

# ARKANSAS

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## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

POLITICAL TRANSPARENCY:  
EXPANDING REQUIREMENTS  
FOR NOTIFYING RESIDENTS  
ABOUT PUBLIC MEETINGS



**ARKANSAS CENTER FOR  
RESEARCH IN ECONOMICS**

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

# The Problem

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Some Arkansas counties still do not publish the time and place of their quorum court meetings online.

Arkansas law does not ensure that residents **receive adequate advance notice** of these meetings so they can make arrangements to attend or send a representative.

The law also does not ensure that residents can **access information** about the content of those meetings.

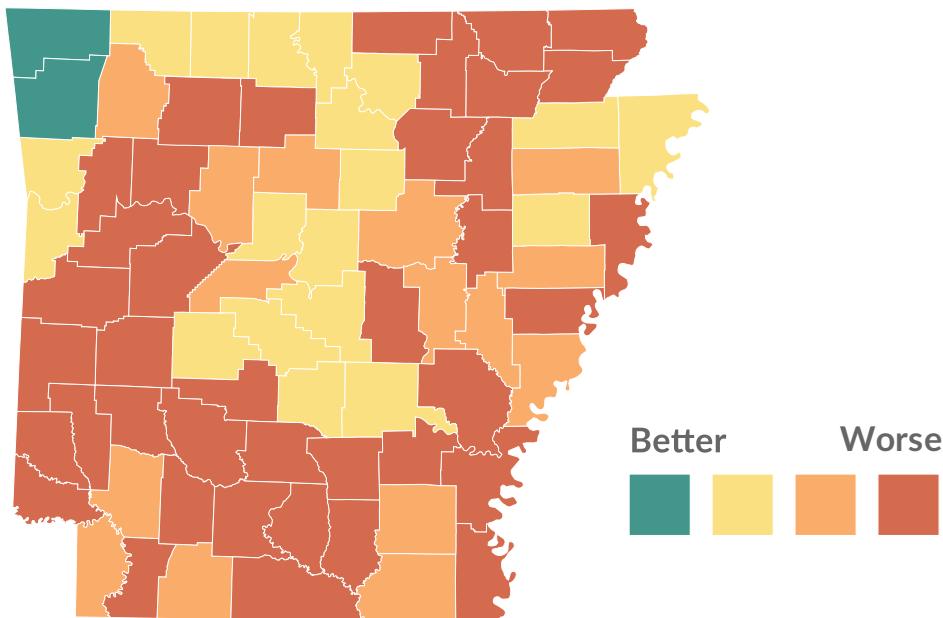
- Only 39 counties publish meeting times and locations online.
- Only 24 counties publish meeting agendas online.
- Only 21 counties publish meeting minutes online.
- Only 9 counties publish meeting videos online.

## Example

Some members of the Pope County quorum court held three meetings in 2019 without notifying the public.

The meetings on May 7, August 1, and August 6 were about the awarding of a Pope County **casino license** to one of five contenders.

## Political Transparency Rankings of Arkansas Counties



Source: Ajayi, Joyce and Kalulu, Mavuto "Access Arkansas: County-Level Web Transparency," 3rd ed. Arkansas Center for Research in Economics. [Forthcoming, 2021]

# The Solution

- Every county should publish its quorum court meeting notices, agendas, and minutes online.
- Every county should publish this information on its own website and/or through a public-facing platform such as Facebook or Arkansas.gov.
- Videos of quorum court meetings should be published on the county website or on a public-facing platform such as Facebook or YouTube.
- Where resources allow, videos should be livestreamed so Arkansans who cannot attend in person are able to watch in real time.

[Benton County](#) and [Washington County](#) are good models as they are the highest-performing counties in Arkansas when it comes to political transparency. On their websites, Benton County and Washington County publish calendars showing all of their public meetings. By clicking on a calendar entry, anyone can get information on how to attend. In addition, the counties sometimes use their [Facebook pages](#) to post links to meeting notices. Meeting agendas and minutes are also available through their websites. For Washington County, recordings of past meetings are made available through links to YouTube videos.

The screenshot shows the Benton County website's public meeting calendar. The page header includes the Benton County logo and navigation links for Home, Departments, How do I, and Elected Officials. A dark blue banner at the top left reads "Runoff Election Results". On the left sidebar, there are links for County Info, Calendar, Office Directory, Employment, Holiday Schedule, and Services. The main content area features a dark blue bar with the text "Looking for older meetings? View the meeting archive →". Below this is a calendar interface for December 2020, with tabs for Agenda, Month, and Week. The calendar grid shows meetings on the following dates:

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday               | Wednesday           | Thursday               | Friday | Saturday |
|--------|--------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------|----------|
| 29     | 30     | 1                     | 2<br>PLANNING BOARD | 3<br>FINANCE COMMITTEE | 4      | 5        |
| 6      | 7      | 8<br>COMMITTEE OF THE | 9                   | 10                     | 11     | 12       |
| 13     | 14     | 15                    | 16                  | 17<br>QUORUM COURT     | 18     | 19       |
| 20     | 21     | 22                    | 23                  | 24                     | 25     | 26       |

# Frequently Asked Questions

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## Question

What does current law say about public meeting notices?

