WE THE VOTERS
20 FILMS FOR THE PEOPLE

Viewer’s Guide
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Dear educator, event organizer, community leader, advocate, and seeker of great and informative content:

WE THE VOTERS℠ initiative is a groundbreaking social impact and web campaign, and we are thrilled you have decided to take part. This viewer’s guide is filled with imaginative tools we hope will spark constructive conversations about government and inspire participation in our democratic process.

People who don’t engage in elections or government usually cite one of four reasons: they don’t think it has anything to do with them; they feel overwhelmed; they think participation is pointless; or they’re turned off by the shouting. Our mission is to break down these obstacles one by one, because citizens who aren’t heard—or who don’t feel connected—are too often left behind.

Together, we can take these challenges head on.

We hope these entertaining and informative films and accompanying materials will inspire you and your organization to share and expand upon these topics, and to help others become informed citizens and active voters. Maybe we’ll even inspire a future candidate or two!

We thank you for taking the time to read through these materials to help put this content to work, and welcome any thoughts and feedback you have on our program and the films.

Gratefully yours,

THE PRODUCERS
ABOUT THE FILMS

WE THE VOTERS. We ARE the voters, yet not all of us know or understand why voting is such a vital exercise to the health of our democracy. Paul G. Allen’s Vulcan Productions and Show of Force have teamed up to produce WE THE VOTERS: 20 Films for the People, a multi-platform project that will inspire and motivate an audience of millions by presenting subjects on democracy, elections, and U.S. governance in a new, accessible format.

Each film is helmed by an acclaimed director, presenting his or her own creative vision. The collection of films incorporates real characters, dynamic storylines, and celebrity influencers that demystify how the government works and motivates Americans to seize the power of their vote. Our team of advisors, academics, analysts, journalists, and historians, guided us through every stage of the filmmaking process, from topic selection and scripting to the final edit, to ensure that the films are factually accurate, non-partisan, and relevant to the American public.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Why should you vote? What role does social media play in elections? Should you trust opinion polls? How important are local elections? These are questions that are often asked about voting. The answers reveal that the process of voting is more complex and more important than just pulling a lever or punching a tab in the voting booth. It’s not enough to just go vote. The American public needs to be informed, motivated, and confident to engage with the political machine on a multitude of issues.

WE THE VOTERS addresses 20 key topics that every American should understand. The 20 films, each 3-6 minutes long, present stories about democracy, elections, and the operations of the U.S. government that will inspire voters and aspiring voters to become more involved in their government.
VOTING: This collection of films provides viewers with several different perspectives on the importance of voting, some challenges voters face in voting, and some practical tips on voting the complete ballot.

- First Time Voters – Why would anyone want millennials not to vote?
- So You Think You Can Vote? – What obstacles might prevent you from voting?
- Citizen Next – Why don’t more legal immigrants become U.S. citizens?
- Hot Tips to Rock the Ballot Booth – Why do local elections matter?

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: The films focusing on this theme explore the different ways Americans can and do engage in their democracy though protest, formal and informal political debate, running for office, and by engaging with and participating in traditional and social media.

- Why We March – Do political protests make a difference?
- Real Voters of the USA – How can we address partisan politics?
- How to Master Debate – What are the standard debate tricks used by politicians?
- Mediaocracy – How does social media shape political opinions?
- Run Rep Run – How can one politician make a difference?

FOUNDATIONS AND OPERATIONS OF GOVERNMENT: These films include an examination of the origins of the political system, the finer points of federalism, and the evolution of political parties.

- #FoundingFathers – Is the Constitution still relevant?
- Altered States – What happens when state and federal laws disagree?
- American Party Animals – Why are there only two major political parties?
WHEN POLITICS GETS PERSONAL: This group of films takes a broad exploration of issues that affect us personally: the cost of healthcare, student debt, and the future of Social Security.

- **Mission Insurable** – Does everyone really need health care insurance?
- **Student Debt Roulette** – How does student debt affect the American economy?
- **The Future of Social Security** – Will Social Security still be solvent in the future?

