

A Guide for New & Experienced Voters: Get Smarter about Engaging with News & Information about the 2024 Presidential Election

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Questions to Answer before Voting

Are you planning to vote in the 2024 presidential election?

Are you registered? If you're registered, have you confirmed your registration? How informed are you about the presidential candidates? Do you want to learn more about the problems facing the country and what, if anything, the candidates plan to do to address them? How familiar are you with where the presidential candidates stand on issues that matter to you?

What personal characteristics do you like and/or dislike about the candidates? What do you know about each candidate's plans for this country's future and are those plans consistent with the future you envision? Are the sources where you learn about the presidential candidates and the election trustworthy?

While answering questions about the candidates and issues prior to casting a vote in the 2024 presidential election is important, it is equally important to be able to trust the sources that provide answers to these questions. That's why for [News Engagement Day 2024](#), we have written a guide to help new voters as well as those who have voted before to become more knowledgeable about the news and sources they rely on for the 2024 presidential election.

As a result of reading "A Guide for New & Experienced Voters: Get Smarter about Engaging with News & Information about the 2024 Presidential Election," voters will learn: (1) how to evaluate the credibility of sources of news and detect disinformation; (2) how to establish an election news engagement routine that will be beneficial to learning about the

candidates and the issues; (3) Gen Z tips for registering and voting.

“A Guide for New & Experienced Voters: Get Smarter about Engaging with News & Information about the 2024 Presidential Election” is the fourth national election guide we’ve created as part of News Engagement Day activities. We previously created guides for the 2018 Midterm Elections, the 2020 Presidential Election, and the 2022 Midterms.

These election guides are not only a natural outgrowth of News Engagement Day since its 2014 founding, the guides are a reminder that engaging with credible news provides voters with the information they need to make decisions about their votes which are not just votes for presidential candidates; they are votes for democracy.

Evaluating News Credibility and Detecting Disinformation by Applying Journalism Principles

During an election season, voters are exposed to messages from candidates and their campaigns, donors and political parties, celebrity and social media influencers, even Russia and other foreign governments that try to influence the U.S. presidential election (Nakashima, 2024). Voters are also, of course, exposed to news reported by journalists who seek to “provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing” as the authors of *The Elements of Journalism* so elegantly asserted (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

The media landscape also includes non-partisan information as well as advertising and opinion, persuasive communication messages that credible news outlets label. And then there’s disinformation.

Detecting disinformation begins with awareness that there are different types of information in the media landscape, from news to disinformation, also called misinformation. Credible news outlets such as *The New York Times*, NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt, NPR, local network-affiliated TV stations, local daily newspapers, The Associated Press (AP), and some cable news channels have journalistic processes to ensure verified news is reported, opinion and advertising are labeled or clearly distinguished from news, and disinformation is prohibited.

Despite efforts to ensure disinformation is not mixed with news from credible news outlets, disinformation is in the media landscape and it's not going away which is why the public must shoulder some of the responsibility for detecting it.

So, what is disinformation? First and foremost, disinformation is not news, which the *Oxford Dictionary of*

Journalism defines as “information about recent events deemed to be interesting, important, or unusual enough to be newsworthy (or fresh information about recent events) that is gathered, verified, and structured in accordance with journalistic norms before being published in media ranging from newspapers to liveblogs” (Harcup, 2014).

Journalistic norms are described in *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* and articulated in journalistic codes of ethics. The first five of the 10 “Elements of Journalism” are, perhaps, the most relevant journalistic norms for the public to understand.

They are: 1) “Journalism's first obligation is to the truth;” 2) “Its first loyalty is to citizens;” 3) “Its essence is a discipline of verification;” 4) “Its practitioners must maintain an

independence from those they cover;" 5) "It must serve as an independent monitor of power" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

These "Elements" guide journalists who gather and verify the information that is reported as news. While there are no educational, exam, or licensing requirements in U.S. journalism which is protected by the First Amendment to the U.S.

Constitution, journalists as defined by former AP Standards Editor Tom Kent are "those who occupy themselves full-time with gathering and transmitting information using fact-based judgements and are guided by a visible transparent code of ethics" (Kent, 2014). While some journalists may be part-time, being guided by a "visible transparent code of ethics" is full-time. And while some large news organizations may have their own ethics code, the code of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) is an ethics framework that applies

to all journalists. SPJ's preamble affirms that "ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with integrity" (Society of Professional Journalists, n.d.). The first of SPJ's four principles—seek truth and report it—underscores that "ethical journalism" should not only be "accurate and fair" but journalists should "take responsibility for the accuracy of their work; verify information before releasing it; use original sources whenever possible (Society of Professional Journalists, n.d.).

By knowing the definition of news and understanding the ethical norms that guide journalists, voters have the basic tools to distinguish news from disinformation, which Merriam-Webster defines as "false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to

influence public opinion or obscure the truth” (Disinformation, n.d.).

