Graph 5 shows voter patterns by age, indicating that voter turnout increases markedly by age.

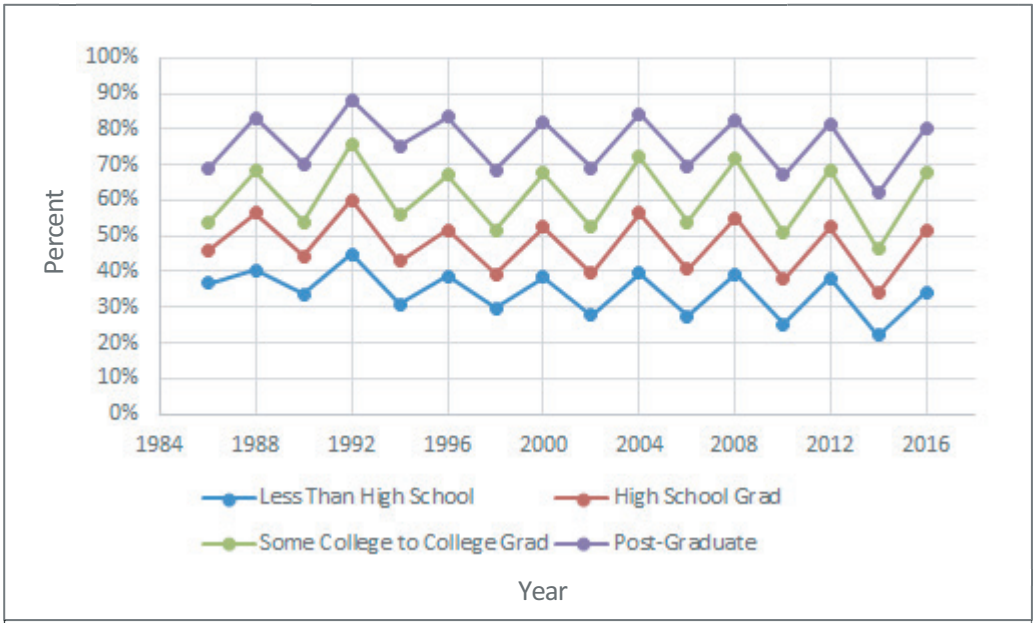
Graph 5. Voter Turnout by Age



Source: United States Election Project using U.S. Census Bureau data

As Graph 6 indicates, incidence of voting increases dramatically as educational attainment increases.

Graph 6. Citizen Voting-Age Population Turnout Rates by Education



Source: United States Election Project using U.S. Census Bureau data

Demos Project

Demos is a New York-based public policy organization that seeks to improve voter participation among underrepresented groups via research, advocacy, litigation and communications, and they have found similar results.

According to Demos, as Graph 7 indicates, "In 2014, turnout among non-Hispanic Whites was 46 percent, compared with 40 percent among Blacks, 27 percent among Asians and 27 percent among Latinos. Between the 2010 and 2014 general election, White turnout dropped by 6 percent. Black turnout dropped by 9 percent, and Asian and Latino turnout by 12 percent and 14 percent, respectively."

Not only does low voter turnout weaken if not endanger the democratic process, but the fact that turnout varies markedly from demographic group to demographic group adds to the sometimes lack of proportional representation of some voter groups.