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM’S POLITICAL ISSUES: These films look at the broader issues—campaign finance reform, lobbying, the value of polling, government regulations, and foreign policy—that are part of our political system and have broad implications for many Americans.

- **I’m Just a $100 Bill** – What is the role of money in politics?
- **Disrupt Lobbying** – How do lobbyists influence the political process?
- **The Poll Dance** – How can political polls help us understand public opinion?
- **Regulation Song** – Do you have to choose between being safe and being free?
- **Foreign Entanglements** – Why does foreign policy matter?
USING THIS GUIDE

The goal of this Viewer’s Guide is to promote what the Greeks and Romans called “civic virtue”—where members of society set aside their personal interests to promote the common good. This guide will help motivate your audiences to embrace their civic virtue and feel confident to engage in politics. Whether you are hosting a house party, conducting a workshop or seminar, or viewing these films in another institutional setting, this guide will help you spark thoughtful and inspiring conversations about voting, civic engagement, and the important issues of this election—and those to come.

This guide is divided into five themes with varying numbers of films in each theme. You can chose to screen all the films in a theme at once or pick and choose which films you feel will engage your audience the most. The specially designed discussion questions accompanying each film will help you review the information presented and extend the experience for your audience. For a shorter, less facilitated viewing you may choose to simply show the films to the group and choose one or two of the discussion questions for post-viewing dialogue. You can also distribute copies of the Viewing Charts at the end of this guide for audience members to write notes while viewing the films within a theme. The chart allows viewers to collect their thoughts before the main discussion.

In total, the collection of films is approximately 95 minutes in length. Each film runs 3-6 minutes. Facilitators should allow an additional 20-30 minutes for discussion of each film.

SUGGESTED PROCEDURE

If you plan to view all or most of the films within a theme, you might want to get the audience members thinking by discussing the pre-viewing questions that accompany each theme’s description. These thematic questions provide a glimpse of the films’ content and get audience members to recall previous knowledge and opinion.

Right after viewing the films within a theme, you may want to start the discussions by asking various audience members to share their ideas from the Viewing Chart. You don’t have to capture everyone’s answers, just a few to help the audience process what was presented. Start with the three things that viewers found interesting, then ask a few other viewers about the questions they had. You can engage
the group in discussing some of these questions or choose to wait until all the main questions for the films have been discussed. Finally, ask several participants for their most memorable moments and their reasons for choosing these moments.

Depending on the size of your group and the time available, you may want to create smaller discussion groups of 4-6 people and assign each group one or two questions from the list. Sometimes it’s a good idea to have the groups identify a moderator and a recorder to collect ideas and answers. Allow each group to discuss their questions, then bring the large group back together for a full discussion.

**USING EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

For a more in-depth examination of many of the issues raised by the WE THE VOTERS films, go to the Extension Activities in this guide. There you’ll find several group activities that engage viewers beyond viewing the films—through an independent study, small group work, or as part of community service activities. Use these examples or come up with your own similar activities using the themes or the individual films as guiding principles. The purpose of these project prompts is to provide an opportunity for a deeper exploration of the larger themes presented by the films.

*When you decide what is right for you, we’d love to hear about it. Please share anecdotes, pictures, and/or videos from your event with us and we may showcase them on our website. Send your stories to education@wethevoters.com.*
FACILITATION TIPS

PREVIEW THE FILMS

The 20 films from WE THE VOTERS target a younger audience familiar with many of the newer colloquialisms and technology of today. In some films, political positions are put forth for discussion and dialogue, but these might not be aligned to all audiences’ views. In other films, the words spoken might be a little racy for some audiences. It is advised that you preview the films first.

BE PREPARED FOR THE DISCUSSIONS

You don’t have to be an expert in all areas of democracy, elections, and the operation of government to lead thoughtful discussions. Reading through this guide and familiarizing yourself with the issues raised in the films can help guide the discussion for a better result. Consider inviting local experts, such as political office holders, political activists, and professors from local universities to provide unique perspectives on the films’ content and address questions from the audience.

BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS FACILITATOR

As a facilitator, you are in a unique role. It is your priority to keep the discussion moving along while staying neutral. It is a good idea to reflect on your own values and positions around the various issues and attitudes featured in the films before engaging others in a dialogue. You want your audience members to feel free to speak their thoughts and positions, and it is critical that you give everyone a safe space for sharing their views. Recognizing that some of the issues addressed by the films might raise powerful emotions, it is important to create an atmosphere that is encouraging and respectful, and that also embraces controversy as one of the fundamental elements of living in a democracy.

SET GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSIONS

It’s a good idea to set some guidelines for discussion with your audience members before you begin the session. Here are some ideas:

- Listen with interest to what others have to say and keep an open mind
- Speak candidly, but respectfully
- Stay on the subject and avoid bird-walks and non-sequiturs
- Respect your time and the time for others to speak
- Learn from each other
ANTICIPATE POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

You’ll want to encourage passionate exchanges as members of your audience discuss and defend their beliefs, but you’ll want to channel this passion into productive dialogue and possibly action. Strategize on ways to deal with potential problems during the discussions—rude behavior, offensive language, a person who wants to dominate the conversation, inattentiveness when others are speaking, or people who interrupt.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Keep in mind that factors such as race, religion, age, geographic location, and socioeconomic class can vary among members of the audience and can have an impact on their comfort level, speaking styles, and prior knowledge. While it isn’t always possible to know the political persuasions or attitudes of your audience, it’s a good idea to get some information about the participants before you show the films.

As you begin your session, open up with some questions for the audience:

- How many of you voted in the last election?
- On a continuum line (you may want to draw this out on a white board or chart pack) how many of you consider yourselves very conservative, very liberal, or somewhere in between?
- How many of you consider yourself politically savvy and informed on current political issues?
- How many of you are or have been engaged in political activities, such as running for office or working on a campaign?
- Of the following issues featured in the WE THE VOTERS films, which do you feel is most important and needs to be addressed by our political leaders: (You might want to record these for later review.)
  - Voting
  - Lobbying
  - Healthcare
  - Immigration
  - Student debt
  - Foreign policy
  - Campaign finance
  - Government regulation
  - Media coverage of politics
  - The future of Social Security
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY THEME

VOTING

Voting is the life-blood of the body politic. It is what makes a democracy democratic. Yet, the United States falls behind in voter turnout over many other industrialized nations. Way behind. The following films present different perspectives on the reasons voting is important to so many people, the challenges some voters face in trying to vote, and practical tips on voting for state and local as well as national candidates.

Pre-Viewing Questions

1. Why do millennial voters have the lowest voter turnout of all age groups?
2. Why do some states regulate voting and who gets the right to vote?
3. Why do many naturalized citizens have such a strong desire to vote?
4. Why is voting for state and local candidates as important as voting for national candidates?

First Time Voters

Program Summary

Olivia likes José. José is excited about voting for the first time. As José heads to the voting booth, a middle-aged Agent of Negativity tries to talk José out of casting a ballot. Why would anyone want millennials not to vote? Starring Tom Arnold.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some arguments you’ve heard (or possibly used yourself) for not voting? Why might these arguments be more or less valid than the reasons to vote?
- What are the myths and realities of the notion that one vote doesn’t make a difference? What are the arguments for or against these?
- Though the older dude does not intimidate our hero, José, do you think this is an example of voter intimidation? If not, what might be? What can be done to negate the effects of voter intimidation?
- The video cites the statistic that millennials (ages 18 to 34) are one third of all eligible voters, 83 million total. Yet, only 18% of millennials voted in 2012. How might this voting group have a big impact on the next election if a majority of them voted?
**Program Summary**

With 50 states, 5 territories, and over 7,000 voting districts, our elections can get pretty chaotic. A quick look at the history of U.S. voting rights shows how we got here, and what obstacles might prevent you from voting.

