

Our nonpartisan candidate guides: A note to users

Civic engagement is critical for an effective democracy. Yet, in the average midterm election, only 40 percent of eligible voters participate. Turnout is particularly low among young voters, in part because of the difficulty of evaluating the positions of each candidate amid a barrage of conflicting claims that often include false or misleading information.

Our goal: At guides.vote, we provide nonpartisan campaign guides that offer fair and well-researched summaries of candidate positions on a wide range of issues important to voters, particularly those important to young voters. We sum up candidate positions in concise, bite-size summaries of candidates' views and offer links to credible sources for further information. Voters can get a sense of candidate positions through a quick scan or follow the links for further information. Our goal is to educate voters without overwhelming them.

Distinctions that matter: Since our goal is to help voters decide, we focus on policy differences between the candidates, rather than issues on which they agree. We also focus on candidate races where the outcome is likely to be close because they are the most important races, and the ones that will engage the most voters.

Carefully researched: Our team of [veteran journalists](#) spends an average of 40 hours on each guide evaluating and reviewing available information. We study campaign websites, newspaper articles, Twitter feeds, voting records, radio and TV interviews, and many other public sources of relevant information. This breadth of research is important because it is often hard to understand candidates' true positions just from their website or official statements. We don't send candidates questionnaires because we find that candidate answers often do little to shed light on their actual positions, particularly on controversial issues. Also, candidates increasingly don't respond to such questionnaires. With limited space and resources, we use the standard general election debate thresholds and only include candidates polling 15 percent or better. We do, however, include the available websites for all candidates in races where we're creating a guide. Because of the same limited resources, we focus primarily on the most significant state-level races where people are most likely to be interested in learning more about the candidates.

Balanced summaries: Once we have compiled our research on each candidate, we create brief summaries of what the public record reflects on each of their views. Where we can't find a position on an important issue on which their opponent has taken a strong stand, we'll say "no position found." If a candidate has demonstrated conflicting positions, we will try to offer both. If we can't find a clear position on the specific question we've asked, but the candidate has offered a more general related position, we'll describe that position and let readers decide for themselves where the candidate stands.

Fair and nuanced: We are committed to nonpartisanship and have been since 2012 when these guides were first produced and distributed. Our partners, including more than two hundred colleges and civic organizations, have said they [particularly appreciate this balanced approach](#). We do our best to accurately represent each candidate's position in as nuanced a manner as possible. We list candidates alphabetically and try to give each candidate equal space. We aim to be accurate, thorough, and fair, though can't guarantee we'll find every relevant statement from a candidate or that every guide will seem perfectly fair to every reader. We understand, for example, that an incumbent who has had to make difficult policy decisions while in office may appear more controversial than a political newcomer with no record to defend. When we find critical new information, such as an important new vote, we evaluate and decide whether its salience merits an update to any of our guides.

Just the beginning: We urge you to use our guides as a starting point for your own research. Go to each candidate's campaign website and read their policy positions (we provide the links in every guide). Follow

the links we provide in our answers to see the context in which the statements were made. Read coverage of candidate races in your local newspaper and listen to candidate debates. Your engagement will make you a more-informed voter and make our democracy stronger. **For more details on our process for creating guides, read [How we create our guides](#).**