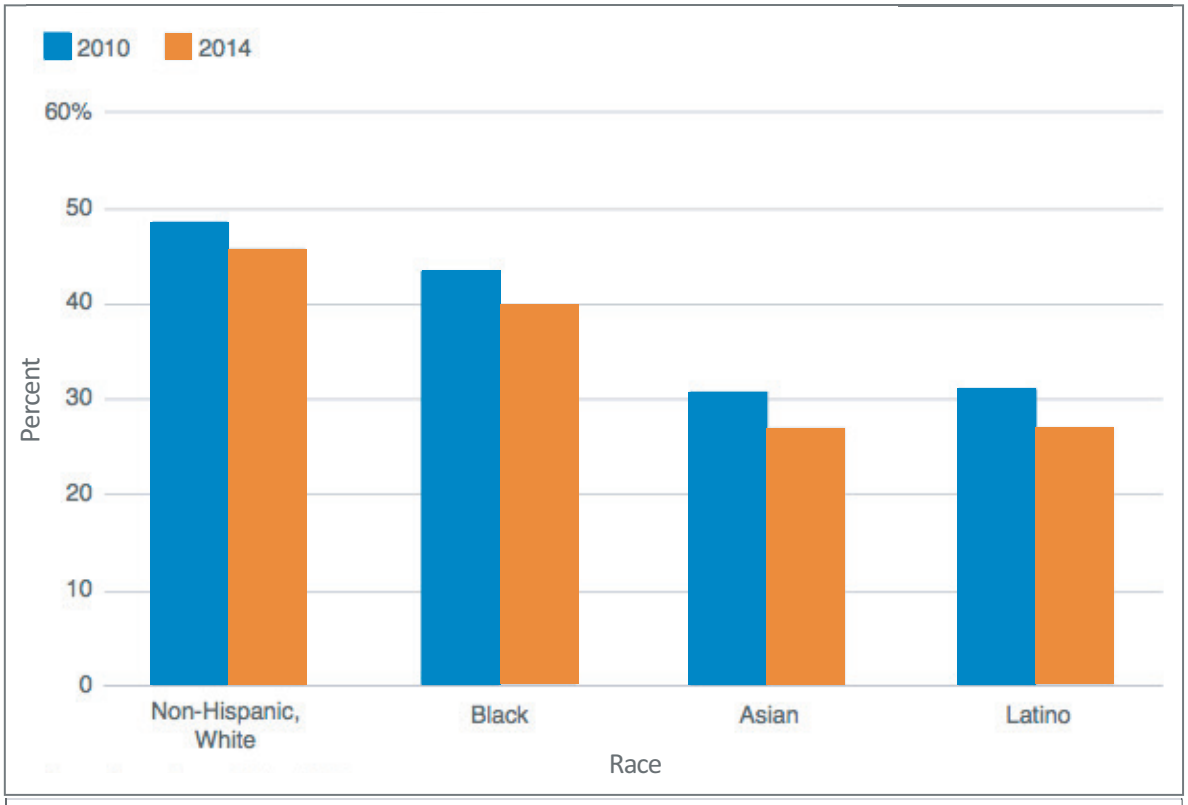
As Graph 8 shows, Demos also found that "voter turnout dropped by 47 percent among the lowest-income bracket between the 2012 presidential election year and the 2014

'Voters are not like nonvoters'

"In 2014, just 41.9 percent of the voting-age citizen population of the United States voted. But the people who voted are not only in the minority, they form an unrepresentative minority. Millions of Americans are too young to vote. Others are disenfranchised felons, unable to vote for health reasons, missed registration deadlines, stuck at work, or dissuaded by voter ID laws. In many salient ways, voters are not like nonvoters: voters are richer, whiter, and older than other Americans."

