

**civic  
alliance**

**civic  
storylines  
toolkit**

**2024**

a guide for media companies  
and content creators



# table of contents

intro .....	3
state of voting.....	7
key dates.....	12
tip sheet - messaging guidelines.....	13
voting and civic engagement storylines.....	18
scripted .....	19
unscripted.....	23
short-form.....	25
podcast.....	27
comedy.....	28
one sheet .....	32
appendix .....	33
a - glossary of terms .....	34
b - voter education.....	39
c - civic culture & campaigns.....	40
d - civic technology .....	42
e - voting rights .....	42
f - voter registration.....	43

## Created in Partnership With:



The importance of using storytelling to inform, inspire action and shape culture has never been greater. In 2024, voters in the U.S. will have the opportunity to vote for President, as well as for a myriad of state offices and ballot referenda.

## 2024 Elections:

# 34

**Senate Seats**

# 435

**House Seats**

# 13

**Governor's Offices**

# 5,812

**State Legislature Seats**

# 1

**U.S. Presidency**

### **Ballot Referenda:**

- Redistricting Reform
- Access to Paid Leave
- Minimum Wage
- Expanding Absentee Voting
- Abortion Rights
- Firearms
- Ranked Choice Voting

The content we consume has the opportunity to make audiences feel seen, connected, and inspired to engage with our democracy, but too often, existing content plays on our biggest fears, or creates a harmful atmosphere of divisiveness which can lead to apathy in voters.

In 2022, [MTV Entertainment & American University's Center for Media & Social Impact](#) found that ahead of the 2020 election, models of authentic and effective civic leadership and civic participation were not readily visible.

### **Additional findings include:**

- Civic themes appear in nearly one-third of episodes, but authentic portrayals of civic leadership are lacking.
- On-screen characters in top-rated entertainment TV programs are **3x more likely** to be seen talking about civic and social issues than taking actions like voting.
- Elected officials, political candidates, and civil servants are **2x more likely** to be shown engaging in illegal activities than policymaking.
- When elected officials, political candidates, and civil servants are portrayed on entertainment TV, they are much more likely to be White (78% White, 23% BIPOC) and identify as men.
- Law enforcement dominates portrayals of civic leadership, appearing nearly **4x more** than elected public leaders and **5x more** than civil servants.

**We need to do better.**

## Looking forward, we have a unique opportunity to transform portrayals of civic engagement.

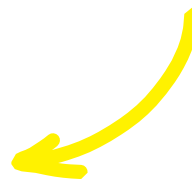
With more Americans receiving information from film, television, and digital content, a storyteller—whether they're a character on a television show, a host of a popular podcast, or an artist with a platform—can help instill empathy and understanding, inspire curiosity to learn more about other communities and cultures, and encourage meaningful civic action. These are tools our collective humanity needs in order to address the crucial civic and urgent social topics of our time.

The Civic Storylines Toolkit was originally launched in 2020 and we are excited to share with you our latest update, designed to help companies and content creators integrate civic themes into their stories in tangible ways. It is meant for everyone—for those who already cover these topics in their day-to-day content, and for those completely new to them who are looking for guidance on how to introduce these issues to their audiences. It is by no means exhaustive, but with the help of our non-profit partners, civic experts, and fellow Civic Alliance members, it provides a framework and set of resources that can be used as a reference point and tailored for individual projects as necessary.

**We are excited to see what you develop!**

**Thank you for using your platform to create a better future for us all.**

**Now let's get to it!**



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**state of  
voting**

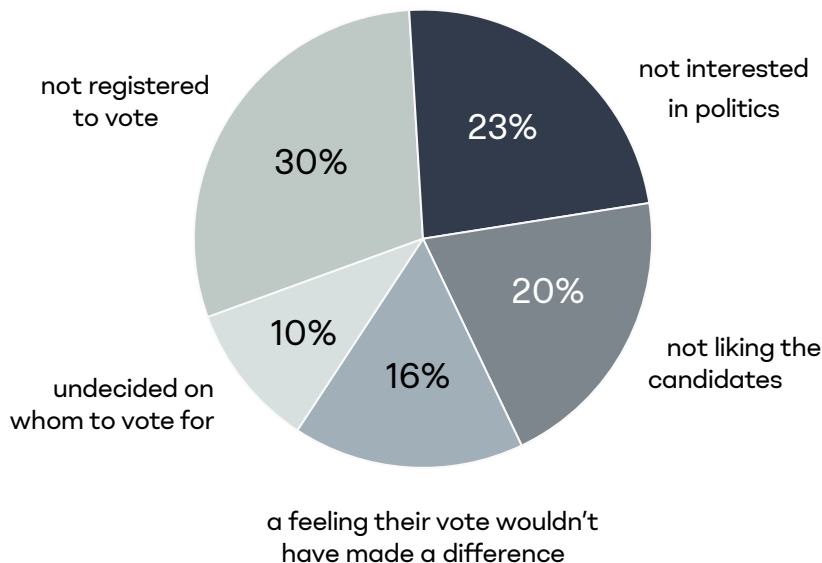
# The 2020 General Election

[Source: Pew Research Center "Turnout in U.S. has soared in recent elections but by some measures still trails that of many other countries."](#)

- More than **158.4 million people** voted in the 2020 U.S. general election, amounting to 62.8% of people of voting age, using Census Bureau estimates of the 2020 voting-age population.
- More broadly, there's a large gap between voting-age turnout (62.8% in 2020) and registered voter turnout (94.1% that same year).
- The 2020 voting surge followed an unusually high turnout in the 2018 midterm elections, when about 47.5% of the voting-age population and 51.8% of voting-age citizens went to the polls.
- According to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, in 2020, about 40% of voters voted by mail, 30% voted in person, and 30% voted early. In 2022, about 31.9% voted by mail.

