

FORUM 411

Engaging Arizona's Leaders

DO GOOD NEIGHBORS MAKE GOOD CITIZENS?

Pride. Loyalty. Passion. Confidence. That's how most of us feel about Arizona. But is that enough? Are Arizonans as involved in our communities as we are attached to them? Can we have one without the other?

A recent poll of more than 3,600 Arizonans reports that we have strong "attachment" to our communities, placing us among the highest levels of 26 U.S. communities that the Gallup Organization measured in a separate study. Attachment, Gallup says, is "the loyalty and passion that connects people to place," and reflects pride in and "overall satisfaction" with it, confidence in its future, and a willingness to recommend it to others. The poll found that more than a third of us – 36% – were "highly loyal and connected to the community," while another 41% were less passionate yet saw "positive aspects of community."¹

This high level of attachment may surprise some, given that Arizona has so often been portrayed as a place of low civic engagement – an outpost of isolated residents who prefer to disappear behind their garage doors and not busy themselves with their community's wider welfare (see sidebar on page 3). That is, we like where we live, but aren't inclined to do much about it. The findings in *The Arizona We Want*, a report by the Center for the Future of Arizona, point to another reality, and thus raise some intriguing questions.

True, the attachment reported by Arizonans is a key element in what social scientists call "social capital" and regard as fundamental to significant civic involvement. As defined by Harvard University professor Robert Putnam, one of social capital's most prominent spokesmen, "it refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense,"





Analysis found that GDP growth in highly attached communities outpaced population growth, suggesting that attachment may be a “leading indicator” of prosperity.

Putnam adds, “social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue.’”² Yet there is evidence that, while most Arizonans like their communities and trust their neighbors, relatively few seem to volunteer, donate to charity, get involved in community issues, or even vote – which are the most frequent measures of civic virtue. Compared to most other Americans, that is, Arizonans display less enthusiasm for civic involvement – despite the good feelings they have for where they live.

Involvement matters. Decades of research show that levels of civic involvement are related to a community’s outcomes. For example, the more involved people are, the better off they and their communities are. In particular, this sense of well being may translate into concrete economic benefit. In *The Arizona We Want*, Gallup reported that, in the communities it studied, the places with more attachment also enjoyed higher levels of gross domestic product (GDP), a standard measure of prosperity. Perhaps even more intriguing, its analysis found that GDP growth in highly attached communities outpaced population growth, suggesting that attachment may be a “leading indicator” of prosperity.

Looking at the Evidence: Attachment

Arizonans have displayed an emotional connection to their communities in many studies. For example, the four surveys of Greater Phoenix residents done for Morrison Institute’s *What Matters* series from 1996-2004 found consistently that two-thirds of respondents reported “a sense of community with other members of their community” and a neighborhood quality of life that was “excellent” or “good.”³ In 2008, Morrison Institute’s statewide *AZ Views* surveys reported that 72% of Arizonans believed the quality of life where they live was excellent (19%) or good (53%).⁴ Even with the recent economic crisis, in an *AZ Views* May 2009 follow-up poll, 65% of Arizonans reported that their local quality of life was excellent (15%) or good (50%). In the 2008 study, nearly 75% said they feel safe walking down their street after dark and 79% said their area had a reputation for being a safe place.

In the *Phoenix Area Social Survey* (PASS), a survey of 800 residents in 40 Phoenix neighborhoods in 2006,⁵ 60% of these residents said they strongly identified with the state of Arizona, and about half said they felt a high sense of belonging to the Valley. In another section, residents were asked how many neighbors were friends and how often they did favors for and visited neighbors. On a scale of 1 to 5 – 5 being highest – the average neighborliness score for all respondents was 2.83, which was above the midpoint.

In addition, a 2008 statewide poll conducted for St. Luke’s Health Initiatives (SLHI) found the majority of Arizonans reporting that people in their neighborhood get along (86%), help each other out (83%), watch each other’s children (82%), and share values (60%).⁶

PHOENIX METRO RESIDENTS HAVE BEEN POSITIVE ABOUT QUALITY OF LIFE

	1997	1998	1999	2004
Residents who report a sense of community with other members of their community	66%	66%	61%	69%
Residents who report they know all or most of their neighbors by name	36%	36%	33%	N/A
Residents who report quality of life in neighborhood excellent or good	58%	65%	63%	64%

n=600. Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University.