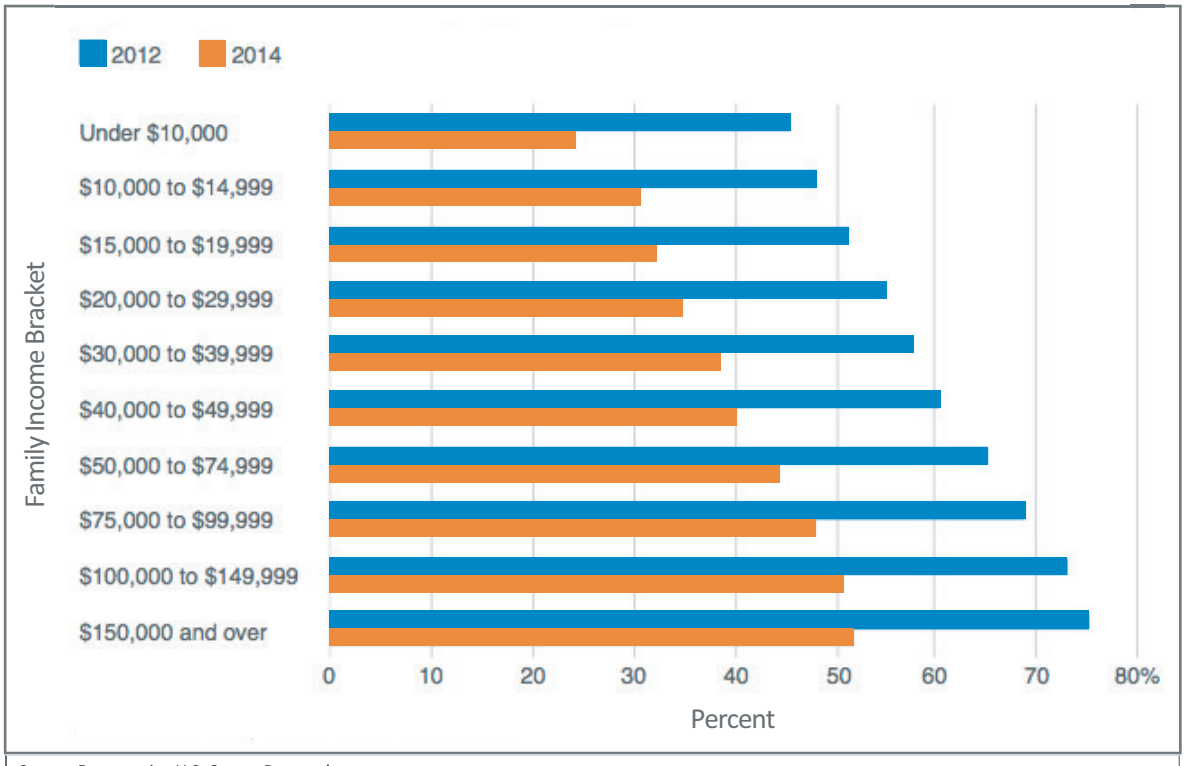
-- Sean McElwee,
The Atlantic

Graph 7. Percent Voting in the General Election, By Race, 2010 and 2014



Source: Demos using U.S. Census Bureau data

Graph 8. Percent Voting in the General Election, By Family Income Bracket, 2012 and 2014



Source: Demos using U.S. Census Bureau data

non-presidential election, but by only 31 percent among the highest income bracket. While 52 percent of those earning above $150,000 voted, only 1 in 4 of those earning less than $10,000 did. Class gaps are magnified by age gaps. Among 18-24 year olds earning less than $30,000 turnout was 12 percent in 2014, but among those earning more than $150,000 and older than 65, the turnout rate was more than five times higher, at 65 percent."

Why Don't More People Vote?

Clearly age, ethnicity/race, income and educational attainment are major factors determining voter turnout. So, why do so many Arizona citizens – and citizens of every state, for that matter – not exercise their right to select their governmental representatives? Why do they treat this hard-fought privilege with either aloofness or, in some cases, outright disdain?

As noted, presidential election years attract significantly more voters than do local, primary and general elections during "off-years." In April 2017, the Arizona Clean Elections Commission hired Phoenix-based advertising agency Riester to conduct focus groups with 73 Arizona voters living in Flagstaff, Tucson and Phoenix. Riester asked voters about their voting attitudes, behaviors and tried to determine what factors make them less likely to vote in local and non-presidential elections.

"Most participants recognized and acknowledged the importance and significance of local elections to their everyday life and community," according to the Riester's report to the Commission. "While some participants felt local elections were less impactful than statewide and national elections, most agreed with other participants that 'local matters' when the conversation progressed. Even so, few mentioned following local elections at all. Participants all felt that you had to dedicate time to search for information for local versus presidential elections where information is 'in front of your face' all the time. Among those who follow local elections, interest is primarily issue and topic driven, rather than candidate driven."

The following comments from focus group participants underline one critical difference between local/primary elections compared with general elections: Local and primary elections do not attract the extensive mass media coverage and attention as a general election attracts. Consequently, voters become less engaged in local and primary elections than they do for general elections. Voter turnout suffers dramatically for these seemingly "second-tier" elections, as focus groups participants noted:

> "Smaller elections are maybe important but you don't hear about them quite as often."

> "You have to seek out the information and once you go looking it's a lot harder to find."

Primary Elections

According to the Arizona Secretary of State's office, in the 2016 primary election, only 990,000 of Arizona's 4.7 million potential voters (eligible voters of both the registered and non-registered variety) cast a ballot. That equates to 21 percent - or only one in five Arizona eligible voters helped select the candidates for the general election. And, since primary voters are restricted to voting only for candidates in their designated political party, only about 10 percent of those eligible to vote (470,000 people) selected the candidates for the general election in each political party.

In 2016, 35 percent of registered Arizona voters were Republicans, 34 percent were not affiliated with any political party (sometimes referred to as independents), and 30 percent were registered Democrats. A handful – less than 1 percent – was registered with either the Green or Libertarian Party.