## For those who chose not to vote in 2020, what did they cite as their reasons for not voting?

[Source: NPR/Medill School of Journalism/IPSOS Survey of Non-Voters 2020](#)



# What About Voters in 2024?

## BY DEMOGRAPHIC:

### Youth Vote:

[Source: CIRCLE Youth and the 2024 Election](#)

- Gen Z youth alone will make up over **40 million potential voters**—including 8 million youth who will have newly reached voting age since 2022—making up nearly one fifth of the American electorate.
- Less than **1 in 5 young people** have heard about politics and issues this year from political parties or campaigns (19%) or from community organizations (14%).
- Young people’s top issues are inflation and the cost of living, jobs that pay a living wage, gun violence, and climate change.
- 65% of 18- to 24-year-olds (Gen Z) and 61% of 25- to 34-year-olds (millennials) list one or more social media platforms as their preferred source of news. ([Source](#))

### Latino/x Vote:

[Source: Brookings Institute Research on Latino Voters](#)

- The number of Hispanic eligible voters has increased by **4.7 million** since 2018, representing 62% of the total growth in U.S. eligible voters during this time.
- 31% of all Latino eligible voters are between 18 and 29-years-old.
- Over half (56%) of Latinos under 30 were first-time voters in 2020 or 2022. Almost a quarter (24%) of Latino voters between the ages of 18 and 29 voted for the first time in 2022. '
- Latinos as a full electorate are more likely to rely on social media than non-Latinos, a trend driven largely by the youngest cohort of Latino eligible voters.



## Women Vote:

[Sources: Pew Research Center, Center for American Women and Politics "Gender Differences in Voter Turnout"](#)

- In 2022, about **70% of women** in the United States were registered to vote. This is higher than the share of men who were registered to vote in that same year ([Source](#)).
- In recent years, the number of registered voters who identified as women in the U.S. has typically been about 10 million more than the number of men registered to vote.

## Black Vote:

[Source: Pew Center Key Facts about Black Eligible Voters in 2024](#)

- Black eligible voter population in the U.S. is projected to reach **34.4 million** in 2024, **up 7% from 2020**
- Black Americans are projected to account for **14.0% of eligible voters** in the U.S. in November
- Black eligible voters are more likely than other eligible voters to be women (53% vs. 51%)
- 60% of Black eligible voters are under the age of 50, compared with 52% of all U.S. eligible voters
- Only about one-in-five Black Americans say they have a great deal or fair amount of trust in information that comes from politicians (20%) ([source](#))

## Baby Boomers:

- Boomers (those born from 1946 to 1964) constituted 69% of the electorate in 2010, but only 48% of it in 2022 ([Source](#)).
- 72% of U.S. boomers are non-Hispanic White ([Source](#)).
- While Boomers tend to skew more conservative than younger voters, a 2018 Pew Research Center report showed that trust in the federal government is generally low across all generations.
- **14% of Boomers** said they trusted the government almost always or most of the time, compared with 15% of Millennials, 17% of Gen Xers, and 18% of Silents ([Source](#)).

## What about potential non-voters in 2024?

[Source: Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School](#)

- Young people who are not in college and do not have a degree (Fall 2019: 48%, Fall 2023: 40%) are less committed to voting than in the recent past.
- Across demographic groups, the decline in voting intention is most pronounced among younger Black Americans (Fall 2019: 50%, Fall 2023: 38%) and Hispanic Americans (Fall 2019: 56%, Fall 2023: 40%). The decline among young Whites is also notable, falling five percentage points, from 62% to 57%.
- According to a 2020 Medill School of Journalism/Ipsos/NPR poll focused on non-voters, people who did not vote in the 2020 election felt a general apathy or disconnect toward politics in Washington ([Source](#)).
  - ◆ Rather than perceived structural barriers or other concerns about voting (e.g., contracting COVID-19), the main reason non-voters did not engage in the process was because they didn't think it mattered.
  - ◆ **Two-thirds of non-voters** agreed with the statement, "Voting in elections has little to do with the way that real decisions are made in our country," compared to 45% of voters.
  - ◆ Half of non-voters agreed that, "I'm only one person, so my vote doesn't make a difference." Fewer than one in five voters (17%) said the same.
  - ◆ Differences in voting behavior also extend to wider social circles: non-voters were significantly less likely to say they have friends or family who vote regularly.

## What else might prevent someone from voting in 2024?

*Source: Brennan Center for Justice "Waiting to Vote: Racial Disparities in Election Day Experiences," Brennan Center for Justice "Voting Laws Roundup: October 2023"*

- In the 2018 general election, some **3 million voters** waited 30 minutes or more to cast

their ballot ([Source](#)). Many of those voters were concentrated in the southeastern United States, home to large shares of nonwhite voters.

- Between January 1 and October 10, 2023, at least **14 states enacted 17 restrictive laws** impacting voting, all of which will be in place for the 2024 general elections (many of these new laws restrict voting by mail) ([Source](#)).
  - ◆ For example, Nebraska adopted a law that requires mail voters who lack a Nebraska driver's license or state ID card to include a copy of an acceptable photo ID with their mail ballot application and their marked ballot.
  - ◆ Texas passed a law that will allow some counties to consolidate polling places, which increases the likelihood of long wait times.
  - ◆ At least **6 states enacted 7 election interference laws**, with all 7 taking effect before the November 2024 elections.

## But wait, what could change in 2024?

Sources: [The Washington Post "2024 won't be a Trump-Biden replay. You can thank Gen Z for that"](#); [CIRCLE Youth and the 2024 Election](#)

- Between 2016 and 2024, the number of Gen Z voters will increase by **52 million people**.
- **1 in 5 eligible voters** will now be members of Gen Z.
- 57% of youth, ages 18-34, say they're "**extremely likely**" to vote in 2024.
- Millennials and Gen Z will be a majority of potential voters in 2028—**over 60% by 2036**.

Source: [Pew Research Center "Turnout soared in 2020 as nearly two-thirds of eligible U.S. voters cast ballots for president"](#)

- Americans voted in record numbers in the 2020 presidential election, casting nearly **158.4 million ballots**.
- More than **6 in 10 people** of voting age and nearly **two-thirds** of estimated eligible voters voted.
- Nationwide, the presidential election turnout was about **7 percentage points higher** than in the 2016 election.
- Turnout in 2020 was the highest it's been since at least 1980.

# key dates

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**July 15–18**

**Republican National Convention**

**August 1**

**National Poll Worker Recruitment Day**

**August 19–22**

**Democratic National Convention**

**September 17**

**National Voter Registration Day**

**October 29**

**Vote Early Day**

**November 5**

**Election Day**

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**tip sheet -  
messaging  
guidelines**

# Recommendations for Content Creators

## Connect the Dots

Emphasize the integral link between measurable positive societal change and active civic engagement. When addressing top issues for Americans, e.g., the economy, immigration, or climate change, illustrate the direct impact of individual votes and actions—especially at the local level.