ARIZONANS SAY THEY GET ALONG WITH NEIGHBORS, BUT ARE CONCERNED ABOUT BAD INFLUENCES ON KIDS

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know or Refused
People in neighborhood do not get along*	2%	8%	56%	30%	4%
People in neighborhood can be trusted*	27%	59%	8%	1%	5%
People in neighborhood do not share values*	4%	22%	48%	12%	14%
People in neighborhood help each other out*	20%	63%	10%	2%	5%
There are people in the neighborhood I can count on*	28%	57%	9%	2%	4%
People in neighborhood watch each other's children**	27%	55%	13%	2%	3%
There are people in the neighborhood who are a bad influence on children**	9%	40%	39%	8%	4%

* n=4,196, ** n=897. Source: St. Luke's Health Initiatives, Arizona Health Survey, arizonahealthsurvey.org.

Trust

Mutual trust among residents is another essential element of healthy communities. While much has been written about Arizonans as a collection of strangers, data again suggest a different picture. The 2008 statewide SLHI study found 86% of respondents reporting that their neighbors can be trusted, and 85% saying “there are people in the neighborhood I can count on.” A 2008 Morrison Institute survey found 54% agreeing that “people in this neighborhood can be trusted.” Most Arizonans also expressed trust in their leaders and institutions. The 2008 Morrison Institute poll found 85% of respondents expressing some or a great deal of trust in local police, 81% in local hospitals, 72% in local schools, and even 54% in local elected officials.

The 2006 PASS survey reinforced this outlook. Respondents were asked if they could trust their neighbors; if their neighbors got along; if it was a tight-knit neighborhood; if neighbors could be depended upon to solve problems cooperatively. On a scale of 1 to 4, 4 being highest, the average trust score for all respondents was 3.08, substantially above the midpoint and thus viewed as high.

ARIZONANS MOST TRUSTED LOCAL POLICE OFFICERS

How much do you trust each of the following to act in the best interests of your community?	Great Deal	Somewhat	Not Much	Not at All	Don't Know
Local police officers	44%	41%	12%	2%	1%
Local hospitals	29%	52%	8%	2%	10%
Local schools	25%	47%	13%	5%	9%
Local religious organizations	24%	42%	16%	3%	16%
Local nonprofit community organizations	19%	53%	16%	1%	11%
Local businesses	14%	53%	22%	4%	8%
Local elected officials	7%	47%	31%	7%	7%

n=545-551. Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2008.

According to Arizonans themselves, then, we are a rather neighborly, trusting group who generally get along with others, hold many values in common, help each other out, have confidence in basic local institutions and believe we share a positive quality of life. We report healthy social bonds with our family, friends, and neighbors. This conclusion not only seems to counter critics' negative notions of Arizona, it would appear to be an ideal foundation for the mix of political involvement, voting, volunteering, giving, and other forms of “civic virtue” whose demise in America is so widely lamented. But if bonding with those around us seems to be commonplace in Arizona, many residents seem not yet to have taken the next steps of translating those positive relationships into civic action.

DISCOURAGING WORDS

Back in 1987, urban columnist Neil Peirce wrote of Phoenix: “people seemingly anxious to isolate themselves from others; installing a private pool, erecting a fence, rarely getting to know neighbors...” and “for the poor, Phoenix might be one of the worst places in the nation to live.... The region is also close to notorious for its dependence on federal dollars and a refusal to spend its own money for social services.”

A *New York Times* columnist in 2007 called Phoenix “the new American city,” where people come because “nobody has a past.”



ARIZONA ATTACHMENT

The *Arizona We Want* lists 11 “key drivers of attachment in Arizona,” from most to least important:

- Social Offerings
- Aesthetics & Natural Environment
- Openness
- Basic Services
- K-12 Education
- Leadership
- Higher Education
- Economy
- Safety
- Social Capital
- Involvement

Looking at the Evidence: Involvement

Neighborhood Activism

The *Arizona We Want* lists 11 “key drivers of attachment in Arizona,” factors “that define a healthy community.” The most potent driver Gallup identified was “social offerings” (i.e., entertainment, easy to meet people). The most weakly correlated driver was “involvement.” The PASS survey found that most respondents, while scoring at about the midpoint for neighborliness and trust, scored below the midpoint on “being active neighborhood problem-solvers.” Asked if they were active in attending neighborhood meetings, working on projects, or contacting government officials about neighborhood problems, the group average score was 2.13, a score below the midpoint. The 2008 Morrison Institute survey asked Arizonans how important 11 cultural and social activities were to them. On a scale from 1 to 10 where 10 was highest, the respondents said they valued “strengthening family relationships” much more highly (7.9) than “being involved in a cause” (5.4) or “volunteering in my community” (5.3).