**Discussion Questions**

- How important is voting to you? Would you have risked life and limb as civil rights demonstrators did during the march on “Bloody Sunday?”
- Explain why a key section of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 authorized the federal government to oversee voting laws.
- How did the decision in Shelby v. Holder affect the federal government’s power to regulate how states administered voting? Explain whether you agree with the majority of the Supreme Court justices that this ruling was necessary.
- What are your views on voter ID laws? Explain whether you think they are necessary to prevent voter fraud or if you think that they are enacted to restrict certain citizens from voting.
- In a post-script to the passage of voter ID laws, federal courts have ruled that voter ID laws in several states are unconstitutional because they discriminated against certain voters. What are your thoughts on this ruling?
**Program Summary**

There are approximately 4.5 million Latino lawful permanent residents of the U.S. who have not obtained citizenship. We learn about their motivations, and the challenges they face on their road to full participation in U.S. democracy.

**Discussion Questions:**

- How would you summarize the feelings of these immigrants towards becoming citizens?
- Immigrants face many challenges during the process to becoming citizens. Should immigration laws be more or less strict and why? What changes in immigration laws would you like to see enacted?
- Many immigrants fear being deported if laws become stricter toward immigrants living in the United States. What sacrifices might many of them make if they are deported and what recommendations would you make to address these sacrifices?

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**Hot Tips to Rock the Ballot Booth**

Program Summary

Everyone's pumped for the presidential election. Or maybe not. But did you know there are dozens of other people and referendums lower down on the ballot?! Our vlogger gives you the 411 on state and local elections. Starring Grace Helbig.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Reflect back on some of the state and local issues presented in the film. Things like more protected green space, bike lanes, fire hydrants and other fire protection services, sanitation, noise ordinances, local crime, family court, animal rights, local prisons, and lotteries. What government positions are in charge of or have the power to regulate or rule on these issues? How many could you match up? Is it important to know this? Why or why not?
- The media doesn’t cover the local elections as much as the national ones. How might you, as a citizen and a consumer of news, help improve this situation?
- What makes it difficult for you to be informed about state and local elections? What types of things would help you be better informed about these elections?
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic Engagement is crucial to the success of any democracy. The framers of the Constitution created a very powerful government, but left it up to the citizens to control that power and use it for the common good. These five films explore different ways Americans engage in their democracy.

Pre-Viewing Questions

1. Why is protesting in the streets a form of civic engagement?
2. How can you have a productive discussion with someone who holds an opposite political view?
3. Are political candidate debates helpful for the public? Do they help people become more informed and engaged?
4. How does the media inform the public about politics?
5. How is running for office a form of civic engagement?

Why We March

Program Summary

The right to assemble and speak out is written in the Constitution. But do rallies and civil disobedience really provoke policy changes? We meet the people who take to the streets to “rage against the machine” and “speak truth to power.”

Discussion Questions

- Identify some of the different causes you saw represented by people exercising their right to free speech and peaceful assembly. In this context, how did you feel about seeing people protest issues that you may not support?
- Discuss whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:
  - People have to disrupt the normal in order to change the status quo.
  - Things spin out of control in a protest and that is the price you pay for free speech.
  - Protest educates people. It emboldens them to push for change.
- One of the conclusions of the film is “If you want to make lasting, durable, political and civic change, you’ve got to convert that energy from protest into policy making.” Discuss how citizens can do this.
**Real Voters of the USA**

**Program Summary**

These housewives get real about politics. Starring Anabelle Acosta, Charlotte McKinney, and Analeigh Tipton as ladies who let heavily partisan politics ruin brunch. Can they learn to listen to opposing points of view and remain friends?

**Discussion Questions**

- Though presented as a farce, does the argument over government spending and balancing the budget sound familiar? Have you ever experienced such a conversation and how did it go?
- The phrase “guns versus butter” refers to an economic model of choosing between defense or civilian goods when spending finite resources. What is the dilemma here and how does spending in both areas generate positive and negative results for the economy?
- In our polarized society, both sides want to hold fast to their convictions. Is there a need for compromise on major issues? How do you think this can come about?