### Examples:

- Showcase moments where cast members, characters, podcast guests, or you discuss issues you care about and explain why you're voting to make a difference on those specific matters.
- Spotlight a crucial factual or fictional County Commissioner's race where the elected candidate implements policies that will directly impact local school funding.

## Build Trust & Inspire Hope

Challenge the prevalent narrative of corrupt, hyperpartisan politics by showcasing examples of dedicated elected officials advocating for and initiating policy change that positively affects their communities. Highlight well-organized polling locations, new and effective voting technology, friendly poll workers, and highly competent election administrators.

### Examples:

- Depict characters who are elected officials bravely exposing wrongdoing and refusing to succumb to temptations of power and money, instead working to enact meaningful reforms.
- Highlight reliable voting technology by showing people registering to vote using the [TurboVote](#) platform or texting VOTER to 26797 and making their voting plan using [BallotReady](#).

## Model a Variety of Civic Behaviors

Go beyond the act of voting and model comprehensive civic involvement such as emphasizing the importance of researching candidates, understanding policies, and engaging in activities like voter registration, canvassing, and even running for local office. Stress the significance of down-ballot voting, especially concerning state and local issues. Share personal civic action stories or depict characters actively participating in both local and national civic processes.

### Examples:

- *Showcase a character feeling frustrated at large-scale problems but deciding to take a small action that has a huge local impact, like a bilingual young person becoming a poll worker and helping dozens of non-English-speaking voters vote throughout the day.*
- *Spotlight someone who is fed up with partisanship and decides to become a poll worker to support the process of democracy rather than any particular outcome, and ends up more inspired and connected after a day of helping their neighbors vote.*

## Highlight Social Cohesion

Showcase stories of people from different backgrounds, identities, and political affiliations connecting over shared values, social identities, and universal aspects of the human experience to inspire voters who are disheartened by political divisiveness.

Actively uplift instances of these individuals engaging in constructive dialogue with curiosity, empathy, and an openness to learning, informed by their unique identities and distinct lived experiences.

### Examples:

- *Show neighbors from diverse backgrounds discussing over coffee how to solve a neighborhood challenge together.*
- *Show a polling place with people of many different backgrounds, ages, identities, and political affiliations serving as poll workers, greeting voters together, perhaps starting off with trepidation or distrust but building respect for one another over the course of a 15-hour day.*

## Make it a Celebration

Create excitement and a desire to get involved by depicting or highlighting stories of first-time voters (of any age!), parties at voter registration centers, campaign volunteer offices, polls/working the polls, and election watch gatherings. Turn civic engagement into a celebratory and social experience that encourages broader participation. Share content or depictions of communities, friends, and families coming together to exercise their civic duty.

### Examples:

- *Show characters attending a neighborhood block party complete with food trucks and live music for people who have just voted.*
- *Show positive voting experiences: young kids tagging along with their parent(s) to the voting booth, poll workers cheering for first-time voters, a group of friends having a “voting party” in a casual setting with their vote-by-mail or absentee ballots discussing everything on the ballot (with food and music).*

## Do's & Don'ts

### Representation

- ✓ **Do** show intergenerational conversations about the importance of voting and civic participation
- ✓ **Do** show diverse civic engagement at all levels of participation (from volunteer to candidate), e.g., young people, people of color, etc.
- ✓ **Do** uplift stories of everyday people choosing to take action and participate—not just “exceptional people”
- ✓ **Do** showcase characters from various backgrounds and political affiliations expressing a shared commitment to democracy and safe and fair elections, even if they disagree on issues and/or candidates
- ✗ **Don't** limit portrayals of civic leadership to law enforcement and the criminal justice system; show more elected officials, election administrators, civil servants, and political candidates
- ✗ **Don't** blame marginalized communities for not voting



# tip sheet - messaging guidelines

## Tone

- ✓ **Do** create scenes or shared content that incorporate civic engagement, that are bright in tone, and include humor (when appropriate) and heart
- ✓ **Do** address the challenges that groups of people and communities face in voting, but also be sure to spotlight solutions and those who are making it easier to vote
- X **Don't** use divisive or judgmental language that alienates any one particular group; use positive and encouraging language that builds community
- X **Don't** spotlight potential voters that are suffering from political apathy, but if you must, don't let it go unchecked and have another person or character challenge this position in a non-combative way
- X **Don't** draw attention to, or depict the use of, negative campaign tactics; instead, focus on positivity and the candidate's platforms
- X **Don't** depict or share stories that make the voting process feel like a chore or hassle, e.g., showing long lines at polling places

<b>Don't Use These Words</b>	<b>Do Use These Words</b>
"Go Vote"	<b>"Be a voter"</b> - help relay that it's okay to "become a voter" even if you have never voted before
"Voter Suppression" or "Voter Fraud"	<b>"Voting Access"</b> - avoid terms that perpetuate a negative narrative around voting
"Activist"	<b>"Supporter"</b> - the term activist can be polarizing, whereas everyone considers themselves a supporter

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**voting  
and civic  
engagement  
storylines**

## Scripted

### Opportunities

In scripted formats, the possibilities for civic engagement integrations are endless; integrations can be in the background, the basis of an episode, or extend to a season-long story arc.

Leverage the control that screenwriters and producers have to think through the range of possibilities that fit the content that is being produced.

- **Diversity of Cast:** Leverage the breadth of your characters to reinforce that all citizens can participate in a range of ways, whether it's voting, organizing, or even running for office.
  - ◆ There are many nonpartisan ways to get involved beyond voting, including serving as a poll worker or becoming an election administrator
- **Plot:** Use concepts like voting and the census as plot devices to heighten the drama or comedy of the scene or relationships between the characters. For younger audiences, this could look like school or class elections, engaging in healthy dialogue over issues with friends, or a 16-year-old being a paid poll worker since they can't yet vote themselves.
- **Character:** In instances where civic engagement may not be central to a storyline, consider an interest in or passion for crucial civic topics that would organically align with who a character already is. When shaping a character, their viewpoints on civic engagement can come through in dialogue, personal relationships, and motivations, as well as range from subtle to obvious.
  - ◆ For example, a young person who translates for older family members who don't speak English could be encouraged by a mentor to do so for voters as a poll worker
- **Visuals:** Integrations don't always need to be major plot points; they can be business on screen that can implicitly remind audiences how important civic engagement issues are.

