

# Voting is only the starting point for democracy

*Use every tool in your democracy toolbox:*

- ✓ Sign up to work the polls on election day
- ✓ Call or write to your elected officials
- ✓ Take a group to meet with an elected official
- ✓ Speak up at a town hall meeting
- ✓ Participate in a protest
- ✓ Volunteer for a local government commission or committee
- ✓ Donate to good candidates for public office
- ✓ Doorbell or phone bank for good candidates
- ✓ Give your time to an advocacy group
- ✓ Donate to advocacy organizations
- ✓ Run for public office yourself

Real democracy — not democracy as the right to go and buy what you want, but democracy as the responsibility to be accountable to everyone around you.

environmentalist Vandana Shiva



***and how!***

## #5 in the Democracy Series

Collect them all!

Protest 101

How to Recognize Voter Suppression  
in its *Habitat Naturel*

How to Change the World: Pocket Guide

Testify!


July 2018



by Bronwyn Mauldin

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Bronwyn Mauldin writes fiction and poetry, and she knows a thing or two about how government works. She encourages you to vote every chance you get. 

## About the title and cover

WHY WE FIGHT is a series of seven propaganda films commissioned by the US Army between 1942 and 1945. The purpose of these films was to encourage Americans to resist rising totalitarianism and support US entry into World War II. They were directed by Academy Award-winning director Frank Capra, an immigrant to the US from Italy.



All seven films are available today in the public domain.

## What they mean when they say

**Ballot** the paper or electronic document where you mark your choices

**Candidate** a person who seeks to be elected

**Election** the process of selecting people for public office through voting

**Franchise** the constitutional right to vote

**Midterm** the national election held halfway through the president's four-year term

**Polling Places** the locations where votes are cast in an election (*also referred to as the polls*)

**Precinct** a subdivision within a county, town, or city for elections; each precinct is usually served by one polling place

**Register** to sign up formally to be on the official list of voters

**Secretary of State** the state-level official who's usually the chief elections official in that state (*not to be confused with the US Secretary of State*)

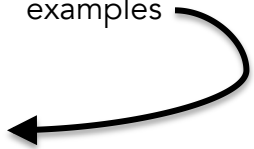
**Vote** to express a choice in an election through a ballot

# In a democracy we choose our leaders

At any election you might have an opportunity to vote for

- City council members
- Judges
- County commissioners
- School board members
- District attorney
- Mayor
- Sheriff
- State assembly members
- Senators
- Members of congress
- President

And more! These are only a few examples

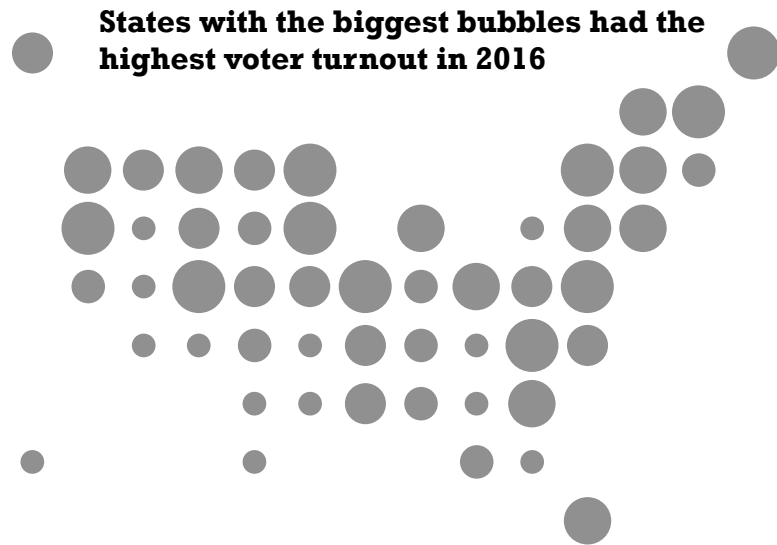


The people have the power  
To redeem the work of fools  
Upon the meek the graces shower  
It's decreed the people rule  
punk poet laureate Patti Smith

## But if you don't choose them, someone else will

The US has one of the lowest voter participation rates in the world. In the 2016 presidential election, only 60% of people who were eligible actually voted.

