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October 27, 2022

Two Reasons for Independents to Celebrate!



L to R: Dr. Jessie Fields, Jackie Salit, Dr. Thom Reilly, John Avlon,
Andrew Yang, Dean Cyntia Lietz, Dr. Omar H. Ali

By Gwen Mandell, Director of National Outreach and Editor of The Hub

On Wednesday, October 19, I had the honor of joining a roomful of invited guests in Washington DC. They were leaders of political reform and democracy organizations, university leaders, academics, and independent activists who traveled from states as far and wide as Arizona, Georgia, Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia, New Hampshire, Ohio, New Jersey and New York. We were there to celebrate the launch of Arizona State University's new **Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy** (co-directed by Independent Voting president Jackie Salit and ASU professor Thom Reilly) and the publication of ***The Independent Voter*** co-authored by Salit, Reilly and Dr. Omar H. Ali.



The event, **The Independent Voter – Who Are They? What Do They Want? Can They Move the Country to Nonpartisan Politics?** was sponsored by the ASU Center and held at ASU's Washington DC-based Barrett and O'Connor Center.

The three co-authors were joined by Cynthia Lietz, Dean of the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, who gave the welcome and introduced a video message from ASU President Michael Crow. Crow said: "There are more independents than ever before. There's lots of discussion all three sides of the equation about election reform.. There's hunger out there for

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finding ways to get the best candidateThere's a desire for a new way of thinking about things so this new center is focused on that." Andrew Yang (co-chair of the Forward Party), John Avlon (CNN senior political analyst and author) and Dr. Jessie Fields (Independent Voting board member) were special guests.

The Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy, as Salit shared in her opening remarks, was created to address the significant bias against independents in many corners ("We think that the more that independents are brought into the mainstream, the more they will have the effect of changing the political culture from the bottom up and force changes at the top that otherwise will not happen"); and to use the platform of influence and prestige that Arizona State University brings to the table, to bring together diverse forces and come up with new pathways for conducting American politics.

Salit added: "That's a broad vision. It's a very big bite at the apple, but we are up for doing the job."

After reporting on some of the initial findings of the Center that are featured in the new book, Dr. Reilly said: "What we discovered in our research is that Independents are a volatile, unpredictable group that do not have a loyalty to party, that they move in and out of independent status. The fact that this has not been studied is amazing, that we automatically dismiss this growing number of individuals who are independents. If you take anything away from this book, it's that being an independent voter is extremely complex. If anyone thinks they can tell you how these individuals vote, they have another thing coming. And the complexity and volatility and unpredictability is what's so important and deserves a deeper dive."

Fields, who wrote the Afterword to the book said: "I became a physician to give back to the community but realized that even that is not enough. We the African American community and all dispossessed communities need to take on the fight for a durable



and inclusive democracy. Our political process itself really needs transformation and that is so connected to all of the concerns we face on the ground in poor communities and communities of color. And this book and this Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy are critically needed."

Ali (Dean of Lloyd International Honors College and Professor of African-American political history at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro) added in his remarks, "We are part of a broad democracy movement and we have to perform in new ways. We have to teach people how to exercise our power to be steeped in that history."

Journalist John Avlon said: "When you look at the way the parties have taken over our politics and you look at the way independents have risen from roughly 25% in 1992 to 45% today precisely as the two parties have gotten more polarized, that's not an accident. But there is an attempt to diminish the impact of independents....so following independents is critical, especially if you want to see who is going to win an election, but also if you want to see a principled resistance to polarization that we're seeing today."

Andrew Yang wrote the Foreword to the book. He said that he wanted to attempt to answer the three questions presented in the title.

Who are Independents: "Half of Americans."

What do they want? "All sorts of different things but most of them want a system that is actually working for them and members of their communities and leaders who will actually treat them like human beings and not just props in their logical argument."

Can we move the country to nonpartisan politics? "We better hope so, because in the absence of that kind of movement, where will we be? We will be in this polarized system that is getting more and more extreme – where now 42% of Democrats regard Republicans as immoral and the same percentage of Republicans feel that way about Democrats."



(L to R): Jackie Salit, Dr. Thom Reilly, John Avlon, Andrew Yang, Dr. Omar Ali.

During a panel discussion that followed, Salit asked the panelists to say why they thought these three issues were now coming center stage in American politics:

Avlon responded: "The polarization that independents are reacting to really is an existential issue for our democratic republic, which is why we've got to deal with it. And I think that's what many independents are trying to do."

Yang added: "Less than 10% feel our democracy is functioning well, and over 50% fear for our country's future. Yet when you bring these realities to the partisans – what do they say is the problem? The other side. If you just help us eke out this last election, all will be well. And more and more Americans know that that's just false."