Ballot Measure Impact

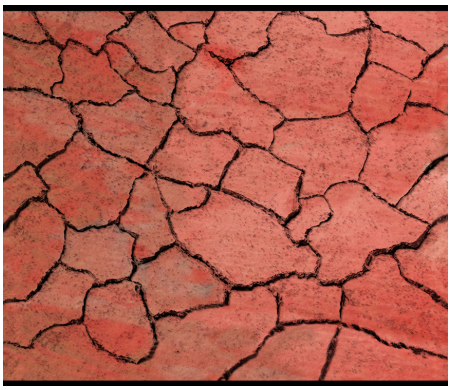
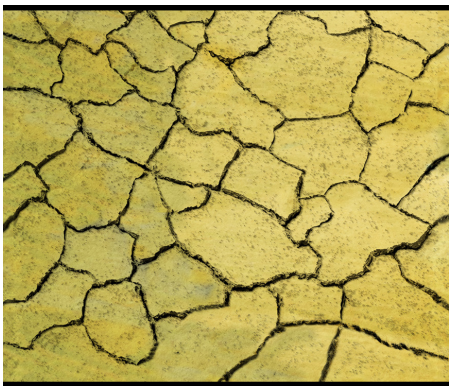
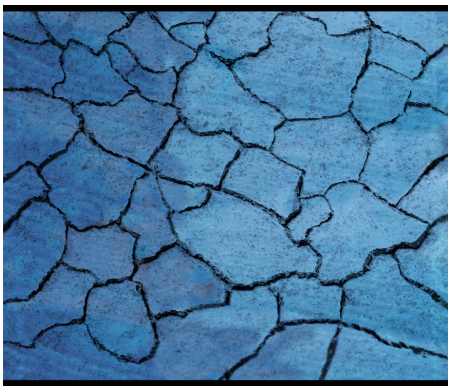
In addition to low voter turnout in primary and general elections, there are even fewer votes cast for ballot propositions and initiatives. Even among those who vote, many do not prepare themselves adequately prior to Election Day on how they will vote on propositions and initiatives, which often are complex, far-reaching and long-lasting to permanent policy. Even among those who are thoughtful enough to try to understand the initiatives and propositions prior to voting, many find the measures so complex and dense that it is difficult to know what exactly they are voting for, what the outcome of a particular vote will entail and, oftentimes, the inability to determine the result of a "yes" or "no" vote.

The fact is, the "average" voter cannot be expected to fully understand complex public policy issues without doing extensive research. Consequently, many voters choose not to vote on a proposition/initiative or ask the opinion of a more knowledgeable friend or colleague about which way they should vote. Either way, the voting process for a direct democracy is diminished.

Even voters see a need for significant improvement in the way initiatives and propositions are presented to voters. The following conclusions are based on a study conducted by Morrison Institute for Public Policy with a representative sample of Arizona voters (1,203 interviews):

- 86 percent agree with the statement, "More nonbiased, nonpartisan analysis of ballot measures should be provided from fellow voters who have studied the propositions and can offer both pros and cons written in everyday language."
- 84 percent agree that, "Too much information regarding ballot propositions comes from campaign advertising from groups who stand to gain something from the outcome of the vote."
- 70 percent agree that, "Initiatives on the ballot are often too complicated and confusing for voters to understand their long-term implications."

- 75 percent of voters believe that, "Citizen initiatives – initiatives placed on the ballot by citizens who have collected the required number of signatures – strengthen our democracy."
- 71 percent of voters agree with the statement, "When I'm deciding how to vote on statewide ballot initiatives, it is often difficult to find credible, unbiased information."

Corruption, Erosion or Corrosion?

The voter crisis manifests itself in many forms: voter apathy, lack of voter engagement, voter anger, and voter ignorance. The result of this apathy is a minority of citizens elect candidates, and initiatives and propositions are approved or rejected based on voters' vague understanding of the issue or a reluctance to even weigh in.

In the focus groups conducted by Riester for the Citizens Clean Elections Commission, the following reasons were identified as impacts on voting decisions, commitment to vote and the actual follow-through to vote:

- Some voters are emotionally disconnected to the responsibility or privilege of voting - it lacks the reward component.
- Lack of sufficient media coverage of and public attention to local elections.
- The complexity of issues relative to the voters' life and little information on how it affects "me."
- Lack of time to research candidates and issues.
- Negativity surrounding election coverage.
- Low level of trust, no faith in the system's functionality.
- Lack of candidate options or people are unable to identify with the candidates.
- Lack of understanding of the issue or the candidates' positions.

Researchers from Riester concluded: "Attitudes about voting were varied among non-voters. Some of the focus group participants said voting is important but the candidates were not desirable enough to vote, while others expressed sentiments that they are just one person and their vote doesn't matter."

Among focus group participants, the top reasons for abstaining include:

- Dislike/distrust of either candidates and/or election campaigns.
- Not enough information about candidates to make a decision.
- "My vote won't matter anyway."

