

How to Talk to People Who Don't Think Their Vote Matters

Voting is at the heart of democracy. It is both a right and a responsibility. Americans feel strongly about democracy, but voting rates are low, and many people feel their vote doesn't matter. A [study by the Knight Foundation](#) gathered the perspectives of Americans who rarely vote to find the top three reasons they cite for not voting:

1. They don't like the candidates (17%)
2. They don't know the candidates and issues (13%)
3. They feel their vote doesn't matter (12%).

Americans who believe their votes don't matter are also ideologically diverse: In the Knight Foundation study, about a third of non-voters leaned liberal, a third leaned conservative, and a third were undecided. And while many less-regular voters are below the age of 40, the study found that 43% of those less likely to vote were above the age of 50.

Engaging with people who don't think their vote matters is critical to strengthening our democracy. Instead of judging someone who doesn't want to vote, we should hear them out, speak to their concerns, find common ground, and emphasize a shared commitment to making our democracy one where all Americans' voices are heard.

How to Answer Commonly Asked Questions About Voting

1. Why Should I Vote?

Voting is fundamental to democracy and remains one of the most widely recognized acts of engaged citizenship. However, much of the conversation around voting is distilled into simplistic commands to *VOTE!*, without discussion of the deeper concerns many reluctant or skeptical Americans hold. We know that people who are disinclined to vote are likely disengaged from other aspects of civic life. Conversations that engender a sense of belonging can be more effective than statements that guilt or push someone into the act of voting.

DISCUSSION TIPS

- **Listen to the person’s concerns or frustrations with the system.** Many concerns around voting stem from negative experiences with government institutions. This year has been especially challenging for many Americans, whose frustrations with the government may be higher than usual. Start by acknowledging how they feel, and listen to their concerns and frustrations.
- **Don’t make the conversation about partisan politics.** Americans who are less likely to vote are much less attached to political parties, and more likely to see political parties as part of the problem. Instead, shift your focus to more tangible, personal concerns, such as the job market, the health and wellness of friends and family, or pressing local issues. Connect these topics to relevant policies in which the person, through their vote, can have a say in these matters.
- **Use non-judgmental and inclusive statements** such as: “We all have a duty and the power to make things better. Casting your vote benefits your community and the country.” 87% of Americans see voting as a way to take action to improve our country.

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2. What Do I Need to Know to Vote?

Many Americans feel insecure in their political knowledge, and as a result, feel underprepared to vote with confidence. This sentiment speaks to broader feelings of disempowerment and disengagement from a local community. When asked how they feel about society today, the majority (64%) of Americans say they feel tired and want all of the issues to just go away.

DISCUSSION TIPS

- **Make the conversation personal, and share your political knowledge and experiences.** A non-judgmental approach is more effective than a confrontational one. Don't overwhelm them with information, facts, and statistics. Assure them that they don't need to know every single thing about every single issue in order to vote or make a change.
- **Help them get more involved in their community.** Are you part of any political groups, community organizations, or volunteer activities? Invite them along to participate and/or introduce them to other members. Make the initial request a low lift for them — simply ask them to accompany you to a meeting without pushing them to make a personal or volunteer commitment.

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3. How and When Do I Vote?

DISCUSSION & ACTION TIPS

- **Make sure the person is registered to vote.**
 - Help them [check their registration status](#), and help them register to vote if they need assistance.
- **Let them know that they have options.** Depending on which state they register in, one can either vote in person; vote at home and drop the ballot off at their local voting precinct; vote at home and drop the ballot off at any postal location; or vote at home and mail the ballot to their election office. The method they choose dictates [how early they may be able to vote](#) (in some cases, this can be as early as 40 days before the election). All registered voters can vote on November 3.
- **Help them create a [personal voting plan](#),** and check in before the election to ask if they need assistance with implementing it.
- **Note that November 3 is the LAST day to vote.** Never believe sources that state otherwise. The most trusted sources of election information are local and state officials, whose names can be found in the U.S. Vote Foundation's [Election Official Directory](#).

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4. What If I Don't Like Any of the Candidates?

The reality of our democratic process is such that we sometimes end up with candidates who may not inspire citizens. It is important to remember and remind others that democracy is bigger than any candidate or political party.

DISCUSSION TIPS

- **Hear and acknowledge the person's reasons for disliking the candidates.**
Broad dislike of candidates may be rooted in a general distrust of politicians, which is very common among Americans — 84% feel that politicians just want their vote and do not actually care about their well-being.
 - **Ask questions about their concerns, and listen to the values they cite as important for candidates to have.** Defending or comparing candidates will likely not be effective.
- **Frame voting as an act of agency rather than a decision centered on who the candidates are.** Voting, more than picking one candidate over another, is an act of agency to ensure that democracy thrives. Emphasize the importance of exercising this right, even if they don't completely agree with or like any candidate. Connect voting to the bigger goal of upholding the democratic process for their local community members and fellow Americans.