



WHY YOU SHOULD

VOTE

You'll Be Part of a Movement

Participation rates remain painfully low, but more Americans are voting. This uptick included both Democratic- and Republican-leaning groups.

Turnout in the 2020 presidential election saw ballots cast by nearly 67% of eligible voters, according to the Current Population Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau. This represents the largest turnout for a presidential election since nearly 68% of registered voters took part in the 1992 race — and more than five percentage points higher than the 2016 election. Mid-term elections in 2018 also marked the highest turnout in more than a century.

More women (68%) than men (65%) cast presidential ballots in 2020, and voting generally increased with age, education level and income, according to the Census Bureau. But while older voters once again participated at higher rates in 2020 than younger voters, the number of younger Americans who took part is also rising. In fact, the youngest eligible voters — those who are 18 to 24 — cast ballots in the presidential election at the highest rate in the century so far.

Turnout was greatest among voters who were age 65-74 in 2020, but those in the robust millennial and Gen Z genera-



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tions now represent the largest eligible block of voters. When combined with members of the Gen X generation, younger people actually outvoted older generations in the 2018 mid-terms for the first time ever.

Some 41 states ultimately showed increased turnout among the nation's youngest

voters in 2020. But that's only one small part of the story: Overall voting participation rose in a total of 44 states, along with the District of Columbia. Incredible double-digit gains were recorded in Arizona and New Jersey, the latter of which had the highest voter turnout rate in 2020 of

any U.S. state.

Unfortunately, this doesn't usually translate into higher voting numbers for local elections, which are often very important, but it's a trend Americans can build on. Our voices are best heard when the most people cast ballots.

Voting allows everyone to

directly express their own unique priorities on a broad variety of issues and policies, both with specific ballot initiatives and through the candidates who are elected. When you enter the voting booth, you're shaping the community that surrounds us, and by extension your country.

Local Elections Matter

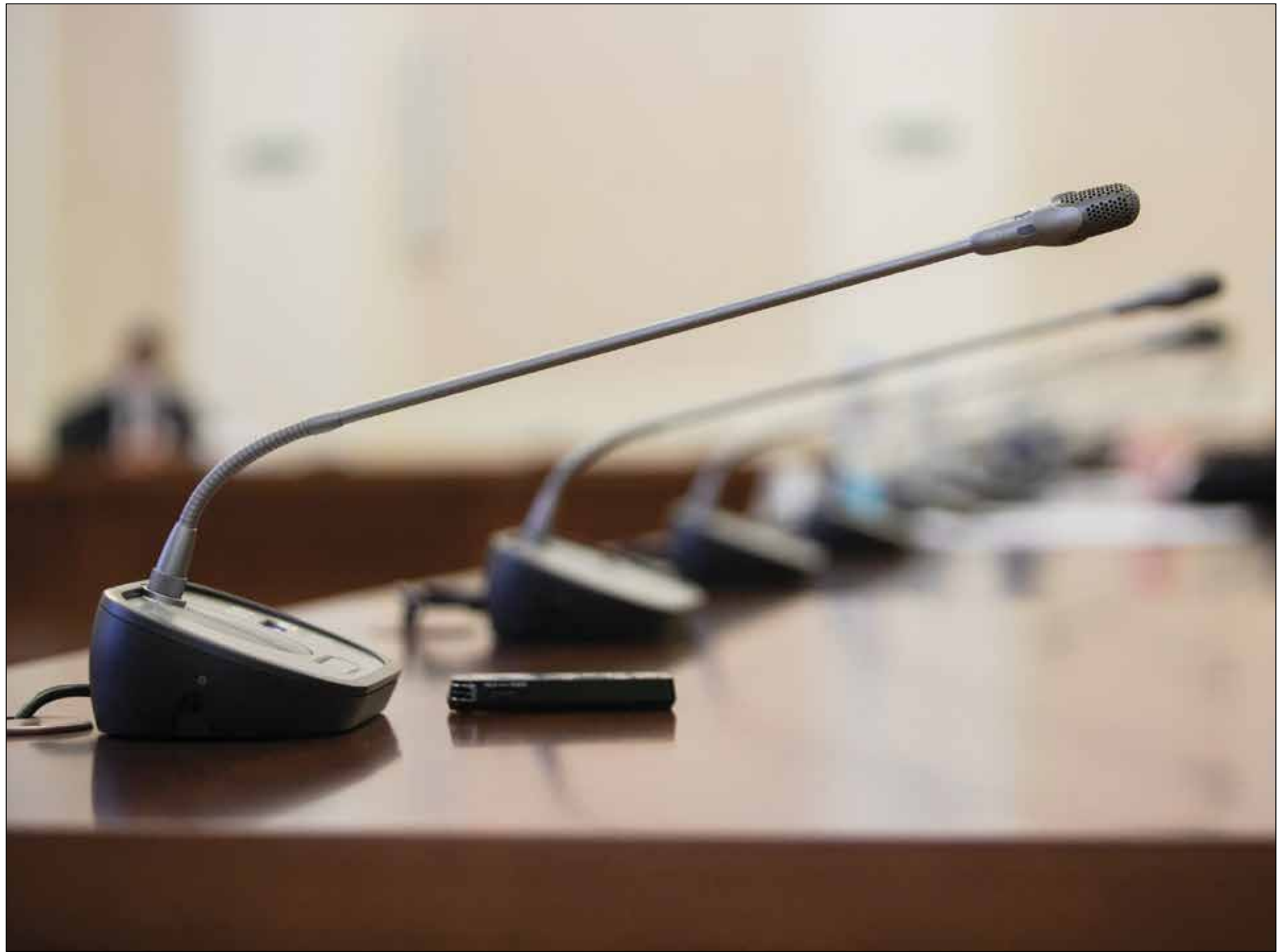
National issues are only occasionally decided by a handful of people. It happens all the time locally.

