



HOW TO PICK A CANDIDATE

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO CHOOSING WHO TO VOTE FOR

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Step 1: Decide what you are looking for in a candidate.

You want to pick a candidate that you agree with on the issues and that you feel would be a good person for the job. Both are important. Your first step in picking a candidate is to decide what you care about and what character you want in a leader.

Create a Candidate Report Card listing your priority issues and the qualities you think are most important in an elected official. Rate the candidates on how closely their views match yours and on their leadership abilities.

Fill in the names of the candidates under that heading. Look at this list of issues and leadership qualities and choose those that are important to you. This list shows issues that have come up in the news and in polls. There are certainly many others. Add those issues or qualities that are important to you.

Issues:

America's leadership in the world
Balancing the budget
Budget Deficit
Children's issues
Civil Liberties
Disparity between rich and poor
Economy
Education
Environment
Ethics
Health Care costs
Iraq
Jobs and outsourcing
Land use
Making America more secure
Relations with other countries
Reproductive choice
Same Sex marriage

Size of government
Social Security and Medicare
Taxes
Transportation
Values
War on terrorism

Leadership Qualities:

Ability to serve as commander-in-chief
Connection with the American people
Credibility
Choosing good advisors
Experience
Honesty & Integrity
Leadership ability
Responsiveness
Taking responsibility
Vision

Next print out the report card and use it to make notes whenever you get another piece of information. You might want to use grades like on a school report card such as A, B, C, etc. You might choose to assign a number between 1 and 5 with 5 being the best grade. You could also just put in a brief note such as Good ideas or Disagree.

Step 2: Take a good look at campaign information

You get a lot of impressions and still feel that you get very little real information about the candidates and their views on the issues. You hear slogans, you recognize the names of famous candidates, and you can see the personalities of those candidates. But does that help you decide who you like for the job?

Candidates use many tools in campaigning for office, such as political ads, direct mail, web sites, and polls. Voters need tools as well, to judge candidates on their positions and qualifications. Here are some tools and suggestions:

★ TV and Radio Ads:

Ask yourself some questions. What did you learn about the candidate? Did you find out any details on what the candidate wants to do? Did the candidate tell you anything about qualifications? Or, was the ad designed only to appeal to your emotions? Separate the glitter from the substance.

★ Direct Mail:

More and more candidates use direct mail to ask for money or votes. Computers make it easy to send a letter that looks like it's just for you. Remember that the letter is another way to try to get your vote and try to see what can be learned from it.

★ Pamphlets and Flyers:

The leaflet slid under your door may contain good, interesting information or it may be full of half-truths. Read it critically. Does it accuse the opponent of something? Did you get it so close to Election Day that the opponent can't answer back?

★ Emotional Appeals:

Listen to a candidate's statements and arguments. Then decide if they are targeted for your emotions alone. Sometimes the words and pictures used are meant to get you to feel a certain way.

Step 3: Learn how others view the candidate.

Poll results are a favorite news story these days. People are asked who they support and sometimes why they support a particular candidate. Polls will tell you who is leading at a certain point in the campaign. Candidates like to know who's leading because it can increase support and contributions from people who want to be on the winning team. Before you believe everything in a poll, ask these questions:

★ **Who paid for the poll?**

Did they give you all the answers? When parties and candidates pay for polls, they can control what results they give you and may not publish any information that may be bad for them.

★ **Was the poll affected by an important event?**

When people see a lot of news stories on an event such as a military crisis or a political scandal, their opinions may change.

★ **What questions were asked?**

Were they fair? You can easily spot really biased questions that couldn't help but produce a resounding Yes or No, but also look for the leading questions that push you to a certain answer or leave no room for a Yes, if... or No, but...

★ **Who was interviewed?**

How were the people who answered picked? Were people chosen at random? Did the poll include all parts of the country? If not, the results may tell you how a small group feels but nothing about the total population.

★ **How many people were interviewed?**

No matter how well a poll is done, there is always a margin of error. And the smaller the number of people, the more chance that there are mistakes.

★ **How many "Undecideds"?**

Remember, once the "undecideds" make up their minds, the results could change dramatically.

★ **How long ago?**

Even the best polls are just a snapshot in time. People may change their minds in a day, a week, or a month, especially as new things happen or they learn more. Look for polls and compare the new poll with past ones, and try to spot trends.