**How to Master Debate**

**Program Summary**

This master class on the dark art of political debate teaches you the diversionary tactics and evasions politicians use to avoid tricky subjects and undermine their opponents. Starring Richard Kind and Josh Malina.
**Discussion Questions**

- Seeing the exchange between the two candidates and the debate tricks highlighted, what does this film teach you about modern political debates?
- What factors have led to candidates using debate tricks and logical fallacies as the norm for political discourse?
- How helpful is it to have statements you hear being made in debates characterized as specific rhetorical techniques?
- Would it be helpful if post-debate analysis by political analysts included identifying when candidates used these techniques? Explain how.
- How can voters better hold politicians accountable for what they say during debates?

**Mediaocracy**

**Program Summary**

We Americans are stuck in social media news bubbles that block exposure to opposing points of view. Here you’ll get concrete advice from leading media experts on how to break free and get fully informed. Narrated by Glynn Washington.

**Discussion Questions**

- Do you think social media has helped polarize the nation? Why or why not?
- How did coverage of the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012 reflect a change in the way news stories were covered and how people consumed the news?
- What is the difference between receiving news from the networks and cable, and engaging in the news on social media? What are the plusses and minuses of social media as a news source?
- Discuss how the following practices can help us be better consumers and producers of news:
  - Select varied news sources
  - Go past the headlines and seek out the full story
  - Consider the source of the news story
  - Fact check what you read
Program Summary

A day in the life of a first-time, millennial, Latina politician in a small New England city. This documentary shows how change starts at the grassroots and grows with hard work. What would it take for you to make a difference in your town?

Discussion Questions

- Reflect on the examples shown in the film of how Juana tries to connect with her community during the campaign. How effective do you think her actions are, and why or why not?
- We often hear that government is out of touch with what voters want. Think about Juana’s comment that millennials are motivated when a candidate speaks to their values and advocates for changes they want to see. How might this be true for all constituents and what can office seekers do to get this message across to voters? What messages can voters convey to candidates to help them get motivated and feel that they are advocates for their concerns?
- If you were helping Juana on her campaign, what advice might you give her to help her get elected?
FOUNDATIONS AND OPERATIONS OF GOVERNMENT

In setting up our government, the Founding Fathers had many competing interest to consider: the rights of the people, the sovereignty of the states, the need for order and stability. To satisfy these interests and create a government that works, they used language and built mechanisms within the Constitution to allow for change and experimentation. These three films examine the origins of our political system, the concept of federalism, and the evolution of political parties.

Pre-Viewing Questions

1. What is the purpose of the Bill of Rights?
2. What mechanisms in the Constitution prevent an abuse of power?
3. How can the United States have two sovereign powers: state and federal government?
4. How can all the needs of the people be addressed by only two political parties?

Program Summary

Politicians argue over the Constitution. Luckily Jefferson, Franklin, and Madison take time out of their afterlives to answer the question: "what would the Founding Fathers do?" Starring Harold Perrineau, Mario Cantone, and Ana Ortiz.

Discussion Questions

• How did the Q&A session on the 4th Amendment reveal the conflict between security and freedom that is inherent in the Bill of Rights?
• Is, as Jefferson suggests, rewriting the Constitution every 19 years, a good thing to do? Why do you think this doesn’t happen?
• How did the Q&A session on the 2nd Amendment reveal the conundrum over the language of the amendment? What do you think the Founding Fathers meant by such language? Support your answer.
• The reason the rights enshrined in the Constitution are so durable and flexible is because the authors purposefully didn’t make them detailed. How can we, the people, protect ourselves from someone changing the meaning?
Program Summary

A mildly paranoid citizen of Colorado uses personal research to explain the difference between State and Federal laws. From pizza laws in Iowa, to pot laws in states where it’s legal, we learn what happens when a state dissents.

Discussion Questions

• Think about the start of your day and the things you did to get where you are now. When the alarm went off, turning on water to brush your teeth, the clothes you put on, the food you ate at breakfast, how you traveled to your destination. Now identify the different ways your state government was involved in those actions. What services were provided to make those actions happen? How does the government regulate some of these services for you? What might it be like if state government did not have the authority to establish or regulate those services?

• Article VI and the supremacy clause notwithstanding, what are the costs and benefits of allowing states to create laws for their own citizens even though they might be in violation of federal law, like the marijuana laws in Colorado, Washington, and a few other states?

