



Advocacy &
Communication
SOLUTIONS

Partnering with Non-profits, Philanthropic Organizations and Government Agencies

Introduction

Are you prepared for this election year? The Advocacy & Communication Solutions (ACS) team is excited about it! In fact, you can consider our latest newsletter a pep rally of sorts. ACS is cheering you on in your outreach efforts, while providing you with supporting tools.

There's a lot at stake nationally, but local elections matter, too. Check out ACS' guide to voter registration and engagement and learn what you need to know before you (or your stakeholders) hit the polls.



IN THIS NEWSLETTER

It's Time to Vote!

[Know where you're going and what you're going to do when you get there](#)

Don't Sleep on Local Elections

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It's time to vote! Know where you're going and what you're going to do when you get there.

Each month, ACS will be looking at different pieces of the voting puzzle and how those pieces fit into your voting strategy and overall civic engagement.

Last month ACS took you step-by-step through how to register to vote, and how your vote can truly impact the outcome of an election.

Now comes the learning part of the voting process...making your plan to vote in your state's primary and educating yourself on ballot issues and candidates.

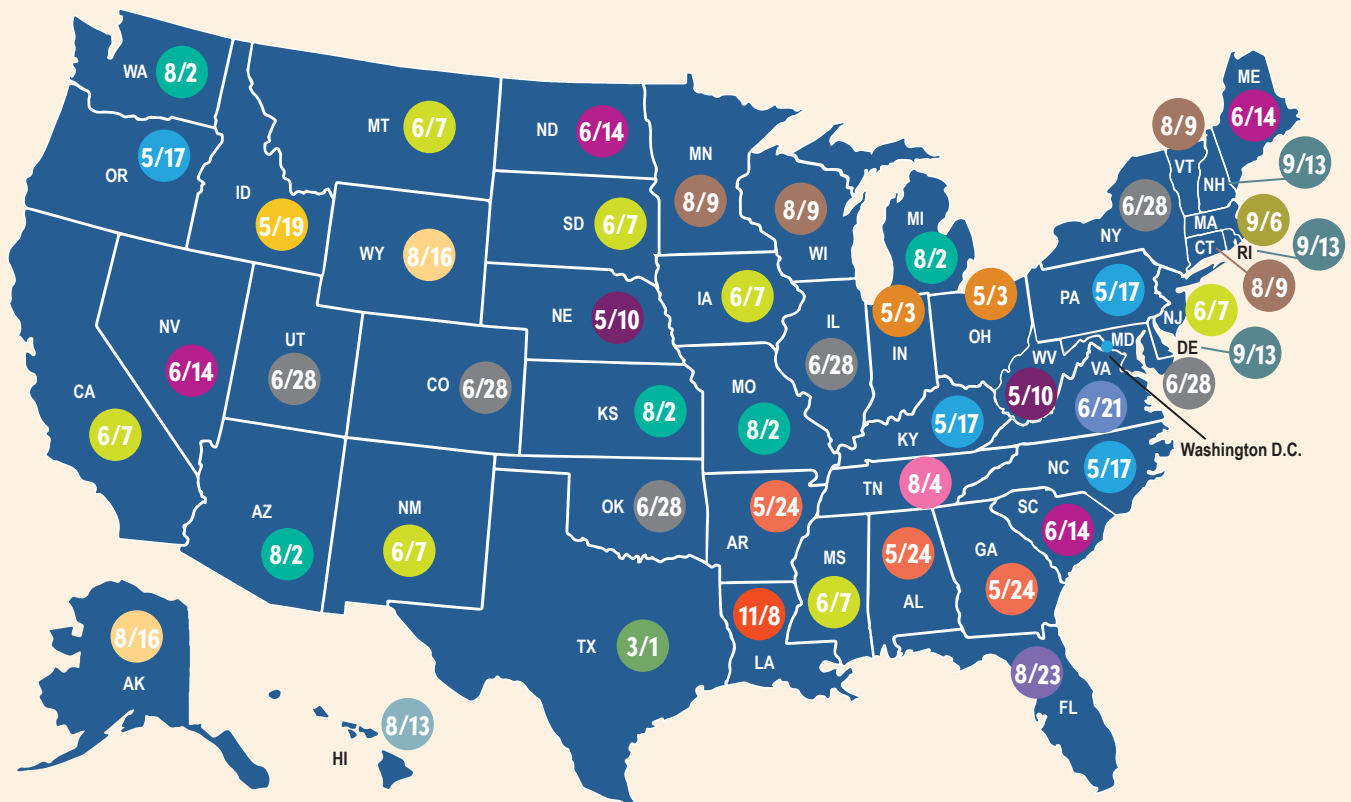
But first, let's check to make sure your voter registration is all good.