The Independent Voter authors with Independent Voting activists from six states

As someone who has spent the bulk of my adult life speaking with and organizing independents, the event (and more importantly the Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy and the book that it celebrated), signaled to me that we could be in for some exciting times ahead. For so long, independents' experience of challenging the barriers of the two-party system and pushing for progress has been like that of Sisyphus pushing a giant bolder up a hill and finding that we are back where we began. We now have some valuable tools in our toolbox to build with. And given the state of the country, not a moment too soon!

I was eager to hear what some other independent activists who attended the event were thinking.

Tiani Coleman, founder of New Hampshire Independent Voters agreed. "It feels like independent voters are having a moment. It was thrilling to be at the launch of the new Arizona State University Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy. To hear the President of ASU share his support and vision for the Center and then be graced by the experience, wisdom and energy of Jackie, Thom, Omar, Andrew, John and Jessie was exciting; I felt hopeful that the march towards a more



sustainable democracy is on the horizon, with independent voters leading the way into a less polarized future wherein we can find innovative, workable solutions to the issues that plague us.”



Jeanette Schultz, who traveled from Dayton, Ohio for the event and is one of the independents featured in the book, said: "Finally! A room full of people who get what it means to be an independent voter. Thank you, ASU, for sponsoring this wonderful event. For me it was a privilege to attend the book signing for *The Independent Voter* and see the results of the authors' research including Chapter 7, "Independents Speak." Twenty-three people, including myself, tell their own stories rejecting the notion of *leaners* that pollsters, partisans, and political parties use to downplay our growing importance as voters. We're definitely an eclectic group able to transform our nation's democracy to achieve fairer representation.

Reverend Carl McCluster, senior pastor at the Shiloh Baptist Church in Bridgeport and a leading independent in Connecticut (and featured in the book) said: "It is a privilege to share in the celebration of the signing of Jackie, Thom and Omar's important work and to witness the tremendous work sponsored by Arizona State University through its Washington DC campus. The book opens the door for fresh thought and promotes the broadest range of inclusion for all Americans in the political process. Their work is heretofore unparalleled in terms of recognizing the nuances that hinder and/or will support and promote broader participation in "The American Experiment" and, if applied, will go far to insure the long-lasting stability of the same. Congratulations and THANK YOU Team Jackie!!"



The Impact of Independent Voters

Jackie Salit and Thom Reilly discussed the Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy, *The Independent Voter* and the impact of independent voters, with host Ted Simons on a recent episode of the Arizona *PBS* show, **Arizona Horizons**.

Simons: Independent voters make up a third of Arizona's electorate and have increasingly become a major influence on the state's election results."

Simons asked Salit and Reilly to speak on a number of questions concerning independent voters, including: Who qualifies as an independent voter? Why

are we seeing more independent voters? What's the impact on younger and minority voters?

Watch the show [here](#) or click on the photo below to view.



Salit and Reilly can also be heard on this *KJZZ* radio interview: "**Independent not moderate: Why Arizona's unaffiliated voters are so hard to predict.**"

Forward Together

Several hundred people were in Houston, Texas on September 24 for a kick-off rally of the new **Forward Party**. Independent Voting president Jackie Salit moderated the panel, "Why We Got Here" with founders of the new party, Andrew Yang, Former Governor Christine Todd Whitman and Former Rep. David Jolly from Florida.



In August, the Renew America Movement (co-chaired by Governor Whitman), the Serve America Movement (headed by Jolly), and the Forward Party (founded by Yang) – three groups founded by former Republican and Democratic leaders – announced a merger to form the Forward Party.

"When I refer to them as distinguished leaders," began Salit in her introduction, "I mean something particular by that...we're talking about people who've had

position and power, who worked hard to build their careers inside of the political parties and could have stayed there, but decided not to. They walked away from that in order to try to build something that's new – not just a new party, but a new *kind* of party, something that could break through the divide in our country and put us on a new path."

Yang spoke to how unusual it is for three organizations to come together in a common cause: "We all sat around the table and said, 'let's team up and try and make the changes that the American people need.' That sounds like common sense...but it's actually quite unusual for organizations to set aside their agenda or egos, or slight ideological differences...for a common purpose."

Salit asked Andrew Yang, Christine Todd Whitman and David Jolly what their reactions were to the doubting (and sometimes negative) press that followed the announcement of the merger of FORWARD, SAM and RAM.

