

HOW TO TALK TO NONVOTERS

Why People Don't Vote

Maryland Edition

Since low voter turnout is a concern for the 2020 Elections, it is important to know the reasons that people give for not voting. Many surveys and studies have collected these reasons, and this book organizes them into categories and provides information to respond when people tell us they do not intend to vote. Where possible, we point out differences among states, and additional links are provided for further information. We will address each of the four main categories and the specific reasons that fall under each.

With this guidance, those working to increase voter turnout will have tools to respond to people's reasons for not voting.

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I Can't Vote

This is essentially the issue of who is qualified to vote. There are some criteria for voting that apply nationwide, mostly those established by court decisions made on challenges to state restrictions on voting. However, voting is largely a state and local matter, so we will point out where qualifications vary state-by-state.

I AM NOT A CITIZEN

- This is a valid disqualification nationally; you must be a citizen to vote in any election

I AM NOT OLD ENOUGH

- The 26th Amendment to the US Constitution gave the right to vote to any citizen 18 years or older. However, states have made some determinations how this applies.
 - Sixteen states (including MD, WV, VA and NC) and DC allow 17-year-olds voting rights in primaries provided they will be 18 upon the corresponding general election.
 - Eleven states allow 17-year-olds to participate in presidential caucuses, but they may not vote in primary elections for other offices.
 - The remaining states do not allow 17-year-olds to vote.
 - For more information, see the [Fair Vote website](#).

THEY THINK I LACK THE MENTAL CAPACITY TO VOTE

- From the [Atlantic](#): "About 30 states and the District of Columbia have laws in their constitutions that can limit people with mental disabilities from voting if they have been ruled "mentally incapacitated," or incontinent, by a court. This means they have been determined unable to manage their own affairs or make specific life decisions, which, other than voting for candidates, can include managing their money, entering a contract, making medical decisions or caring for their children.

I HAVEN'T LIVED HERE LONG ENOUGH

- From [Wikipedia](#): State Residency: In 1972, the US Supreme Court ruled that limits on voter registration of up to 30 to 50 days prior to an election were permissible for logistical reasons, but that residency requirements in excess of that violated the equal protection clause, as granted under the Fourteenth Amendment.

I HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD

- It is a common misconception that a person can lose voting rights for being arrested or for a misdemeanor conviction. Only a felony conviction can result in the loss of voting rights.
 - Amendments to the US Constitution adopted after the Civil War prohibited States from denying "the privileges or immunities of

citizens of the United States. . . without due process of law."

However, a citizen may be denied the right to vote (and subjected to "involuntary servitude") upon conviction of a felony.

- In almost every state, a person's voting right may be restored.
 - Other than Maine and Vermont, all U.S. states prohibit felons from voting while they are in prison.
 - 17 States and DC allow those on parole and probation to vote
 - 3 states prevent parolees from voting
 - 17 ban those on probation from casting ballots
 - 11 states further restrict voting by ex-felons depending on the crime, including waiting periods, including:
 - 7 states that permanently disenfranchise people for some or all felonies (unless restored by the Governor)
 - Kentucky and Virginia that prohibit almost all ex-felons from voting permanently (although the Democratic governors of each state recently restored voting rights for over 140,000+ ex-felons)
 - In a 2018 ballot issue, the voters of Florida restored the rights of felons to vote upon release, but the Legislature imposed a requirement that they pay all fines and costs first. This requirement was upheld by the Florida Supreme Court.
- For up-to-date information, see the [Sentencing Project](#)

I DON'T HAVE A HOME OR PERMANENT RESIDENCE

- From [Wikipedia](#): [H]omeless persons in all states have the right to register and vote if they satisfy other conditions. In most states, when registering to vote, homeless voters may designate any place of residence, including a street corner, a park, a shelter, or any other location where an individual stays at night. . . . Designating residency is needed to prove that the citizen lives within the district where he or she wishes to vote. Some states also require a mailing address in order to send out the voter ID card, which the individual must show on Election Day. Some states allow individuals to use PO Boxes as mailing addresses; other states allow the address to be that of a local shelter, advocacy organization, outreach center, or anywhere else that accepts mail on behalf of a person registering to vote. States such as Arizona and Nebraska allow homeless citizens to use county court houses or county clerks' offices as mailing address.