But I already registered!

Great! A+! But let's not leave anything to chance. Check your voter registration. Get that out of the way.

OK, registration is good. Now what?

Now let's check the map to see when your state will hold its congressional primary election!



¹Subject to change. [Check primary election updates for your state.](#)

Got your date (see sidebar)? Great! Let's make a plan to vote by looking at your voting options.

Some states have recently enacted various new voting laws and restrictions (read more below in the section titled "[The pandemic changed everything...especially voting](#)").

Yes, some new laws make it more difficult for people to vote—also called a form of voter suppression. These new laws may impact you. But it doesn't mean you can't vote. In fact, don't let it stop you at all. You just need to know the rules and the limitations. You can [find your state's exact laws](#) and restrictions. And then you can work on changing those laws if you think they are unfair—and that's important advocacy!

Option 1: Vote early!

Most states have early voting but the [exact rules, deadlines, and locations](#) that guide how to vote early vary significantly by the state and/or community in which you live. There are, however, great [resources](#) to help you every step of the way so you know all you need to do to ensure your state allows early voting and if that early voting is in person, by mail, both, or something else.

Option 2: Vote by absentee ballot.

Voting by absentee ballot (also called mail-in voting) has made it easier for those with disabilities, those living abroad, even those who are in the hospital, to make their voices heard on Election Day. It's convenient and eliminates wait time for early or in-person voting. Like most voting laws, different states have different regulations surrounding mail-in voting; [learn your state's laws before you request your absentee ballot](#). Regardless of what you've heard in the media, voting by absentee ballot is a safe and verifiable option for those who need—or want!—to use it.

Option 3: Vote at your polling place.

Traditionalist? Great! If you prefer to vote in person on Election Day, [make sure you know where you're going](#), as polling locations can change from election to election.

***OK, I know WHERE and WHEN I'm voting.
But what will be on my ballot?***

Congratulations! You've just entered a critical phase of your voter engagement, or, as ACS likes to call it, know before you go.

State congressional primary elections

3/1—Texas

5/3—Indiana, Ohio

5/10—Nebraska, West Virginia

5/17—Kentucky, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania

5/19—Idaho

5/24—Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia

6/7—California, Iowa, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Dakota

6/14—Maine, Nevada, North Dakota, South Carolina

6/21—Virginia

6/28—Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, New York, Oklahoma, Utah

8/2—Arizona, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Washington

8/4—Tennessee

8/9—Connecticut, Minnesota, Vermont, Wisconsin

8/13—Hawaii

8/16—Alaska, Wyoming

8/23—Florida

9/6—Massachusetts

9/13—Delaware, New Hampshire, Rhode Island

11/8—Louisiana

And what should you know? As much as possible. The goal is to understand every single item that is on the ballot you will be considering, whether that's the ballot that arrives in your mail, the one you view in the voter box at your local Board of Elections (BOE), or at your polling place. But don't get overwhelmed! We all can't know everything. But knowledge is power, and power can change the world, so let's get started.

First, let's see what is on your ballot.

Some of your local ballot issues are determined by your precinct—the separate voting districts in your city, decided on by your address, each with its own polling location. What you vote for in your precinct may not be the same for someone else in your city, who is in a different precinct. Everyone, however, regardless of precinct, will have the same county, state, and federal issues reflected on their ballot.

Next, do some research on the candidates/issues.

Once you have your list of issues and candidates, do some research! Look up speeches the candidates have given or letters to the editor that have been submitted on their behalf. Local levy? Look to see where the money is going and if it's a replacement or a renewal (these are very different things—see sidebar). Check out social media pages (both personal and political). Attend a town hall meeting. Get your local PTA/4H/Rotary/Whatever group to host a question-and-answer session. Ask a trusted friend (or not trusted friend so that you gather diverse viewpoints) their opinion. Gather information. USE GOOGLE. You'll be amazed at how much you can find out using the internet and a little bit of time.