• Identify laws in your state that are not uniform throughout the United States. These might be laws that are related to social issues such as abortion, gay marriage, or issues like welfare reform, healthcare, or gun control. Discuss the costs and benefits of allowing individual states to make up their own laws and not have all laws the same in all states.

American Party Animals
Program Summary

More young people than ever identify themselves as politically “independent.” This animated film (narrated by Morgan Spurlock) looks at pros and cons of our two-party system, and at what makes it so hard for third parties to win power.

Discussion Questions

• Do you favor a two-party system or would you like to see more political parties deeply involved in elections? Why?
• If you support a third party (like the flamingos in the film) and are in the minority, is it better to stay at home or vote anyway? Explain why.
• The film states that sometimes voting is less about who you want in office and more about who you don’t want in office. How do you feel about voting being characterized this way?
• Because we often vote against a candidate rather than voting for one, elections tend to become very negative. Though negative campaigning may be effective when trying to gather votes, is this the best way to campaign in an election? Explain.
WHEN POLITICS GETS PERSONAL

Politics affect us personally—our quality of life, how we’re educated, and how we access health care. We need to make sure our public servants have our interests in the forefront. These films take a broad look at many of the issues that have affected individuals on a personal level during past and present elections—and most likely, those to come.

Pre-Viewing Questions

1. How much responsibility should the government have for our personal needs like healthcare, education, and our quality of life?
2. Why is healthcare so expensive?
3. When borrowing money for a college education, who wins and who loses?
4. How does Social Security work?

**Mission Insurable**

Program Summary

Secret Agent Brink must escape the villain’s lair in time to register for healthcare, or have his fingers broken, which will stick him with thousands of dollars in medical costs. Many Americans know how he feels: tortured to debt.

Discussion Questions

- Though “Mission Insurable” takes a whimsical view of the costs of healthcare, what was the main message of the film?
- Healthcare is one of the important issues being discussed in this election. What would you like to say to candidates running for public office about your concerns about healthcare?
- The film closes out with the statement, “The more people who can get insured, the more affordable healthcare becomes.” Do you feel this is true? What can be done to make health care more affordable?

**Student Debt Roulette**

Program Summary

Lots of millennials are worried about college debt, but not every student will get slammed equally. Who wins and who loses? This animated game show will reveal the answer! The prize is less income inequality and a vibrant American economy.
Discussion Questions

• Describe the dilemma many students face in trying to get a better education and a higher paying job.
• In the 1980s, state and federal government cut taxes and reduced spending on higher education. The costs for individuals went up and private banks began loaning money to make up the difference and to make a profit. Who do you think should share the bulk of funding for a college education and why?
• How can America educate its students for the workplace of the future without putting them in tens of thousands of dollars (on average) in debt? Discuss the following options:
  • Increase government spending on education, making college more affordable.
  • Limit interest rates on student loans.
  • Boost the programs for 2 and 4-year degrees to make graduates better prepared for good paying jobs.
• How can you determine which candidates for public office will support reforms in educational funding?

The Future of Social Security

Program Summary

Social Security is a “pay-it-forward” system that will theoretically benefit all of us. Fixes were made to take care of the retiring baby boomers, but what about millennials? Can they rely on government help in retirement?

Discussion Questions

• What are your thoughts on the fate of Social Security? Do you feel reform is best and why? Or is a completely different system needed and what would that look like?
• Of the different reforms mentioned in the film, which one do you favor and why? What problems do you see with this reform and how would you address it?
  • Expand Social Security benefits
  • Partial privatization
  • Increase payroll contributions
  • Cut benefits
  • Increase the salary cap for taxing Social Security
  • Delay the retirement age
• Do you feel, as the film suggests, that it’s not time to panic? Explain.
THE POLITICAL SYSTEM’S POLITICAL ISSUES

We often hear calls about a “rigged system”—that the government that’s supposed to establish justice, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty is hopelessly tied up in corruption, over-regulation, and policies that are near incomprehensible. But understanding how the system works is the first step to improving it. These films delve deep into the issues of campaign finance, lobbying, polling, government regulation, and foreign policy to help the public make sense of these complex issues.

