



DON'T CALL IT A PRIMARY **How the Scottsdale City Election Works**

by Ethan Knowlden

The upcoming election on July 21 is often called a “primary.” But for the Scottsdale City Council race, that label is misleading. Our election is citywide and nonpartisan. There are no districts, and **all eight candidates run against each other for three seats.**

For political parties, the July election determines which candidates will represent each party on the November ballot for offices like Congress, the State Legislature, and other partisan races.

But that’s not how the City Council race works.

WHAT THE JULY ELECTION ACTUALLY DOES

The July election narrows the field. The top six vote-getters move on to the November 3 general election. The other two candidates are eliminated. However, there’s an important twist.

WINNING OUTRIGHT IN JULY

A candidate can win a seat outright in the July election. To do that, the candidate must receive one-half of one-third (for the three seats open) of the total votes cast for City Council, rounded up. **This works out to about 16.67% of the total votes cast.**

If one candidate reaches that threshold, they win a seat immediately. In that case, the next four candidates with the most votes advance to November, where they compete for the remaining two seats.

If two candidates reach the threshold, they both win seats outright, and only two candidates advance to November to compete for the final seat.



IT TAKES FEWER VOTES THAN YOU THINK

The July election happens in the middle of summer, and **voter turnout tends to be low**. Many Scottsdale residents are traveling in June and July, when ballots are mailed and returned.

Recent turnout numbers show the pattern:

- **2022:** 44% of registered voters cast ballots
- **2024:** 39% voted

Another factor: **many voters select fewer than three candidates**, even though three seats are available. That reduces the total vote count and lowers the number needed to win outright. Because of this, the number of votes required to win a seat in July can be surprisingly small.

For example:

- **2024:** Jan Dubauskas won outright with **27,717 votes** (17.89% of the total council votes)
- **2022:** Kathy Littlefield and Solange Whitehead both won outright with 37,036 and 31,790 votes (21.7% and 18.6%)

If every Scottsdale registered voter participated and voted for three candidates, the number needed to win outright would likely exceed **80,000 votes**. But turnout and voting patterns mean the real threshold is much lower.

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