Finally, have a firm idea of how you are going to vote on each issue PRIOR to filling in that ballot.

Remember...there's nothing wrong about leaving an option blank, or only voting for two of the three candidates when you could vote for all three. Your votes will still be counted. But you should try to vote on as many ballot items as you feel comfortable, especially when they affect your day-to-day life.

So, there you have it. You've got your voting plan and you know your issues and candidates, and how you're going to vote. You've taken another important step towards voter literacy!

A renewal levy extends the terms of an expiring levy but uses property values from when the levy was originally passed, meaning the amount you pay doesn't change, even if property values have increased.

A replacement levy also extends the terms of an expiring levy, but considers current property values, meaning the amount you pay in taxes will likely go up, and the amount available to support an issue increases.

Look for next month's topic on how to be an informed voter and how you can be an involved citizen at the local, state, and national levels.

And look for more tips and tricks coming up in 2022!

- ▶ **May:** Get involved! How can you be an involved citizen and informed voter?
- ▶ **June:** Got free time? Become a campaign volunteer!
- ▶ **July:** Know your voter rights!
- ▶ **August:** What the heck is a special election?
- ▶ **September:** National Voter Registration Day! Are you ready?
- ▶ **October:** It's general election time!
- ▶ **November:** The general election is over...now what?
- ▶ **December:** Looking ahead to 2023!

Don't Sleep on Local Elections

Election Day 2022 is on the horizon. During this midterm year (the halfway point between presidential elections), all eyes are on state and local contests.

Historically, voter turnout in nonpresidential elections has been low, but there's been an uptick in activity at the local level in recent years.

About 60 percent of the voting-eligible population votes during presidential election years and about 40 percent votes during midterm elections. Most recently, 2020 and 2018 marked the highest presidential and midterm turnout in more than a century, according to analysis from [FairVote](#), a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) organization that advocates regarding electoral reform in the United States.



Municipal elections: where every vote really counts

Municipal elections are those in which electors vote on public official positions—such as city council, county councils, county executives, and school boards—some of which are leveraged as a steppingstone by candidates for higher office. Within these elections, voters have an opportunity to choose what individuals will control, fund, defund, enhance city services, influence education opportunities, and address issues that directly impact the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Anyone who isn't convinced about the importance of local elections can look at recent outcomes in Cleveland and New York.

In 2021 the Cleveland, Ohio Mayoral race saw the [fewest votes cast in a mayoral election over the last 50 years](#). Regardless, those who did vote contributed to 34-year-old Justin Bibb being elected and the city's first new mayor in 16 years with a [commanding margin over his competitor 63 percent–37 percent](#).

New York has the opportunity to engage a new set of voters after its [Mayor Eric Adams and city council approved legislation](#) granting voting rights to those who have permanent legal resident status, most of whom are green card holders. Starting January 9, 2023, more than 800,000 legal permanent residents will be eligible to vote in municipal elections.

Votes for city ordinances, charter amendments, and school board members are just as essential as those for the nation's commander-in-chief.

Footage from school board meetings nationwide have made headlines throughout the pandemic, spurring interest in school board elections. From the debate about mask mandates for students to frustrations about virtual learning and teacher shortages, a lot is on the line for many municipalities and towns.

"While it's easy to blame the balkanization of local school boards on the supercharged political atmosphere, that's just too easy," Max McCoy explained in a [Kansas Reflector opinion piece](#). "It's letting us—you, me, and our neighbors—off the hook for not taking school boards and other political elections seriously enough to show up and vote."

Bottom Line: Voter engagement and outreach efforts should not wait until the next presidential election. Now is the time to educate, engage, and act.

"Local elections may not get the spotlight on the national stage or draw you in with controversial click-bait headlines, but they are certainly not to be discredited." –Isra Ahmad explains in her Forbes op-ed, ["Unleashing the Power Of The Ballot: Impact Of Local Elections."](#)

"Disgusted by the chaos at local school board meetings? Then vote in local elections" –Max McCoy, author and journalist, [Kansas Reflector](#)

Tools You Can Use:

ACS offers step-by-step instructions for nonprofits to create and implement a successful Get Out the Vote (GOTV) effort as well as a sample script for voter engagement and frequently asked voter questions. View or download the [Guide to Developing a Successful GOTV Program for 501\(c\)\(3\)s](#).

