



# Who are you voting for?

## Website tells you where the candidates stand

**I**n general elections, most people have already decided who they are going to vote for well before Election Day. Many people just stick with their party, and those who don't have had plenty of time to get to know the limited selection of candidates they have to choose from.

The primaries are a little trickier. Each party has multiple candidates vying for multiple positions. The candidates in each party usually share very similar ideas on the issues. The lesser races on the ballot are full of names that don't mean anything to the average voter. A lot of us end up picking candidates we don't really know much about.

If you take your voting responsibility seriously, you want to elect the best people to office to advocate for the positions you believe in. Researching a slate of candidates can be a daunting task that many people don't have the time or inclination to take on. Campaign commercials are not a good source of accurate information. Reading *The Sunday Times* and *The Times-Tribune* every day is, of course, a good way to get to know the candidates and the issues, as we cover them extensively prior to the primaries. But if you want to take a deeper dive, visit [justfacts.votessmart.org](http://justfacts.votessmart.org), a website that helps you vet



candidates for races all over the country.

The site purports to be non-partisan. It uses mostly volunteers from all points on the political spectrum. It claims its staff is motivated by a desire to get people the facts in order to elect people that will preserve our democracy. Vote Smart is supported by donations and doesn't take money from any organizations that advocate for a particular candidate or issue.

There's a prominent search bar at the top of the homepage. You can enter a specific candidate's name, or you can enter

your address to call up a list of all the potential candidates running or serving in your area. Once you pick a candidate to research, there are six categories of information to explore: Bio, Votes, Positions, Ratings, Speeches and Funding. Going through all of this information tells you where they're from, where they were educated (if they were educated), and what their political and professional experience is. You also can learn where they stand on the issues — based on what they've said and how they've voted (if they have already held office), how special interests view them and who they take money from.

In addition to information on candidates, the site covers other election-related issues. There's a section on ballot measures from all around the country. Another section has links to the websites

of national political parties, featuring many besides Democrats and Republicans. There's information on the nuts and bolts of voting and the major issues being debated. The education section describes the constitutional structure of our government and has lesson plans for teachers. You also can look up who is currently serving in almost any elected or appointed office on the national, state and local levels. The site also offers a free Voter's Self-Defense Manual.

Vote Smart's predominantly red, white and blue design is functional and easy to use. This site is very useful for anyone who wants to do a quick check on a candidate or those who want to take a deep dive into politics.

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