

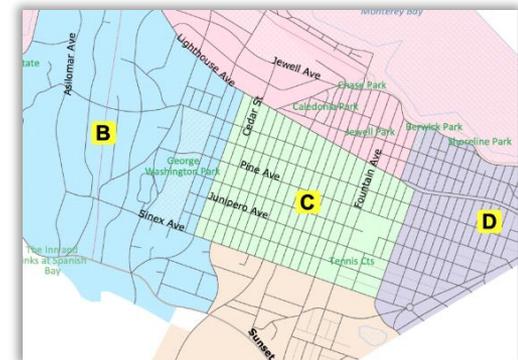
APACHE JUNCTION

District Elections Discussion

April 14, 2025

What are by-district elections?

- City is drawn into districts of equal population
 - ▣ Typically, the Mayor remains a citywide position
 - ▣ Six Councilmembers = Six districts
- Elections remain staggered
 - ▣ Three Council seats up for election every two years
- Vote by District
 - ▣ Only the voters in a Council district vote for the representative of that district



What Prompts the Change?

1. Federal Voting Rights Act Challenge

- Simplified explanation: A significant and concentrated “protected class” population grows large enough to be a majority of a district
 - “Protected Classes” are Latino, Black/African-American, Asian-American, or Native American

2. Size Becomes Unwieldy

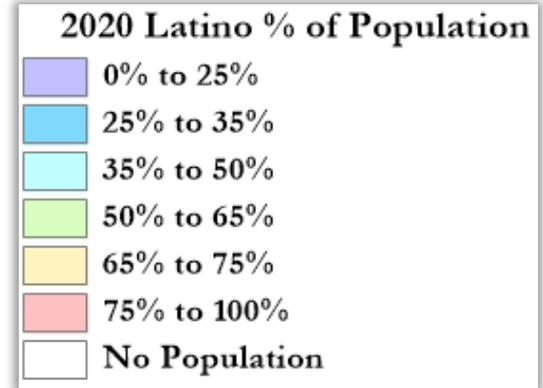
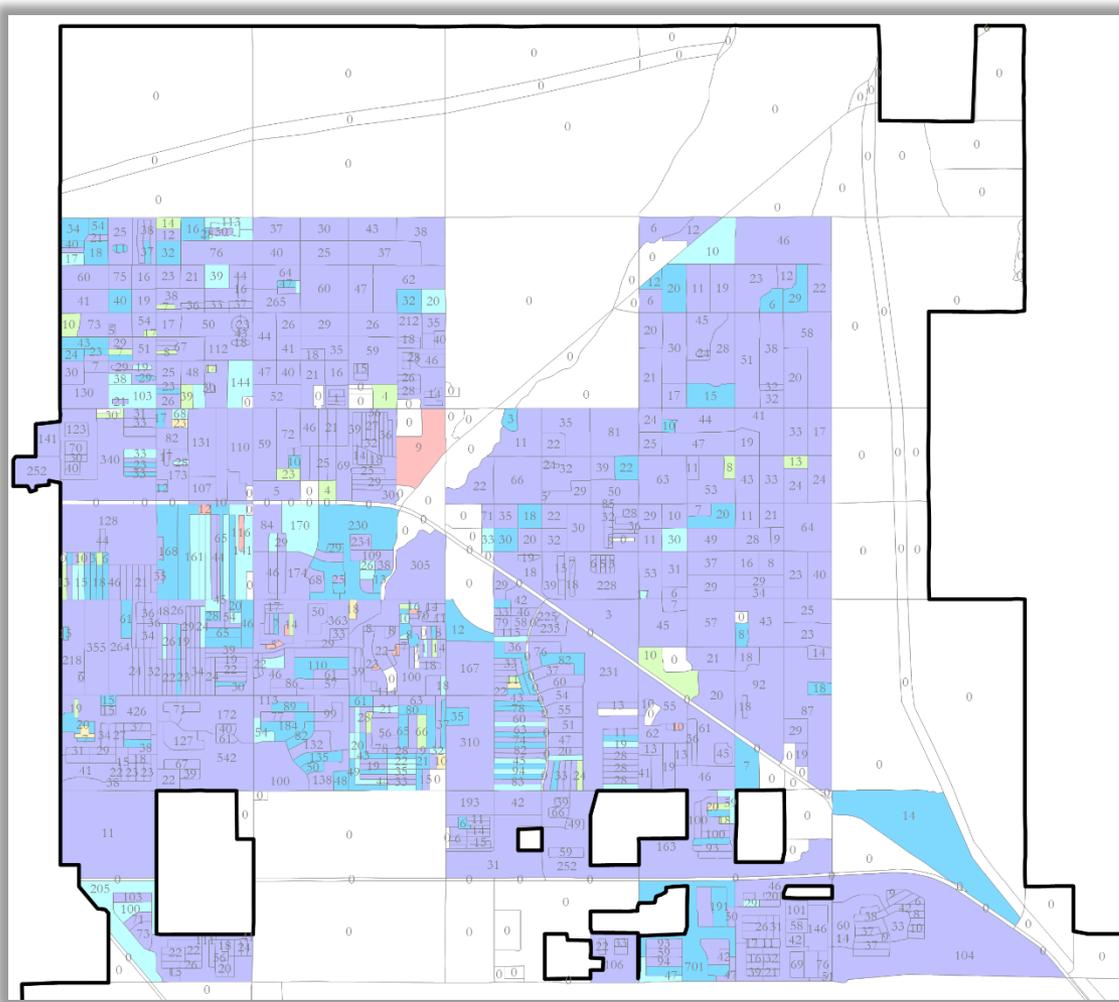
- When residents and Councilmembers feel a City is too big to reasonably campaign in and represent the entire city
- The cost of campaigns is often a factor in deciding to change

