



# everettupshaw.com Voting Guide

## Quick Start Guide

**1-REGISTER:** Search "[state] voter registration" now. It's not hard but there may be early deadlines to show ID or submit papers in person.

**2-PARTY [OPTIONAL]:** To vote in a political party's internal ("primary") election, search "[state/county] [political party name]" for information.

**3-WHEN:** Search "[state/county] election calendar [year]" every year for early and regular election days and mail-voting deadlines.

**4-WHERE:** A month ahead of each election, search "[county] polling places." **WARNING:** You must vote in your precinct unless county-wide voting is allowed that particular day; locations also vary day to day.

**5-WHAT:** At the same time, search "[county] sample ballot [month, year] election" for an official sample ballot showing you exactly what a voter in your precinct will see on election day.

**6-HOW:** (i) Print out your sample ballot or list out all the offices and propositions on a blank piece of paper. (ii) Start researching unfamiliar candidates and propositions, writing down your choices. (See below for how I do my research.)

**7-GET OUT AND VOTE ON ELECTION DAY!** Don't forget to bring your notes. (See below for my thoughts on voting when you're unsure.). Then feel good about putting your days as a nonvoting chump behind you. You've done right by your family, friends, neighbors, and fellow Americans. **THANK YOU!**

## Better Voting Guide

### How can I research candidates for office and what skills they should have?

You have three advantages in evaluating candidates, so use them: 1st, they can be questioned (by you or others who cover politics); 2nd, their actions can be observed; and 3rd, with extremely rare exceptions, you know what they want: for you to choose them instead of their opponents. Watch them, listen to them, and interpret what they say skeptically, with their motive in mind. You are looking for specific, concrete evidence of their actions; and testable evidence to prove their claims. For example, 2026-03-24 version – logo TM and all contents © 2026 by Everett Upshaw

"Everyone should have good medical care" and "We should keep criminal thugs from sneaking into the country" are aspirations virtually everyone agrees with. Better, testable information would be how an incumbent voted on past bills, and whether they live their own life in accordance with what they say they support. (1) Start your research with nonpartisan sources that send questions to all candidates and publish their answers. You get to read the candidates' own words and you get to judge their answers to serious questions instead of their slogans and puff pieces. If they answer, you learn where they stand. If they keep puffing slogans instead of answering, it tells you they're ignorant or dishonest. The League of Women Voters has been doing this longer than anybody else and usually cover all federal and state offices. They also explain what job the candidates are supposed to be doing! 'Vote411 is less consistent but also explains the job before presenting the candidates' answers. They try to cover local offices too. (2) Local newspapers usually provide reporting and recommendations for voting (including at the local level), but sometimes in two separate places. Read the reporting to learn; read the recommendations in light of how much you do (or do not) respect the paper and its staff. (3) Other newspaper and Internet news sources, such as Ballotpedia, provide reporting about candidates and propositions, and should be evaluated like local newspapers. For incumbents, look for reports disclosing how (and whether) they voted on bills favoring specific policy positions, and whether they followed the law in discharging their official duties. (4) The candidates themselves, and the political parties, have websites, although it can be hard to find much substance on them. (See the "challenge" on the home page.)

## **What are ballot propositions and how can I research them?**

Ballot propositions allow voters to vote on specific laws. Although potentially powerful tools for democracy, in practice, like all government choices, they're usually tricky; and individual voters don't have as much time and resources to study them, as legislators do. Research propositions similarly to candidates, recognizing it is a harder task because you cannot cross-examine a proposition or observe its behavior; and the motives of those who wrote it may be unclear. (1) If you can find nonpartisan sources that send questions to officials and groups who support and oppose each proposition, I would start with them. (2) More likely, you will have to start with newspapers and Internet news sources. Ideally, ones covering all of the propositions on your ballot in a single place. You want information and recommendations about the propositions themselves (which you must interpret depending on how much you trust or mistrust the source), and perhaps more importantly, who is supporting and opposing the proposition. The mother lode is usually identifying what individuals or groups originally authored the proposition and getting an idea of what they want. Are they businessmen? Commuters? Big taxpayers? Or political strongmen? (3) Sometimes you can identify who is for and against a bill by reading who paid for a particular political ad. (4) Look at the websites and fliers of the groups you have identified as supporters and opponents, evaluating what they have to say based on whether it makes sense, whether they point to verifiable factual evidence to back up their arguments, and what you can tell or guess about their motives.

## **What if I don't like any of the candidates, or I'm still not sure who to vote for?**

Make your best guess, pick the least of the evils, and VOTE for every contested office, unless you've literally never heard of any of the candidates and don't know anything about any of them. Don't like any of the candidates? That's not unusual, if you're a reasonable person with an appropriate dose of skepticism. But someone WILL fill each office anyway, and all of us WILL be stuck with that person. So hold your nose and help us avoid the worst for everyone by voting for the lesser evil.