Turnout varies by state. Only 43% of Hawaii voters voted in 2016, but nearly 75% of Minnesota voters did.



Among everyone who was eligible, 65% of Whites voted, while 59% of African Americans, 49% of Asians and nearly 48% of Latinos did.

It's worse when presidents aren't on the ballot. In the 2014 midterm elections only 36% of voters showed up nationally. Local election turnout is even more dismal. In the 2018 Kansas City mayor's race, **only 8% of people who were eligible actually voted.**

## Politicians are all crooks

This is a line they use to **keep you from voting.** Yes, some politicians are crooks, but not all of them are. No candidate is perfect. Find the one you think is best and vote for that one (see pp. 10-13).

## It's too hard (or too complicated)

It's no harder than figuring out how buy tickets and go to a concert. See pp. 8-9 for a practical guide on how to plan for Election Day.

## I've never voted before

Take someone with you the first time you vote. Democracy works better when you bring friends.

*In reality, there is no such thing as not voting: you either vote by voting, or you vote by staying home and tacitly doubling the value of some Diehard's vote.*

*writer David Foster Wallace*

# Excuses people give for not voting and why you won't fall for them

## My vote doesn't count

One vote can make all the difference (see p. 5).

## People like me never win elections

And they never will if everyone like you decides not to vote (see p. 4).

## Voting doesn't change anything – we need a revolution!

This isn't an either-or. You can be a radical activist and still vote in every election.

## I'm busy that day

Many states offer early voting or vote-by-mail options. Your Secretary of State website has all the details on how to do it.

## Yours could be the one vote that makes the difference.

In 2017 an election for the state House of Delegates in Virginia ended in a tie. They decided the winner by a coin toss.



Tied elections have been decided by tossing coins, drawing straws, and other games of chance in

2016 in Florida

2015 in Mississippi

2014 in New Mexico

2012 in Texas

*et cetera*



In each of these elections, if one more person had turned out to vote, their candidate would have won.

Every election is determined by the people who show up.  
*political scientist Larry Sabato*

# A TALE OF

While federal laws cover basic civil rights for voting

Some states are doing everything they can to help people vote.



*Easy peasy in Washington State*

- All elections are held by mail – they send you a ballot and you don't even have to leave your home
- You can register to vote any time, even election day
- When you get a driver's license or state ID you'll be automatically registered to vote (starts in 2019)
- If you're not 18 when you get your DL or ID, you can pre-register so it kicks in automatically

What's the difference?

## Primary Election      General Election

Anyone can run in a **primary**. Usually, each party holds a primary to choose one finalist.

Winners of each primary face off in the **general** election. Whoever wins this is elected.

This means you have to vote in two separate elections on two different days in one year – once in the **primary** and once in the **general** election

What if the candidate you vote for in the **primary** doesn't win?

Then vote for the next-best candidate in the **general** election

**PRO TIP:** An elected official you 75% like is more likely to do things you want than an official you only 10% like.

*Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.*

*theologian & ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr*

We must love this democracy enough to go to jail for it in nonviolent civil disobedience, to sue in the courts for it and to register everybody we know to vote at the ballot box for it.

*civil rights leader Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II*

## Watch out for con artists & cheaters



There are folks out there who want to keep you from voting or trick you into voting for a candidate who won't represent your interests. They've been known to

- Send out mailers with wrong information about what day to vote, where to vote, or how to register
- Post that same kind of intentionally false information on social media
- Create news sites that look like real media outlets but spread lies about the candidates
- Try to make you feel confused, intimidated, or bored by elections

**Don't fall for their scams. Educate yourself. Use reliable sources.**

# TWO STATES

most election rules and regulations are set by the states

But some states seem to be doing everything they can to keep people from voting.