For example:

- ◆ **Clothes:** Show characters wearing an "I voted" sticker on their t-shirt during a scene, or on their water bottle or laptop

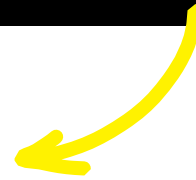
# voting and civic engagement storylines

- ◆ **Signs:** Consider showing a “Remember to Register to Vote” sign in the background of an office or school
    - Additional sign ideas: “16- and 17-year-olds can be paid poll workers on Election Day!” or “Election Day is the last day to vote—but not first!”
  - ◆ **Mail:** When characters check their mail, perhaps include absentee voting or census forms waiting for them
    - Or, when a character gets a new driver's license at the DMV, include an automatic voter registration card
  - ◆ **Locations:** Have characters pass by a polling station or ballot drop box on their way to lunch
- **Writers Room:** Depending on interest, bring civic engagement experts into your writers' room for a workshop to inspire creativity and allow opportunities for Q&A.

## Pitfalls

- Regardless of whether your content is entirely based in reality, avoid the spread of misinformation in fictional worlds.
  - ◆ For example, see glossary definitions to differentiate between election administrators, poll workers, and poll watchers
- Be cautious of depictions that make voting and civic engagement seem inaccessible or challenging, which can discourage people from participating

## Scripted Relevant Case Studies



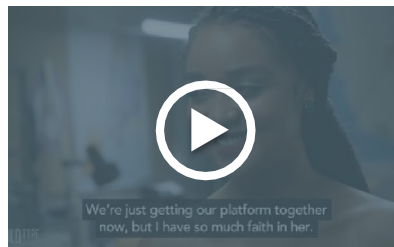
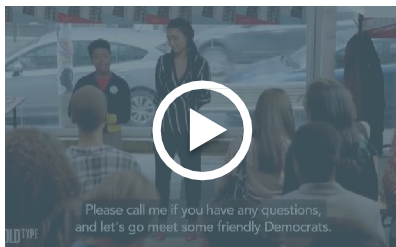
### THE BOLD TYPE: Season 3



**Background:** In season three of THE BOLD TYPE, fed up after realizing that her Councilman doesn't have his city's best interests at heart, Kat decides to channel her passion by volunteering for his opposition. Eventually, Kat decides to run for City Council herself. Throughout her campaign, she faces hurdles such as racial profiling while canvassing for office and dealing with the opposition digging into her past. As the season comes to a close, Kat's campaign ends when she loses the race to the incumbent.

**Impact:** Both [fans](#) and [critics](#) loved Kat's campaign storyline which gave fans a look into the campaign process.

### Sample Clips:



# voting and civic engagement storylines

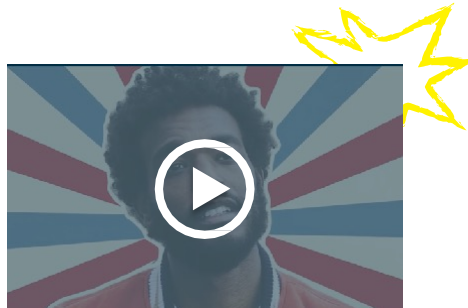
## THE CHI: Season 5



**Background:** In season five of SHOWTIME's THE CHI, due to his love for his community and desire to create change, Victor decides to run for City Council. Victor builds his campaign team and goes into the community to ask folks what is important to them. He faces internal battles balancing his public life with his private life and ultimately decides to be honest with his community, building trust, and encouraging votes.

**Impact:** The continuing storyline was well received by [fans](#) across social media, as several shared their support for Victor's campaign.

## Sample Clips:



## Thought Starters

- Have shows on your network engaged with social issues before? Is there a way to tie those social issues into civic engagement?
- How might we incorporate civic engagement messages into "coming of age" shows focused on identity? (i.e., ONE DAY AT A TIME, THE DIARY OF A FUTURE PRESIDENT, THE BOLD TYPE)
- How might a civic engagement storyline further character development or advance tension/conflict within your show?
- How might we incorporate civic engagement into the world of the show in subtle ways?

## Unscripted

### Opportunities

- **Reality:** Tap into the real experiences and interests of cast members, particularly those who are not already known for being involved in politics or social issues.
  - ◆ For example, stories of positive/memorable voting experiences (e.g., going as a kid with parents, being cheered/welcomed by poll workers as a first-time voter, getting pizza delivered to the polls when there's a long line)
- **Diversity:** Leverage the diversity of reality television talent to acknowledge both the structural barriers people might experience in accessing the polls (i.e., previously incarcerated folks getting their voting rights back) and the unique opportunities to access the polls (i.e., in most states, young people ages 16 and 17 can be paid poll workers, even though they can't vote).
- **Fanbase:** Utilize the direct relationship that cast members have with their fans by extending integrations to cast or show social accounts.
- **Interviews:** When capturing cast interviews, encourage producers to include 2-3 questions about voting as a standard part of their interview process; responses can be integrated into a relevant storyline, used as in-show bumpers, or cut into ancillary content.
  - ◆ These questions can be personal—about someone's first time voting, a time they felt proud when they voted, if anything funny or awkward has ever happened when they've voted, why they vote, etc.
- **Make the most of opportunities to register people to vote:**
  - ◆ With a live audience format, consider including a booth to register to vote while in line or waiting to get in
  - ◆ If looking for an opportunity to get talent or contestants out of their typical environment (i.e., an outing for a dating show), consider the activity being registering people to vote in a public space
  - ◆ Have cast members compete to register the largest number of voters or sign up the largest number of potential poll workers

# voting and civic engagement storylines

- ◆ Turn sets into polling locations
- ◆ Leverage format-driven or competition series, such as showcasing a civic engagement-themed food competition, runway looks for the polls, or an “I voted” sticker design competition
- ◆ In large cities or counties, make the most of opportunities to sign up people as poll workers where [Power the Polls](#) has identified a need (e.g., many large cities or counties need thousands of poll workers every election, including Los Angeles, Baltimore, Houston, Chicago, etc.)

## Pitfalls

Cast members and talent should avoid endorsing specific parties or candidates; rather, focus on issues they're passionate about or their own personal stories and how those experiences connect to voting, and/or focus on the importance of protecting the system of democracy itself by ensuring elections run smoothly.

**Note:** If talent wants to endorse a candidate or is working for one, there are laws that can dictate creative that vary [by state](#).