## **What if I'm still not sure whether to vote for a proposition?**

If in doubt about a proposition, vote NO. (1) Laws should be clear, with specific, predictable effects. Yes, you should fairly try to understand propositions even if they're complicated. Simple short sentences are rarely specific or predictable. But ultimately, if you can't understand it, it probably shouldn't be a law, and you definitely shouldn't be passing it. (2) It takes money and effort to put propositions on ballots. If groups are sincere, they should disclose their identities and explain themselves in a way you can evaluate against who they are, how they make money, and what kinds of people they are. If you aren't sure you can tell who really supports this bill the most or who benefits from it, you're being hustled and scammed. (3) We should allow others to control their own lives unless there are strong, obvious reasons to interfere with them. Most propositions are intended to force people to do something. If you aren't confident you're doing the right thing, leave people alone. If you can't even tell who's going to be affected or how, the proposition may come right back down on your own head. Why would you want that?

## **How can I tell if a candidate is full of baloney?**

Be skeptical and do your best. Every candidate will show you their best. Your job is to find the worst in them; and because they will almost always hide it, your real job is usually to look for lies and evasions meant to hide what they don't want you to know. Here are a few tips: (1) NEVER vote for a candidate who has betrayed his country or voters' trust; if you do, they and every other traitor and criminal will be emboldened to use government to betray us and steal from us all. (2) Rarely consider voting for a candidate who lied to voters, or whose position changes frequently without explanation, or who otherwise says things that don't make any sense. These are signs of candidates who view our country and our fellow citizens as prey and marks instead of respected brethren, putting them in the "lesser evil" category at best. (3) Prefer candidates who actually answered questions they were asked by neutral organizations, to candidates who avoided responsive answers. (4) Prefer candidates who speak about specific policies, world situations, choices, and facts, to candidates who talk vaguely about feel-good generalities. (5) Adjectives and adverbs are nice, but listen for the subject and verb when a candidate talks. The best sentences, where responsibility is taken or commitments are made, identify specific individuals as the subject: "Mary and I," "my opponent," "the Senator from Texas," etc. Hazy group labels like "Americans," "cat ladies," and "fascists" hint the speaker is probably blowing smoke. And if there's no subject at all, it's a bright red flag. Specific action verbs like "voted," "authored," and

"stopped" are more likely to signal a meaningful, testable claim than fuzzy verbs like "am," "feel," and "cherish." (6) It's fine for a candidate to reasonably compromise with others in order to pass legislation, as long as their reasoning and motives are practical and for the country; compromising lets us live together in peace. (7) It is even okay if a candidate changes their opinion on a few things once in a while, as long as they explain it and the explanation is reasonable, believable, and focuses on the benefit of the country as a whole. Learning and adapting for the country are good.

## **How can I decide what news sources to trust?**

Don't trust any source without some reason; and remember different sources will be more trustworthy on some topics (ones they know about) than others. The best reason is what you know personally. (1) Do not ignore your peeps. You have a pretty good idea which of your friends, family, and colleagues are well-intentioned, which of them are honest, and what subjects each of them is reasonable (or unreasonable) and knowledgeable (or ignorant) about. Listen and talk to them, but do so without turning off your critical brain. People don't have to know everything to be good people. (2) If you've been reading a particular news source for awhile, you should be able to tell if it gives specific information or not, and whether what they say or predict is true or comes about. (3) Be cautious with new sources. Be absolutely paranoid about sources that you can't associate with specific people, companies, or governments, or even with physical locations; and sources you can't verify through sources you already trust. (4) But you absolutely cannot rely on the comfortable and familiar alone. Social media and real-world friends have many strengths, but social media sells, and friends primarily offer, engagement and connection, not news. Social media will show you two things: what you like the most, and what scares you the most; and if you rely on it exclusively, the evidence is you will have a narrow, biased understanding of world events, and an intolerant view of other people in other groups. You must force yourself to find and read a significant amount of information and ideas from worlds other than your own. (5) In addition to a variety of free and social sources of news, you should subscribe to at least one news source that (i) charges subscribers (the Manchester Guardian is the last free source of real news I know of in the English-speaking world, but they need and deserve for you to pay if you read them regularly); (ii) is selling the hard, credible, independent reporting of its own staff as its primary product; (iii) gets uncompensated endorsements and support from a broad range of moderate everyday people; (iv) is not controlled or unduly influenced by owners (i) whose primary income and status derive from other businesses, and (ii) are not aligned with political parties or prominent political figures or movements in your country. While there are no perfect sources, I have been satisfied with The Economist for years and have recently enjoyed the New York Times. (6) Be downright doubtful of news that arrives just-in-time for an election or key vote, and of news sources which repeat and amplify such news without appropriate cautions and qualifications. Information that cannot be verified, disproven, corroborated, questioned, absorbed, or processed before it must be acted upon in an election, may be too important to ignore; but it is definitely suspicious and you should use all the other information you have to make as much of your decision as possible.