



Lessons from the States: Building Trust in Arizona Elections

State Election Series 1 of 3

By Chris McIsaac and Bill Gates

No two states approach election administration the same way, and those differences provide extensive opportunities for states to learn from each other by observing the strengths and weaknesses of various election policies.

Executive Summary

The American election system is highly decentralized and relies on state and local governments to set policy and administer elections. This structure results in significant variation in how different jurisdictions run elections, creating opportunities for states to learn from each other’s successes, challenges, and best practices. To explore these differences and promote cross-state learning, we have developed a policy study series focused on the unique blend of election policies in place in three swing states that have played pivotal roles in recent federal elections: Arizona, Georgia, and Pennsylvania.

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This first paper in the series focuses on Arizona and three aspects of the state's voting system that are especially instructive:

- 1. Citizenship verification.** Arizona is one of only two states that require documentation to establish U.S. citizenship when registering to vote in state and local elections, and the state's approach to citizenship verification underscores the importance of having a process that is easy to comply with and administer.
- 2. Mail-in voting.** Arizona has a long history of allowing early mail-in voting—a convenience that is popular with constituents but comes with its own set of challenges (namely, slow reporting of results).
- 3. Primary election reform.** Despite the defeat of an all-candidate primary initiative at the ballot box in November 2024, Arizona remains well-positioned to adopt reforms that would facilitate a nonpartisan approach to primary elections, with the goal of giving its large population of Independent voters a stronger voice.



Arizona's experience in these areas offers practical lessons that can help the state continue refining its own election processes while also guiding other states in efforts to enhance accessibility, integrity, and public trust.

Introduction

One of the most unique aspects of America's electoral system is the high degree of decentralization, whereby state and local governments retain the primary responsibility for election policy and administration in their respective jurisdictions.¹ As a result of this structure, no two states approach election administration the same way, and those differences provide extensive opportunities for states to learn from each other by observing the strengths and weaknesses of various election policies.²

In recent years, Arizona has emerged as a competitive state in high-profile national campaigns, drawing increased attention to the mechanics of how the state conducts its elections.³ Three aspects of Arizona's system offer meaningful contrasts with other state approaches. First, Arizona is one of only two states with a citizenship verification requirement to vote; this is particularly relevant at this time because of the growing interest among Republican lawmakers to adopt this type of policy nationwide.⁴ Second, the state has a long history of allowing mail-in voting to promote engagement and accessibility, but, despite their democratic benefits, such policies have created challenges in counting ballots in a timely manner.⁵ Third, the state boasts one



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1. "Election Administration at State and Local Levels," National Conference of State Legislatures, Jan. 29, 2025. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/election-administration-at-state-and-local-levels>.
2. Ibid.
3. Elliott Davis Jr., "The 2024 Swing States: Why Arizona Could Sway the Presidential Election," *U.S. News & World Report*, Nov. 5, 2024. <https://www.usnews.com/news/elections/articles/the-2024-swing-states-arizona-could-sway-the-2024-election>.
4. "Voter ID Laws," National Conference of State Legislatures, April 16, 2025. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id>; H.R. 22, Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, 119th Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bills/119th-congress/house-bill/22>.
5. Jessica Swarner, "A Timeline of Arizona's Long History of Early Voting," *The Copper Courier*, Oct. 13, 2020. <https://coppercourier.com/2020/10/13/a-timeline-of-arizonas-long-history-of-early-voting>; Suevon Lee, "Why Is Arizona Still Counting Votes?," *ProPublica*, Nov. 20, 2012. <https://www.propublica.org/article/why-is-arizona-still-counting-votes>.

of the largest populations of unaffiliated voters in the country, making primary reform particularly worthy of consideration.⁶

This paper explores these aspects of Arizona’s voting system, highlighting components that can serve as models for other states seeking to build trust in their election processes. It also considers areas where Arizona could improve its election processes based on the experiences and best practices found in other parts of the country.

Overview of Arizona’s Election System

To establish a foundation for this paper’s discussions on Arizona’s proof of citizenship voting requirement, mail-in voting system, and primary election reform efforts, it is helpful to better understand the current state and structure of Arizona’s voting system. This includes factors like its emergence as a battleground state, election administration practices, voter eligibility requirements, methods for casting and counting votes, and approach to primary elections.

Battleground Status

Arizona is a fast-growing state that has recently evolved politically from a Republican stronghold to a battleground state.⁷ In 2024, the state supported Republican Donald J. Trump for President and Democrat Ruben Gallego for U.S. Senate.⁸ Similarly, control of the state capital is split between Democratic Governor Katie Hobbs and Republican majorities in the legislature.⁹

In addition, unaffiliated voters—commonly known as Independents—are now the second largest voting bloc in the state, accounting for 34 percent of Arizona’s 4.5 million registered voters.¹⁰ This exceeds the number of Democrats in the state and trails Republicans by only 2 percentage points.¹¹

Geographically, 75 percent of the state’s estimated 7.6 million residents are concentrated in Maricopa and Pima Counties, which are home to the state’s two largest urban centers of Phoenix and Tucson.¹² From a voter registration perspective, Maricopa County’s voter affiliations track closely with the overall state percentages, but with an even smaller margin between the number of Republicans and Independents.¹³ The reverse is true in Pima County, where Democrats account for 37 percent of voters, followed by

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Unaffiliated voters—commonly known as Independents—are now the second largest voting bloc in the state, accounting for 34 percent of Arizona’s 4.5 million registered voters.

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6. Caitlin Sievers, “Arizonans reject measure that would open primaries,” *AZ Mirror*, Nov. 5, 2024. <https://azmirror.com/2024/11/05/arizonans-poised-to-reject-measures-that-would-close-and-open-primary-elections>.
 7. “July 1, 2024 Population Estimates,” Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity, last accessed April 23, 2025. https://oeo.az.gov/sites/default/files/data/popest/2024_Estimates/July1_2024_Arizona_Population_Estimates.pdf; “More Counties Saw Population Gains in 2023,” United States Census Bureau, March 14, 2024. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2024/population-estimates-more-counties-population-gains-2023.html>; Davis Jr. <https://www.usnews.com/news/elections/articles/the-2024-swing-states-arizona-could-sway-the-2024-election>.
 8. “2024 Arizona Election,” NBC News, Nov. 5, 2024. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-elections/arizona-results>.
 9. “2025 State & Legislative Partisan Composition,” National Conference of State Legislatures, Jan. 31, 2025. <https://documents.ncsl.org/wwwncsl/About-State-Legislatures/2025-State-and-Legislative-Partisan-Composition.pdf>.
 10. “State of Arizona Registration Report: 2025 April Voter Registration,” Arizona Secretary of State, April 1, 2025. <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/VoterReg/2025/State-Voter-Registration-April-2025.pdf>.
 11. Ibid.
 12. “July 1, 2024 Population Estimates,” Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity, last accessed April 23, 2025. https://oeo.az.gov/sites/default/files/data/popest/2024_Estimates/July1_2024_Arizona_Population_Estimates.pdf.
 13. “State of Arizona Registration Report: 2025 April Voter Registration.” <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/VoterReg/2025/State-Voter-Registration-April-2025.pdf>.