The pandemic changed everything...especially voting

If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it's that—when there is no other option—we must find new and sometimes uncomfortable ways of doing the things that are important. The onset of the pandemic in early 2020 and varying state mandates for in-person activities that followed collectively changed the campaigning ways of candidates and ballot efforts, and how those who were generally “Election Day voters” would vote—not only for that election, but for all elections moving forward.



Please maintain a six feet distance

Face-to-face campaigning is difficult in the midst of or even emerging from a pandemic; COVID-19 forced elected officials, political candidates, and local organizations to radically shift their campaigns to mostly-digital platforms, finding new ways to rally the support they need.

With continued apprehension around large group gatherings, campaigning has returned to traditional techniques—like phone banking and door hangers—coupled with newer and zero-exposure methods—like text messaging, social media posts/engagement, and virtual townhalls and debates, to name a few. Although restrictions on in-person gatherings have relaxed with the arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine, voters have remained interested in receiving candidate and issue education from the comfort of their homes. As we move towards the 2022 primary, assume these new campaigning practices will continue, and expect that voters will want engagement to take place where they are comfortable, and not the other way around.

History in the making: voter behavior

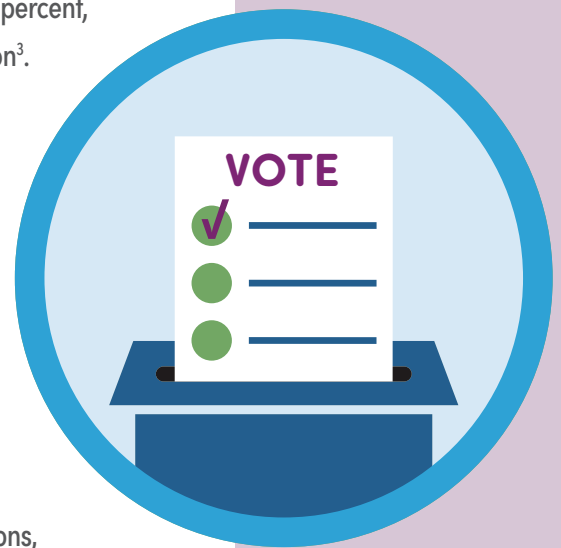
As COVID-19 spread throughout the United States, voters were forced to reconsider their voting practices—for some states this happened as early as during their primary elections, and nationally for the 2020 general election. The need to step out of voting comfort zones emerged, with the most significant change being the number of voters moving to early or absentee voting, instead of the traditional day-of voting practices.

In a particularly confusing example, Ohio closed its polling locations the night before the primary election was set to take place in March 2020. The primary was pushed back six weeks, and the state moved to an all-mail election. Anyone planning on voting day-of was out of luck. Because of these factors and not surprisingly, the number of mail-in/absentee ballots increased in Ohio by 444 percent—from 287,843 mail-in ballots in its 2016 primary to 1,565,808 in the 2020 primary².

In Nevada, voters were encouraged to vote by mail and were told there would be limited in-person voting for its June primary election to mitigate the exposure and spread of COVID-19. Not surprisingly, the percentage of mail-in votes skyrocketed to 98.4 percent, compared with less than 9 percent mail-in votes in its 2018 general election³.

In the 2020 general election, early and mail-in voting continued to be the comfortable route for most voters, and, for the first time in U.S. history, more people voted before Election Day than on Election Day⁴. Mail-in voting numbers in Ohio were once again high, with 58.6 percent voting early in-person or by absentee ballot, compared to 33.5 percent in the 2016 presidential election⁵. Nationwide, that number increased from 21 percent in 2016 to 46 percent in 2020.⁶

To address the shift in voter behavior, local Boards of Elections (BOE) have deepened their commitment to educating the public on voting options, encouraging people to vote, and ensuring that those who want to vote know how to cast their ballot. While some of those voting methods were already being used throughout the U.S., many states had to modify their voting processes, and some plan on making those changes a permanent addition to their voting practices moving forward.



