



Becoming an Informed Voter

OR HOW TO BE THE BEST CITIZEN YOU CAN BE!

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How do State and Local Governments Affect Our Lives?

Many people think that “*government*” means only the federal government - the House and Senate, the Supreme Court and the President.

While three out of five people of voting age show up to vote for President, when it’s time for local elections, that number drops dramatically.

Examples of things regulated by state and local officials:

- Do you want your town to have a recycling program?
- Do you think that your local library needs more books and/or programs?
- Do you want your school to teach sex education?
- Do you want better textbooks and/or programs at your school?
- Do you want your state to legalize marijuana for medicinal or recreational use?
- Do you want your local and/or state government to increase the minimum wage?

The answers to these questions are determined by decisions made by your local elected officials. *If you don’t vote, you don’t have a voice in how these decisions are made!*

Candidates on a Typical Large City Ballot in a Presidential Election Year

Federal Elected Officials: President, Vice President, U.S. Senators, U.S. Representatives

State Elected Officials: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Comptroller, Treasurer, State Senators, State Representatives

County Elected Officials: Board President, Tax Assessor, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Recorder of Deeds, Sheriff, State's Attorney, Treasurer, Board of Commissioners, Board of Review, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District

City Elected Officials: Mayor, Clerk, Treasurer, City Board of Education, City Community College District, City Park District, City Aldermen

Local Elected Officials: Townships, Municipalities, Park Districts, Library Districts, School and Community College Districts, Township Trustees of Schools, Fire Protection Districts

How Can You Use Your Political Voice?

STEP 1	Find Your Elected Officials at https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials . This website links you directly with your federal, state, and local elected officials.
STEP 2	Calling your elected officials is the most effective way for them to hear your voice! For federal elected officials, call them in Washington, DC at (202) 224-3121) or call their State District Offices.
STEP 3	Attend town hall meetings, office hours, and public meetings. Most members of Congress follow a schedule of being in DC when Congress is in session (typically in DC Monday through Thursday), and heading back to their districts when voting is done for the week (typically Friday through Sunday).
STEP 4	Engage with your elected officials on social media such as Twitter and Instagram. Social media usage for elected officials varies.
STEP 5	Engage with your elected officials on local media. Use the power of the press and write letters to the editor and/or op-eds in your local and regional papers, naming and shaming (or praising) your elected officials for the stances that they take. They track when they are written about and mentioned in all media.

Being an engaged citizen and an informed voter means that once you cast your vote, you must continue to follow issues you are passionate about and hold your elected officials accountable!

How Many Americans Vote?

How many Americans vote in Presidential elections? 2 out of 5

How many Americans vote in Midterm elections? 3 out of 5

How many American are not registered to vote? 1 out of 5

Why don't some Americans vote?

- They don't have the right to vote, i.e., convicted felons in some states.
- They find voting to be too difficult, i.e., voter suppression efforts.
- They don't think their vote makes a difference, i.e., apathy.

Source: Rock the Vote, U.S. Elections Project

Almost 92 million eligible Americans did *NOT* vote in the 2016 Presidential election. *Source:* World Population Review

Voter registration and participation are crucial for the nation's democracy to function properly and for citizens to have fair representation by our government.

Five Myths About Voting

Voting Myth #1

Myth: The U.S. Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to vote.

Truth: States are in charge of voting laws, and while amendments to the Constitution tell states what they cannot do (deny the vote based on race, gender or age, for example), nothing in the Constitution tells the states what they must do (make sure all citizens can vote).

In many states, for example, people aren't allowed to participate in elections if they've been convicted of a felony or if they don't have a state-issued I.D. Find laws for your state at <http://www.rockthevote.org/voting-information>.

Voting Myth #2

Myth: Presidential elections are the ones that really matter.

Truth: Do you care about where your water comes from? How your police are trained? What you learn in school? State and local elections shape all of these issues and more.

Voting Myth #3

Myth: Voter fraud is a big problem in the United States.

Truth: Voter fraud is extremely rare. However, the effects of voting myths like can lead to real consequences. When voting myths are spread, people may start to feel that their vote doesn't matter. Even more, it can lead to restrictive voting laws that make it harder for eligible voters to exercise their right and cast a ballot.

Source: Brennan Center for Justice, a nonpartisan law and policy institute - Extensive research reveals that voter fraud is very rare, voter impersonation is virtually nonexistent, and many instances of alleged fraud are, in fact, mistakes by voters or administrators. <https://www.brennancenter.org/issues/ensure-every-american-can-vote/vote-suppression/myth-voter-fraud>

Voting Myth #4

Myth: College students must vote where their parents live.

Truth: College students have dual residency—they can choose to either register and vote at home or at or near school. But everyone needs to register to vote. Because laws vary by state (see Myth #2), you may need to register well in advance of election day.

Voting Myth #5

Myth: My vote doesn't count.