Independents (33 percent) and Republicans (28 percent).¹⁴ The rest of the state's population leans Republican, accounting for 41 percent of the registered voters in Arizona's 13 other counties.¹⁵

Roles and Responsibilities

As elections in Arizona have become progressively more competitive, the election process itself has received increased levels of scrutiny and attention from lawmakers and the public.¹⁶ Setting policy and administering elections is a joint effort between Arizona's state and local governments.¹⁷ The state legislature and governor set the laws that direct elections in every county, and counties administer elections consistent with state law under the supervision of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State is an elected official who serves as Arizona's chief election officer, responsible for canvassing and certifying statewide elections.¹⁸

At the county level, responsibilities are shared between the elected county recorders, the appointed election directors, and the elected boards of supervisors.¹⁹ For example, county recorders are responsible for voter registration and early voting, the election director administers Election Day operations and tabulates votes, and the board of supervisors determines polling locations and certifies results.²⁰

Voter Eligibility

Like most states, the basic requirements for voting in any Arizona election include being 18 years of age, a U.S. citizen, and a resident of the state.²¹ Arizona takes a number of steps to confirm eligibility, such as requiring proof of U.S. citizenship when registering to vote and presenting identification (ID) when casting a ballot.²² Arizona is one of 13 states to require ID and one of only two states (along with New Hampshire) to require proof of U.S. citizenship.²³ Arizona's citizenship check, however, does not apply to federal elections, as it conflicts with federal law—a distinction that creates administrative complexities.

Casting a Ballot and Counting the Vote

Arizonans have a variety of voting methods to choose from. This includes mail-in voting, whereby ballots can be returned via United States Postal Service (USPS) or a secure drop box. Voters can also cast a ballot in person on Election Day or



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14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Alexa Corse, "Arizona GOP's Election Audit Confirms Biden Win in State," *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 24, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/arizona-gops-election-audit-confirms-biden-win-in-draft-report-11632467822>; Rachel Leingang, "What has and hasn't changed about voting in Arizona ahead of the Primary," *AZ Mirror*, July 11, 2022. <https://azmirror.com/2022/07/11/what-has-and-hasnt-changed-about-voting-in-arizona-ahead-of-the-primary>.

17. "Election Administration at State and Local Levels." <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/election-administration-at-state-and-local-levels>.

18. Ibid.

19. "How Elections Work," Arizona Citizens Clean Elections Commission, last accessed March 12, 2025. <https://www.azcleanelections.gov/election-security/how-elections-work>.

20. Ibid.

21. "Arizona Voter Registration Instructions," Arizona Secretary of State, May 2024. https://azsos.gov/sites/default/files/docs/az_voter_registration_form_standard_20240613.pdf.

22. A.R.S. § 16-579 (A)(1). <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00579.htm>.

23. "Voter ID Laws." <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id>; Todd Bookman, "Federal judge hears arguments of NH's proof of citizenship voting law," National Public Radio, April 23, 2025. <https://www.nhpr.org/nh-news/2025-04-23/federal-judge-hears-arguments-over-nhs-proof-of-citizenship-voting-law>.

during the state’s 24-day early voting period.²⁴ Arizona has offered flexible voting options for decades, including no-excuse absentee voting (since 1991) and the option to receive ballots in the mail automatically for each election (since 2007).²⁵ In 2024, 85 percent of voters voted early or by mail compared to 15 percent who voted in person on Election Day.²⁶

Primary Elections

Arizona holds partisan primary elections that are (in most cases) open to Independent voters.²⁷ The purpose of the primary is to elect a nominee from each participating political party who will then advance to compete in the general election. Arizona permits its 1.5 million Independent voters to participate in this process by selecting either a Republican or Democratic primary ballot.²⁸ The presidential preference election (or PPE—Arizona’s version of the presidential primary) is the exception to this general rule, as that contest is limited to political party members only.²⁹

In the next sections, with this overview of Arizona’s system in mind, we explore lessons and recommendations related to Arizona’s proof of citizenship requirement, early voting procedures and timelines, and primary election structure.

Proof of Citizenship

Requiring proof of citizenship to vote has long been an area of debate in election policy.³⁰ The issue is once again top of mind, as Congress is considering legislation that mandates this policy nationwide.³¹ Known as the SAVE Act, the bill was approved by the House of Representatives in April 2025 and is now awaiting action in the Senate.³² A version of this policy was also included in President Trump’s March 2025 executive order on elections.³³ However, the section of the executive order addressing citizenship verification was blocked in federal court in April.³⁴ As the state with the most experience actively enforcing a proof-of-citizenship requirement, Arizona can help inform this debate and shed light on some of the implementation complexities that must be considered.



Requiring proof of citizenship to vote has long been an area of debate in election policy.

24. A.R.S. § 16-542. <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00542.htm>.

25. Swarner. <https://coppercourier.com/2020/10/13/a-timeline-of-arizonas-long-history-of-early-voting>.

26. “2024 General Election County Canvasses,” Arizona Secretary of State, Nov. 5, 2024. <https://azsos.gov/elections/election-information/2024-election-info>.

27. “State Primary Election Types,” National Conference of State Legislatures, Feb. 6, 2024. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>.

28. “State of Arizona Registration Report: 2025 April Voter Registration.” <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/VoterReg/2025/State-Voter-Registration-April-2025.pdf>.

29. A.R.S. § 16-241. <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00241.htm>.

30. Carrie Levine, “How the debate over proof-of-citizenship laws reopened after decades,” Votebeat, March 31, 2025. <https://www.votebeat.org/2025/03/31/proof-of-citizenship-law-trump-executive-order-elections-nvra>.

31. H.R. 22. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/22>.

32. Michael Gold, “House Votes to Require Proof of Citizenship in Federal Elections,” *The New York Times*, April 10, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/10/us/politics/house-citizenship-elections-save-act.html>.