- Too busy.
- Lack of trust in the system.

Specific comments from the focus group participants include:

"So much negativity, who do you vote for?"

"It would be important if you trusted the system."

"It doesn't matter. Too many people, our vote doesn't count."

These focus group responses are consistent with the findings of Professors Daniel Stockmeyer, Lyle Scruggs, and then-doctoral candidate Berndette LaMontagne in their 2012 paper *Bribes and Ballots: The Impact of Corruption on Voter Turnout in Democracies*. The paper, published in the International Science Review, concluded that corruption has both direct and indirect consequences for voter turnout. Directly, "citizens could become frustrated with a corrupt political establishment, and, even more detrimentally, lose trust in their political representative(s)." But "corruption might be one explanation for why democracies have experienced declining voter turnout during the past 30 years or so … (as corruption) has increasingly become the focus of media and public attention during the past 20 or 30 years."

Independents, are much less likely to vote in either the primary or general elections. In the report *Gamechangers?*, Morrison Institute asked independent voters why they didn't vote in the previous election. A few examples of their responses are:

- Didn't know they could vote in the state primaries.
- Felt that they shouldn't vote in the state primaries if they don't belong to that party.
- Takes so much time to research, so they only vote in the general election, which they view as more important.
- Don't like the options, so don't vote at all.

Clearly, there are myriad reasons registered voters and "potential" voters choose not to vote. Data from a 2015 Morrison Institute survey list reasons non-voters gave for failing to vote in the 2014 primary and/or general election (Table 7).

Table 7. Why People Say They Don't Vote

2016 Elections	Primary	General
No time/too busy	21%	28%
Didn't want to	13%	10%
Out of town	10%	11%
Forgot	9%	8%
Not registered	7%	7%
Didn't like candidates	4%	4%
Didn't know I could vote	4%	
Didn't know how to vote	2%	
Other	29%	31%

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, ASU, poll of Arizona adult residents

Making the Connection

The incidence on non-voting is well documented. Those least likely to register and cast a vote are easily identifiable.

The voting patterns of Millennials in Arizona's 2016 general election (30 percent of those eligible to vote, including those registered and not registered voted in the election) was less than one-half of the 62 percent voting among Baby Boomers. Unless a concerted effort is put forth voting is likely to continue to decline.

What then, can we do as a state and as a nation to build up our voter base as more older Americans are passing away?

Voters - especially younger voters - must be convinced that their vote counts and that taking an active role in choosing their representatives and determining public policy is not only their right but, more importantly, their duty. In essence, they need to see the connection between government and themselves.

This is not a new idea. There have been numerous efforts to register non-registered eligible adults and to try to get registered voters to the polls. While there have been some successes, it is clear that much still needs to be done, particularly among young adults, the less well-educated and the poor – often the very populations that most need representation in government.

That is not to say that voting behavior among older adults, the well-educated and the affluent is perfect. While their voting record is much better than their less affluent, less well-educated and younger counterparts, it is still important to communicate the need for them to vote as well.

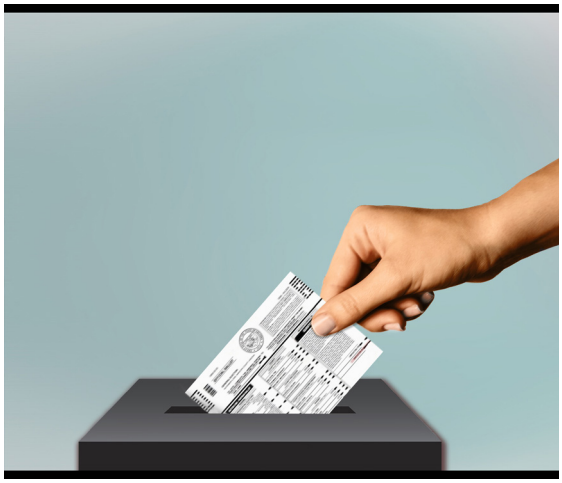
As this report illustrates, there is a key disconnect between voters and non-voters: available information. For example, voters and non-voters may say they are more interested in state and local issues, yet too few actually vote in such elections - even though these races usually have the most direct effect on state and local issues.

Voters also need to better prepare themselves to vote. They need to understand the positions candidates take on issues, so they can elect a candidate who best represents their own ideals and values; and they need to have a better understanding of the propositions and initiatives that appear on the ballot.
This will take time, work and continued effort. At this time, too few voters are willing to make that effort and thus far, too few institutions have been willing to commit resources to address that challenge full force.