3. A Region Feels Neglected

- If one part of a City feels neglected and unrepresented, it could push for districts to ensure a voice on Council



Apache Junction Demographics



2020 Census Data:

38,499 Total Population

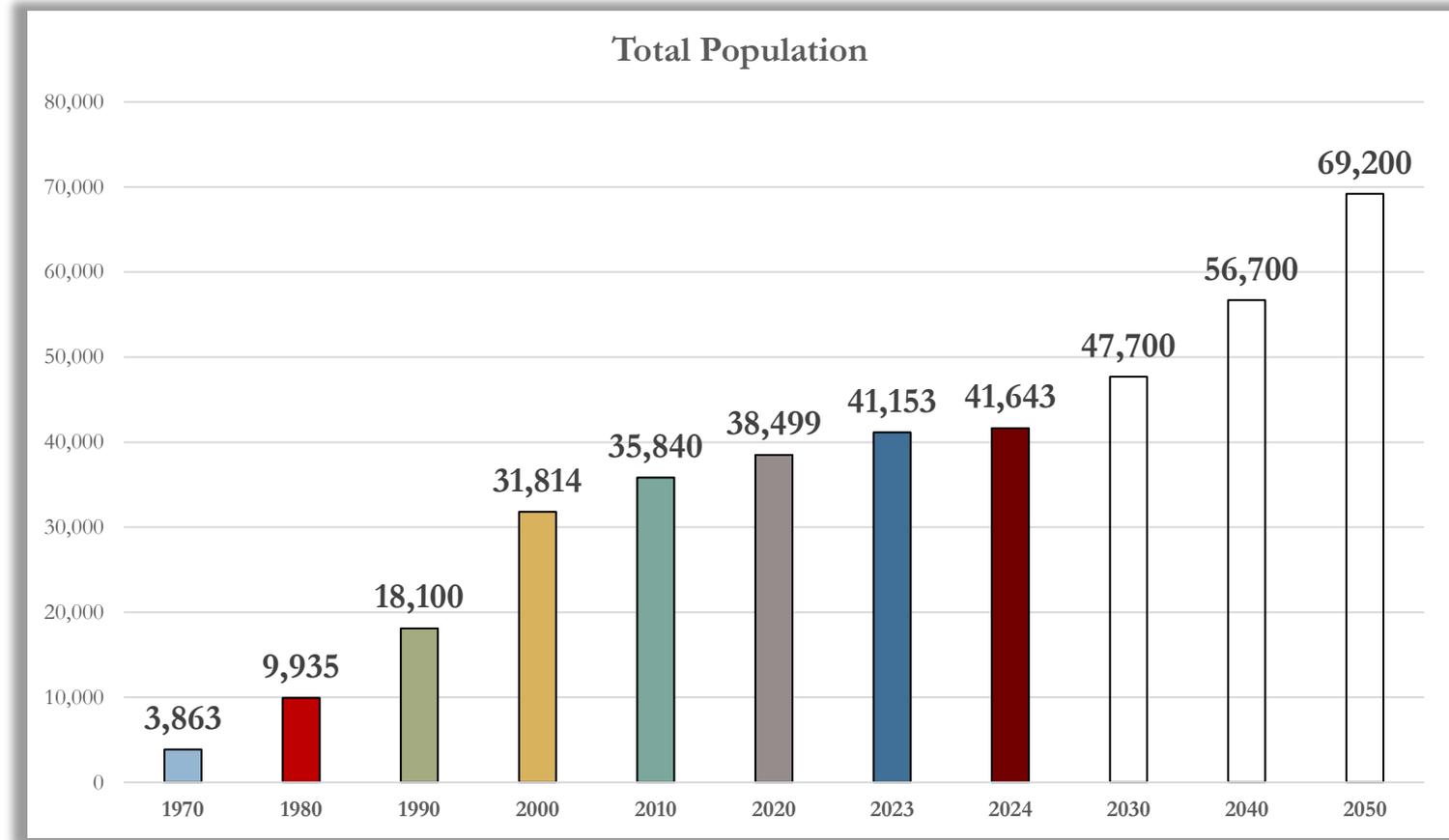
29,283 Non-Hispanic White (76%)

6,647 Hispanic/Latino (17%)

2,569 Other (7%)

Latinos are 1/6 of city's population.
Latinos are not geographically concentrated.