Texas became a part of the Union with a one-vote margin. John F. Kennedy became president with a margin of victory so razor thin that he would have lost in 11 states if less than 1% of voters changed their minds. Impeached President Andrew Johnson avoided a Senate conviction by one vote.

But these narrow outcomes are even more common on the local level, primarily because participation is so incredibly low. Oddly, local elections are nevertheless deeply important. They fund and administer schools, parks, public safety, transportation, libraries and housing — all institutions that everyday Americans hold dear.

And yet fewer than 15% of eligible voters take part in electing community leaders like a mayor, school board member or city counselor.

In fact, turnout for recent local elections in the country's 30 largest municipalities was just 15%, according to researchers at Portland State University. They analyzed some 23 million voting records to determine local patterns in 50 major U.S. cities. In Dallas, Fort Worth and Las Vegas, turn-out in some cases actually fell into single digits.



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Older voters continue to exercise their right to vote far more consistently than younger generations, and the Portland State researchers found that has changed the average local election voter profile in America: Their median age is now 57, nearly a generation older than the actual age for those who are eligi-

ble to vote. Local residents who are retirement age or older were some 15 times more likely to vote than eligible voters in the 18-34 age bracket.

Ironically, votes count much more when it comes to city- and county-level decision making. That's because presidential elections garner hun-

dreds of millions of votes while local elections are decided in an environment where only thousands of voices are being heard. In smaller communities, votes only number in the hundreds.

These local elections may also determine important issues like taxation, zoning and various ordinances.

Concerned about educating children? Criminal justice reform? Unsafe intersections, over-development or potholes? Solutions to these top-of-mind issues — and many, many others — happen at the local level. In the end, they also have far more direct impact on daily lives than anything that happens at the federal level.

Honor those who Sacrificed

Scores of veterans fought around the world to ensure American freedoms like the right to vote.

Some sacrificed everything. Now states and counties from coast to coast are recognizing their service at the ballot box with various “Vote in Honor of a Veteran” programs.

Far-flung places like the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, Maine, North Carolina, Vermont, Washington and West Virginia, as well as smaller entities like Florida’s Palm Beach, Pinellas and Putnam counties, now sponsor these programs, which were established to remind voters of veteran sacrifice. California has its own version titled “Honor Veterans. Vote.” Louisiana’s is called “Honor Vets ... Vote!”