33. Exec. Order No 14248, 3 C.F.R. 14005 (2025). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-03-28/pdf/2025-05523.pdf>.

34. Nick Corasaniti, “Trump’s Attempt to Overhaul Election Law Is Partly Blocked by a Judge,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/24/us/politics/trump-election-order-judge-blocked.html>.

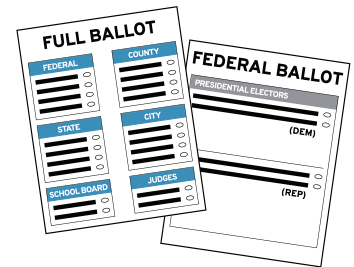
Background

The recent push to require a citizenship check for voting has been driven by concerns that noncitizens might be able to vote in American elections because of federal laws that currently prohibit election officials from verifying citizenship status as part of the voter registration process.³⁵ Under the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), applicants need only attest to being citizens by checking a box on the registration form.³⁶

Arizona's history of requiring proof of citizenship dates back to 2004 when voters approved Proposition 200.³⁷ The law required county recorders to verify proof of citizenship as part of the voter registration process and included a "grandfather clause" that exempted all registered voters at the time the proposition went into effect from having to show proof of citizenship unless the voter later registered to vote in a different county.³⁸ Litigation blocked Arizona from fully implementing the law for over a decade, and, in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately prohibited citizenship verification for federal elections on the grounds that the NVRA—which requires attestation of citizenship but not proof—preempted Arizona's state law.³⁹ However, Arizona was permitted to implement the law for state and local elections.⁴⁰

To comply with the court decision, Arizona established a bifurcated voter registration system that involves two different lists of voters: one for "full ballot" voters who provide evidence of citizenship and can therefore vote in federal, state, and local elections and another for "federal-only" voters who attest to citizenship but do not provide documentary evidence.⁴¹ For perspective on the size of each list, 99 percent of Arizona's 4.4 million registered voters were eligible to vote a full ballot in the 2024 election.⁴² The remaining 1 percent (around 45,000 voters) did not provide the required documentation and are limited to voting for federal offices only.⁴³

As Congress advances legislation that would mandate citizenship verification nationwide, lawmakers should consider several important lessons from Arizona's history with Proposition 200 and experience implementing this policy.



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35. "Federal Role in Voter Registration: The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) and Subsequent Developments," Congressional Research Service, Feb. 7, 2025, p. 10. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45030#page=10>.

36. "National Mail Voter Registration Form," United States Election Assistance Commission, Sept. 18, 2024, p. 4. <https://www.eac.gov/voters/national-mail-voter-registration-form>.

37. "State of Arizona Official Canvass: 2004 General Election," Arizona Secretary of State, Nov. 2, 2004, p. 16. <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/2004/General/Canvass2004General.pdf#page=16>; "Arizona 2004 Ballot Proposition 200," State of Arizona, Nov. 2, 2004. <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/2004/info/PubPamphlet/english/prop200.pdf>.

38. A.R.S. § 16-166 (F) and A.R.S. § 16-166 (G). <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00166.htm>.

39. *Arizona v. Inter Tribal Council of Ariz., Inc.*, 570 U.S. 1 (2013). <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/570/12-71/case.pdf>.

40. Ibid.

41. "Federal Only Voters," Clean Elections, last accessed April 23, 2025. <https://www.azcleelections.gov/federal-only-voters>.

42. "State of Arizona Registration Report: 2024 General Election," Arizona Secretary of State, Nov. 5, 2024. https://apps.azsos.gov/election/VoterReg/2024/State_Voter_Registration_October_2024.pdf.

43. "Federal Only Registrants as of October 7th, 2024," Arizona Secretary of State, Oct. 7, 2024. https://apps.azsos.gov/election/VoterReg/2024/Publish_Statistics_for_Federal_Only_Registrants_as_of_OCTOBER_7th_2024.pdf.

Lesson One: Make it easy for Americans to navigate citizenship verification processes

Arizonans can prove citizenship by presenting various documents—typically by submitting an Arizona driver’s license or state ID number.⁴⁴ This requires coordination across government agencies, as the ID itself does not distinguish between an American citizen and other lawfully present residents, such as visa or green card holders.⁴⁵ However, Arizona’s statewide voter registration database has the ability to communicate with the state motor vehicle division (MVD) database that specifies whether an individual presented a document proving citizenship when applying for a license.⁴⁶

If the MVD database confirms that an individual presented that documentation, the county recorder is required to register that person as a full ballot voter.⁴⁷ If the MVD database shows that the individual did not present proof of citizenship or confirm that they are a noncitizen, the county recorder is required to follow up with the applicant and request the necessary information.⁴⁸ At that point, if the applicant does not provide proof of citizenship but is otherwise eligible, the county recorder must register the individual as a federal-only voter.⁴⁹ Of note, Arizonans can also submit the required proof of citizenship online or by mail, as the state accepts license numbers and photocopies of original documents as acceptable forms of proof.⁵⁰

Overall, Arizona’s citizenship verification policies make it easy for most citizens to prove eligibility and prevent noncitizens from registering to vote. Importantly, this process puts the primary burden on the government to share information rather than on Arizonans to submit the same information multiple times to different agencies.

Lesson Two: Make it easy for election officials to verify citizenship

Arizona’s citizenship verification system functions well in most cases, but it has experienced some implementation challenges. In 2024, for example, election officials discovered that more than 200,000 registered voters had been incorrectly labeled in government databases as having provided proof of citizenship when they had not.⁵¹

This error stemmed from a loophole created by the interaction of two policies: a 1996 state law requiring the MVD to check citizenship when issuing new driver’s licenses and a grandfather clause in 2004’s Proposition 200 that exempted existing voters from re-verification unless they registered in a new county.⁵²



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44. A.R.S. § 16-166. <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00166.htm>.

45. “State of Arizona 2023 Elections Procedures Manual,” Arizona Secretary of State, December 2023, p. 4. https://apps.azsos.gov/election/files/epm/2023/EPM_20231231_Final_Edits_to_Cal_1_11_2024.pdf#page=17.

46. Ibid., p. 6.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., pp. 7-8.

49. Ibid.

50. “Arizona Voter Registration Instructions,” pp. 1-2. https://azsos.gov/sites/default/files/docs/az_voter_registration_form_standard_20240613.pdf.