I’m Just a $100 Bill

Program Summary

Ever wonder how bills make their way through Congress? Dollar bills that is. We uncover the role money plays in politics, and shine light on the controversies swirling around Super PACs, dark money, and free speech.

Discussion Questions

- According to polls, many Americans believe there is too much money in politics. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
- In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Citizens United v. FCC that free speech was indispensable to democracy and no less true if the speech comes from a corporation. What are your thoughts on the Citizen’s United decision that equated money with free speech? Do you feel the large political contributions that resulted from this ruling are a threat to democracy?
- It seems for now that the 1% at the top income brackets contribute most of the money in elections. Is this a problem? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Money has been a part of politics for many elections and looks like it will be for many more. Discuss the following proposals to give citizens a better option:
  - Demand to know who has made the political contributions.
  - Have the government alone fund elections.
  - Ignore political ads.
  - Increase individual contributions to compete with the larger donors.
**Disrupt Lobbying**

*Program Summary*

Our inept but intrepid reporter, Josh Horowitz, enters the heart of darkness, aka Washington, D.C., planning to expose the corrupt lobbyists perverting our democracy. They exist, but he meets some lobbyists who break the stereotypes.

*Discussion Questions*

- What were some of the stereotypes regarding lobbying that were “disrupted” in the film?
- In the film, lobbying is said to be an important part of the democratic process. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- What do you feel are some of the problems and benefits of lobbying? What suggestions would you make to legislators to improve the lobbying process?

**The Poll Dance**

*Program Summary*

Election polls make new predictions every day. Should you pay attention? Clare Malone and Harry Enten offer a “millennial’s guide to polling” that will help you tell the good polls from the bad.

*Discussion Questions*

- What are your thought on polling and using polls as information tools?
- Identify information in the film that told you something you didn’t know before now.
- What information from the film do you feel would help you make an informed decision when voting in an election and why?
Program Summary

This music-video tribute to government rules pokes bipartisan fun at our contradictory attitudes toward freedom and safety. How much regulation is enough? Where do you draw the line between protections and tyranny?

Discussion Questions

• What are your reactions to how the conservative and liberal positions on regulation are characterized in the film? Do you feel these are accurate? Explain.
• Considering all the areas mentioned in the film where government is involved in our lives, what role do you feel government should play?
• How do you explain the contradictory ideas held by many liberals and conservatives mentioned in the film over freedom and safety?
• With so many people holding tight to their convictions, how can Americans find common ground on so many of the issues that need addressing in this country?

Program Summary

Canadian comedian David Milchard comes down to ask Americans why they care so little about foreign policy. Turns out we're not really sure what foreign policy is! We don't realize how international relations impact us here at home.
**Discussion Questions**

- Why do you think most of the potential voters David interviewed have more interest in domestic policies than foreign policy?
- How are U.S. domestic policies on the economy and the environment connected to its foreign policy? Review how clothes and climate change are examples of this.
- When understanding the interconnectedness of the global economy, why are international trade deals so important to the U.S. economy?
- What would you tell someone who asked you why U.S. Foreign Policy is important?
EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Identify one of the major issues mentioned in one or more of the films (e.g., Social Security, healthcare, immigration, campaign finance reform, etc.) Tell participants they are on a taskforce charged with examining the problem and making recommendations to a Congressional Committee. They are to identify the major problems contained in this issue, the various solutions proposed to address the problem and their supporting and opposing arguments, and make recommendations on best practices to address the issue.

2. Organize the large group into small groups. Have each group select one film from the WE THE VOTERS collection of films and identify the film’s message, the most important issues covered, and any lingering questions or curiosities sparked by the film. Each group will research the topic to find information to address their inquiries as well as to feel informed enough to create their own original conception of the film’s topic. They may choose to write and act out a play, make a children’s book or comic strip, or develop a blog or social media entry to express the topics raised in the film.