- For state-specific information, see this [chart](#) on page 41.

I DON'T BELONG TO A POLITICAL PARTY

- In states with closed primaries, only those registered as affiliated with a party are allowed to vote in the primary. Where the registration for one party is overwhelmingly larger than for a voter's party, he/she may feel disenfranchised. While this is not a voter disqualification for general elections, it is similar to the situation that voters of a minority party experience in a general election when all of the state's electoral college votes regularly go to the majority party presidential candidate. This causes many to believe that their vote does not count, especially since candidates for president rarely campaign in their state.
 - Twenty states have fully or partially closed Democratic presidential primaries, meaning you must be registered as a Democrat to vote in the primary.
 - Eleven states further have partially open primaries where unaffiliated voters, but not registered Republicans, can vote in the Democratic primary.
 - Seventeen states have fully open primaries where any person, regardless of their party registration, can cast a ballot in the Democratic presidential primary. In most open primary states, however, voters are only allowed to participate in one party's primary.
 - To see which states have open or closed primaries, see this [map](#)
 - Many states have different rules for federal and state-level primary elections, and the map only applies to Democratic presidential primaries.
 - Since every state has its own unique laws and stipulations regarding presidential primaries, double-check your own state's rules before deciding how to register.
 - Maryland: has a closed primary – you can only vote to choose nominees for your party

I AM A COLLEGE STUDENT FROM OUT-OF-STATE

- A college student votes in the same manner as any other registered voter: you may vote in person on Election Day or, if eligible, by absentee.

- If voting in state where college is located, verify the residency requirement (may be up to 20 days ahead of election day).
- Students who will be absent from the locality where they are registered to vote because they attend school in another locality are eligible to vote absentee (verify requirements for absentee ballots since some require a reason).

I CAN'T SHOW THE IDENTIFICATION REQUIRED TO VOTE

- The type of identification needed to vote varies by state, and some have strict requirements that often make it harder for poor people to obtain the official ID:
 - For information on Voter ID laws by state, see [Vote Riders](#)
- Many consider this kind of requirement to be a deliberate means to suppress the vote, especially among certain groups. For information on voter suppression measures by state, see the article “Which US States Make it Hardest to Vote” in the [Guardian](#).
- Specific States:
 - MD: specific ID not required; can show alternatives and usually not asked at polls
 - PA: Pennsylvania driver’s license or state ID number, or the last four digits of your Social Security number.
 - VA: A valid photo ID must be presented when voting in person in Virginia, including:
 - a valid student ID card with a photograph of the voter and issued by any public or private high school, college, or university in Virginia
 - Virginia driver’s license, or ID card issued by the Virginia DMV, U.S. passport, or any other photo ID issued by Virginia, one of its political subdivisions, or the U.S., including the free photo ID issued by the Department of Elections
 - a valid employee ID card containing a photograph of the voter; or
 - a tribal ID issued by any of the 11 recognized tribes in Virginia.
 - WV: West Virginia driver’s license/ID number, or the last four digits of your Social Security number.

It's Too Hard

The process of voting is often more complicated than it needs to be, and people often find it burdensome. However, there are ways to navigate a state's process that can make it relatively easy.

SEPARATE REGISTRATION AND VOTING

- Every state except Nebraska makes voting a two-step process, registering and voting. States require registration to create a list of who is allowed to vote on election day or by mail. The good news is that a person only needs to register once, as they will remain on the rolls unless removed upon death.
- The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 defines the process of removing a voter from the voter registration list. Under this law, the election board cannot remove a voter just because he or she doesn't vote.
- The election board can remove a voter at the voter's request or after notifying the voter if:
 - The voter has been convicted of a felony and is in prison
 - The voter is under a mental disability and a court has specifically found that the voter can't communicate a desire to participate in the voting process
 - The voter has been convicted of buying or selling votes
 - A jury commission notifies us that a voter has moved, died, or is a non-citizen
 - The Social Security Administration or state health agency reports that the voter has died.
- In addition, many states allow a person to register at the polls on election day, making it a one-event process.
 - Maryland: allows same-day registration
 - Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia: do not allow same-day registration