51. Sejal Govindarao, “Number of voters with unconfirmed citizenship documents more than doubles in battleground Arizona,” *Associated Press*, Oct. 3, 2024. <https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/elections/2024/number-of-voters-with-unconfirmed-citizenship-documents-more-than-doubles-in-battleground-arizona>.

52. “Session laws, State of Arizona, 1996,” in *Arizona Session Laws, 1912-present* Vol. 2 (Arizona State Senate, Arizona Legislative Council 1996), p. 1211. <https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/20922?keywords=1996&highlights=WylxOTk2lI0%3D&lsk=921eced8918b4a86e8789f5a5f51989c>.

As a result, some Arizonans had registered to vote before Proposition 200 using a driver's license issued before the MVD began checking citizenship in 1996. If those individuals later renewed their licenses (a process that did not require them to prove citizenship) and then used that renewed license to register to vote in a different county, the system incorrectly flagged them as having provided valid proof, "effectively grandfather[ing] in pre-October 1, 1996 customers indefinitely."⁵³ For example, someone who secured a license in 1990 and then renewed it in 1997 would not have had their citizenship status checked by the MVD. But because the renewed license showed a 1997 issue date, election officials would have assumed that the license complied with Proposition 200's requirements.

As Election Day approached in late 2024, this error created confusion about voter eligibility. The state Supreme Court ultimately ruled that affected voters could participate and would not be penalized for the state's administrative error.⁵⁴ Since then, state agencies have updated their procedures, including changes to how the MVD verifies identities for license renewals, to ensure that the previous loophole is closed.⁵⁵

This serves as a cautionary tale to other states to ensure that the various government agencies involved in the voter registration process are communicating effectively and that agencies should take proactive steps to identify and mitigate unintended consequences stemming from the way different areas of the law interact.

Lesson Three: Provide support to Americans who need help navigating this process

Although most Arizonans find it easy to comply with the current citizenship verification processes, some struggle to prove their American citizenship when registering to vote. One analysis of the state's voter rolls found disproportionately high concentrations of federal-only voters registered in precincts located on or near tribal lands, Arizona's three public universities, and a large homeless shelter in Phoenix.⁵⁶

Although the specific reason for having insufficient documentation at the point of voter registration varies, election officials and policymakers can take steps to help reduce the number of Arizonans who end up on the federal-only list by having a customer-service mindset.⁵⁷ For example, raising awareness about Arizona's unique registration rules could help reduce the number of out-of-state college students who show up to campus without bringing their passports or birth certificates. Similarly, election offices could enhance staff training to help



Election officials and policymakers can take steps to help reduce the number of Arizonans who end up on the federal-only list by having a customer-service mindset.

53. "Report on Audit of MVD's Authorized Presence Policy and Data for Voter Registration Purposes," Arizona Department of Transportation, Jan. 31, 2025, p. 4. <https://www.democracydocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/hobbs-mvd-audit.pdf#page=5>.

54. *Steven Richer v Adrian Fontes*, Arizona Supreme Court, Sept. 20, 2024. <https://www.azcourts.gov/Portals/0/201/ASC-CV240221%20-%20209-20-2024%20-%20FILED%20-%20DECISION%20ORDER.pdf>.

55. "Report on Audit of MVD's Authorized Presence Policy and Data for Voter Registration Purposes," p. 4. <https://www.democracydocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/hobbs-mvd-audit.pdf#page=5>.

56. Jenn Fifiield, "Who are the Arizona voters without proof of citizenship? They may surprise you," *AZ Mirror*, Dec. 16, 2024. <https://azmirror.com/2024/12/16/who-are-the-arizona-voters-without-proof-of-citizenship-they-may-surprise-you>.

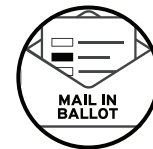
57. Sydney Heimbrock et al., "How U.S. Government Agencies Can Fix Their Customer-Service Problem," *Harvard Business Review*, March 21, 2023. <https://hbr.org/2023/03/how-u-s-government-agencies-can-fix-their-customer-service-problem>.

Arizonans obtain replacement birth certificates or marriage certificates that indicate a name change when needed.⁵⁸ In addition, Congress or state legislatures could provide modest funding to cover the cost of producing a duplicate document for those who lack the resources.⁵⁹ Some steps have already been taken in this regard. In 2015, Arizona lawmakers approved legislation to streamline the process for Native Americans born before 1970 to acquire a “delayed birth certificate,” as many of these citizens were born outside of hospitals and were never issued a birth certificate.⁶⁰ In short, these types of policies can help reduce the number of individuals without necessary documents.

Early Voting, Late Results

Voting early and by mail has become a common practice in America, with approximately 66 percent of the more than 155 million votes cast in the 2024 election occurring before Election Day—up from 14 percent in 2000.⁶¹ Arizona has been at the forefront of this shift and consistently exceeds the national rate of early votes cast because of the convenience of the state’s early mail-in and in-person voting options.⁶² Unfortunately, the speed of Arizona’s vote count has been an area of concern for many years.⁶³

This issue has been exacerbated as Arizona has emerged as a swing state, consistently producing close races in high-profile campaigns.⁶⁴ In such circumstances, even administrative improvements would be unlikely to overcome the reluctance of the media to project a winner before nearly all the votes have been counted.⁶⁵ Still, these actual and perceived delays can create an opening for false claims to take root and, over time, erode trust in the election process. To prevent this, Arizona could adopt policies from other states to help speed up the count and minimize the time it takes to determine a winner.



Actual and perceived delays can create an opening for false claims to take root and, over time, erode trust in the election process. To prevent this, Arizona could adopt policies from other states to help speed up the count and minimize the time it takes to determine a winner.