3. Voting is the oxygen for any democracy. Without it, democracy suffocates. For decades, United States voter turnout has been at or below 60% for general elections and below 50% for midterm elections. The United States ranked 26th among developed countries in voter turnout for the 2012 election. The numbers get worse when examining different age and race groups, with millennials finishing a dismal last place with 18%, and only 20% of Hispanics voting in the 2012 general election.

A number of the films in WE THE VOTERS explore some contributing factors to low voter turnout, for example, showing the point of view of first time voters, unsure and prone to intimidation; state sponsored attempts to restrict certain population segments from voting; and the promise and challenges of new citizens becoming voters.

Form small groups and ask viewers to examine why voter turnout is so low in this country and develop ways to improve the numbers. Each group should create a visual presentation (poster, video, slideshow, PowerPoint) that illustrates their findings. Encourage the groups to be creative (consider First Time Voters, Student Debt Roulette, or Disrupt Lobbying) in their presentations of their findings.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

VOTING

- League of Women’s Voters http://lwv.org/get-involved/local-leagues
- State Secretaries of State https://ballotpedia.org/Secretary_of_State_(state_executive_office)
- Voter Registration http://www.eac.gov/voter_resources/contact_your_state.aspx

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- Brennan Center for Justice https://www.brennancenter.org/
- Bipartisan Policy Center http://bipartisanpolicy.org/
- Dirksen Center www.dirksencenter.org
- Hamilton Center www.hamiltoncenter.org

FOUNDATIONS AND OPERATIONS OF GOVERNMENT

- Constitution USA with Peter Sagal, “Federalism” http://www.pbs.org/tpt/constitution-usa-peter-sagal/federalism/#.V_QtT8njWug
- Cornell University Law School, “Federalism” https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/federalism
- National Constitution Center www.constitutioncenter.org
- Pew Research Center, “U.S. voter turnout trails most developed countries” http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/02/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/
WHEN POLITICS GETS PERSONAL

General


Healthcare


Student Debt

• Time, “Why the Student Loan Crisis is Even Worse than People Think” http://time.com/money/4168510/why-student-loan-crisis-is-worse-than-people-think/

Social Security

• Forbes, “Social Security Could be in Worse Shape than We Thought” http://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiehopkins/2015/02/18/social-security-could-be-in-worse-shape-than-we-thought/#512933da75a6

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM’S POLITICAL ISSUES

Campaign Finance Reform

• Brennan Center for Justice, “Money in Politics” https://www.brennancenter.org/issues/money-politics
Lobbying

- OpenSecrets.org Lobbying Database https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/

Polling

- ISideWith.com https://www.isidewith.com/polls
- Polling Report.com http://www.pollingreport.com/
- Five-thirty-eight http://fivethirtyeight.com/
- Princeton Election Consortium http://election.princeton.edu/category/2016-election/

Government Regulation


US. Foreign Policy

- Foreign Affairs https://www.foreignaffairs.com
- Global Issues http://www.globalissues.org/
- US State Department, “Policy Issues” http://www.state.gov/policy/

CREDITS FOR THE DISCUSSION GUIDE AND CLASSROOM LESSONS

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- Editors: Kristin Lehner, PBS Education and Vicky Pasquantonio, PBS NewsHour Extra
- Project Advisors: Leah Clapman, PBS NewsHour Extra and Ed de Leon, PBS Education
## VIEWING CHART: VOTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FILM TITLE</th>
<th>3 points from the film that stood out</th>
<th>2 questions you have after viewing the film</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Time Voters</td>
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<td>So You Think You Can Vote?</td>
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<td>Citizen Next</td>
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<td>Hot Tips to Rock the Ballot Booth</td>
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<td>Real Voters of the USA</td>
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<td>Run Rep Run</td>
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<td>#FoundingFathers</td>
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<td>Altered States</td>
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<td>American Party Animals</td>
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<td><strong>Student Debt Roulette</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The Future of Social Security</strong></td>
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<td>I’m Just a $100 Bill</td>
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<td>Disrupt Lobbying</td>
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<td>The Poll Dance</td>
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<td>Regulation Song</td>
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<td>Foreign Entanglements</td>
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