Disinformation is not limited to text; it can also be a photo, a video or audio, called deepfakes and defined by Merriam-Webster as “an image or recording that has been convincingly altered and manipulated to misrepresent someone as doing or saying something that was not actually done or said” (Deepfake, n.d.).

While disinformation has been used to push lies dressed up as news, deepfakes have been used to spread election deceptions such as pretending a candidate said something to mislead voters in robocalls or give the false impression that a popular celebrity endorsed a candidate when there was no evidence of an endorsement (Rosenzweig-Ziff, 2024; Bond, 2024).

As disinformation makes its third documented appearance in a U.S. presidential election, it is imperative that the public is aware of it, especially because it is more likely to be found on a social media platform than *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, or NPR. But that doesn't mean all platforms shouldn't be approached with a journalist's skepticism because disinformation is everywhere.

It's also important to underscore that when candidates *intentionally* mislead the public in a speech, an interview, or during a debate, that's disinformation. And journalists have a responsibility to fact-check and correct the inaccurate information as CNN did following the Sept. 10, 2024, Presidential Debate between former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris that was watched by 67.1 million when it aired on ABC (Fact-checking, 2024).

Because news is as close as your smartphone and is distributed by an array of platforms and sources, including social media, YouTube, apps and notifications, Google and other search engines, digital newsletters, legacy media such as newspapers, TV, radio, and cable, and even family and friends, evaluating the credibility of news begins with the source, but it doesn't stop there.

As a rule of thumb, the more news is engaged with, the likelihood of being exposed to disinformation increases. In fact, just having some familiarity with what disinformation is contributes to one's ability to detect it, according to the forthcoming book, *Gen Z, Social Media, and News: Implications for the Future of News Engagement, Journalism, the U.S., and Democracy*. According to the results of the national survey conducted exclusively for the forthcoming book, 67% of Gen Z,

62% of Millennials, and 70% of the older generations group, comprised of Gen X, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation had previously encountered disinformation (Poindexter, *forthcoming*).

But it's not enough to detect disinformation in the news landscape—it's important to know what to do with it. When disinformation is encountered, it can be reported or ignored but it should never be "liked" or "shared" which only feeds the algorithm which can exponentially increase the disinformation's visibility and lead to more "likes" and "shares." Disinformation with lots of "likes" and "shares" can also become a "talking point" for a candidate, campaign or cable program host, further spreading false information.

Establishing an Election News Engagement Routine

According to a 2023 Pew Research Center analysis, “in 2016, 51% of U.S. adults said they followed the news all or most of the time” (Forman-Katz, 2023). Six years later in 2022, that percentage had fallen to 38% (Forman-Katz, 2023). Not only had there been a decline in regularly following the news, the percentage of Americans who admitted to following news “only now and then” had increased from 12% in 2016 to 19%, six years later (Forman-Katz, 2023). And during that same year, 9% of Americans said they “hardly ever follow the news” (Forman-Katz, 2023).

When voters follow the news “only now and then” or “hardly ever,” the vote they cast will be less informed. Being less informed about credible news makes it harder to accurately answer questions about the candidates and their positions on issues that are priorities for voters.

But if a voter establishes an election news engagement routine, it can be a simple and effective way to stay on top of news about the candidates, the issues, and other relevant election news. In fact, according to *Gen Z, Social Media, and News: Implications for the Future of News Engagement, Journalism, the U.S., and Democracy* (Poindexter, forthcoming), those who have a news engagement routine are more likely than those without routines to engage with news and inform themselves.

This suggests that if new and experienced voters create and incorporate an election news engagement routine into their lives before they vote, they will increase the likelihood they will have the news and information they need to make their voting decision. The following guidelines can be used to establish a routine to engage with election news.

First, the election news engagement routine should include credible sources that are guided by journalism ethics. Second, more news sources are better than one source and diverse sources, outlets, and platforms are recommended over one type of source such as social media. Based on these guidelines, the following categories of news outlets and platforms are recommended for an election news engagement routine: a) news app (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, NPR, the Associated Press, NBC, ABC or CBS); b) social

media or video sharing platform (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.); c) local news outlet (local TV, local cable news, local newspaper); d) Fact-checks.

News apps are easy to use, and they have a common-sense organization—national, world, business, weather, politics, technology, sports, entertainment, health, climate, etc. News apps produced by legacy newspapers include editorials and opinion columns that are labeled accordingly. *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the local newspaper require a subscription while NPR, AP, and TV networks are free.

After downloading the news app, activate the breaking news notification which will allow a breaking news headline to appear on your smartphone screen. The headline can be read, and it can be clicked to access the breaking news story.