Background

Arizona has a long history of providing voters with different options for casting their ballots. Today, that includes early, in-person voting beginning 27 days before Election Day; no-excuse absentee voting, whereby ballots are mailed to voters and can be returned either to a polling location or a secure drop-box; and in-person

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58. “How to get a certified copy of a U.S. birth certificate,” U.S. General Services Administration, Jan. 30, 2024. <https://www.usa.gov/birth-certificate>; “How to get a copy of a marriage certificate or a marriage license,” U.S. General Services Administration, Nov. 5, 2024. <https://www.usa.gov/marriage-certificate>.
59. “Birth Certificates Official Fees,” US Birth Certificates, last accessed March 10, 2025. <https://www.usbirthcertificates.com/official-fees>.
60. Ryan Heinsius, “Gov. Ducey Signs Delayed Birth Certificate Bill into Law,” KNAU News Talk - Arizona Public Radio, April 8, 2015. <https://www.knau.org/knau-and-arizona-news/2015-04-08/gov-ducey-signs-delayed-birth-certificate-bill-into-law>; “Senate Bill 1393,” State of Arizona Senate, Fifty Second Legislature, 2015. <https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/52leg/1r/laws/0197.PDF>.
61. “Voters Broadly Positive About How Elections Were Conducted, in Sharp Contrast to 2020,” Pew Research Center, Dec. 4, 2024, p. 17. https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2024/12/PP_2024.12.3_election-2024_REPORT.pdf#page=17; “2024 Presidential Results: Trump wins,” NBC News, Nov. 5, 2024. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-elections/president-results>; “Voting by mail and absentee voting,” MIT Election Data and Science Lab, Feb. 28, 2024. <https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/voting-mail-and-absentee-voting>.
62. Anita Snow, “Arizona enlists county employees to help tackle a surge of 2-page early ballots,” *Associated Press*, Oct. 31, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/arizona-election-early-ballots-2eaed8ca8f756a735021e4cd97e9af43>.
63. Lee. <https://www.propublica.org/article/why-is-arizona-still-counting-votes>; Tim Stellar, “Slow Arizona vote-counting doesn’t show fraud,” *tucson.com*, Nov. 11, 2018. https://tucson.com/news/local/stellar-column-slow-arizona-vote-counting-doesn-t-show-fraud/article_e8a09a29-a284-5c12-b10b-f44b57cd0a00.html; Billal Rahman, “Why Do Arizona Votes Take So Long To Count?,” *Newsweek*, Nov. 10, 2024. <https://www.newsweek.com/why-arizona-votes-take-so-long-count-1983479>.
64. Davis Jr. <https://www.usnews.com/news/elections/articles/the-2024-swing-states-arizona-could-sway-the-2024-election>.
65. “CEIR Explains: How Election Results Coverage Really Works,” The Center for Election Innovation & Research, October 2024. <https://electioninnovation.org/research/how-election-results-coverage-really-works>.

voting on Election Day.⁶⁶ Like most jurisdictions across the country, Arizona initially required an approved excuse for anyone to vote from anywhere other than their approved polling location.⁶⁷ Typically, this policy was designed to accommodate members of the military located abroad or individuals with a disability or illness who could not physically get to their polling location.⁶⁸

In 1991, Arizona became one of the early adopters of a new policy that allowed any registered voter to vote absentee.⁶⁹ In 2007, Arizona expanded this policy and created a “Permanent Early Voter List” so that voters could opt in to automatically receive a ballot in the mail for each election, rather than having to request an absentee ballot for each election.⁷⁰ And in 2012, that list became the “Active Early Voter List,” reflecting a revised policy that would remove “inactive” voters from the list who fail to participate in two consecutive elections.⁷¹

As a result of these flexible voting policies, 85 percent of the 3.4 million votes cast in Arizona’s 2024 general election were cast early.⁷² In general, the early voting system is well equipped to efficiently process early ballots as they are received in the mail or collected from ballot drop boxes throughout the early voting period. However, if many voters opt to return their ballots in person on Election Day, it can place a strain on the system and contribute to delays. In 2024, 265,000 early ballots were returned on Election Day, accounting for more than 7 percent of the total votes cast.⁷³

This illustrates how policies designed to address specific aspects of the election process—from voter convenience to election security to efficient ballot processing—can have unintended effects. It also suggests that simple policy changes could address timing challenges while maintaining robust voting options for Arizonans.

Lesson One: Voting policies focused on convenience and security can have unintended consequences

A confluence of factors contributes to reporting delays in Arizona under the current system, including early ballot return deadlines, security procedures designed to prevent election fraud, and decisions by voters around how they choose to return their ballots. Even when election administrators implement best practices to speed up the count—such as pre-processing early ballots upon receipt—other factors can quickly undermine those efforts.



Arizona's early voting system is well equipped to efficiently process early ballots as they are received in the mail or collected from ballot drop boxes. However, if many voters opt to return their ballots in person on Election Day, it can place a strain on the system and contribute to delays.

66. “Early In-Person Voting,” National Conference of State Legislatures, March 18, 2025. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/early-in-person-voting>. “Table 1: States with No-Excuse Absentee Voting,” National Conference of State Legislatures, Dec. 20, 2023. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-1-states-with-no-excuse-absentee-voting>.

67. “We’ve got this: 100 years of Arizonans voting by mail,” The State Library of Arizona, Oct. 15, 2020. <https://statelibraryofarizona.wordpress.com/2020/10/15/weve-got-this-100-years-of-arizonans-voting-by-mail>.

68. Ibid.

69. “Session laws, State of Arizona, 1991,” in *Arizona Session Laws, 1912-present* Vol. 1 (Arizona State Senate, Arizona Legislative Council 1991), pp. 136-137. <https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/20921?keywords=1991&highlights=WylxOTkxll0%3D&lsk=1f4372d4ef2ae1e110b67c2a9c25fe29>.

70. Christopher Conover, “Arizona’s long history with voting by mail,” Arizona Public Media, Aug. 21, 2020. <https://news.azpm.org/p/newsfeature/2020/8/21/178857-arizonas-long-history-with-voting-by-mail>.

71. Doug Ducey, “Re: Senate Bill 1485 (early voting list; eligibility),” Office of the Arizona Governor, May 11, 2021. <https://www.azleg.gov/govlettr/55leg/1r/sb1485.pdf>.

72. “2024 General Election County Canvasses,” <https://azsos.gov/elections/election-information/2024-election-info>.

73. “Early Ballots Received at Polling Locations on Election Day,” Arizona Secretary of State, Nov. 5, 2024. <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/2024/ge-EarlyBallotsDroppedElectionDayGENERAL.pdf>.

For example, the deadline for returning an early ballot in Arizona is 7:00 pm on Election Day.⁷⁴ This deadline applies to all early ballots, regardless of whether they are returned via USPS, deposited in a drop box, or delivered to a polling location. Compared to other states' processes, such as California's, New York's, and West Virginia's, which count ballots that are postmarked on Election Day but arrive multiple days later, Arizona's strict deadline—in theory—supports quicker vote tabulation.⁷⁵ In fact, President Trump's March 2025 executive order on elections seeks to establish a nationwide deadline for all mail-in ballots to arrive by Election Day.⁷⁶ Yet when voters wait until the last minute (Election Day) to return early ballots, delays ensue because of the more labor-intensive steps required to process them. Arizona also has strict requirements around reviewing ballot affidavits and verifying signatures to ensure that the envelopes contain legitimate ballots from eligible voters.⁷⁷ These steps, which are designed to ensure election integrity, are not required when voting in person because voters' identities are verified when checking in at a polling location.

