THE GEN-Z

CIVIC LITERACY

TOOLKIT



THE YOUNG PEOPLES CAMPAIGN | ARCHIVE THE FUTURE

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UNDERSTANDING THE MIDTERMS

When election season hits, the media and politicians use language that feels designed to confuse you. But you cannot play a game if you don't know the rules. This is your cheat sheet to the midterm elections: what you are actually voting on, how community power works, and the invisible barriers built into the system.

THE BASICS

Midterm Elections

The elections that happen exactly halfway through a president's four-year term. While the presidential race gets the hype, midterms decide who controls Congress, plus the local leaders (governors, mayors) who actually control your daily life.

Civic Engagement

The umbrella term for taking action to improve your community. Voting is just one piece of it. Creating a media campaign, attending a city council meeting, organizing a walkout, or volunteering are all civic engagement.

Down-Ballot Races

The local offices listed below the high-profile national races on your ballot. These are the District Attorneys, City Council members, and School Board officials, the people who actually decide your city's budget, transit funding, and policing rules.

Ballot Measure (or Referendum)

A proposed law that citizens get to vote on directly. You aren't voting for a politician; you are voting "yes" or "no" to make the law yourself.

Partisan vs. Nonpartisan

A partisan race means candidates are listed with their political party (Democrat, Republican, etc.). Nonpartisan races (often for judges or school boards) don't list a party, you have to do your own research on what they stand for.

COMMON BARRIERS

Voter Suppression

Legal but deliberate tactics used to make voting physically or structurally harder for specific communities. This includes closing polling places in certain zip codes so lines are hours long, cutting early voting hours, or strictly limiting mail-in ballots.

Disenfranchisement

Being entirely stripped of your legal right to vote, often due to structural laws like those preventing formerly

Gerrymandering

When politicians redraw the maps of voting districts to group certain voters together (or break them apart) to guarantee their own political party stays in power, effectively watering down the youth and minority vote.

Voter Apathy vs. Disengagement

Apathy implies people don't vote because they don't care. Disengagement recognizes that when young people face massive structural barriers, confusing ballots, and politicians who ignore them, staying home is often a symptom of a broken system, not a lack of caring.

MEDIA, POWER, AND ACTION

Media is not just how we consume information; it is a tool for building power. The way a story is framed by the press directly influences public opinion, voter turnout, and how politicians act. Understanding the media ecosystem helps you spot algorithmic bias and verify the information shaping your community.



Check Your Sources

Not all news is built the same. Corporate Media is often driven by ratings, algorithms, and extreme national stories. Community Journalism (like the historic Chicago Defender) focuses on local accountability and how policies impact specific zip codes.

- When researching an issue for your campaign, always pull facts from local, credentialed community reporters rather than national talking heads.

Control the Narrative

Whoever holds the camera writes the history. If outside media only frames a neighborhood as "dangerous," politicians will only send police. If you use your platform to highlight a lack of after-school jobs, politicians are pressured to send funding.

- Do not just share other people's outrage. Document your lived experience. Use your phone to broadcast the actual root causes of issues in your neighborhood.





Make A Clear Ask

A viral video without a clear CTA is just entertainment, not organizing. To actually change a system, your media campaign must tell your audience exactly what to do next to apply pressure.

- Don't just make a post saying "our transit system is broken." End it with: "Check your voter registration for the Nov. 7th midterms so we can vote out the incumbents cutting the transit budget."

BUILD YOUR PEER-TO-PEER CAMPAIGN



Find the Root Cause

A successful campaign connects a personal, everyday frustration (like the trains always being late) to a structural condition (the city council cutting the transit budget).

- **GOAL:** Start with a daily frustration and trace it back to the policy or leader responsible for it.
- **THE ACTION:** Don't just say, "My school building is too hot in the summer." Connect it to the source: "The school board cut funding for building repairs in our district."

Choose Your Medium

Determine the best medium to tell your story. Will you use a 60-second documentary, a photojournalism essay of your commute, or a data graphic showing the budget breakdown?

- **GOAL:** Pick the format that best fits your message and where your audience actually spends time.
- **THE ACTION:** Decide if your story is best told through a 60-second short video (documenting real footage), a graphic design post (breaking down hard facts or data), or a photo/written story (focusing on personal interviews).





Make A Clear Ask

A campaign needs a clear "ask." Telling your audience to "share this video" is okay. Telling them to "pledge to vote in the midterms" is better. Giving them a specific phone number and a script to call their City Council member is elite.

- **GOAL:** Tell your audience the exact action they need to take right now to help fix the problem.
- **THE ACTION:** Move past vague statements like "spread awareness." Give them a concrete task: "Pledge to vote on Nov. 7th" or "Call this phone number to demand the city council fix our park."



Sustain the Pressure

A campaign doesn't end when the polls close. Real systemic change requires tracking the issue, attending local meetings, and holding the people who win accountable for their promises.

- **GOAL:** Remember that an election or a viral video is just the start, not the finish line.
- **THE ACTION:** Plan how you will track the issue after the vote. Hold the winning candidates accountable to their promises by following up, attending local meetings, and keeping your community updated.



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