

Policy Brief: Increasing voter education through voter guides

Executive Summary: More than 30% of American voters fail to complete their ballots, and a recent study found that 42% of participants cast a ballot while remaining objectively uninformed. The United States has a representative democracy that relies on informed voters to function, yet the rise in social media and mistrust of the government has led to increased misinformation and stagnant levels of civic literacy. The American government must take it upon itself to create a reliable, factual, neutral source of information to help support voters in their decisions. As originally upheld in the case *Drexel v. Nadler*, state voter guides provide an unique vehicle of expression and have begun to gain traction in American politics; they must now become a regularity to ensure all races are decided by an educated and informed electorate.

Policy suggestion: Create statewide and local election guides created by a neutral regulatory body

- Each candidate is allowed to write a 250-word summary of their positions
 - They are not allowed to critique their opponent or the opposing political party
 - All information must be accurate
 - Information must come in paragraph form
 - All registered candidates are allowed to submit a statement for **free**, there are no spending rules that apply to candidates who take part
- Each race has its own voter guide

- If the race is statewide, it is regulated by a statewide committee, and if it is a local county election, it is regulated by a local committee
- Prior to the election, all candidates must agree on the members of the regulatory committee. The members are chosen through the same process as independent redistricting committees are -

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/5449/text?utm=>
- Ballot initiatives also come with a voter guide
 - The voter guide for the ballot initiative is written by a statewide/local committee in which an up to 600 word summary details what a “yes” and “no mean
 - The regulatory committee for these races is voted on by the 2 PAC groups involved in the conflict
- Voter guides also come with background details
 - Candidates are each allowed to submit 1 photo of themselves
 - Candidates each write a 200-word background about themselves, which are also regulated by the committee

Implementation body: Nonpartisan legislative staff agency

Risks:

- Improper vetting of regulatory members or improper committee etiquette may lead to biased creation of voter guides
- Gives more room for the media to fuel the current election fraud sentiment if they believe voter guides impact the outcome of the election

- Unequal funding and distribution of voter guides can lead to voter disenfranchisement

Precedent: Oregon's Secretary of State published the nation's first voters' pamphlet in 1903, and since then there has been slow development. As of today, Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, and Arizona are the only states who have state voter guides that include candidate statements. California is currently the only state that has voter guides at polling sites and only around 10 states mail voter guides. States such as California and Oregon charge candidates 25 dollars per word on their voter guide, adding up to thousands of dollars for candidates. Ballot measure guides are common, but the main problem with both ballot measure and candidate guides is that they are commonly 10s of pages long and feature complicated language. To achieve the intended goal of increased voter education and literacy, guides must be written in plain English, readable in 10 minutes and easy to comprehend. New York City and San Francisco are the best examples for local elections who provide and mail voter guides.

Cost, impact, and distribution: After a law requiring voter guides to be created is passed, the rollout could take up to 6 years in each state. In the initial 2 years, the government should roll out a pilot program in select voter locations before expanding. Assuming each guide is sent out through mail, posted online, and available at voting centers, states can expect to spend 100 - 400 dollars per 1000 voters, assuming that guides are physically sent out to the houses of registered voters. While each race gets its own guide, guides are sent together in one envelope to minimize costs. For each race, every

3 candidates per race adds another page to the individual race voter guide, starting at 1 page for 3 candidates. The expected impact of these guides is to establish a baseline of information for Americans who feel uninformed about elections. Impacts will especially be seen in local elections which receive low amounts of funding. Often, voters are unaware of the candidates in smaller elections, and if they are, they may not understand the importance and role of local elected officials