Early ballots that arrive before Election Day are not subject to the same time crunch because Arizona permits election workers to get a head start on processing ballots as soon as they arrive—a practice known as “pre-processing” ballots.⁷⁸ In fact, Arizona's pre-processing system represents a best practice, and other states in the national spotlight, such as Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, would benefit from emulating Arizona on this front.⁷⁹ Yet the early ballots that arrive on Election Day in Arizona are, by definition, not pre-processed and, instead, extend the slow-moving review process into subsequent days.⁸⁰

Thus, Arizona's experience shows that the interaction between well-meaning policies designed to increase voter access and ensure secure elections can have unintended and counterproductive effects. States considering these types of policy changes should anticipate and monitor for such challenges during implementation.

Lesson Two: Various solutions can address these unintended consequences

Two main strategies for minimizing the negative effects of late-arriving early ballots are to reduce the number of ballots that need to go through the signature verification process and to change the deadline for ballots that require signature verification. Arizona has already taken action on the first strategy, and the state could look to other states' processes for a clear path to implementing the second.



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74. A.R.S. § 16-548. <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00548.htm>.

75. “Table 11: Receipt and Postmark Deadlines for Absentee/Mail Ballots,” National Conference of State Legislatures, April 8, 2024. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-11-receipt-and-postmark-deadlines-for-absentee-mail-ballots>.

76. Exec. Order No 14248, 3 C.F.R. 14005 (2025). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-03-28/pdf/2025-05523.pdf>.

77. A.R.S. § 16-547. <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00547.htm>; A.R.S. § 16-550. <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00550.htm>; A.R.S. § 16-550.01. <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00550-01.htm>.

78. A.R.S. § 16-550. <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00550.htm>.

79. “Table 16: When Absentee/Mail Ballot Processing and Counting Can Begin,” National Conference of State Legislatures, Oct. 22, 2024. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-16-when-absentee-mail-ballot-processing-and-counting-can-begin>.

80. Grace Gordon et al., “Ballot Pre-processing Policies Explained,” Bipartisan Policy Center, Sept. 7, 2022. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/ballot-pre-processing-explained>.

With regard to the first point, in 2024, lawmakers approved bipartisan legislation that established a new option for voters to voluntarily show photo ID when dropping off an early ballot in person.⁸¹ Under this new procedure, which is scheduled to go into effect in 2026, the early ballot envelope will be marked with an “ID Verified” stamp after a voter shows their ID. Ballots with this designation will bypass the signature-verification process and be deemed ready for tabulation. Although this will require additional effort by voters, election officials can proactively explain how the ID check helps speed up vote counting and result finalization and encourage voters to take this extra step.

Another process adjustment that could shift a larger proportion of ballots requiring signature verification into the pre-election time period is changing the deadline for early ballots returned in person. Six states take this approach (Arkansas, Connecticut, Louisiana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and Vermont), setting the deadline for early ballots delivered in person between one and three days before Election Day.⁸² Florida takes a slightly different approach by reducing the number of ballot-return locations three days before Election Day, which is also the conclusion of the early voting period.⁸³ At that point, mail-in ballots returned in person must be delivered to official county offices rather than drop boxes located at polling locations.⁸⁴

The Arizona legislature approved House Bill 2703 earlier this year, which would have moved the deadline for mail-in ballots returned in person to the Friday before Election Day; however, Governor Katie Hobbs vetoed the bill.⁸⁵ In her veto letter, Hobbs outlined concerns that the bill, which also amended other aspects of Arizona election law, would negatively impact access to the ballot.⁸⁶ Now, state lawmakers are advancing another proposal—HCR 2013—that would ask voters to approve these policies at the ballot box during the 2026 election.⁸⁷

Arizona lawmakers should consider revisiting the deadline issue as a standalone policy, as the combined impact of an earlier deadline and the forthcoming implementation of the optional ID check for hand-delivered early ballots holds great potential to alleviate Arizona’s issue with counting ballots in a timely manner. Of course, highly competitive races will inevitably take time to resolve, particularly if they require recounts. But these policy changes can help relieve the current bottleneck and speed up the process of tabulating votes in most Arizona elections.



Arizona lawmakers should consider revisiting the deadline issue as a standalone policy, as the combined impact of an earlier deadline and the forthcoming implementation of the optional ID check for hand-delivered early ballots holds great potential to alleviate Arizona’s issue with counting ballots in a timely manner.

81. “House Bill 2785,” State of Arizona, Fifty Sixth Legislature, 2024. <https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/56leg/2R/laws/0001.pdf>.

82. “Table 11: Receipt and Postmark Deadlines for Absentee/Mail Ballots,” National Conference of State Legislatures, April 24, 2025. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-11-receipt-and-postmark-deadlines-for-absentee-mail-ballots>.

83. Fla. Stat. § 101.657 (1)(d). (2024). http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0100-0199/0101/Sections/0101.657.html.

84. Fla. Stat. § 101.69(2)(a). (2024). http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0100-0199/0101/Sections/0101.69.html.

85. “House Bill 2703,” State of Arizona, Fifty Seventh Legislature, 2005. <https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/57leg/1R/bills/HB2703H.pdf>.

86. Katie Hobbs, “Re: House Bill 2703: early voting; tabulation; ballot deadlines,” Office of the Arizona Governor, Feb. 18, 2025. <https://www.azleg.gov/govletter/57leg/1r/hb2703.pdf>.

87. “House Concurrent Resolution 2013,” State of Arizona, Fifty Seventh Legislature, 2025. <https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/57leg/1R/bills/HCR2013H.pdf>.

Primary Elections

Primary elections play a central role in the way Americans elect leaders at all levels of government, and the election structure varies dramatically from state to state. On one end of the spectrum, 10 states, including Pennsylvania, Florida, and Nevada, hold closed primaries that select candidates from each political party who will then go on to compete against each other in the general election.⁸⁸ Participation in this type of primary requires affiliation with a political party. In contrast, Alaska, Washington, Louisiana, and California hold primary elections that are open to all registered voters and include all candidates on a single ballot, regardless of political affiliation.⁸⁹ Under this structure, the purpose of the primary is to narrow the general election field down to a more manageable number, often just two candidates.