REGISTRATION TAKES EFFORT

- These days, states have multiple ways to register, including by mail (using a required form), online, and often through various state agencies (especially

motor vehicle licensing and registration sites). Some states allow same-day registration at the polls on election day

- The following websites can help people navigate the registration and voting process and prepare to vote:
 - Vote.org: [Everything You Need to Vote](#)
 - WikiHow: [Everything You Need to Know to Vote in 2020's U.S. Election](#)
- Maryland allows same-day registration - instructions:
 - For the 2020 Presidential Primary Election, go to a vote center (centro de votación) on election day in the county where you live.
 - For the 2020 Presidential General Election only, go to an early voting center in the county where you live during early voting or to your assigned polling place on election day and bring a document that proves where you live.

I'M NOT SURE WHAT TO DO AFTER MOVING

- Since representation in the legislature is determined by geographic districts, a person's address is central to voting. Should a voter move, he/she will need to notify the election board of a change of address. In many states, changing one's address relating to their driver's license and/or motor vehicle registration will result in the election board being notified as well. However, it is always best to verify with the election board that the change has been made, and this can be done online.
- Most of time, the election board learns from other sources that a voter has moved. For example, the United States Postal Service returns a voter's sample ballot and provides the voter's new address. When we receive this information, we send a letter asking the voter to confirm where he or she lives. The letter is sent by forwardable mail and includes a return card for the voter to use to tell us his or her new address. This is the called "confirmation mail" process and is required by federal law.
 - If the voter returns the card and confirms that he or she has moved to another address in the state, the election board changes the voter's registration address.
 - If the voter returns the card and confirms that he or she has moved to another state, we cancel the voter's registration. If the voter doesn't respond to the mailing within 2 weeks, the voter becomes an "inactive voter." If the "inactive voter" doesn't vote or try to vote in

the next two election cycles (four years), the voter's registration will be cancelled. [Again, this process is required by federal law for all states.]

FACTORS THAT MAY IMPEDE VOTING

While there are multiple factors that could make voting harder, most of them can be resolved by using certain features of a state's electoral system, specifically:

- Early voting - establishing a number of days and locations where people can vote before the election day.
- Vote by Mail or absentee voting - usually requires the voter to apply for a mail-in ballot, and may require an excuse.

In addition, many organizations offer support services to help voters with childcare or rides to the polls

- If you or your organization can provide transportation or childcare, provide a number
- Create your own list of organizations offering rides or childcare

Specific factors:

- Tuesday elections fall on a workday - Elections in the US have traditionally been held on Tuesdays. Since this is a workday for most people, this can be an inconvenience, even though employers are supposed to allow workers time off to vote. Voting by mail or early voting on non-workdays are options.
- Working and living in different cities - For people who travel long distances to work, finding time to vote is often an issue. Voting by mail or early voting on non-workdays are options.
- College students away from home - For many college students, traveling home to vote is difficult. If the home state has early voting, it may still be possible to travel during this period. Another option is to vote by mail. A third option is to register and vote in the jurisdiction where the college is located.
- Multiple jobs - People who work multiple jobs often have difficulty finding the time to vote. In such cases, voting by mail or early voting on non-workdays are options.

- Transportation/Lack of polling places near voters (election day and/or early voting) - In some states, early voting has a limited number of voting sites, often not served by public transportation, making it harder for people to vote. Offering transportation can help.
- Homeless - People without a fixed residence (although allowed to register and vote) often have trouble getting to the polls. Offers of transportation may help.
- Disabled - Some disabled people are unable to vote by mail, so a trip to the polls (either election day or early voting) is needed. While most government provide special transportation services for disabled people, offers of transportation may help.
- Lack of Childcare - While many parents take their children with them to vote, this is not always a viable alternative, so offers of childcare can be helpful.