In addition to a news app produced by a credible news organization, social media, with some caveats, should be part of a news engagement routine. Social media is popular for news because of “convenience, speed and the element of social interaction,” according to a Pew Research Center study (Wang & Forman-Katz, 2024).

But news on social media is also criticized for being “inaccurate, low quality and politically biased” (Wang & Forman-Katz, 2024). In fact, inaccuracy is what users most “dislike” about news on social media (Wang & Forman-Katz, 2024).

So, while social media should be included in any news engagement routine because of its benefits, news posted there should be approached with a journalist’s skepticism. While journalists and news organizations—and even presidential

candidates—are active on social media, social media users should always remember that social media platforms are not journalistic enterprises guided by ethics and the post could be disinformation.

The popular social media platform TikTok is particularly problematic, according to [NewsGuard](#), which provides “tools to counter misinformation.” In a “sampling of searches on prominent news topics” on TikTok, “almost 20 percent of the videos presented as search results contained misinformation. This means that for searches on topics ranging from the Russian invasion of Ukraine to school shootings and COVID vaccines, TikTok’s users are consistently fed false and misleading claims” (Brewster et al., 2022).

Local news outlets should also be included in an election news engagement routine, especially for local and state races

and state-wide voter initiatives such as for abortion rights.

Finally, because of the presence of disinformation in the news landscape, especially social media, check out the variety of fact-checkers to verify the posted information is news—not disinformation. In addition to fact-checking sites such as

[Snopes](#), [Poynter Fact-Checking](#), and [FactCheck.org](#), the

following fact-checks are sponsored by news organizations:

Reuters Fact Check, AP Fact Check, *Washington Post's* The Fact Checker, and CNN Politics Fact Check.

The final step in creating an election news engagement routine is integrating it into one's daily life so that at least once or twice a day, trustworthy news is read, watched or listened to. This can happen while getting ready for work, driving to or from school, working out at the gym or while eating lunch or taking a break, and even while waiting in the check-out line at

the grocery store. And some like news with their first cup of coffee in the morning or with dinner in the evening. Again, the most important thing is to integrate your news engagement routine about the 2024 presidential election or any other news topics into the life you already lead.

With your smartphone a constant companion and the news just a few clicks away, informing yourself as part of an election news engagement routine will ensure that credible news and information—not disinformation—will be the basis for deciding whom to vote for as the next occupant of the White House.

Gen Z Tips for Registering and Voting

If you're planning to vote in the 2024 presidential election, you must be registered to vote. Even if you think you're registered, it's essential to verify your voter registration.

[Vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov)—an official website of the United States government is where you can check your voter registration status. It takes less than a minute and you only have to submit your state, name, street address, county, and date of birth. If you learn you're not registered, the Vote.gov site can link you to the office in your state that oversees voter registration so you can register before the deadline.

While registering to vote is widely promoted, tips on registering and voting from a Gen Z perspective are not. That's why I asked my UT-Austin journalism and media students in

J349L, News Literacy for the Digital Age and J351F, Journalism, Society, and the Citizen Journalist, to share their voting advice.

Specifically, on the first day of class, I gave my students a volunteer assignment to answer the question: What recommendation do you have for Gen Z voters who are voting for the first time? My students were also asked to include their name, age, and hometown with their recommendations. Their voting tips were sorted into four categories: (1) Confirm voter registration and make plan to vote; (2) Do your own research; (3) Waiting in line to vote; (4) Etc.

The following are my Gen Z students' tips for registering to vote and voting in their own words.

Confirm Voter Registration and Make Plan to Vote

- 1) "Ensure that you are registered before you go. I thought I was registered when I went in 2020, but I was not. Also, make sure you know when & where you can vote." (*Blake Dickey, 22, Dallas, TX*)
- 2) "Make sure to research the voting rules for your county or state, especially if you've moved somewhere else for college. Don't get turned away." (*Chloe Moore, 21, Clemson, SC*)
- 3) "Have a plan in advance on where/when you plan to vote in order to make sure it isn't something that passes you by." (*Elena Juarez, 21, McAllen, TX*)
- 4) "Make sure you're registered to vote in the right county. Do your research ahead of time. You don't have to vote for the same people your friends are voting for. Voting is an inalienable right. Take advantage of it." (*Nate Loya, 21, El Paso, TX*)

5) “If you are doing an absentee ballot, send your application and actual ballot via certified mail!! If you use certified mail, you can be sure that both your application for an absentee ballot and the actual ballot arrive at its appropriate destination.” (*Paisley Porter, 20, Houston, TX*)

6) “Before election look for your local polling station.”
(*Lucero Corona, 22, Donna, TX*)

Do Your Own Research

1) “Preview sample ballots to ensure you’re knowledgeable about ALL candidates, including local, state, national and even city bonds.” (*Ana Marie Cordova, 21, El Paso, TX*)

2) “Make sure you do your own personal research on all the candidates and not just listen to what you see on social media.” (*Elle Grinnell, 21, Dallas, TX*)

3) “Do your research on who is running and what your own values/ethics are. Nowadays, some people tend to follow a crowd without really knowing what the crowd believes in. It’s important to ask questions & have conversations to really understand what you believe in. After that, research the

people who are running—what ‘promises’ are they making?”