Arizona has approximately 1.5 million Independent voters and a longstanding history of allowing them to participate in primary elections.⁹⁰ Yet voters rejected a recent initiative to establish an all-candidate primary in Arizona that would have further expanded the ability of Independents to support their preferred candidates in primary elections and created incentives for candidates to appeal to a broader segment of the electorate.⁹¹ This recent experience provides useful insights for other states considering a move to an all-candidate primary and also for future efforts to successfully advance this type of reform in Arizona.

Background

Primary elections in Arizona currently follow a common model whereby candidates within each political party compete against each other, and the winners advance to the general election. Traditionally, only members of each political party were allowed to vote in primary elections, creating a strong incentive for voters to join a political party. However, in 1998, Arizona voters approved Proposition 103, which allowed unaffiliated voters to participate in most partisan primary elections.⁹² Presidential primaries are the exception, however, and remain closed to Independent voters.⁹³

In the years following the approval of Prop 103, Arizona experienced an uptick in the share of the electorate registering as unaffiliated. To illustrate the shift, in the four presidential elections held from 1984 to 1996, approximately 90 percent of registered voters in Arizona were affiliated with either the Republican or Democratic parties.⁹⁴ In the first four presidential elections of the 2000s, however, the average Independent share of the electorate jumped to 26 percent.⁹⁵ Today, Independents account for 34 percent of voters in the state,



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88. “State Primary Election Types,” National Conference of State Legislatures, Feb. 6, 2024. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>.

89. Ibid.

90. “State of Arizona Registration Report: 2025 April Voter Registration,” <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/VoterReg/2025/State-Voter-Registration-April-2025.pdf>.

91. Sievers. <https://azmirror.com/2024/11/05/arizonans-poised-to-reject-measures-that-would-close-and-open-primary-elections>.

92. “Proposition 103,” Arizona Secretary of State, July 21, 1998. <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/1998/Info/PubPamphlet/prop103.html>.

93. Ibid.

94. “Voter Registration History: Statewide- General Elections,” Arizona Secretary of State, last accessed March 11, 2025. <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/VoterReg/History/General>.

95. “State of Arizona Registration Report: 2000 General Election,” Arizona Secretary of State, Nov. 7, 2000. <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/voterreg/2000-11-01.pdf>;

“State of Arizona Registration Report: 2004 General Election,” Arizona Secretary of State, Nov. 2, 2004. <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/voterreg/2004-10-25.pdf>;

“State of Arizona Registration Report: 2008 General Election,” Arizona Secretary of State, Nov. 4, 2008. <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/voterreg/2008-10-22.pdf>;

“State of Arizona Registration Report: 2012 General Election,” Arizona Secretary of State, Nov. 6, 2012. <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/voterreg/2012-10-30.pdf>.

which exceeds the total for Democrats and follows closely behind Republicans.⁹⁶ This suggests that opening primaries to Independents removes one of the incentives for joining a political party and allows voters to opt in or out based on a party's ideas rather than as a requirement for participating in the process.

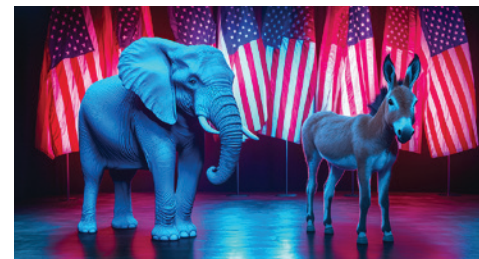
Proposition 103 was a step in the right direction for Arizona to expand access to the election process without forcing voters to register with a political party. Twenty-five years later, Proposition 140, which was put to the ballot in 2024, attempted to reform the fundamental purpose of the primary from a party-nomination process to a field-narrowing process.⁹⁷ However, it failed by a margin of 59 percent to 41 percent after experiencing strong resistance based on the perception that it could serve as a possible stepping stone toward ranked-choice voting (RCV).⁹⁸

Lesson One: Voters remain skeptical of all-candidate primaries

Dissatisfaction with both major political parties has been growing and currently remains at record highs, which has led to a growing block of Independent voters nationwide.⁹⁹ Some experts view this shift as an indicator that citizens might be more receptive to primary election reforms that would move away from traditional U.S. partisan primary models, and such measures were on several state ballots.¹⁰⁰ However, the 2024 election results suggest that citizens are not yet embracing such reforms, as all-candidate primary measures were defeated in seven states, including Arizona.¹⁰¹

The central feature of Arizona's Proposition 140 was the requirement that the state hold primary elections in which all candidates—regardless of party affiliation—would appear on a single ballot, and all registered voters would pick from the same list of candidates.¹⁰² By shifting the purpose of the primary from selecting the nominee of each party to narrowing the field for the general election, the initiative would have put the focus on the individuals and their ideas while providing an incentive for candidates to appeal to a broader segment of the electorate.¹⁰³ This change could have also helped reduce the number of unopposed general election races in noncompetitive districts by shifting the contest that determines the winner from the primary to the general election.¹⁰⁴

Although the initiative directed the state to adopt the all-candidate primary and advance two to five candidates to the general election, it left the decision related



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96. "State of Arizona Registration Report: 2025 April Voter Registration." <https://apps.azsos.gov/election/VoterReg/2025/State-Voter-Registration-April-2025.pdf>.
97. "Arizona Proposition 140: Make Elections Fair Arizona Act," 2024 General Election, Nov. 5, 2024. https://apps.azsos.gov/election/BallotMeasures/2024/2024_AZGeneralElection_PublicityPamphlet_E.pdf#page=224.
98. "2024 General Election Canvass," Arizona Secretary of State, Nov. 25, 2024, p. 16. https://apps.azsos.gov/election/2024/ge/canvass/20241105_GeneralCanvass_Signed.pdf#page=16.
99. "Around 3 in 10 Americans now have unfavorable views of both parties," Pew Research Center, Sept. 15, 2023. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/the-republican-and-democratic-parties/pp_2023-09-19_views-of-politics_04-02-png; Jeffrey M. Jones, "Independent Party ID Tied for High; Democratic ID at New Low," Gallup, Jan. 12, 2024. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/548459/independent-party-tied-high-democratic-new-low.aspx>.
100. Ashley Lopez, "Ballot measures to upend state election systems failed across the country," NPR, Nov. 8, 2024. <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/08/nx-s1-5183210/nonpartisan-primary-ranked-choice-voting-results>.
101. Ibid.
102. "Arizona Proposition 140: Make Elections Fair Arizona Act." https://apps.azsos.gov/election/BallotMeasures/2024/2024_AZGeneralElection_PublicityPamphlet_E.pdf#page=224.
103. Matt Germer, "America's Primary Elections Are Ripe for Reform," R Street Institute, June 1, 2022. <https://www.rstreet.org/research/americas-primary-elections-are-ripe-for-reform>.
104. Ryan Williamson and Matt Germer, "Reimagining the Ballot: A Comprehensive Look at Primary and General Election Systems," *R Street Policy Study* No. 310, October 2024. <https://www.rstreet.org/research/reimagining-the-ballot-a-comprehensive-look-at-primary-and-general-election-systems>.