State-specific options:

- Maryland: early voting is available on multiple other days at multiple sites in each county; mail-in voting allowed without giving reason for absence from polls
- Pennsylvania: no early voting; mail-in voting allowed without giving reason for absence from polls
- Virginia: early voting a local registrar's office beginning 45 days before Election Day and ending the Saturday before Election Day; mail-in voting allowed without giving reason for absence from polls
- West Virginia: no early voting; absentee ballot by mail only allowed for:
 - Illness, injury or other medical reason (due to concerns of COVID-19, all voters may apply to vote absentee in the 2020 Primary Election because of "medical reason")
 - Disability or advanced age
 - Incarceration or home detention (does not include individuals convicted of any felony, treason, or election bribery)
 - Work hours and distance from county seat
 - Inaccessible early voting site and polling place
 - Personal or business travel
 - Attendance at college or other place of education or training
 - Temporary residence outside of the county
 - Service as an elected or appointed state or federal official

- Delaware: no early voting; mail-in voting allowed without giving reason for absence from polls

INTIMIDATION

- Intimidation by friends or family
 - Some report that they feel intimidated by people they know, either to vote a certain way or not to vote at all. Sometimes this is not overt, but they may belong to a social group where voting is disparaged or not encouraged, and peer pressure alone can prevent some people from voting.
 - While we cannot recommend that a person leave a non-voting social group, we can help them develop the confidence to overcome social pressure. Emphasis on the importance of voting and the urgency of the current state of the nation are often helpful in motivating these people to vote.
- Intimidation by people at polls
 - Attempting to pressure or intimidate people at the polls is a crime and should be reported to election judges and/or police
 - Federal: "Whoever intimidates, threatens, coerces, or attempts to intimidate, threaten, or coerce, any other person for the purpose of interfering with the right of such other person to vote or to vote as he may choose, or of causing such other person to vote for, or not to vote for, any candidate for the office of President, Vice President, Presidential elector, Member of the Senate, Member of the House of Representatives, Delegate from the District of Columbia, or Resident Commissioner, at any election held solely or in part for the purpose of electing such candidate, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than one year, or both." US Code 18 U.S.C. § 594.
 - Maryland: "A person may not knowingly: (a) . . . influence or attempt to influence a voter's voting decision through the use of force, threat, menace, intimidation, bribery, reward, or offer of reward; . . . influence or attempt to influence a voter's decision whether to go to the polls to cast a vote through the use of force, fraud, threat, menace, intimidation, bribery, reward, or offer of reward; or . . . engage in conduct that

results or has the intent to result in the denial or abridgement of the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race, color, or disability. (b) . . . a person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine of not more than \$2,500 or imprisonment for not more than 5 years or both." Annotated Code of Maryland, Election Law Article, § 16-201.

- Pennsylvania: "If any person . . . shall use or practice any intimidation, threats, force or violence with design to influence unduly or overawe any elector, or to prevent him from voting or restrain his freedom of choice. . . , he shall be guilty of a felony of the third degree, and, upon conviction thereof, shall be sentenced to pay a fine not exceeding fifteen thousand (\$15,000) dollars, or to undergo an imprisonment of not more than seven (7) years, or both, in the discretion of the court." Pennsylvania Election Code, Article XVIII, Section 1828.
- Virginia: "It shall be unlawful for any person to hinder, intimidate, or interfere with any qualified voter so as to prevent the voter from casting a secret ballot. The officers of election may order a person violating this subsection to cease such action. If such person does not promptly desist, the officers of election, or a majority of them, may order the arrest of such person by any person authorized by law to make arrests, and, by their warrant, may commit him to the county or city jail, as the case may be, for a period not exceeding twenty-four hours. Any person violating this subsection shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor." Virginia Code § 24.2-607
- West Virginia: None
- Delaware: "Every person who . . . shall by force, threat, menace or intimidation, prevent or hinder, or attempt to prevent or hinder, any person qualified for registration from being registered or any person qualified to vote from voting according to said person's choice at any such general, special or municipal election, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall be fined not less than one hundred dollars nor more than five thousand dollars, or shall be imprisoned for a term not less than one month nor more than

three years, or shall suffer both fine and imprisonment within said limits, at the discretion of the court; and shall further for a term of ten years next following said person's sentence, be incapable of voting at any such general, special, municipal or primary election or convention or meeting." Delaware Code, Article V, Section 7.