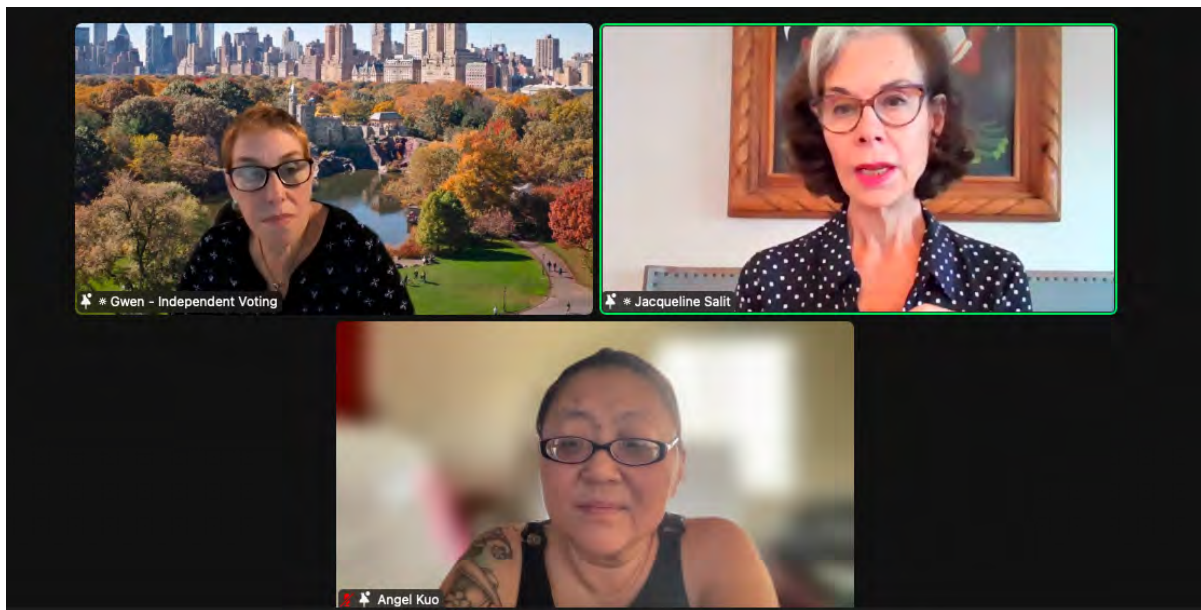
Watch the video below for their responses.



Spokesperson Training: Changing the Mindset

Independent Voting's Spokesperson Training program has become a valuable training ground for independents from all walks of life and experience. On September 20, 19 independents came together to sharpen their skills and tell their stories of why they became independents and what that means to them.

After viewing a Powerpoint presentation filled with facts and anecdotes about independent voters, trainees participated in a question and answer session with Independent Voting president Jackie Salit and were then treated to a public speaking performance training session with performance trainers (and independents) Cathy Salit (a founder of the **Global Play Brigade**) and Maureen Kelly of **Performance of a Lifetime**.



In the Q&A, Angel Kuo of Las Vegas, Nevada (an activist in Nevada's "**YES on 3**" campaign (see below) posed this question to Salit on behalf of her group:

What can we do to change the mindset of the political world that is divided into two, Democrats and Republicans, and get Independents into the conversation?

Salit's answer made clear why a program like the Spokesperson Training is so important for independents:

"It is so apparent that the mindset (which is of course policed by the rules, the regulations, and the culture of how politics is practiced) is so fixed on the idea that there are two parties, two points of view, two choices – and there will never be anything other than that. . . when what the independent community is

saying is this: There's more to life and public policy than the binary choices that are being put in front of the American people."



(Top Row L to R) Don Waisenan (New York & Arizona); Bob Lin (California); Robert Brady (Arizona); (Second Row L to R): Richard Sinclair (Arizona); Dennis Lopez (Florida); Tara Murphy (New Jersey); Angel Kuo (Nevada); (Third Row L to R): Julie Lenner (Illinois); Suzanne Flathers (Connecticut); Dave Harlow (North Carolina); Len Breslow (Maryland) (Fourth Row L to R): Doug Balder (Massachusetts); Al Bell (Arizona); Reed Harrison (Maryland) Colleen Bergnanis (Arizona); (Bottom Row L to R): Will Carter (West Virginia); Anthony (A.W.) Simpson (Indiana); Elaina Goldstein (Rhode Island); Kathy Ramsey (New Mexico)

Spokesperson Trainees Speak

Participants shared their journeys in the performances of their stories. The stories were indeed varied.

A few examples:

Anthony Simpson from Indianapolis, Indiana built on his experience as a member of UAW for 25 years and his familiarity with fair collective bargaining representation to make his statement about independents. "I believe that voters need to be able to bargain with their votes," he said. After the training, he commented: "I'm proud and excited by the growth of the independent voters community. I hope our talents and skills will lead to bigger platforms with power and influence over more citizens of America."