Voters are encouraged to submit a photo and short biography of a veteran. The photo is typically added to a special display at the country elections offices, while the bio information may be kept in a book for interested citizens to review.

“We have received very positive feedback from the veteran’s community,” Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate told the USA Vote Foundation. “This is just a small way we can say thank you to them. Hundreds of thousands of brave men and women defended our freedoms and our right to choose our representative



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form of government. We cannot say: ‘thank you’ enough for what they did for us, but we can honor them by participating in our elections.”

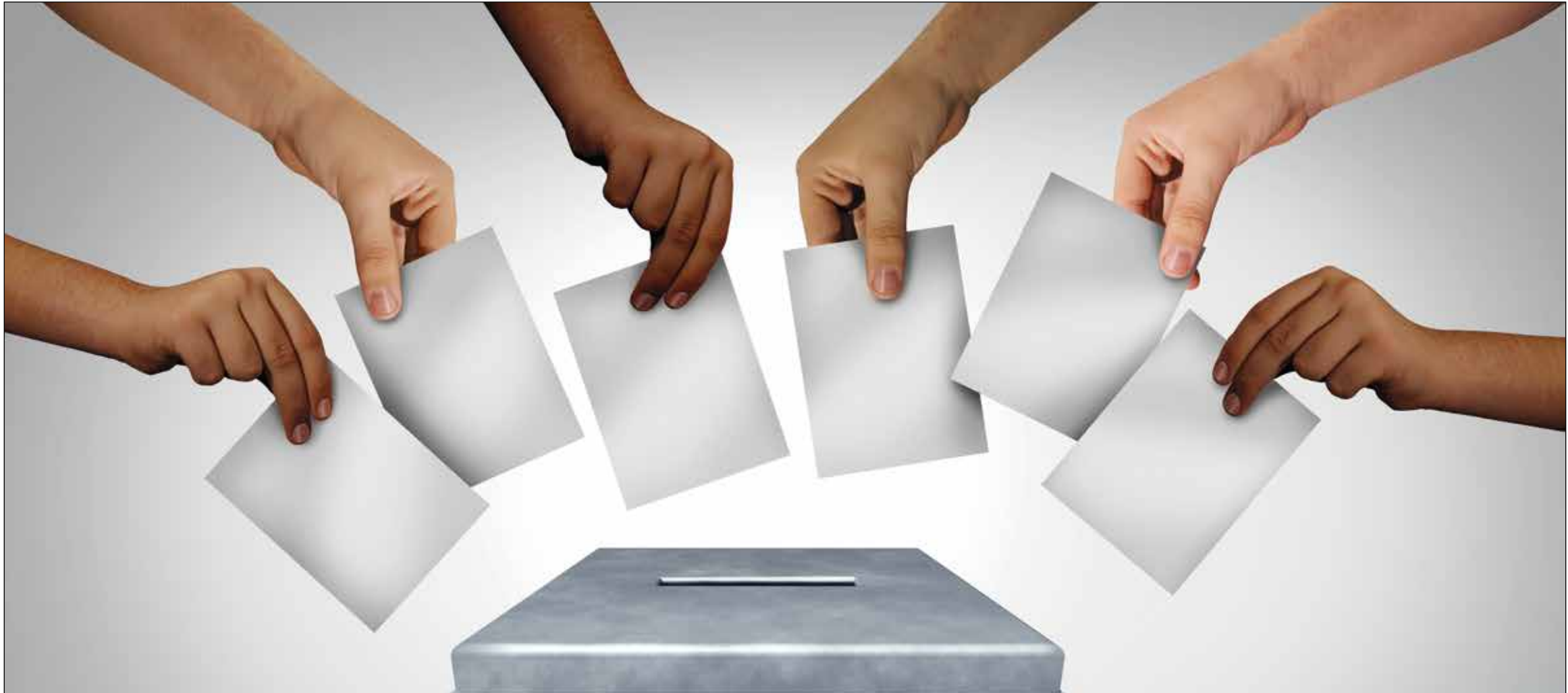
Maine has collected their personal stories in a publication called “Maine Remembers Those Who Served,” which is available online. Maine also

has a special button. Ohio posts their stories to the secretary of state’s website, while California, Iowa and North Carolina are among those that offer vets their own personalized lapel pins. (North Carolina’s pin was created as part of a Wake Technical Community College graphic

design course.) Alabama officials hand out stickers to participants that say, “I Vote in Honor of a Veteran.”