BURNOUT: TOO MANY ELECTIONS

- One of the features of American democracy is the frequency of elections
- While we cannot reduce the number of elections, we can help voters to understand the importance of voting. Emphasis on the urgency of the current state of the nation is often helpful in motivating these people to vote.

I Don't Know Enough

Many people who do not vote cite lack of information as a reason. For some, this is related to a general lack of awareness of the elections, the candidates or the issues, it may also involve difficulty finding understandable, trustworthy information. Given the potential number of offices and candidates for those offices as well as ballot issues, many people become overwhelmed with the complexities of voting, and many feel that they don't know enough to make informed decisions. People also worry about feeling personally responsible if they vote for a candidate or position and the results are not what they envisioned.

Common complaints include:

- I don't have time for learning and deciding
- Lack of info to make informed decisions
- There are too many candidates/items on ballot
- I don't know the candidates
- I don't know the issues
- Sources of info are too biased

EDUCATION IS NOT A BARRIER

- Data show that the single biggest predictor of whether someone will vote is whether they hold a college degree. College graduates usually make more

money, are more likely to look for information about politics, and are more likely to have friends who vote.

- However, like parenting, there is no educational requirement for voting, and it isn't hard to find enough information to make good decisions.

HOW TO KNOW ENOUGH

- The best and most unbiased source of information on who is on the ballot (based on your address) is the League of Women Voters: [LWV Vote411](#) which includes a voter guide for each state.
 - In some cases, you can also link to your state LWV:
 - See [Maryland](#)
 - See [Pennsylvania](#)
 - Other Good Sources
 - Official Government website: [usa.gov](#) “Decide Who to Vote For”
 - [Ballotpedia](#)
 - A good article “Voting Guide 2020: Issues That Matter to Seniors” can be found [here](#)

I Don't Have a Reason to Vote

Most of what we hear from nonvoters are aspects of the political system that limit the ability of the people to feel that their opinions are represented and make a difference in the direction of the country, state or local community. Many of these concerns are legitimate and point to real defects in our democracy that cannot be addressed overnight. We need to acknowledge the systemic issues and some of the proposed remedies, but concentrate on the need for people to be engaged now in selecting leaders that could implement real solutions.

A SINGLE VOTE DOESN'T MATTER

- There are many examples of close elections where a handful or even one vote would have made a difference in the outcome, including:
 - One study reported that between 1898 and 1992, "one of every 100,000 votes cast in U.S. elections, and one of every 15,000 votes cast in state elections, 'mattered' in the sense that they were cast for

a candidate that officially tied or won by one vote." For a list of close election results at national and state level see [Wikipedia](#).

- Most recently, in the 2017 Virginia elections, both candidates for State Delegate received exactly the same number of votes in the 94th District. The race was determined by blindly drawing the winner's name from a bowl, and that one seat determined which party controlled the chamber.

SOME VOTES COUNT MORE THAN OTHERS

- Although the US Supreme Court established the principle of "one person, one vote" in electing representatives to make the laws, there are deviations from this rule.
 - Each state elects two US Senators, so states with few people have as many as very populous ones.
 - To see the relative influence of voters in states click [here](#)
 - Changing the representation in the US Senate would require a constitutional amendment and is not feasible at this time, especially since two-thirds of the Senate and three-fourths of all states would need to approve it.
 - The distortion in equal representation in the Senate carries over into the election of the President, since each state is allocated one vote for every Senator and one for each Representative in the Electoral College.
 - To see the relative influence of voters in states see the chart "Electoral College Votes Per Voter" found [here](#).
 - Changes to the Electoral College would require a constitutional amendment, which is not feasible, but fifteen states (representing 189 electoral college votes) have passed the National Popular Vote Compact (NPV) to direct their Electors to vote for whichever candidate wins the national popular vote. Should enough states adopt this law, it would assure that the winner of the popular vote nationally got enough Electoral College votes to be elected President.
 - While we should acknowledge that people in some states have more representation in government, we can argue that it shouldn't deter people from voting, since failure to vote amounts to the person's complete refusal to exercise any power to impact government policy.