Kathy Ramsey lives in the small town of Almagordo, New Mexico and is active with New Mexico Open Elections. She said: "I really want to see a restored respect in political dialogue and I'm not finding it within our organized parties. I'm an independent because I think we can do better."

Dr. Dave Harlow, currently serves as Senior Vice President for Allied Health for East Carolina University Health and has been a healthcare leader for over 30 years. He said: "At a time when political discourse has become so polarized, being an independent is so critical to sifting through the noise and making well thought-out choices that don't toe the party line. I don't think we can ever stop gridlock without independent voters being heard."

About the training, **Angel Kuo** from Nevada said: "This workshop was not only informative, but also a great opportunity to meet and interact with other politically like-minded people in an inclusive and supportive space."

Kathy Ramsey added: "This training allowed me to improve my message in educating about independent voting and underscored how important using our stories is in claiming our power in impacting meaningful change."

Independent Voting has been receiving an increasing number of requests to connect journalists with independents to be interviewed.

Spokesperson Trainee, Al Bell, also of Arizona, joined another member of the Independent Voting network, Karilyn Van Oosten, and appeared on *NBC's Meet the Press* to talk about the Arizona elections.

And Dennis Lopez, Attorney from Tampa Florida, was recently a panelist on **The Voice of Independents** segment on Florida *WEDU PBS's* "This Week."

Check out spokesperson trainee Suzanne Flathers' story featured in the Profile in Independence section below.

Next Spokesperson Training:

Monday, January 30 6:30 ET

You can apply for the next spokesperson training [here](#).

"Yes on 3" in Nevada Means More Democracy for the Voters

The citizens of Nevada have the opportunity to vote for a ballot measure in this year's midterms to enact nonpartisan primaries and ranked choice voting in the general election through Ballot Question #3. In Nevada, this is called Final Five Voting.



Winning this important democracy reform in Nevada would have ramifications nationwide. Nevada would follow Alaska in being the second state in the country to enact this kind of ballot measure.

Under Final Five Voting, Nevadans will have the opportunity to vote for all candidates regardless of party registration and the five most popular candidates will go on to the general election. The general election will use a ranked ballot to determine the winner.

Sondra Cosgrove, representative of Nevada First, said:

"In Nevada, we have over 600,000 voter voices being suppressed in our closed primary elections. That should be unacceptable to anyone who cares about the health of our democracy. With voter outreach and education, we can enfranchise those Nevadans through an open primary and also amplify their voices through ranked choice voting in the general election. But we need help reaching voters who are on the margins.

For more information on the campaign, email info@vote-nevada.org.


Check out this virtual discussion (below), hosted in September by John Opdycke, president of Open Primaries, with Cosgrove, Joe Brezney, and Cesar Marquez, three key leaders from Nevada First who are leading the **"Yes on 3"** campaign:


not been studied is amazing, that we automatically dismiss this growing number of individuals who are independents. If you take anything away from this book, it's that being an independent voter is extremely complex. If anyone thinks they can tell you how these individuals vote, they have another thing coming. And the complexity and volatility and unpredictability is what's so important and deserves a deeper dive."


OPENPRIMARIES
VIRTUAL DISCUSSION SERIES
NEVADA 2022:
BETTING ON REFORM





Watch this video message below from Independent Voting president Jackie Salit about Independent Voting's survey, "**From 2022 to 2024: Independents Look Ahead.**"

 Salit survey message

 Copy link


**From 2022 to 2024:
Independents Look Ahead**
Take the survey!

Watch on  YouTube

 independentvoting.org

Take the Survey Here

Share the survey widely (Find the survey on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) or from the [campaign page](#) of [Independent Voting's website](#) or [download the survey here](#)).

Arizona Independents Organize



Fifteen independents from Arizona joined a statewide meeting held via Zoom on September 21. The meeting was organized by Richard Sinclair, Henry Schulgasser (Scottsdale), and Al Bell (Peoria). Cathy Stewart, Vice President for National Development for Independent Voting, provided insights regarding national efforts to gain recognition and form functional alliances among independents. She also shared details about the almost twenty-five-year battle to improve the election system in Arizona on behalf of independent voters, pointing out that Arizona was ground zero in the fight for democracy.

The group dubbed themselves the **Arizona Independent Voters' Network**.

Said Sinclair:

"We are a community of voters who choose to think for ourselves and not hew exclusively to a party doctrine or agenda. Our focus is on facilitating informed individual decision-making and enabling those decisions to be expressed without artificial or arbitrary constraints established to favor political parties. Our mission is to establish, expand, and sustain a robust communication

network that will promote the exchange of ideas and information among Arizona's Independent Voters' Network."