Some states are making this...uncomfortable

While local BOEs are educating its voters on how they can vote at a local level, state level support may be a much different story. With this history-changing voting behavior comes

²[HealthyElections.org](https://www.healthyelections.org/ohios-2020-presidential-primary-and-comparisons-to-2016-july-27-2020) Ohio's 2020 Presidential Primary And comparisons to 2016 July 27, 2020 Author: Pia Deshpande

³<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/13/mail-in-voting-became-much-more-common-in-2020-primaries-as-covid-19-spread/>

⁴<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/more-voting-more-security-what-2020-s-historic-turnout-means-for-the-future-magazine2021.aspx>

⁵<https://www.ohiosos.gov/media-center/press-releases/2020/2020-11-27a/>

⁶<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/what-absentee-voting-looked-like-in-all-50-states/>

new policies that are, unfortunately, resulting in voter suppression in some states, while significantly expanding opportunities to be civically engaged in others.

Voter suppression is not a new problem; historically, some elected officials running for re-election or supporting/opposing a ballot issue will try to make it harder for people to vote (e.g., limiting open BOE hours to when most people are working, reducing voting locations in underserved population areas, etc.). With new voting habits and preferences changing rapidly, states where voting was already an accessibility issue may be making things more difficult.

By the end of 2021, 19 states had enacted 33 laws that make it harder for Americans to vote⁷. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, these laws have varying impacts and include making mail-in or early voting more difficult and enacting stricter voter ID regulations, just to name a few.

Restrictive laws in four states—Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, and Texas—imposed new or more stringent criminal penalties on election officials or other individuals. In Georgia, election officials and volunteers could face criminal charges simply by handing out water or snacks to voters waiting in line, or by encouraging people to mail in their absentee ballots. Iowa and Kansas can now charge citizens returning ballots on behalf of voters unable to because of a disability or other issue. And in Texas, legislation was passed that restricts how and when citizens can cast ballots and enacts more stringent barriers on voting by absentee ballot. These new laws magnify those obstacles already in place for some underserved populations. Moving forward, Texas citizens with language barriers or disabilities will find it even more difficult to be accommodated.

Conversely, those states where it has historically been easy to vote are passing legislation to make it even easier; 25 states have enacted 62 laws to expand voting accessibility. And while this is a step in the right direction, actual access is not determined on a nationwide scale, meaning you could be punished simply for living in the wrong state.

Prepare now or pay later

With all of these changes—good or bad—happening at the national, state, and local levels, preparation will be the key to successfully casting your ballot.

⁷<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-october-2021>

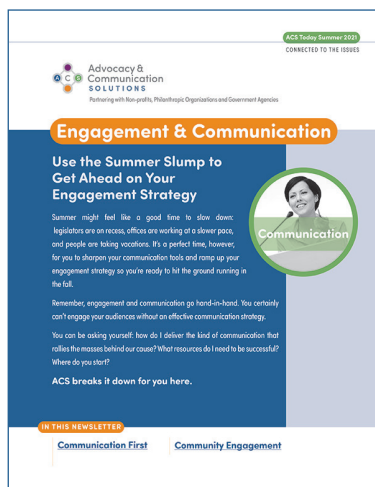
For an in-depth look at each of these steps, please check out our [March Tips & Tricks for Voter Engagement](#); for those who want a cheat sheet, here are the steps you'll need to take before Election Day:

1. [Register to vote](#) in your state; if you know that you've already registered, [check to ensure your registration is up-to-date](#)
2. Decide HOW you want to vote and [review your state's \(possibly new\) laws regarding voting options](#)
3. [Get to know your ballot](#) by doing some research on what your issue and candidate voting options will be

The pandemic has taught us that change affects all facets of our lives, and how we vote is one more thing we've had to shift and adapt. As we move towards the 2022 primary election, remember that voting is still a right and not a privilege—regardless of how your state's laws reflect that—and that your voice can help change the landscape at a local, state, and national level.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Summer 2021 Newsletter



Winter 2022 Newsletter



WANT MORE?

Want to learn how communication, strategy development, advocacy, or capacity building can move your organization forward? Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations?

Contact one of our team members, call toll free at 1-877-372-0166, or visit our website at advocacyandcommunication.org.

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