GERRYMANDERING RESULTS IN SAFE SEATS FOR THOSE IN OFFICE, SO WHAT'S THE POINT?

- In the US House of Representatives as well as state legislatures, representation is determined by creating districts that each have the same number of people. After the national census every ten years, each state is required to revise these districts to adjust for changes in population. How this is done varies from state to state, with four using nonpartisan commissions and seven using commissions composed of political appointees, while the majority (35 states) place this power in the hands of elected officials who have a personal or partisan interest in how the lines are drawn.
 - For a map of which method is used in each state, see [Ballotopedia](#)
 - In many states, redistricting has been used to give one party over another for the next ten years, often using methods that are controversial. This leads to valid complaints that lawmakers are choosing their voters instead of voters choosing them. The practice of using unfair political power to manipulate district boundaries earned the name "gerrymandering" in 1812 when the Governor of Massachusetts, Elbridge Gerry, signed a bill creating a particularly partisan district that was compared to the shape of a mythological salamander. If districts are drawn fairly, then the people elects representatives who reflect the views of the population as a whole. But if the district lines are manipulated through partisan gerrymandering, then the legislature becomes untethered from the popular will.
 - However, courts have invalidated district maps that violate certain principles.
 - In 1995, the Supreme Court held that racial gerrymandering is a violation of constitutional rights and upheld decisions against redistricting purposely devised based on race.
 - However, with respect to partisan gerrymandering, the court ultimately decided that this is a nonjusticiable political question for federal courts, leaving it to states and Congress to develop remedies.
 - This makes it critical for voters to elect candidates in every state who support independent, nonpartisan commissions to conduct redistricting based on objective criteria.

I DON'T TRUST THE COUNT TO BE RIGHT

- Some people doubt the accuracy of the vote counting, despite the extremely low incidence of error. In these cases, it is important to point out:
 - The running of elections and all vote counting is done at the local level by nonpartisan staff and overseen by all parties. Allegations of fraud, therefore, are attacks on the integrity of elections managed by local officials of both parties.
 - Canvassing (the actual vote counting process) is made open to public view and is monitored by representatives of the parties.
 - Where electronic machines are used:
 - Certified voting systems are never connected to the Internet, thereby avoiding the risk of hacking (thumb drives are used to transfer data)
 - Cybersecurity services offered by the Department of Homeland Security conduct regular scans of election agency websites looking for vulnerabilities, and perform risk and vulnerability assessments of the systems
 - Most systems have a paper trail to verify results by comparing paper ballots to the counts given by the scanning devices.
 - Election boards conduct comprehensive post-election audits to verify the integrity of the entire process

MY BELIEFS ARE NOT REPRESENTED BY THE PARTIES/CANDIDATES

- Unlike most countries governed by parliamentary systems, our government's structure has historically made elections a contest between the two major parties, Democratic and Republican. This limits the options for voters whose views vary significantly from either party.
- Voters who have trouble deciding between the candidates from the two major parties may choose not to vote rather than choose "the lesser of two evils" or claim that there are no differences between them.
 - There are always issues on which the candidates representing the two parties do not agree, so it may be helpful to challenge the voter's claim and give examples where the parties and/or candidates differ.
 - It may be helpful to ask these voters if they can name anyone who agrees with them completely on every issue. Since they likely

disagree with everyone on something, they should try to focus on the issues on which they agree with the candidates and make a choice on that basis.

- While chances for third-party candidates winning election to major national office are remote, it is possible for groups within the larger parties, or in opposition to one or both of them, to exert influence on the two major parties.
 - Supporting a group outside the parties can also sway public opinion and often cause one of the parties to adopt policies the voter supports, giving them a reason to vote.
 - Voters working within a party may have a chance to support one of these factions during the party primary, but they must accept their party's nominee or risk having the opposing party win the seat.
 - Supporting a faction within a party gives more voters a voice, and these factions often have success in shaping the party's policies.
- In some elections, voters are given the chance to select "none of above" instead of a candidate, giving them the option to make a protest vote indicating that they do not want either candidate.