BUILDING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY FOR ARIZONANS

Activity	Score
Strengthening family relationships	7.9
Exercising and staying healthy	7.3
Sharpening my mind; intellectual pursuits	7.2
Having a spiritual life	6.8
Developing my creativity	6.5
Making new friends and expanding my social network	6.5
Learning about new ideas	6.4
Supporting environmental causes and conservation efforts	6.2
Being involved in a cause	5.4
Volunteering in my community	5.3
Being on the leading edge of new art	4.0

n=626-632. Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University.

Volunteering

In 2008, 33% of adults in Arizona said they volunteered in their communities.⁷ This represents a lot of involvement, yet it does not compare well with other states. In fact, according to the census-based website, Volunteering in America.org, Arizona placed 42nd in its rate of volunteering.⁸ Asked again about volunteering through a charitable organization in 2009, again one-third of Arizonans said yes and two-thirds said no.

MOST WHO VOLUNTEER FOCUS ON A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION OR HELPING CHILDREN OR YOUTH

Purpose of volunteering	%
At or through your church, synagogue, or mosque	19%
To serve children or youth	19%
To serve people in need (not health)	13%
To serve seniors	11%
For other purposes	8%
To serve people in poor health	7%
To promote social change	6%

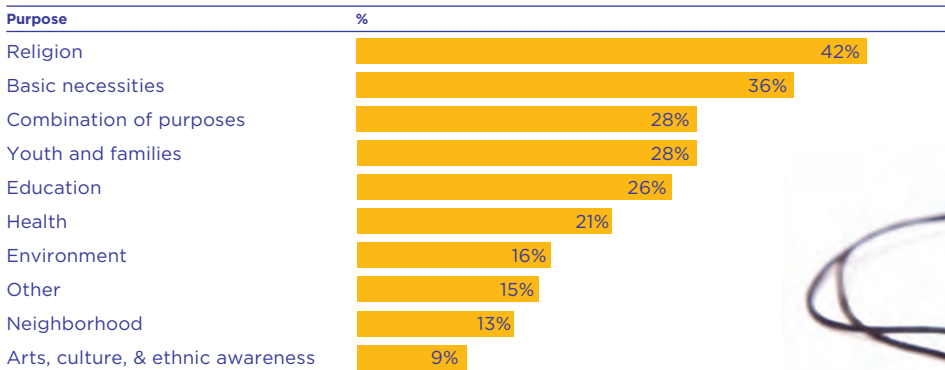
n=456. Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2009.



Charitable Giving

Of 10 most frequent charitable purposes listed in the 2008 AzViews poll, “neighborhood” came in ninth. In a separate October 2009 poll, 77% of Arizonans said they made some kind of charitable donation, most commonly to religious organizations; this places Arizona around the national average. More than half of Arizonans said they gave more than \$25 in 2008 to extended family members, friends, or community members without expectation of repayment. Given the state of the economy, however, it is unlikely that giving will grow substantially soon. In response to a question, 12% of Arizona households said they expected to give more to charity in 2009 than in 2008, while 38% said they would give less.

RELIGIOUS CAUSES RECEIVE THE MOST CONTRIBUTIONS

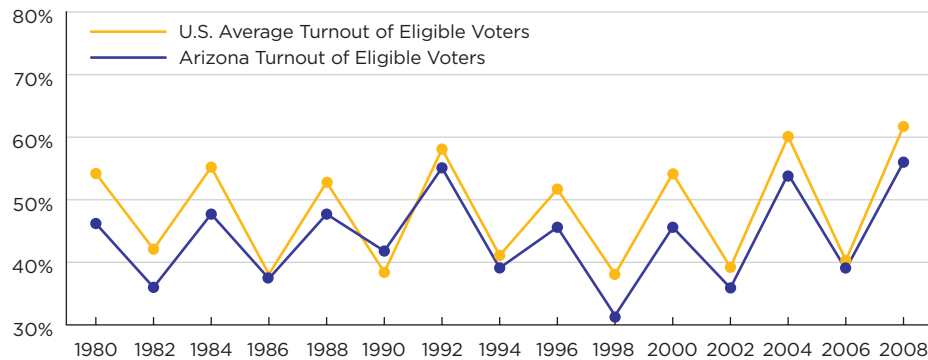


n=687. Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2008.

