



Empowering the Informed Voter: A Step-by-Step Guide to Non-Partisan Ballot Research

Welcome, League of Women Voters members and civic leaders. Researching candidates and ballot issues is a fundamental pillar of our democracy. Beyond campaign advertisements and media coverage, non-partisan resources provide a neutral window into a candidate's prior experience and their specific stands on the issues that affect our community. This guide is designed to help you navigate these tools to ensure your vote is as informed as possible.

The Golden Rule of Non-Partisan Research

These platforms are neutral clearinghouses that rely directly on candidates to submit their own information. **If a section is blank, it means the candidate did not provide the information.**

Learning Insight: The Significance of the Blank Space To maintain absolute neutrality, platforms like Vote411 and Ballotpedia never "fill in the blanks" or interpret a candidate's platform for them. In this context, a blank response could be a valuable data point.

Having established the foundation of non-partisan data, let's begin with the essential tools for your specific voting logistics.

1. Your Local Essentials: govotetn.gov and shelbyvote.com

Before researching *who* is running, you must determine *where* you are voting and *what* specific races appear on your ballot. This is a function of your address and these portals serve as the definitive sources for election logistics.

Website Name	Primary Use Case
govotetn.gov	Find where to vote: The official statewide portal for identifying your specific polling location and checking your registration status.

shelbyvote.com	View your district's ballot: The official local source for Shelby County residents to download a sample ballot specific to their address and district. Polling locations are also available.
----------------	--

Once you have identified the logistics of your district, you can transition from the "where" to the "who" using deeper research tools.

2. In-Depth Candidate Comparison: Vote411.org

[Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org) is the League's premier tool for seeing how candidates stand on specific issues through their direct, unedited responses to questionnaires.

How to Navigate Vote411

1. **Access your ballot:** Click the button labeled **"See What's On Your Ballot."**
2. **Filter Results:** For general elections, leave the party selection at **"All Parties"** to see every candidate in the field.
3. **Initiate Search:** Hit **"Save and View Races"** to generate a list of positions and resolutions.
4. **Race Overview:** To see all candidates in a specific race, click **"View All"** next to that race.
5. **Individual Candidate Deep-Dive:** Once on the race page, you must click **"View All"** a second time next to a specific candidate's name. Scroll down to read their full biographical details and policy responses.

Feature Focus: The "Compare" Tool

To see how candidates' stances align or diverge:

- Click the **"Compare"** option for **Candidate 1** and then **Candidate 2**.
- The candidates' responses to each questionnaire item will appear side-by-side, allowing for a direct comparison of their priorities.

While Vote411 excels at providing current, direct responses to voter questions, the next tool provides a wider lens into a candidate's digital footprint and historical context.

3. Legislative and Historical Context: Ballotpedia.org

[Ballotpedia.org](https://www.ballotpedia.org) serves as a comprehensive encyclopedia for your ballot, offering extensive background on candidate history and the implications of legislative changes.

How to Navigate Ballotpedia

- **Address Entry:** On the main landing page, scroll down to "Enter your address to see elections on your ballot."
- **Generate Ballot:** Click "**View Ballot.**"
- **Select Election:** Select the relevant election date (for example, the upcoming November election) from the list provided.
- **Enter the Portal:** Scroll down to the green **GO** button and click it.
- **Expand Details:** Once the ballot information appears, you must **click the arrow on the right** of any position or name to expand the section for additional information. Clicking a candidate's name will take you to a dedicated page featuring links to their campaign websites and social media accounts.

Insightful Analysis: Ballot Amendments

Ballotpedia is the essential tool for deciphering the complex language of amendments and resolutions.

- **"Yes" vs. "No" Implications:** Click on an amendment to see a clear breakdown of what a "Yes" vote changes versus a "No" vote.
- **Stakeholder Positions:** View a curated list of positions taken by various organizations and individuals, helping you see who supports or opposes the measure.

By combining the current issue-based responses from Vote411 with the historical context and social media footprints found on Ballotpedia, you can form a holistic view of every candidate.

4. Quick-Reference Platform Comparison

Platform	Best For...	Key Feature
----------	-------------	-------------

shelbyvote.com	Local Logistics, sample ballot	Official sample ballots for Shelby County residents based on your precinct/polling place information which is a function of your address.
govotetn.gov	State Logistics	Identifying your polling place and registration status.
Vote411.org	Direct Comparisons	Side-by-side candidate responses to issue questionnaires.
Ballotpedia.org	Context & Background	"Yes/No" amendment implications and links to candidate social media accounts.

5. The Informed Voter's Final Checklist

Complete these steps to ensure you are ready to cast an intentional vote:

- ☐ **Download your district-specific sample ballot:** Have you visited *shelbyvote.com* (for Shelby County) or *govotetn.gov*?
- ☐ **Review side-by-side responses:** Have you used the **"Compare"** feature on *Vote411.org* for the most critical races?
- ☐ **Expand all details:** On *Ballotpedia*, did you remember to **click the arrow on the right** to see full candidate backgrounds?
- ☐ **Evaluate the "Yes/No" outcomes:** For every amendment, do you understand exactly what a "Yes" vote will change?
- ☐ **Check the digital footprint:** Have you followed the campaign website and social media links on *Ballotpedia*?
- ☐ **Assess candidate engagement:** If a candidate's information was blank, have you noted their choice not to participate in non-partisan outreach?

Your vote is your voice. By utilizing these professional resources, you ensure that your voice is informed, intentional, and impactful. Happy voting!