I DON'T LIKE THE CANDIDATES

- This may be a reflection of the objection above about choice of party, or it may simply be a personal dislike. Studies have shown that having a candidate that a voter believes in can be a top motivator for the person to vote.
- If the statement is based on personal dislike, it is helpful to refocus on the issues as the way for a voter to decide who to support.

THERE'S TOO MUCH INFLUENCE FROM BIG MONEY AND SPECIAL INTERESTS

- Since elections began, campaign contributions have been a significant factor in deciding the winners. Large donations in particular can distort elections and override the will of the people since money can give a candidate considerable advantage in communicating his/her name and positions to the voters.
- The Supreme Court opened the doors to almost unlimited amounts of money flowing to campaigns when it overturned limits that Congress had

imposed on donations over the last 100 years. This could be overturned only by:

- A constitutional amendment (requiring supermajorities in Congress and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the states to vote in favor), or
- Appointment of Supreme Court justices willing to overturn these recent decisions. (This makes elections for President and for US Senators even more important)
- However, in recent years, online donations have increased the ability of candidates to accumulate small donations from many more people, giving candidates with broad support a better chance to overcome the impact of wealthy donors.

LACK OF TRUST: SYSTEMIC ABUSE OF GROUPS

- For many people in the United States, the benefits of our nation have not been fully available, and extensive systems continue to disadvantage them. For this reason, many people of color (African Americans, Latinx, Native Americans, etc.) do not trust politicians who promise to change these systems. Many would say that they have placed their trust in officials or candidates only to have their hopes dashed time and again. They are justifiably cynical about politicians.
- The best way to approach this issue is to acknowledge it, validate the voter's experience, and listen to their views about issues. It is important that they experience being heard by you and shown that you understand and acknowledge their point of view.
- Where possible, indicate that you will work to dismantle oppressive systems and give personal examples of work you have done to do so. While this may not result in them voting this time, they will at least know that they have allies, and that they are not alone in seeking change.

DISILLUSIONMENT: THE CANDIDATES WON'T ACTUALLY CHANGE ANYTHING

- Regardless of what some candidates may say, there are certain things that will not change, regardless of who is elected to office, including:
 - The basic structure of our government as a representative democracy, even if we tweak its design by enacting constitutional amendments,

- That no single official, even a President, can change everything alone, without the cooperation of other parts of government,
- The fact that the world and its issues are complicated, and simple solutions are invariably ineffective, and
- The fact that no one has a complete understanding of the issues and can solve all of the problems.
- However, even a casual review of history reveals positive changes that have been made over time.
 - The right to vote in America, which was originally limited to free, white men with wealth and/or property, has been extended to women, African-Americans, Native Americans, younger people, and those without economic means,
 - The government has taken a larger role in supporting education for all children (state constitutions now guarantee public schools), basic necessities such as food (SNAP/Food Stamps), income (Unemployment Insurance, Workers Compensation, Social Security, Public Assistance), and healthcare (Medicare, Medicaid, Affordable Care Act), and
 - The government now protects more groups of people from unfair discrimination, including actions based on religion, race, nationality, gender, age, and gender identity.
- While these changes have not solved all problems and are not perfect, the trend has been towards expansion of rights, needed services, and protections.

LYING BY CANDIDATES & OFFICIALS

- Many people believe that "all candidates lie" and can point to examples where this is the case. However, studies have shown that officials keep their promises to a remarkable degree.
 - "Generally, politicians do actually try to accomplish the things they say they'll do." See [Do Political Candidates Just Tell Us What We Want to Hear?](#)
 - For up-to-date, nonpartisan, unbiased information on the statements of candidates and officials, see [PolitiFact](#). This source also provides comparisons of politicians that identify which ones tell the truth more often than others.