Voting

As a measure of civic involvement, no activity is considered more fundamental than voting. Widely viewed as not just a right but a duty of every citizen, it’s been called a “civic sacrament.”⁹ Arizonans, however, have on the whole been less engaged in this civic task than residents of most other states. During the past three decades, Arizona’s percentage turnout of eligible voters in national elections has topped the national average only once, in the 1990 election that featured a tight gubernatorial race between Fife Symington and Terry Goddard and two controversial ballot propositions concerning a holiday for the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Arizona’s turnout ranked 14th in that election, while in most others since 1980 we remained near the bottom of all states.

ARIZONANS HAVE NOT BEEN KNOWN FOR TURNING OUT TO VOTE



Source: U.S. Elections Project, George Mason University.¹⁰



In response to a question, 12% of Arizona households said they expected to give more to charity in 2009 than in 2008, while 38% said they would give less.

AMERICA'S DECLINE IN SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Family dinners and family vacations, or even just sitting and talking with your family, are down by one third in the last 25 years.
- Having friends over to the house is down by 45% over the last 25 years.
- Participation in clubs and civic organizations has been cut by more than half over the last 25 years.
- Involvement in community life, such as public meetings, is down by 35% over the last 25 years.
- Church attendance is down by roughly one third since the 1960s.

Source: Harvard University's Saguro Seminar.



The High Attachment, Low Participation Paradox

Why do most Arizonans seem to like their neighbors, their neighborhoods, and their state, but exhibit less interest in shared civic activities? Putnam and other social capital scholars suggest that the answer to this apparent paradox may lay in the difference between “bonding” and “bridging.” “Bonding” social capital, they say, creates networks among groups of similar people – for example, family members or even members of a gang; “bridging” social capital promotes ties between different types of people – expectant parents in a birthing class, say, or military recruits. Bridging social capital – which promotes trust and cooperation among differing groups – is the type that Putnam and others say makes the most difference. So why would Arizonans bond well but bridge less?

This is an important issue for Arizona that deserves more analysis than can be offered here. It might in fact serve as an effective avenue into the more general question of civic engagement in the state. Meanwhile, some possible explanations include:

- Arizona is home to lots of newcomers, many of whom remain mobile after they get here. The PASS study found few adults who had lived at their current home very long, while nearly two of five said they would probably or definitely move from their present home within two years. The study also found that residents who were born here and have lived longest in the Valley expressed the strongest sense of belonging here. It's also important to note that large numbers of Arizona residents move out of the state each year as well as move in. If people do not intend to stay, they may not get involved.
- Distances in Arizona's cities and from place to place are great. Physical distance discourages cooperation and activism.
- Arizonans are less trusting of political leaders than of other community leaders. This may dampen people's faith that their actions can affect the civic good.
- Arizona has relatively large proportions of lower-income, less-educated residents – two groups known for less involvement in civic affairs.
- Many current Arizona residents say they came here to escape past involvements, and in search of a sort of freedom from imposed obligations. The pull to be involved and the push from established networks may be less.
- Putnam's research has also led him to conclude that increasing diversity in a community tends to reduce trust among both similar and dissimilar groups. This suggests that, as Arizona becomes more ethnically diverse, both bonding and bridging social capital can be weakened rather than strengthened.

Implications for Policy

One understandable response to all this is – as always: So what? Why should Arizonans care about academic discussions of abstract notions like “civic engagement,” particularly when the state's numbers aren't that much lower than others? One reason is the most obvious: the freedoms enshrined in the U.S. Constitution did not arise by accident; it would be unwise for us to ignore their upkeep and their transmission to future generations. The second reason is more concrete: Civic engagement has been repeatedly linked to higher quality of life, more robust economic growth, better school achievement, and lower crime rates – among other real

and measurable benefits. The World Bank, an institution not given to romanticizing social ills, promotes civic engagement as a business-development strategy.