# Unscripted Relevant Case Study



## RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE: *Season 12*

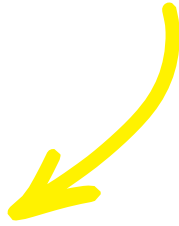
**Background:** The RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE team included a music video-esque PSA with queens from the show explaining why voting is important, why they vote, and encouraging the show's audience to get involved by getting registered for the upcoming election.

**Impact:** 100+ viewers registered to vote as a result of the PSA.



# voting and civic engagement storylines

## Sample Clip



## Thought Starters

- How might we incorporate civic engagement messages into episodic content (i.e., a show where the same concept or formula is applied to different scenarios, like CATFISH, WIFE SWAP, and INK MASTER)?
- How have cast members engaged with social issues before and how might we leverage that engagement to create momentum around registration and voting?
- How might shows with an emphasis on community and/or belonging address the importance of voting being a positive and empowering experience for every voter (and connect to poll workers being the face of democracy)?
- How can we leverage show formats that already incorporate voting? (e.g., RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE, SURVIVOR) and could there be an opportunity to explore different types of voting (e.g., ranked choice)?
- Beyond people who have previously been outspoken about social issues, are there new and unexpected voices we can bring into this conversation?

## Short-Form

### Opportunities

- Get right to the point: short-form forces you to cut out the fat and immediately dive into the purpose of the content.

# voting and civic engagement storylines

- Try different messaging strategies: short-form content provides the ability to instantly see what's working and what's not. Feel free to adjust your GOTV messaging as you see how certain content performs.
- Digital, specifically social media, is the most natural environment for political conversation. Creating short-form digital content meant for social is a way of organically integrating your brand into an environment where conversations are already happening.
- Connect directly with your fans/viewers: short-form content also functions as conversation starters. If your fans begin to engage and ask questions, engage with them back and continue the dialogue. It's a great way to both inform and build brand awareness and loyalty.

## Pitfalls

- Editorial guidelines for political content should always be in place, regardless of whether you are a corporation, non-profit, NGO, or startup. What does your company agree on? What does it not?
  - ◆ Even a company that prefers to stay silent on political matters will inevitably have an opinion. Raising the minimum wage? Equal Pay? Sustainability? Having just one single issue that you can support can help guide your entire GOTV campaign while remaining completely non-partisan.

## Thought Starters

- Once you get into scripting or rough cuts, think to yourself, "Where do I get bored?"
- When it comes to GOTV content, think of all of the different PSAs you've ever seen, and try to recall the messaging they used to get viewers to vote. Then, think about the fact that many of those PSAs failed. How can your voice be different?
- What issues does your audience care about? Again, this doesn't have to be inherently political. What are they dealing with in their everyday lives? Use those everyday experiences as the core reason for getting to the polls.
- Would your 19-year-old cousin like this? If not, it's probably not that shareable. Try something else.

## Podcast

### Opportunities

- In interview podcasts, leverage conversations around social issues to talk about the importance of showing up to the polls.
- Find opportunities to include questions about the voting process as a standard part of a host's interview process.
- Identify podcasters who may not already focus on politics or social issues, especially those who have greater influence with low-propensity voters (see "The State of Voting" for more details), and encourage them to work messaging about registration and voting into their existing content in a way that feels natural and organic.
- Encourage podcasters to make civic engagement a part of their brand by talking about registration and voting on social media, in interviews, and within their shows.
- With the emergence of video podcasts, there are a number of additional opportunities to leverage the visual medium to remind listeners about voting, e.g.,:
  - ◆ Have the hosts wear their "I voted" stickers
  - ◆ Include signage in the set dressing, e.g., "remember to register to vote"
- Find opportunities to integrate voting and registration into characters' lives in scripted podcasts. For example, when a character turns eighteen or is talking about social issues.

### Pitfalls

- For shows that aren't specifically about politics, podcasters should avoid endorsing specific parties or candidates; rather, focus on issues they're passionate about or their own personal stories and how those experiences connect to voting. For political opinion shows where a creator is outspoken on who they are endorsing, the creator should speak to the candidate's stance on key voter issues to explain why they are getting their vote to help inform their listeners.

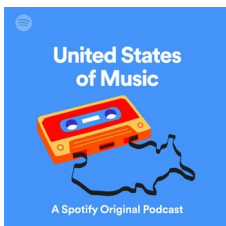
# voting and civic engagement storylines

- If needed, acknowledge that voting can be complicated and confusing, but try to focus on uplifting stories and solutions that don't increase listeners' worries about voting access.

## Case Studies



- **Clarify:** Spotify and Mic's 2016 election podcast explored the issues most important to its audience during the election and empowered them to go out and vote. Artists were joined by journalists and experts to provide explanation, commentary, and personal stories to bring each issue to life.



- **United States of Music:** Spotify's 2017 podcast, hosted by Sasheer Zamata, utilized Spotify listening data to uncover stories about musicians, people who love music, and the stories that connect them, one city at a time. The podcast used music to bridge gaps between different sides of America.

## Thought Starters

- How might we incorporate civic engagement messages into shows that traditionally don't talk about "the issues" or have a more comedic feel?
- How have podcasters engaged with social issues before, and how might we leverage that engagement to create momentum around registration and voting?

## Comedy

### Opportunities

- Use humor to highlight funny truths about the way Americans do—or do not—choose to vote.
  - ◆ Use humor to highlight how Americans are finding levity amidst polarization, e.g., the internet becoming obsessed with [this very weird "I voted" sticker](#)

# voting and civic engagement storylines

- Use humor to teach Americans how to vote by mail or vote early since these methods are still novel for many Americans (50.5% of Americans voted early in 2020, but this dropped down to 42.6% in 2022 post-pandemic) (Source: Vote Early Day)
  - ◆ Use humor to illustrate how fun voting by mail can be, i.e., hosting a voting party for friends around the kitchen table with snacks, drinks, music, and debate.
  - ◆ Use humor to point out how some election administrators have started referring to early voting as “the voting period” and Election Day as “the last day to vote” — how much language or framing influences how people behave.
- Use humor as a way to playfully apply social pressure on non-voters. Studies have shown how social pressure is very effective in getting people to vote, and comedy, more so than earnest approaches, is a great medium to make people feel bad for not doing the right thing.
- Tap an already civically engaged group of talent and comedians to use their voice (and social media platforms!) to encourage fans and viewers to vote and give them resources to do so.
  - ◆ For audiences who are primed to do more than vote, consider encouraging them to text their friends to register to vote and/or serve as poll workers with humor.
- Utilize wardrobe (especially in stand-up) and set dressing to promote voting and civic engagement, both serving to normalize the concept and making it feel “cool.”
- Create storylines in scripts that show characters experiencing positive, empowering feelings from voting, including interacting with poll workers and experiencing polling places that are welcoming and friendly.
- Have stand-up shows where the price of admission is pledging to vote or registering to vote on the spot via HeadCount partnerships.
  - ◆ A follow-up action can be signing up to be a poll worker via Power the Polls partnerships, especially in jurisdictions that have significant needs for poll workers.
- Use humor to breakdown or demystify the “Vote by Mail” process for the general public.

