

INTRODUCTION

Why study Arizona Constitution and government?

One cannot live in the United States for very long without hearing the word "constitution." Like most countries, the United States is founded on a constitution. States also have constitutions. Often, so do chess clubs, churches, bowling leagues, mens' and womens' social clubs and scores of other organizations. Americans love constitutions.

It is hardly a joke to say that when half a dozen Americans get together to form a club or organization, the first thing they do is write a constitution. There are reasons for that.

The United States was the first modern nation to have a constitution. All of the original thirteen colonies wrote constitutions. As the United States grew, each new state wrote a constitution.

But what is a constitution?

A constitution is a fundamental document which spells out exactly how a government, state or society is to be organized. It is meant to be a lasting document including only the most important features of a government which do not readily change. For example, a constitution might specify if a state will have a one- or two-house legislature; how the Chief Executive is to be selected and for how long; what powers each branch of government will have; and how disputes are to be resolved.

In many ways, a constitution is like a set of boundaries for a government. It sets the responsibilities and limits of actions of each of a government's parts. For example, the President of the United States can veto a bill passed by Congress; Congress can override that veto with a two-thirds majority.

A constitution also determines and limits the time in which certain actions are to take place. For example, United States presidential elections occur every four years. Senators serve six year terms; representatives face an election every two years.

Often, a constitution also contains statements of a society's highest ideals and goals. After the Civil War, legislation gave freed slaves the right to vote. But an amendment (the Fifteenth Amendment) was made to the Constitution guaranteeing the same thing. Constitutional law is higher than statute law and cannot be easily repealed. The Constitution of the United States also leaves many powers to the states.

Arizona's Constitution dictates how the state of Arizona is to be organized and governed. It determines how our governor and legislature are to be elected, what powers they have and what powers are withheld from them.

The Arizona Constitution also spells out how state laws are to be made, enforced or repealed. Since these laws shape the lives and fortunes of every resident of the state, they are very important to study. They tell us what behavior is allowed, what behavior is forbidden and what the consequences of violating those standards shall be.

The Arizona Constitution also contains a Declaration of Rights which, like the United States Bill of Rights, outlines the great guarantees sacred to all individuals.

The following study is a basic introduction to how and what the Arizona Constitution and government grew to be, how it has changed, and why it has taken the shape it has. It is only the beginning of understanding the ongoing story of Arizona. But the information contained in this book lies at the heart of what Arizona citizens must know to take an informed, active, responsible part in the destiny of their state.