Truth: Every vote is counted; every vote matters. Examples:

- In 2017, a perfect tie in one race meant that party control of the Virginia House of Delegates was decided by drawing a name out of a hat. Republican David Yancey was declared the winner. The win gave Republicans control of the state House by a single seat.
- In 2016, a Vermont Senate Democratic primary was determined by a single vote out of more than 7,400 cast.
- In 2016, a Vermont House of Representatives seat was determined by one vote out of 2,000 cast. This race was a rematch. When the candidates first faced each other in 2010, the race was also decided by one vote — in the other direction!

SO YOUR VOTE MATTERS!

Where Can I Find Information on Elections, Issues, and Candidates?

Voter Registration and Elections Information

Arizona Clean Elections

www.azcleanelections.gov

This site serves as the election hub for Arizona voting information, has an app with voter information, hosts candidate debates, and mails voter education guides to Arizona registered voters. *Interested in becoming a political candidate? This site will give you information on what to know before running for office and candidate training!*

Yavapai County Voter Registration and Elections

<https://www.yavapai.us/electionsvr/>

Voter Registration/Early Voting: (928) 771-3248

Election Services: (928) 771-3446

This site serves as the election hub for Yavapai County voting and election information, including general election county candidates, vote centers, early ballot status, permanent early voting list (PEVL), request a one-time early ballot, voter registration status, uniformed and overseas citizens, and drop box information.

Yavapai County Drop Box Locations

<i>TOWN</i>	<i>DROP BOX LOCATION</i>
Chino Valley	Town Hall, 202 N. State Route 89
Dewey-Humboldt	Town Hall, 2735 S. Highway 69
Prescott	County Administration Building, 1015 Fair Street
Prescott Valley	Town Hall, 7501 Skoog Blvd.

Are You Passionate About Certain Issues?

Issue Voter

<https://issuevoter.org>

This nonpartisan site gives you the power to share your voice in the political arena. Start by selecting issues you have strong feelings about or want to learn more about. When new bills related to your interests come up, you can offer your opinions, send feedback directly to your representatives and track whether or not they voted your way. *This site is a great tool to become more engaged on issues that impact you and your community!*

Rock the Vote

www.rockthevote.org

Rock the Vote is a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to building the political power of young people but it's a powerful tool for any voter. You can use this site to register to vote, check your voter registration status and polling place, sign petitions, and learn more about issues and state and federal elected officials. *Because we all lead busy lives, you can set up personal voting alerts on this site to remind you to vote!*

How To Know What / Who to Believe?

FactCheck

<https://www.factcheck.org>

FactCheck is a nonpartisan “consumer advocate” for voters that aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics. It monitors the factual accuracy of what is said by politicians in TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews and news releases. *Are you concerned about a comment made by a politician? Ask FactCheck to look into it! The site also has a Debunking False Stories page.*

PolitiFact

<https://www.politifact.com>

PolitiFact is a nonpartisan fact-checking site that seeks to sort out the truth in American politics. A Truth-O-Meter gauges the relative truthfulness of statements made by politicians. You can search by subject, state (there’s a tab for Arizona), person, or truthfulness. *Are you concerned about climate change or the economy? This site will help you sort out the truth!*

Are You a Government / Political Geek?

Ballotpedia

<https://ballotpedia.org>

Ballotpedia is a nonprofit and nonpartisan political encyclopedia. This comprehensive site covers federal, state and local elections, with calendars of dates, parties, candidates, platforms and information on voter ID, polling places, ballots and absentee voting, Supreme Court cases, and public policy.

Preserving Our Democracy: George Washington's Concerns

George Washington in his farewell address in September 1796 warned that:

Political parties must be restrained because of their tendency to distract the government from their duties, create unfounded jealousies among groups and regions, raise false alarms among the people, promote riots and insurrection, provide foreign nations and interests access to the government where they can impose their will upon the country, and generally weaken the government.

Source: <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=15&page=transcript>

An example of our political polarization: In 2017, both the Republican and Democratic Parties encouraged their freshmen members to spend *30 hours per week* on call time to raise money for re-election. Why? The pressure to raise campaign cash skyrocketed after the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission* decision, which gave corporations, labor unions and certain nonprofit groups the ability to spend without limit on political ads for federal candidates. This law fueled the rise of "Super PACs" and "dark money."

According to data compiled by <https://maplight.org>, winning House members in the 2012 election cycle raised an average of \$1,689,580, while winning Senators, on average, raised \$10,476,451. *Do they have time to represent our interests in Congress if they spend so much time raising money for re-election? Is this acceptable?*

Source: The Government Affairs Institute at Georgetown University.

Techniques to Improve Civility

The country has become very polarized justifying George Washington's worst fears about preserving our democracy. Here are some ways to improve our civil discourse. We all have a right to our own political views, but it is helpful when we express them in a constructive and respectful manner.

1

**Understand the
Other Person's
Perspective**

2

**Demonstrate
Empathy**

3

**Show Respect
to All**

4

**Practice Win-
Win
Negotiation**

5

***Disengage and
Avoid When
Necessary***

TIP: Find areas of common ground with those you disagree with.
For example, we all love our country and want to build a strong, vibrant community! 😊