MY SOCIAL GROUP MEMBERS DON'T VOTE

- A person's friends and associates, co-workers, or fellow students often influence whether or not a person votes. A social group whose members generally do not vote can create peer pressure to act likewise. Often the desire to "fit in" is not conscious, and it can help to question how the individual really feels about voting or if they are just following the others. Emphasizing the importance of exercising one's individual right to vote can raise awareness and result in acting differently than the group. Furthermore, stressing that the group could exercise more power by voting might help influence the others to follow suit.

YOUNG PEOPLE: OLDER PEOPLE ARE MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT MY FUTURE

- Research at Tufts University "consistently indicates that election systems and the preparation many young people receive (or fail to receive) to become informed voters are inadequate, leading to significant variations in voting rates by race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and other socioeconomic and demographic factors."
- "Young people have a massive stake in the decisions that shape the country. Nearly all issues affect youth, and many affect youth differently or uniquely: education, healthcare, the environment, immigration, housing, gun violence, and foreign policy that may send them or their peers to war. When young people vote and participate in civic life, they can bring valuable perspectives to these issues and play an active role in shaping their future. If youth are excluded or do not participate, our democracy is not truly representing all people and not meeting its full potential." See [Understanding Youth Civic Engagement](#)
 - For a ranking of states where youth vote is likely to be significant, see [Where Will Young Voters Impact the 2020 Election?](#)
 - For information on states where youth of color may have particular impact, see [Potential Impact of Youth of Color in Key 2020 Elections](#)

APATHY - I DON'T CARE ABOUT POLITICS

- The hardest group to convince to vote are the most apathetic. Studies have shown that as much as 26% of the population can be considered "politically disengaged."

- According to a [study](#) by the group More In Common:
 - They are more likely to be young, low income, distrustful, detached, patriotic, and conspiratorial.
 - "They are different from . . . Liberals in being more anxious about external threats and less open in their attitudes towards differences. For instance, they are the most likely to say that being white is necessary to be American and that people who hold other religious views are morally inferior. They are more concerned about the threat of terrorism and are quite closed to the view that Islamic and American values are compatible. They are practically invisible in local politics and community life, being one of the least likely groups to participate in political rallies or vote in local elections. They are also the least well informed group on all measures of political knowledge. They are the most pessimistic about the possibility of reconciling differences between political factions. Overall, this makes the Politically Disengaged a difficult segment to reach and mobilize."
 - However, they share the same concern as most Americans with the divisions among us, and many consider it the most serious problem that we face today. As with any group, it is important to listen attentively to their opinions and show that some people are willing to acknowledge their point of view, even if we do not agree with everything they say. Anything that engages such people in authentic conversations could eventually lead them to take more interest and become involved in voting. And voter education along with real conversations about values could broaden their perspective and encourage them to reexamine their positions on issues.

NO ONE ASKED ME TO VOTE

- No one should ignore the fact that some people don't vote because no one asked them to do so.
- This can especially happen where:
 - One party has an overwhelming majority in the state or locality. In these cases, there are few contested elections, and candidates don't think it is worthwhile to ask voters to vote for them.
 - The voter is a person of color, and the white power structure believes it can afford to ignore their potential impact.

- A young person has just reached the age to vote, and they have never encountered anyone who valued their vote.
- Regardless of the reason, it is important to communicate that we value their vote and their participation in government. So **ASK!**

Summary

“Over 90 percent of Americans agree with the principle that citizens have a duty to vote,”ⁱ even those who do not do it regularly or at all. This means that we start at an advantage when we encourage people to vote in the next election. During our conversations with nonvoters, we need to remind them of this duty and seek to identify the reasons they give for not voting. It is important to listen carefully to hear what problems they are having and address them with good, unbiased information. We hope that the material presented here and the links to other sources will give you the tools to do this effectively.

Real, authentic discussions are the best way to approach any conversation, and we should be prepared to share our own stories about the importance of voting and the issues that motivate us in making decisions. As representatives of nonpartisan, nonprofit groups, we are not salespeople making a pitch for a particular party or candidate. We are working to preserve and expand democracy in order to make our nation and our world a better place.

As a friend of mine said after losing an election: “The People have spoken. It is always good when the People speak.”

ⁱ <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-politicalscience/chapter/voting-as-political-participation/>