The group will be meeting regularly. If you are in Arizona and interested in participating in the Arizona Independent Voters' Network, email azind2022@gmail.com."

The Carter Center Turns Attention to U.S. Democracy

The Carter Center's Democracy Program has long been known for its work globally to support democratic elections and strengthen participatory democracy. It has been a pioneer in election observation, monitoring 113 elections in Africa, Latin America, and Asia since 1989 and developing many of the techniques now common to the field.

THE
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This year, the Center has turned increased attention to some of the issues we face across the United States, launching the **Candidate Principles for Trusted Elections** initiative, an effort to encourage candidates, political parties, and voters to uphold five core doctrines of democratic elections: integrity, nonviolence, security, oversight, and the peaceful transfer of power. The Center is targeting a handful of states for this year's initiative, including Georgia, where the three Secretary of State candidates, including the incumbent have signed on, as well as the incumbent Governor Kemp and his Democratic challenger Stacey Abrams.

The Carter Center reached out to Independent Voting with an invitation to endorse the Candidate Principles. Said Cathy Stewart, Vice President for National Development at Independent Voting: "I am very glad to have the Carter Center joining with so many organizations working on election integrity and their work to involve candidates in this conversation. In addition, at Independent Voting we have been concerned that a vulnerability in our election process lies in allowing the Democratic and Republican parties to run the elections, arbitrate disputes and count ballots. I am hopeful that over the next many years, the conversation about the need for nonpartisan election administration will grow."

You can read more about the Candidate Principles for Trusted Elections [here](#).

Profiles in Independence

Suzanne Flathers

Haddam , CT

I recently retired and have been registered as an independent voter in Haddam Connecticut (otherwise known in Connecticut as “Other”) all my life. I have a BA in Psychology and worked primarily in the aerospace defense industry as a Contract Specialist (CS) and later as a CS in the Veterans Administration.



Suzanne Flathers

I have a strong belief in the ability of people to change things by actively participating and exercising their constitutional rights to vote. This may seem naive and trite in today's political environment but this core principle originated in the constitution where it still resides today — just waiting to be re-discovered by today's American voters.

While there is no mention of the two-party system in the Constitution, the earliest elections laid the foundation for its formation. The two parties, over the years have lost sight of their original purpose to serve the country's voters. Instead, they have developed into political dynasties — with the sole intention of obtaining and retaining power over the American electoral system.

The time has come to slay this two-party monster, removing its power and replacing it with an election system that truly serves all American voters. Together we CAN make this happen. Please write your State Representatives and demand an end to the two party system.

In the News

Read Thom Reilly's latest article, "**Good faith and the honor of partisan election officials used to be enough to ensure trust in voting results, but not anymore.**"(*The Conversation*)

Read "**The Rise of Independents**," which features Dr. Omar Ali. (*UNCG-Research*)

Ali is also quoted in a recent article about independents, "**Major parties court independent voters, who outnumber GOP in NY**." (*Newsday*)

Watch this interview ("**Open Primaries would give independents a bigger voice**") of Open Primaries President John Opdycke by Chris Cuomo (*NewsNation*)

Sue Davies of New Jersey Independents is featured in "**The Reality and Impact of the Independent Voter**," about New Jersey independents by Lisa Jacknow. (*Princeton Perspectives*)

Cesar Marquez (activist in the Nevada "Yes on 3" effort and a co-founder and director at Move Nevada Forward) wrote this editorial "**Buck the status quo — Nevada needs ranked choice voting**" to support Final Five (nonpartisan) primaries and ranked choice voting. (*Reno Gazette-Journal*)

Read "**The threat to democracy that no one is talking about**," an opinion piece by Harry Kresky, counsel to Independent Voting and Jeremy Gruber, senior vice president of Open Primaries." (*The Fulcrum*)

Read this interview with Forward Party National Political Director Joel Searby, in "**A New Type of Political Party Has Launched and is Coming to a City Near You**." (*IVN Network*)

Read "**Elections should have us all on the same team, the voting team**" by former state representative and president of New Mexico Open Elections, Bob Perls. (*Albuquerque Journal*)

Open Primaries' president John Opdycke and chief communications officer for Haywood County Schools, Gabe Hart co-wrote the opinion piece "**Why Tennessee should not require partisan voter registration**." (*The Tennessean*)

Read "**Open primaries or election reform? CT needs both**," by Linda Brinton, independent candidate for state senate in the 25th District for Norwalk and Darien. (*Connecticut Mirror*)

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