## Answer

Arkansas's **open public meeting law** requires that "all meetings, formal or informal, special or regular, of the governing bodies of all municipalities, counties, townships, and school districts and all boards, bureaus, commissions, or organizations of the State of Arkansas, except grand juries, supported wholly or in part by public funds or expending public funds, shall be public meetings." For **regular meetings**, the law requires that the time and place be furnished to anyone who requests the information. For **special or emergency meetings**, the law requires that "the person calling the meeting shall notify the representatives of the newspapers, radio stations, and television stations, if any, located in the county in which the meeting is to be held and any news media located elsewhere that cover regular meetings of the governing body and that have requested to be so notified of emergency or special meetings of the time, place, and date of the meeting. Notification shall be made at least two (2) hours before the meeting takes place in order that the public shall have representatives at the meeting."

What's the biggest problem with the current law about public meeting notices?

Current law does not sufficiently guarantee that residents will know about meetings and have the opportunity to attend. Also, the law has no provision giving residents easy access to meeting agendas, minutes, or videos.

What else is wrong with the current law about public meeting notices?

The law presumes that the media will always be at the meetings to report on the deliberations, which is not always the case. The law also does not provide for adequate notice to media outlets outside the county.

Why do residents need to know about quorum court meetings?

Arkansas residents need access to quorum court meetings so they may participate in and oversee the making of policies that affect their lives. They also need access so they can hold public officials accountable for their actions. Taxpayers need to know if their resources are being spent prudently.

Why publish meeting notices, agendas, minutes, and videos online when many constituents live in rural areas with poor internet service?

Governor Hutchinson's [Arkansas State Broadband Plan](#) is working toward bringing broadband internet to all population centers of 500 people or more by 2022. Journalists and other citizen advocates who already have strong internet connections through broadband or cellular data can provide oversight now.

What should I do if my local government does not have the means and expertise to maintain a website to publish meeting information?

Every county can publish this information quickly and for free through a public-facing platform such as Facebook or [Arkansas.gov](#).

# Suggested Reading

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## ACRE Resources

- Ajayi, Joyce and Kalulu, Mavuto “[Access Arkansas: County-Level Web Transparency](#),” 2nd ed. Arkansas Center for Research in Economics. 2019.
- Ajayi, Joyce and Kalulu, Mavuto “Political Transparency for Improved Resident Participation.” Arkansas Center for Research in Economics. Policy Brief [*forthcoming 2021*]
- Mavuto Kalulu “[In public view: Don’t gamble on transparency](#)” Arkansas Online, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 20 September 2019.

## Additional Resources

- [§ 25-19-106 - Open public meetings - 2010 Arkansas Code](#)

## ACRE Experts

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### Joyce O. Ajayi, MPS

oajayi1@uca.edu

Ms. Ajayi is a policy analyst with Arkansas Center for Research in Economics (ACRE). She brings to her work a background in law, government, and nonprofits. Her research interests include government transparency, issues related to women's empowerment, and child welfare. Her work on government transparency was recently accepted for publication in the *Southwest Business and Economic Journal*. She is a candidate in the interdisciplinary PhD in Leadership Studies program at the University of Central Arkansas. She holds a master's degree in public service from the University of Arkansas's Clinton School of Public Service and law degrees from Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria and the Nigerian Law School. She lives in Little Rock with her family.



### Mavuto Kalulu, PhD

mkalulu@uca.edu

Dr. Mavuto Kalulu is a policy analyst with the Arkansas Center for Research in Economics. He is also an affiliated member of the graduate faculty in the Interdisciplinary PhD in Leadership Studies program at the University of Central Arkansas. He received his PhD in economics from the University of Mississippi in 2014, concentrating in public choice and industrial organization. His research interests include governmental transparency, good governance, and K-12 education. He also holds an MBA from Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri. His work has been published in the *Journal of Development and Communications*, the *eJournal of Education Policy*, and *Citizenship, Democracies, and Media Engagement among Emerging Economies and Marginalized Communities* (Palgrave Macmillan). His other work has been accepted for publication in the *Southern Business Journal*, *Midwestern Business and Economic Review*, and the *Southwest Business and Economic Journal*. His writing has been featured in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, the *Jonesboro Sun*, and the *Log Cabin Democrat*. He also co-authored the first and second editions of this report.

## About ACRE

The Arkansas Center for Research in Economics (ACRE) is an Arkansas focused research center housed in the College of Business at the University of Central Arkansas. ACRE scholars and policy analysts use research and analysis to find solutions for Arkansas's problems. Our research focuses on barriers to employment, taxes and subsidies, good governance and government transparency.

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