But there have been a few in-roads in civics education for younger people, including Governor Doug Ducey's first-in-the-nation civics examination, which requires high school students to correctly answer at least 60 out of 100 questions on an exam identical to the civics component of the naturalization test used by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; and 2018 legislation sponsored by state Rep. Paul Boyer, R-Dist. 20, which awards graduating seniors who have attained "a high level of proficiency in civics" a State Seal of Civics Literacy on their diploma.

Still, too many potential voters today feel ignored or forgotten. Many also feel inadequate, ignorant, overwhelmed and embarrassed by their lack of knowledge on election matters, so they outwardly dismiss elections as something unworthy or unnecessary. The truth is, many potential voters don't know where to look for credible and nonpartisan voter information. In fact, many don't know how or where to even start.

Education is the Key



As a democracy, we cannot be shackled by apathy. We must unlock our full potential, and voter education is the key.

If potential voters were able to initially form and then build upon a fresh foundation of knowledge, perhaps their understanding, appreciation and participation in voting would improve. For example, if a voter understands the Arizona Corporation Commission's (ACC) role and responsibilities, including decisions that directly impact monthly electric bills and choice of energy sources, he or she could be more inclined to learn about ACC candidates on the ballot, their qualifications and stances on key issues and, presumably, vote. The same theory can be applied to issues related to education, family care, taxation, transportation, workplace and social policies. It's also important to understand the different levels of jurisdiction: national, state and local. For example: What's the difference between the U.S. Senate and Arizona Senate? What's the difference between the House and the Senate? What does the state Treasurer do?

What Morrison Institute is Already Doing

To help answer these questions, Morrison Institute will offer three interrelated briefing papers, including this one, and two more between now and Arizona's next general election in November:

1. *Arizona's Voter Crisis*, which examines voter participation trends and the present strain on our representative democracy, as well as explaining some of the reasons that potential voters choose not to vote.
2. *Arizona Voter Engagement*, which will list various groups' efforts and contact information to get more people to become engaged politically and vote.
3. *Arizona Primary Elections*: Primarily Forgotten, a look at often-ignored primary elections in terms of elections being decided de facto before the general election.

Citizens Clean Elections and Morrison Institute will also hold three "town hall-style" meetings around the state to examine and discuss regional challenges and solutions in improving voter turnout. Local elected officials, voters and "potential voters" will be invited to participate in this effort.

As part of the statewide voter education project, Morrison Institute also provided Arizona Citizens Clean Elections with digestible and easy-to-read information regarding responsibilities and qualifications of each elected office.

The information is presented on three levels: basic, mid and advanced. Such neutral, nonpartisan information will help frequent, infrequent and "potential" voters make the connection between how government works and why it's important to help shape that government, and at the same time perhaps offer frequent voters additional knowledge. After all, it's important not only that more people vote but also that more people know for what and for whom they're voting.

In 2016, Morrison Institute for Public Policy and Arizona State University launched a first-in-the-nation instructional program for new lawmakers. The award-winning Arizona Legislative Academy, under its director and former Arizona House Speaker Andy Tobin, provided nonpartisan data, expert analysis and insightful information on issues ranging from changing demographics to economic development; future water supplies to education; and the state constitution to health care and human services.

Although it is much more detailed than the three levels of general voter information provided to Clean Elections, the Legislative Academy program presented to new lawmakers in January 2017 is available to the public at MorrisonInstitute.asu.edu. Even the most-engaged voter will find new information here that underscores the integral connection between government and citizens in terms of roles, responsibilities, challenges, opportunities and impact.

Arizona Citizens Clean Elections and Morrison Institute believe a somewhat-similar Citizens Voter Academy can help bridge the knowledge and confidence gap between voters and nonvoters via easily accessible information, preparing all citizens to cast an informed ballot in federal, state and local elections.

Of course Arizona's voting crisis cannot be solved in a single election cycle - or even a couple of election cycles. But it can be changed one potential or infrequent voter at a time in terms of registration, education, engagement and execution.

The solution to Arizona's voter crisis is literally in our hands.

It's called the ballot.

> *"Nobody will ever deprive the American people of the right to vote except the American people themselves – and the only way they could do that is by not voting at all. The continuing health and vigor of our democratic system depends on the public spirit and devotion of its citizens which find expression in the ballot box."*
>
> - President Franklin D. Roosevelt, White House radio address, Oct. 5, 1944

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