“We often take for granted the very things that deserve our gratitude and highest appreciation. We instead, focus on complaining about things like the national debt,

when in fact, the biggest debt is that of our veterans who fought and died for the freedom we all enjoy,” Louisiana Secretary of State Tom Schedler added. “Our debt to these heroes can never be repaid but our gratitude and respect can — and must — last forever.”



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Boost Voting Numbers

Many other democratic nations have significantly higher voting-age participation than the United States. Some nations instituted mandatory voting, while in the U.S., voting is an individual responsibility.

Americans voted in record numbers in 2020, but we're still very far behind in participation rates compared to other highly developed democratic nations.

Turkey (89%), Sweden (82%), Australia (81%) and Belgium (78%) are among the countries that have significantly higher voting-age participation than the U.S., even after an historic turnout in 2020.

To be fair, Australia and Belgium are among the more than 20 nations

around the globe with a some version of mandatory voting. These compulsory laws aren't always enforced, but they seem to work: Chile, for example, shifted from mandatory to voluntary voting in 2012 and saw turnout plunge from 87% to 42% — numbers that are more in line with historical numbers in U.S. midterm elections.

Chile is also among the nations that automatically puts all those who are eligible on its voter rolls, while registration in the U.S. is a decentralized, indi-

vidual responsibility. Germany and Sweden automatically adds their citizens, too.

Registered voters in the U.S. represented only 64% of those are actually old enough to vote in 2016, according to the Census Bureau. That's a much smaller number of potential voters than in many other places. For instance, more than 90% of voting-age citizens are registered in countries like the U.K., Canada, Sweden and Slovakia.

As in the U.S., Canada has experienced huge recent turnouts at the ballot box. Hungary's parliamentary elections in 2018 found 72% of voting-age citizens participating. Still, not every nation is seeing the same uptick we enjoyed in the most recent national election.

Greece, which has its own unen-

forced compulsory-voting law, saw voting fall from 89 to 64%. Norway had the lowest turnout in at least 40 years during parliamentary elections. Enthusiasm has waned in Slovakia since their independence from Yugoslavia in 1992.

America could very easily join them, if the recent uptick in participation falters — and there's still plenty of room for improvement: Back in the mid-19th century, turnout among eligible voters for U.S. presidential elections would exceed some 80%.

These days, nearly half of eligible voters in the U.S. say they don't traditionally vote, meaning about 92 million people's voices go unheard. Without them, America will continue to fall behind in the international community.

More About Non-Voters

Elections were decided for much of the country's history by who was allowed to vote, rather than turnout. Not anymore.

Most African and Native Americans, women and men between the ages of 18-21 were once barred from the ballot box. That represented an overwhelming majority of adult citizens. These days, all of those Americans have the right to vote. Elections are instead too often determined by who shows up.

The number of people casting ballots fell by 10% along in the three decades between 1968-98, with a little more than 51% participating in presidential elections and less than 40% taking part in mid-term contests.

Those numbers have risen some since, but more than 40% of the American electorate still stays home — a figure that's about twice as high as countries without mandatory voting like Denmark, New Zealand, South Korea or Sweden.

But who are these non-voters, and why don't they participate? The Knight Foundation's sweeping 100 Million Project sought to answer those questions in 2020, surveying more than 13,000 non-voters across the country. For the purposes of their research, Knight defined a nonvoter as any eligible



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adult aged 25 or older who'd voted in one federal election or none since 2008. Knight followed up their polling by conducting focus groups with thousands of respondents in order to hold more in-depth conversations.