Apache Junction Population



If drawn today, each district would contain approximately 6,941 people.
Total population, not registered voters, is used.

Change Points In Other Cities

	Year	Population at Change	2024 Population
Phoenix	1982	789,704	1,697,696
Mesa	1998	366,825	524,892
Glendale	1988	148,134	260,878
Peoria	1989	50,618	203,065
Buckeye	2005	19,931	113,349
Surprise	1997	14,290	165,916

Mesa and Glendale changed to districts after growing rapidly.

Buckeye and Surprise changed to districts in as massive growth began.

Peoria made the change during rapid growth.

The geographic concentration of Latinos was a significant issue in all but Mesa.

Who Decides to Change?

- A change to by-district elections must be approved by the voters
 - ▣ Unless districts are ordered by a Judge
- Typically, the Council votes to put the question on the ballot
 - ▣ In a primary, general or special election
- If approved by the voters, districts are then drawn for use in the next Council election
 - ▣ Once approved, some City Code Sections may need updating to reflect the by-district elections structure



Who Draws the Districts?

- The City Council is in charge, unless voters in a charter city create an independent commission
- Districts are drawn at the time of change and redrawn after every decennial Census
- State law requires districts be equal in population and compact in shape
- The process typically involves significant public outreach and engagement



When Do I Vote?

- Today, each voter casts:
 - ▣ One vote for Mayor every 2 years
 - ▣ Three votes for Council every 2 years
 - ▣ Each voter is one of approximately 12,000 general election voters citywide (and one of about 6,800 primary voters)

- In by-district elections, each voter would cast:
 - ▣ One vote for Mayor every 2 years
 - ▣ One vote for Council every 4 years
 - ▣ Each voter is one of roughly 2,000 general election voters in a district (and one of roughly 1,100 primary voters)



Vacancies & Recalls

- If no one runs:
 - ▣ The seat is treated as a regular vacant seat, and the Council can appoint or call a special election

- If a seat is vacated by the Councilmember:
 - ▣ Just like today, the Council can appoint a replacement or call a special election

- In a recall election:
 - ▣ Only the voters in the district vote on the recall and on the potential replacement candidate

Only registered voters residing in the district are eligible for the seat.



Expense of Districts

□ Costs:

- \$30,000 to \$150,000 for districting and each redistricting
 - (Plus any potential litigation costs if a map is challenged)
 - Cost is driven by the level and duration of public outreach

□ Savings:

- The fees paid to the County for each election *may* go down
 - A possible small reduction if the Mayor continues as a 2-year term
 - Larger savings every other election if the Mayor has a 4-year term

Some Other Considerations

- New residents are often slow to get involved in local politics
 - ▣ A large new development may initially lack interested candidates
 - ▣ But, once established, new developments are often strong advocates of districts

- Impact on economic center
 - ▣ Residents around a “downtown” area tend to oppose expansion of businesses in the area, so district elections can either limit or enhance future economic growth (see below)

- Districts provide a voice, not a majority
 - ▣ Having one local resident on Council gives an area a voice, but it still takes a majority vote to pass anything



General Pro's and Con's

Advantages

- ❑ Create more connection between a voter and the representative
- ❑ Lowers cost of campaigns and reduces influence of mail and other paid media
- ❑ Creates a clear connection between a local issue and local leader
- ❑ Enables each region to have a voice on the Council



Disadvantages

- ❑ Local focus can lead to “logrolling” a.k.a. deal-making and higher spending
- ❑ Other-district representatives may pay less heed to local resident concerns
- ❑ “Not in my backyard” pressure can reduce housing and economic growth
- ❑ Smaller electorates may allow candidates to win with small vote counts
- ❑ Can lead to more uncontested elections
- ❑ Increases interest in paid personal staff for each Councilmember

Decision Checklist:

Factor	Current Status
Federal Voting Rights Act Liability	Not a concern at this time.
Too big for citywide elections?	City's population is growing, but not exploding. Districts drawn today would be small, with roughly 1,100 primary and 2,000 general election voters in each.
Do campaigns cost too much to run citywide?	?
Does a region feel unrepresented / neglected?	?
Any special factors for or against districts?	?

The question marks indicate local decisions that NDC is not in a position to evaluate.



Discussion