(Kimberly Andrade, 21, Laredo, TX)

4) “Check out a voting guide produced by a news outlet, such as the ones published by the *Texas Tribune*.” *(Mae Lackey, 21, Fort Worth, TX)*

5) “Inform yourself on the candidates and their platforms. Try to stick to credible and unbiased news sources. Don’t simply vote based on others’ opinions or anything on social media that might not be factual.” *(Lauryn Kapiloff, 21, Houston, TX)*

6) “Research your potential candidates using CREDIBLE sources, and refrain from believing the first thing you see about someone from social media.” *(Wynne Hamson, 23, Austin, TX)*

7) “Be prepared and do your research. Don’t vote one way because someone told you to. Don’t base your vote solely on social media.” *(Katie Redd, 21, Orange County, CA)*

8) “Do your research—find a site you trust (I use LWV-League of Women Voters) to give you a summary of each candidate’s positions, then write (on paper, no phones allowed in voting)

who you'd like to vote for in each position.)" (*Ava Garderet, 21, Dallas*)

9) "Do more research outside of social media. Make your own decisions, not what your parents or friends want."

(*Lorraine Willett, 21, Tuscon, AZ*)

10) "Consume a balanced and broad range of news to properly form your own, educated opinion. In other words, don't just read one publication or news organization's content; explore all viewpoints + coverage. Don't let the opinions or beliefs of others—even those you highly respect such as parents, mentors or friends sway your vote. This is about you and your beliefs; not the person next to you."

(*Annabelle Moore, 21, Mission Hills, KS*)

Waiting in Line to Vote

1) "Take advantage of early voting." (*Alex Tran, 23, San Antonio, TX*)

2) "Be patient! The lines can get long when going into vote and it can sometimes lead people to be less encouraged to take time out of their day to vote but remember that voting

is an important part of being a good citizen so try to be patient.” (*Lola Moreno-Flores, 21, Austin, TX*)

3) “Be early! Lines will form and you don’t want to miss your chance to vote.” (*Abby DeYoung, 20, Leander, TX*)

4) “Do not wait until the last minute. Be prepared to wait in line (no phone). Research beforehand.” (*Beliv Rinke, 21, Austin, TX*)

Etc.

1) “Vote in local elections, not only the presidential, and know the powers and responsibilities of your local elected officials before doing so.” (*Christian DeBrady, 21, Philadelphia, PA*)

2) “You can encourage others to vote without partisanship. Democracy only works if we all participate, and it’s not so much important who you vote for, but that you vote at all.” (*Sophia Talley, 21, San Antonio, TX*)

Closing Thoughts and One Final Recommendation

“Get Smarter about Engaging with News & Information about the 2024 Presidential Election” is the fourth guide we have produced as part of News Engagement Day which I founded in 2014 as one of my most important initiatives as president of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), the largest association of journalism and communication educators, professionals, and graduate students. I founded News Engagement Day to be held on the first Tuesday in October, approximately one month before Election Day, the period before Election Day when voters are likely to pay more attention to news about the candidates, the issues, and the election.

With the 2024 Presidential Election being called the most consequential election in our lifetimes, it is essential that everyone who plans to vote informs themselves from credible news, prior to casting their ballot.

Please share this election guide so that voters will be more knowledgeable about what constitutes news that can be trusted, and they are more aware of the presence of disinformation and its intent to deceive and mislead. With recommendations from this Guide and a commitment to an election news engagement routine, voters will be able to navigate the news landscape and have the news and information they need to make voting decisions that are in line with their values and vision for America's future.

Finally, after you cast your vote, don't forget to proudly wear your "I Voted" sticker and encourage others to vote too because that's how "We the People" keep our democracy healthy and strong for us and the generations that will come after us.

Special Thanks

News Engagement Day Committee

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Kyshia Brown, Website & Graphics Designer, AEJMC

Panelists, “Being Smart about News Engagement, Disinformation, Influencers & Journalism Do’s and Don’ts During the 2024 Presidential Election Season,” AEJMC Conference, Philadelphia, August 2024:

Peter Bobkowski, Kent State University

Stephanie Edgerly, Northwestern University

Logan Molyneux, Temple University

Laura Castañeda, USC

Lars Willnat, Syracuse University

Amanda Siew, University of Oklahoma, Co-Author, “Out with the Old, In with the New: What Young Adults Think of the ‘TikTokification’ of News,” Recipient, 2024 News Audience Research Paper Award

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