At first thought, it is hard to imagine a less promising time in our nation or state's recent history to contemplate a campaign for greater civic involvement. America's Civic Health Index, published annually by the government-sponsored National Conference on Citizenship,¹¹ concluded this year that "the economic recession is causing a civic depression." Its national survey found 72% of Americans reporting cutbacks on time spent volunteering and doing other civic activities. The 2009 survey also asked national respondents, "In your opinion, how strong is the civic tradition of your state?" The bottom three states in this regard were Illinois, Arizona, and Georgia.

But the survey's authors acknowledge that the current hard times need not quash civic involvement. The crisis could, in fact, have the opposite effect and encourage people to work together on serious problems in our communities and state. If so, it won't happen without leadership at all levels of Arizona government and society that recognizes the long-term importance of civic engagement – and the need to work together to promote it. New policies are needed. Leadership is crucial. Ultimately, however, ordinary Arizonans themselves must figure out how to build upon residents' affection for their state to promote the values and habits of civic participation. Economic recession and partisan gridlock make this an especially challenging time to generate civic engagement in Arizona. But challenging times are exactly when pragmatic, inclusive, evidence-based responses are most needed.

Some Suggested Initiatives:

- Include civic engagement in the state's initiatives for education. Begin civics education as early as possible, attach civics to service-learning projects, incorporate civic education into standards, provide post-school leadership training for college and young adults.
- Regularly assess the impact on neighborhood cohesion of large-scale public policy decisions, such as mass transit, residential development, downtown projects, etc.
- Widen the opportunities for citizens to help make policy. Projects such as ASU's 100 Greatest Challenges and the White House Citizen's Briefing Book, undertaken through a "deliberative democracy" process, offer concrete ways for people to learn and participate.
- Continue to make voting as easy as possible. Arizona was a leader with the "motor voter" statute in the 1980s. Vote by mail and early voting have proven popular.
- Tap faith-based organizations' considerable influence for civic engagement.
- Hold a civic summit to focus on and energize civic engagement.
- Make civic engagement a cornerstone of Arizona's centennial observations in 2012.

In the coming months, Morrison Institute will look further at attachment and involvement, bonding, and bridging in an effort to assist the robust public conversation that must take place if a healthy, dynamic democracy is to thrive in Arizona.

PROMISING PROGRAMS

- **The O'Connor House Project**
A community effort, launched under the direction of former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, to promote the compromise and consensus needed to move society forward.
- **Hampton Youth Civic Engagement**
A Virginia program to instill community pride and leadership skills in young people and engage them in governance.
- **ASU's Center for Civic Education & Leadership**
A program to enhance civics education in Arizona's K-12 schools as a way to promote democracy and freedom.



How can you and other
Arizonans become more
actively involved in
the well-being of your
community and the
future of the state?

Send your suggestions to
morrison.institute@asu.edu.

- 1 *The Arizona We Want*. Phoenix, Center for the Future of Arizona. <http://www.thearizonawewant.org>. (2009).
- 2 R.D. Putnam (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, Simon & Schuster.
- 3 Morrison Institute for Public Policy, *What Matters*, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2004.
- 4 <http://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/publications-reports/az-views>.
- 5 S. L. Harlan, M. Budruk, et. al. (2007) *Phoenix Area Social Survey: Community and Environment in a Desert Metropolis*. Global Institute of Sustainability, Arizona State University.
- 6 St. Luke's Health Initiatives (2008) Arizona Health Survey, arizonahealthsurvey.org.
- 7 Morrison Institute of Public Policy, Arizona Indicators panel survey, October 2009.
- 8 Data come from the *Current Population Survey (CPS) September Volunteer Supplement* of 60,000 US households. Data from 2006-2008 are combined. Results are reported at: <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/index.cfm>.
- 9 By former University of Notre Dame president Theodore Hesburgh.
- 10 The United States Election Project, George Mason University, <http://elections.gmu.edu/index.html>.
- 11 National Conference on Citizenship, 2009 Civic Health Index; <http://www.ncoc.net>; accessed November 2009.



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Morrison Institute is a leader in examining critical issues, a catalyst for public dialogue, and a forecaster of coming issues and outlooks. An Arizona State University resource, Morrison Institute uses nonpartisan research and communication outreach to help improve Arizona's quality of life.

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