# voting and civic engagement storylines

- Use humor to shed light on the absurdity of claims of election fraud. Election Day is not one election — it is approximately 8,000 elections happening simultaneously across the country, in around 8,000 jurisdictions, each with its own election administrator, ballots, poll workers, ballot counting process, and reporting.

## Pitfalls

- Remaining non-partisan in comedic storytelling is difficult, particularly in stand-up, as comedians are generally liberal-leaning and want to express their authentic views.
  - ◆ If talent wants to endorse a candidate or is working for one, there are laws that can dictate creative that vary per state.
  - ◆ One way to remain firmly non-partisan is to focus on the election process itself, and the systems/structure of democracy as something to be protected and preserved.
  - ◆ Endorsing a candidate, party, or cause can be divisive and may alienate some of your audience.



## Relevant Case Studies

- In March 2016 (in the midst of Democratic Primaries), Broad City aired an episode in which [Hillary Clinton](#) guest starred. Although co-creators Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer went on record stating that they were not trying to make a political statement but rather just create good entertainment, they still managed to do the former by normalizing not only the act of civic engagement but also showing a Presidential candidate as relatable and with a sense of humor.
- <https://www.vogue.com/article/broad-city-hillaryclinton-recap>
- [Watching political comedy and satire makes young people more likely to be civically engaged.](#)

# voting and civic engagement storylines



- The Daily Show and Power The Polls: More than **700,000 people** signed up to work the polls in the 2020 cycle through the coalition's first-time campaign to recruit a new generation of election workers—**nearly 3x the original 250,000 goal set when the campaign launched in late June 2020**. This was largely thanks to **Trevor Noah's** 6 weeks of wrapping The Daily Show by calling attention to the crisis and urging viewers to sign up.

<https://twitter.com/TheDailyShow/status/1283099189568626690>

- ◆ This is a great example of how a higher-level call to action (i.e., serving as a poll worker) can resonate with audiences who are largely already planning to vote.

## Thought Starters

- What are the misunderstood aspects of civic engagement or the voting process that comedy can be used to demystify and bring levity to?
- How can comedians use humor to help dispel political misinformation while maintaining credibility as information sources?
- How can comedians teach people about being politically educated and involved?
- How can humor bring levity to how hard but necessary it is to get involved?
- How can humor help put the 2024 election in a larger context—e.g., if viewers want to see different presidential candidates in 2028 or 2032, democracy needs to stay strong, and people need to find ways to take action and build the pipeline?



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# What is the Civic Alliance?

**Founded by [Democracy Works](#) and the [CAA Foundation](#), the Civic Alliance is America's premier non-partisan coalition of businesses united by our commitment to a thriving democracy.**

We stand together in support of fair and transparent elections in which voting is safe and accessible. We use the influence of our platforms to empower every American to use their voice.

We believe a healthy democracy should be nurtured and that this work does not begin or end on Election Day. The Civic Alliance activates corporate America year-round to create a dynamic culture of corporate civic engagement.

We are a growing community of over 1,315 companies with a combined reach of over 5.8 million employees.

**Please join us by visiting [www.civicalliance.com](http://www.civicalliance.com)**

# What is the Civic Storylines Toolkit?



**We believe the creative community has an unprecedented opportunity to help elevate civic participation and normalize voter identity in our communities this election year and beyond.**

Civic Alliance member companies including Creative Artists Agency (CAA), Comedy Central, MTV, Spotify, and Paramount, with the help of leading nonprofit, non-partisan voter organizations and civic experts, have come together to create a go-to civic guide for content creators.

This guide provides creators with the tangible framework they need to incorporate accurate and timely civic themes across diverse media formats, from scripted, unscripted, and podcasts to short-form, and across genres from comedy to drama.

It is meant to be used as a reference point and should be tailored for individual projects as necessary.

If you are a company interested in getting involved with the Civic Alliance, or if you are a creator interested in diving deeper into a specific civic issue referenced in this guide, please email [Dennis.StRose@caa.com](mailto:Dennis.StRose@caa.com).



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**appendix**

## Glossary of Terms

**Automatic Voter Registration:** Under an automatic voter registration system, eligible voters are given the option to register to vote, or are by default registered to vote, whenever they interact with government agencies, such as the DMV. Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia have enacted automatic voter registration, with more states anticipated to pass the reform soon. States that have previously adopted Automatic Voter Registration report an increase in registration, and there have been no issues with noncitizen registration.

**Absentee Voting:** All states will mail an absentee ballot to eligible voters who request one, but deadlines and requirements vary by state. The voter may return the ballot by mail or in person. As of February 2024, 19 states require an excuse for absentee voting, while 28 states and the District of Columbia permit any qualified voter to vote absentee without offering an excuse. Some states offer a permanent absentee ballot list; once a voter asks to be added to the list, they will automatically receive an absentee ballot for all future elections.

**Ballot:** A list of candidates and proposed laws that voters mark to make choices. A ballot may be made of paper and marked with a pen or hole punch. Alternatively, ballots may be electronic, allowing voters to mark their choices with the push of a button or by touch screen.

**Ballot Initiative:** A proposed law drafted by citizens and placed on the ballot. Citizens will vote to approve or reject it. Ballot initiatives are usually drafted by groups who are passionate about an issue.

**Canvass:** Aggregating or confirming every valid ballot cast and counted, which includes absentee, early voting, Election Day, provisional, challenged, and uniformed and overseas citizens. This is also done to solicit votes for a candidate or cause, usually by door-knocking or phone banking.

**Caucus:** A meeting held by members of a party to decide an issue. Most often, caucuses are statewide meetings held in presidential election years. Members of a party choose a candidate to support, or they elect members to a state nominating committee.