*Indiana Dept of Voter Suppression*

- You must show a government-issued ID in order to vote on election day
- The polls close at 6 pm – only two other states close so early
- If you want an absentee ballot you have to explain why – and the state only accepts 9 reasons
- Indiana has a dirty habit of purging their voter lists without telling voters (a violation of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993)

# HOW TO VOTE

## A four-step process

### 1) Register to vote

The deadline to register can be anywhere from a week to a month before Election Day. By federal law you can register at the DMV, by mail, or when applying for public assistance.\* Most states offer online registration.

**PRO-TIP:** Even if you think you're already registered, double check. You can do this online through your state's Secretary of State website.

### 2) Research the ballot & decide who you'll vote for

Who's running for what offices? Are there any initiatives to vote on? Once you know what's on the ballot, then you get to make your choices. (This is the fun part – more on how to do this on the next pages.) If you're voting by mail, mark your choices on your ballot and mail it in.

**PRO-TIP:** If you're voting in person on Election Day, write down your choices and take the list with you to the polls.

\*The exception is North Dakota, where you don't have to register at all

# vs. POLICY

Pick two or three issues that are very important to you and do some research to find out what all the candidates' policy positions are.

For candidates who've been in office before, find out how they've voted on those issues in the past.

*If they've never been elected before, find out what they've said about those issues. Look at their website and search for news articles about them.*

#### Also!

Find out if any advocacy groups working on issues you care about have endorsed any candidates

*Are any advocacy groups working on issues you oppose? You can vote against their candidates.*

#### Example

If you support LGBTQ rights, find out who the Victory Fund endorsed and vote for them

*If you oppose guns in schools, see who the NRA has endorsed and vote for that person's opponent*

**Exercise your right to vote. But more important than that is to get other people to exercise their right to vote.**

*union organizer Dolores Huerta*



# PERSONALITY

All the candidates say predictably nice things, like

- “[Your city] is the best city in America.”
- “I’ll tackle the real issues.”
- “I’ll fight for you.”
- “Those other candidates are politicians but I’m a regular person just like you.”



Sure they say the right things on their profile, but who is this candidate when they're at home? How do you know if you can really count on them to represent you once they're elected?

Just because they seem like someone you'd want to hang out with doesn't mean they'd make a good elected official.

Instead of choosing candidates based on **personalities**, it's better to choose them based on their **policies**.

## 3) Plan your Election Day logistics

Where is your polling place (the location where you vote)? It's probably in the neighborhood near where you live. What time do the polls open and close?

It's always best to vote first thing in the morning before going to work or school. If you can't, then try to vote on your lunch break or on your way home. Do you need to make arrangements for someone you care for like children or parents? Do you need to rearrange your work schedule in order to vote? Does your state require you to show ID? Bring it with you.

Would it be easier to vote by mail? If so, you'll need to request an absentee ballot in advance.

## 4) Cast your ballot!

That's just two-dollar phrase meaning VOTE!



Wear your sticker with pride!

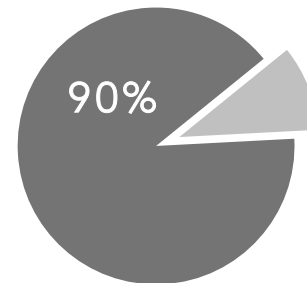
# HOW NOT TO CHOOSE WHO TO VOTE FOR



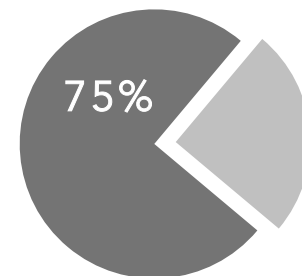
"I will only vote for a person I agree with 100%."

This will bring you nothing but heartache and disappointment because no one in the world thinks exactly the way you do.

Instead, find a candidate you agree with...



...or at least



We must not only vote but fight to vote. The voting booth really is the one place on earth where the least powerful equal the most powerful.

*feminist & activist Gloria Steinem*

Turn the page to find out how