★ **Be smart about how you use group ratings:**

Endorsements provide clues to what a candidate thinks is important. Some organizations representing special interest groups (business, the environment, labor, older Americans, etc.) go through people's votes on bills and rate them on how closely they match one group's point of view. These ratings can be helpful, but they can be misleading. Never take them as the final word.

★ **Check the organization's reputation.**

Can they be trusted?

★ **What is the group's bias?**

Which issues are important to its members? Are they the same ones you care about? What one group might label as a vote for wasteful spending, another might see as a vote in support for an important project.

★ **What votes were included in the ratings?**

Sometimes, for instance, the vote that really tells you how the person thinks is on an amendment, not on the main bill. Do the group's choices and explanations help you sort it all out?

Step 4: Rate the candidates on how they campaign

You can tell a lot about a candidate by the way the campaign is run. We deserve open, honest and campaigns that tell us about what the candidate wants to do. We shouldn't put up with unfair campaigns.

★ Does the candidate answer questions?

Is the candidate willing to debate with opponents? Does the candidate appear in person or send a "stand-in?"

Here are some ideas that help you identify an unfair campaign:

★ Name-calling:

A candidate might call an opponent "wishy-washy" or "two-faced" when he or she really is just showing that it's OK to listen to both sides and to change your mind. Don't listen to attacks on a candidate's family, ethnicity, gender, race or personal characteristics that don't have anything to do with how the candidate will do the job.

★ Spreading rumors:

Watch for tricky statements such as, "Although everyone says my opponent is a crook, I have no personal knowledge of any wrongdoing." These unfair hints can sway an election long before a fair campaign investigation can stop them.

★ Loaded Statements:

"I oppose wasteful spending" doesn't say much - and it makes it seem like the candidate's opponent is for it. A candidate should say which spending should be cut and which spending is necessary.

★ Catchwords:

Beware of empty phrases such as "law and order" ... "The American Way," that are designed to trigger a knee-jerk, emotional reaction without saying much.

Spot Phony Issues

★ Passing the blame:

When one candidate accuses another candidate or party of being the cause of a major problem, such as unemployment or inflation, check it out. Was it really possible for the candidate to solve the problem? Has there been time to tackle the problem?

★ Promising the sky:

Be realistic. Voters shouldn't expect miracles and candidates shouldn't promise them.

★ Evading real issues:

Many candidates work very hard to avoid giving direct answers to direct questions. It's not enough, for instance, for a candidate to say, "I've always been concerned about the high cost of health care," and leave it at that. Watch out for candidates who talk about benefits and never mention costs or how the nuts and bolts of a program will work.

Step 5: Examine the candidate's campaign finances.

Where do the candidates get the money to pay for their campaigns?

- ★ Use their own money
- ★ Get money from a few rich people
- ★ Get money from many people giving small amounts
- ★ Get money from Political Action Committees? (PACs, as they are known, are groups formed to raise and distribute money to candidates and issues.)

Many types of information about money given to campaigns must be reported to the government and are watched by the press. Will people who are elected vote to support the people who gave them money? You may hear something like, "We all know Smith is backed by big money interests," or "The union has Jones in its pocket." Every candidate needs support from a wide range of people and groups who may not represent the candidate's views on all the issues. Judge the candidate's own words and deeds. You can get information about campaign contributions:

Federal Election Commission

1-800-424-9530

<http://www.fec.gov>

State Public Disclosure Commission

1-360-753-1111, Toll Free: 1-877-601-2828

<http://www.pdc.wa.gov/>

Step 6: Where can you find the information you need?

You want to make the right decision, but sometimes it's hard to quickly and easily find the information you want.

- ★ Read your local newspaper.
- ★ Listen to the news on television or radio.
- ★ Talk to your friends about the election.
- ★ Call the political parties.
- ★ Check the League of Women Voters Web site:

Washington Voter - with information on voting, elections, and candidates.

Go to <http://www.washingtonvoter.org>

Step 7: Pick a candidate

Now that you have the tools to make an informed choice - **DO SOMETHING!**

- ★ Back the candidates you believe in.
- ★ Talk to your friends and co-workers about "your" candidate.
- ★ Don't be afraid to ask tough questions at candidate meetings, at rallies and when a campaign worker rings your doorbell.
- ★ Call TV and radio stations and newspapers to praise or criticize campaign spots.
- ★ Be a letter writer. Tell candidates, newspapers and party leaders how you feel about the issues.
- ★ Don't tolerate unfair campaign practices.
- ★ Call the League of Women Voters in your area to find out how to get involved and make a difference.

VOTE for the candidate of your choice.