**Constituent:** A person who lives, works, or pays taxes in an area that an elected official represents.

# appendix a – glossary of terms

**Delegate, Convention (Unpledged, Pledged, and Super):** Someone chosen to represent their town or state at a national political convention. A pledged delegate must support the candidate chosen by the voters they represent. An unpledged delegate is not bound to support a specific candidate. A superdelegate is often a party official or veteran politician. Superdelegates are not required to be chosen or elected to the position and can support any candidate they choose.

**Early Voting:** In 47 states and the District of Columbia as of February 2024, any qualified voter may cast a ballot in person during a designated period prior to Election Day—no excuse or justification required. A few states require absentee or by-mail voters to provide an excuse for this voting method. Some election officials call Early Voting the “Voting Period” and Election Day the “Last Day to Vote” to encourage people to vote as early as possible and minimize long lines on Election Day.

**Election Official** (also Election Clerk, Election Administrator): Professional staff employed by the local jurisdiction (city, township, county, etc.) is tasked with administering each election in that jurisdiction. Election officials print ballots, ensure voting procedures follow state requirements, designate polling places, hire and train temporary election workers, oversee ballot counting, certify an election was conducted legally, and give the official vote count, different from a Poll Worker or a Poll Watcher.

**Election Worker (also Temporary Election Worker, Election Judge, Poll Worker):** See Poll Worker.

**Electoral:** A person who is certified to represent their state's vote in the Electoral College.

**Electoral College, Electoral Vote:** The process Americans use to elect the president and vice president. The number of electors a state receives is equal to that state's number of U.S. senators and representatives. Those electors then gather to cast the state's votes in the Electoral College. They vote for the candidate who won in their state during a presidential election.

**General Election:** A final election for a political office with a limited list of candidates. The candidates in the general election are the people who won their party's primary election. General elections happen at a local, state, and national level.

**Incumbent:** The person currently in a particular job or political office.

# appendix a – glossary of terms

**Mail Voting:** Every state provides for some method whereby voters can cast ballots without visiting a physical polling place. Mail voting includes automatic mail-in ballot systems and request-required mail-in ballot systems. In eight states and in Washington, D.C., every voter receives a mail-in ballot by default.

**Midterm Election:** The federal election for members of Congress is held every four years, during even years where there is not a presidential election (e.g., presidential election years are 2016, 2020, 2024, 2028, and midterm election years are 2018, 2022, 2026, and 2030).

**Nominee:** The final candidate chosen by a party to represent them in an election.

**Platform:** A collection of beliefs, legislative goals, morals, and ideals. A political party's platform outlines its principles and plans to govern.

**Political Action Committee (PAC):** A group organized to raise money or support for a politician or cause.

**Poll Watcher (also referred to as Poll Monitor, Election Observer):** Often appointed by political parties, candidates, or other outside groups to observe election activities. Poll Watchers are not involved with the actual administration of the election and are generally prohibited from interfering in the electoral process apart from reporting any issues to relevant authorities, though rules vary widely by state. Different from a Poll Worker.

**Poll Worker (also referred to as Temporary Election Worker, Election Worker, Election Judge):** A temporary, paid, non-partisan role, hired and trained by the jurisdiction's elections office to provide assistance in administering elections. Poll workers staff polling places during early voting and on Election Day (check in voters, hand out ballots, troubleshoot voting machines, manage lines, hand out "I voted" stickers); other temporary roles include picking up ballots from ballot drop boxes and/or supporting ballot processing. Different from a Poll Watcher.

**Polling Place (also referred to as Polling Station):** The location in which you cast your vote. Your area may hold voting in schools, churches, community centers, or other central public places. Your polling place is assigned based on your legal address.

**Popular Vote:** The votes cast during an election for a candidate or about an issue. Whichever candidate or decision about an issue gets the most votes has won the popular vote. The U.S. President and Vice President are determined by an Electoral College vote.

# appendix a – glossary of terms

**Precinct (also referred to as Election District, Voting District):** Each city, county, or geographic area is divided by address into precincts to assign polling places and gather votes. A precinct can sometimes be called an election district or voting district.

**Primary Election (Open and Closed):** An election held to choose which of a party's candidates will be nominated for the general election. In an open primary, all voters can vote for any candidate they prefer, regardless of the voter's or candidate's party affiliation. In a closed primary, voters can only vote for a candidate from the party that the voter belongs to.

**Provisional Ballot:** Type of ballot used to collect a vote when there are questions about the voter's identity or ability to vote at that precinct. A provisional ballot is counted when the voter's information is confirmed.

**Ranked Choice Voting:** A vote variation that allows each voter to rank contest options in order of the voter's preference, in which votes are counted in rounds using a series of runoff tabulations to defeat contest options with the fewest votes, which elects a winner with a majority of final round votes in a single win contest and provides proportional representation in multi-winner contests.

**Recall Election:** An election for voters to choose whether to remove an elected official from office before the end of the official's term. A recall election can generally take place if enough voters sign a petition asking for one. Rules on the number of voters needed and the officials who can be recalled are different from state to state. Federal officials cannot be recalled; they can only be impeached (see Impeachment). These officials include President, Vice President, Representatives, Senators, and Federal judges.

**Recount:** Counting the votes again because of a suspected error in totaling them the first time.

**Redistrict:** The process by which seats in a legislative body are distributed among administrative divisions based on changes in population.

**Referendum:** A proposed new law or a proposal to repeal an existing law that is passed to the voters to approve or reject. Some states require the following to be approved by a referendum before they can be adopted: spending bills, bond issues, and constitutional amendments.

**Rising American Electorate:** The Rising American Electorate includes unmarried women, people of color, and young people.

# appendix a – glossary of terms

**Runoff Election:** A second election held when no candidates reach the necessary threshold of votes to win in the first election.

**Special Election:** An election to fill a vacant position if an officeholder dies, resigns, or is impeached. It is not part of the regular election schedule.

**Super Tuesday:** The day when the most states and territories hold presidential primary elections or caucuses. The candidates who win on Super Tuesday are more likely to win their party's nomination. This year, Super Tuesday takes place on March 5, 2024.

**Term:** The set length of time for someone to serve in an elected office. The President and Vice President of the United States serve a four-year term. U.S. representatives serve two years and U.S. senators serve six years.

**Town Hall Meeting or Debate:** A setting in which candidates for office answer questions from voters. In a town hall-style debate, a moderator helps ensure candidates follow the rules they agreed to.