They found that nonvoters' party preferences tend to reflect the general electorate:

33% said they support Democrats, 30% backed Republicans and 18% favored third-party candidacies. Breaking the numbers down further, the average nonvoter was a nonreligious, white married woman between the ages of 56-73 with a full time job making less than \$50,000 a year.

This composite non-voter considers herself a moderate, and most often doesn't vote because she simply doesn't like either candidate. At the same time, the internet and cable TV age has created confusion with these nonvoters. Nearly half of them told Knight that an overabundance of information has made it

more difficult to determine what's important — or even true.

Yet these nonvoters represent a huge block of influence, if they'd become engaged with the process: Some 77% of these composite nonvoters were actually registered to vote — they just didn't exercise that right.

Not Voting Could Cost You

America's election system isn't particularly easy to navigate, but there are financial implications if you don't. Skipping elections means having no say in local taxation and spending.

It's difficult for some people to grasp how to register to vote, and still more difficult to carve out the time to cast a ballot. Elections also require that voters make informed choices about candidates and their platforms, and sometimes to study jargon-filled language to judge an amendment or bond's worth.

Then, after all of that, you have to believe that your vote will make a difference — no easy task. One Ipsos poll found that 80% of occasional voters and 68% of nonvoters were less likely to believe government directly impacts their lives than did people who voted consistently (84%). A National Public Radio survey found that two-thirds of nonvoters agreed with the idea that voting has little to do with how the country actually runs.

How do we break the log-jam? The Ipsos poll found that inconsistent voters would only find their way to the polls when they felt like their vote really mattered — or when the stakes were unusually high. Often, little-noticed local elec-



tions meet both standards.

Ipsos' non-voting respondents were typically younger, had lower levels of education, were not affiliated with either party, and — crucially — were more likely to be lower-income workers. Yet local elections regularly deal with issues which directly impact the bot-

tom line. Not voting could literally be taking money out of your own pocket.

Much of direct taxation, and the spending that's most noticeable in our lives, is controlled at the city, county and state levels. But embarrassingly low local participation leaves those decisions to a

previous few.

Studies on turnout in these elections show that homeowners, the wealthy and the elderly dominate the vote. By not participating, others ensure that their opinions and needs aren't addressed, while also skewing local policies in a way that may not be representative

of the actual populace.

Ironically, 74% of those who responded to a survey by the Pew Research Center felt that voting was a more important element of good citizenship than paying taxes. In fact, the two are interrelated — so staying home could really cost you.

Voting Empowers the Powerless

The average politician uses two main inputs when deciding how to vote — voters and donors.

It's safe to say that most of us don't have the cash to compete against huge corporations or lobbying groups when it comes to donations. Voting levels the playing field by increasing the number of voices they hear. That leads to better, more responsive representation at every level of government. It may also more precisely direct funding initiatives and laws that impact every facet of our lives.

Your vote does more than ensure that a certain candidate takes office. These elected officials then play a critical role in deciding on issues ranging from infrastructure to jobs, from taxes to community safety and more. If you don't vote, your precinct, town, county or state may not receive the critical funding and attention they deserve to bolster education, health care, youth programs, employment, veteran programs and the environment.

By not voting, you are effectively allowing someone else to decide how all of these critical community decisions will be managed, sometimes for many years. Elected officials are regularly involved in presenting tax initiatives, tax collecting and funding allocations. If a candidate takes over



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who doesn't share your views on how that money is spent, you can't complain if you sat at home on election day.

Local and state members of the school board will decide everything from curriculum and uniforms to pre-K and lunch and after-school programs, from teacher salaries

to infrastructure improvement. At the state and national level, elected officials have a direct say on fairness in hiring practices, the minimum wage, pay equity and workplace safety. Access to certain reforms of health care can be controlled by those we elect, as well. Social Security and

Medicare are government-run programs that impact millions of seniors lives every day.

Funding to hire law enforcement and first responders flows from city, county and state coffers. Your elected representatives also have a direct say in crime prevention programs, parks and recreation

initiatives, and critical infrastructure programs that impact safety, access and traffic control. Roads and bridges don't get fixed without a sign off from a government official. Make sure they're making decisions based on what your community actually wants — by voting.