to the exact number to the legislature. The choice was left for lawmakers because there are tradeoffs between different approaches. In practice, though, leaving the choice for lawmakers created an opening for the opposition to focus on the potential use of RCV if lawmakers opted to advance three or more candidates to the general election. Sometimes referred to as an instant runoff, RCV is a style of election that allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference. Proposition 140 did not advocate for RCV, but the mere possibility of it being leveraged in that way proved to be a convincing argument against the measure.¹⁰⁵

Clearly, the unsuccessful outcome of Proposition 140 in Arizona and the failure of other similar ballot initiatives across the country was a disappointment for primary reform advocates. However, if the overall level of dissatisfaction with the major political parties continues to grow, voters may grow increasingly receptive to primary reforms.

Lesson Two: Independents' participation in partisan primaries improves voter choice, but an all-candidate primary would create stronger electoral incentives

There is no question that Arizona's post-1998 primary system is more equitable to the state's 1.5 million Independent voters than the closed primary system that came before it. The current approach enables all voters to participate in taxpayer-funded primary elections, regardless of party affiliation, and offers voters increased choice regarding which primary to participate in from year to year. However, there is little evidence that the state has become less polarized over the past 25 years, suggesting that maintaining the partisan primary system and simply allowing Independents to participate is insufficient for driving change to electoral incentives that would create a more moderate candidate.¹⁰⁶ In fact, by one measure, Arizona was one of the most polarized state legislatures in the nation in 2020.¹⁰⁷

In addition to the overall trend toward more polarized politics, another factor contributing to this outcome is that not all Independent voters are "moderate" voters. Forty percent of Independents self-identify as conservative or liberal, and more than one-half report leaning toward one political party or the other.¹⁰⁸ It is therefore not surprising that allowing these voters to participate in a primary process that already rewards candidates who earn support from the ideologically motivated base of their respective parties is an insufficient remedy for changing the incentives that drive candidate behavior.

Ultimately, the all-candidate primary model continues to hold promise, as it creates an incentive for candidates to appeal to a broader segment of the electorate. First and foremost, the all-candidate primary shifts the deciding race in more elections from the primary to the general election. Particularly in districts where Republicans



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105. "Arguments 'Against' Proposition 140," Arizona Secretary of State, last accessed March 11, 2025. https://apps.azsos.gov/election/BallotMeasures/2024/Prop_140_Against_Arguments.pdf.

106. Christian Grose, "Reducing Legislative Polarization: Top-Two and Open Primaries Are Associated with More Moderate Legislators," *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 1 (2020), pp. 6-7. https://schwarzenegger.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/images/files/Grose_JPIPE_June_2020_Preprint_Official_Article.pdf#page=6.

107. Boris Shor and Nolan McCarty, "Two Decades of Polarization in American State Legislatures," *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 3 (2022), p. 352. https://research.bshor.com/publication/polarization_2decades/polarization_2decades.pdf#page=10.

108. Joseph Cerrone, "Research Brief: Growing Cohort of Independent Voters Becomes Critical Segment of Electorate," Unite America, Nov. 15, 2024. <https://www.uniteamerica.org/articles/research-brief-growing-cohort-of-independent-voters-becomes-critical-segment-of-electorate>.

or Democrats hold large voter-registration advantages, the dominant party may hold a competitive primary election while the other parties may choose to not even field a candidate in the general election. This results in the eventual winner of the general election being selected by a relatively small number of voters compared to the number who participate in the general election. For example, in 2024, 3.4 million Arizonans voted in the general election, which was nearly 3 times higher than the 1.3 million who voted in the July primary.¹⁰⁹ The all-candidate primary forces candidates to compete for support from this larger group, creating an incentive to appeal to a wider segment of the electorate.

The 2024 election also provided evidence that some candidates were successful in broadening their base of support, with split-ticket results being a prominent example. In Arizona, for instance, an estimated 9 percent of Independent voters supported Republican Donald J. Trump for President and Democrat Ruben Gallego for U.S. Senate. Similarly, in other swing states, Independent ticket splitting ranged from 7 percent to 14 percent.¹¹⁰ That translates to hundreds of thousands of voters who were persuaded to vote for candidates from different parties—evidence that Americans are open to candidates with winning ideas regardless of party affiliations.

Overall, the all-candidate primary represents a natural extension of Arizona’s existing election system that prioritizes freedom and choice but could do a better job of creating incentives for candidates to appeal broadly to the diverse Arizona electorate. The amount of split-ticket voting in 2024 suggests that Arizona voters stand to benefit from a shift away from electing candidates in low-turnout, partisan primaries and instead selecting public officials through higher-participation general elections.

Conclusion

Arizona’s experience offers timely lessons on how states can design election systems that are secure, accessible, and responsive to voter needs. From navigating citizenship verification to improving vote tabulation and exploring primary reform, Arizona demonstrates both the promise and the complexity of election policy. By learning from these successes and setbacks, other states—and Arizona itself—can refine their approaches in ways that strengthen voter confidence and improve democratic participation. The path forward requires collaboration, adaptability, and a commitment to building trust—an outcome within reach when states pursue reforms with clarity, coordination, and intent.



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About the Authors

Chris McIsaac is a governance fellow at the R Street Institute.

Bill Gates is the Director of the ASU Mechanics of Democracy Laboratory and a Professor of Practice at ASU Watts College of Public Service of Community Solutions.

109. “2024 General Election Canvass,” p. 1. https://apps.azsos.gov/election/2024/ge/canvass/20241105_GeneralCanvass_Signed.pdf; “2024 Primary Election Canvass,” Arizona Secretary of State, Aug. 15, 2024, p. 1. https://azsos.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2024_Primary_Election_Official_Canvass_0815b.pdf.

110. Dan Hunting et al., “The independent vote in 2024: An analysis of swing-states vs. US,” Arizona State University Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy, January 2025. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_jEsAcMLfhpMELNxt5YyGJlqswkvF/view.