**Voter Fraud (Election Fraud):** Interfering with the results of an election by doing illegal things that affect the vote's outcome. Types of voter fraud include bribery, illegal voter registration, tampering with voting machines or ballot boxes, voter impersonation, vote-buying, and false advertising about the election date or how to vote. Organized voter fraud is often called election fraud.

**Voter Identification (Voter ID):** Requirements implemented by state legislatures in 37 states as of February 2024 require voters to present some form of ID at the polls—which in some cases must include a photo. Commonly accepted forms include driver's licenses, state-issued ID cards, and military ID cards.

**Voter Intimidation (Voter Suppression):** An attempt to prevent eligible people from voting or forcing them to vote a certain way. The attempt may be made by an official, individual, or group. Some voter intimidation tactics include using verbal or physical threats, threatening with weapons or jail time, tests involving literacy, property ownership, or citizenship, poll taxes, and other types of intimidation to prevent an eligible person from voting freely.

## Voter Education

### **BallotReady**

<https://www.ballotready.org/>

BallotReady aggregates content from candidates' websites, social media, press, endorsers, and the board of elections for comprehensive, non-partisan information about the candidates and referendums on your ballot. We link everything back to its original source so voters can verify any piece of information, and we make every effort to confirm details with the candidates themselves, giving them the opportunity to share even more information.

### **CIRCLE at Tufts University**

<https://circle.tufts.edu/>

CIRCLE, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, is a non-partisan, independent research organization focused on youth civic engagement in the United States. They conduct extensive research on youth participation and leverage that research to improve opportunities for all young people to acquire and use the skills and knowledge they need to meaningfully participate in civic life. In all of their work, they are especially concerned with understanding, addressing, and ultimately eliminating the systemic barriers that keep some young people marginalized from and underrepresented in civic life. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy. Since 2008, they have been based at Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life.

### **Nonprofit VOTE**

<https://www.nonprofitvote.org/>

Nonprofit VOTE is a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 2005 by a consortium of state nonprofit associations and national nonprofit networks to provide resources and training for the nonprofit sector on how to conduct non-partisan voter participation and election activities.

### **Students Learn Students Vote Coalition**

<https://www.studentslearnstudentsvote.org/>

The Students Learn Students Vote Coalition promotes civic learning and engagement on campuses across the country by providing a series of key steps and information on best practices that institutions can use to create a more voter friendly campus.

### **U.S. Census Bureau**

<https://www.census.gov/>

The Census Bureau is the federal government's largest statistical agency. It is dedicated to providing current facts and figures about America's people, places, and economy.

## Civic Culture & Campaigns

### The Ad Council

<https://www.adcouncil.org/>

The Ad Council produces, distributes, and promotes campaigns that improve everyday lives. Our memorable work inspires ongoing dialogue, engagement, and action around significant public issues, creating a measurable difference in society. As a private, nonprofit organization, the Ad Council focuses on approximately 50 national campaigns at a time, each sponsored by nonprofit organizations or federal government agencies.

### Center for Secure and Modern Elections

<https://modernelections.org/>

Center for Secure and Modern Elections aligns bipartisan, pro-voter campaigns in states across the country that modernize the voting system, making elections more efficient and secure. Center for Secure and Modern Elections works directly with local partners and lawmakers who lead in-state activities.

### Civic Responsibility Project

<https://www.civicresponsibility.org/>

The Civic Responsibility Project is a non-partisan 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works with businesses, nonprofit experts, and local government leaders to increase voter participation. The Civic Responsibility Project's mission is to support businesses committed to shifting cultural attitudes about civic participation, fostering a healthy and hopeful civic culture.

Their most recent project with Harvard Kennedy School's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation examines the ways in which companies can play a role to engage their employees and consumers in elections.

### I am a voter.

<https://iamavoter.com/>

I am a voter. is a non-partisan movement that aims to create a cultural shift around voting and civic engagement by unifying around a central truth: our democracy works best when we all participate.



## **Power the Polls**

<https://www.powerthepolls.org>

Power the Polls is a national non-partisan initiative to recruit the next generation of poll workers—also called election workers or election judges—to power our elections. Power the Polls works with election administrators across the country to identify poll worker gaps and mobilizes its broad coalition of nonprofit and corporate partners to recruit the poll workers election administrators need.

## **Time to Vote**

<https://www.maketimetovote.org/>

Workers shouldn't have to choose between earning a paycheck and voting. Time to Vote is a non-partisan movement led by the business community to contribute to the culture shift needed to increase voter participation in our country's elections.

## **Vote Early Day**

<https://www.voteearlyday.org/>

Vote Early Day is a collaboration among media companies, nonprofits, technology platforms, and election administrators to create a national, ownerless holiday to tap the unprecedented energy around the 2020 election and mobilize the largest early turnout in history. The national holiday is set for Tuesday, October 29, 2024 (one week before Election Day!) when the majority of states have in-person early voting options and most voters will still have enough time to request absentee ballots for Election Day.

### Civic Technology

#### **TurboVote**

<https://turbovote.org/>

TurboVote is an online service to help people vote in every election—local, state, and national—and is developed by Democracy Works, a non-partisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that works to simplify and modernize the voting process. Over seven million voters receive election reminders through TurboVote.

## appendix e – voting rights

### Voting Rights

#### **Fair Elections Center**

<https://www.fairelectionscenter.org/>

Fair Elections Center is a national, non-partisan voting rights and election reform 501(c)(3) organization based in Washington, D.C. Their mission is to use litigation and advocacy to remove barriers to registration and voting, particularly those disenfranchising underrepresented and marginalized communities, and to improve election administration.

#### **Election Protection Hotline: 866-OUR-VOTE**

<https://866ourvote.org>

The national, non-partisan Election Protection Coalition works year-round to ensure that all voters have an equal opportunity to vote and have that vote count. Made up of more than 300 local, state, and national partners, Election Protection uses a wide range of tools and activities to protect, advance, and defend the right to vote.

## Voter Registration

### HeadCount

<https://www.headcount.org/>

HeadCount is a non-partisan organization that uses the power of music to register voters and promote participation in democracy. They reach young people and music fans where they already are—at concerts and online—to inform and empower.

### National Voter Registration Day

<https://nationalvoterregistrationday.org/>

Every year millions of Americans find themselves unable to vote because they miss a registration deadline, don't update their registration, or aren't sure how to register. National Voter Registration Day wants to make sure everyone has the opportunity to vote. National Voter Registration Day seeks to create broad awareness of voter registration opportunities to reach tens of thousands of voters who may not register otherwise.