QUEER THE VOTE

PEOPLE'S POLICY & POWER guide

2026 Edition: Midterm Elections

Created by NATIONAL LGBTQ TASK FORCE

What's changing, what's at stake, and why the midterms matter.

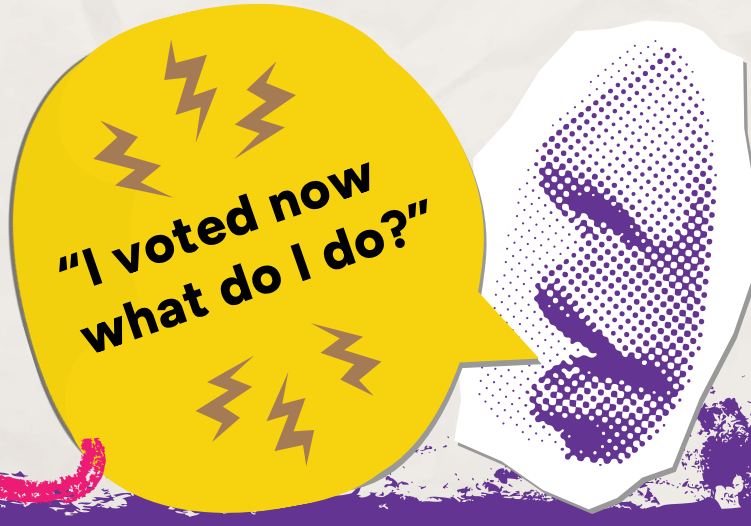
The cost of housing, groceries, healthcare, childcare, gas, and many other financial needs is stretching families thin. Immigration enforcement is reshaping communities, along with voting rules being rewritten to further erode civil protections. LGBTQ people, specifically transgender people, have continued to face legislative and regulatory attacks both at the state and federal level.

Reproductive freedom remains dependent on geography and what resources are available in one's neighborhood. Federal agencies, the United States House of Representatives and Senate, the courts, local, and state governments are making decisions that will shape civil rights and economic security for years.

This guide is about connecting the dots, and is bigger than who you should vote for; **it's about who will use their power to push against the status quo after election season is over.**

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The Moment We're In and What's Changing

AFFORDABILITY

- **Taxpayers** have been forced to absorb higher costs while navigating an economy that does not feel equally stable for everyone.
- Housing affordability, healthcare costs, food, utilities, childcare, transportation, gas, pay wages, and debt are not separate political issues. **Together** they determine whether people can afford to live, raise families, access critical avenues of care and remain in their communities.
- What to consider:
    - Who is the government making the economy work for? Is it working for you, your friends, and family?

HEALTHCARE

- Access to equitable care is one of the clearest examples of how elections become personal and impacts all of us across party lines.
- The U.S. House and Senate makes decisions, sets the budgets, and then state governments allocate resources. The following fall under the oversight of both federal and state governments to make decisions that ensure safety and access, not to take it away.
    - Medicaid, Medicare, Marketplace, reproductive health and mental health services, gender-affirming care, prescriptions, and the funding of hospitals and community health programs.
- For someone trying to fill a prescription, locate a provider, or simply maintain insurance coverage, it can be life-changing.

IMMIGRATION & HEIGHTENED LAW ENFORCEMENT

- We have witnessed an increase in cross-agency law enforcement presence across the country. This costs huge amounts of money, and always impacts communities who are simply trying to survive.
- Immigration policy is increasingly connected to questions about citizenship, due process, federal enforcement power, family unity, and access to public institutions - regardless of citizenship status.
- All communities have suffered at the hands of these agencies.
- Behind every debate over enforcement, the who, what, and why, the community members whose lives have been built and impacted have been changed for a lifetime.



CIVIL RIGHTS

- Voting rights have been attacked at every angle and level of government. The Supreme Court of the United States recently affirmed mail-in ballots, but this has not hindered further attacks, intimidation tactics, redistricting and gerrymandering, and voter rolls being purged.
- Many civil rights battles have shifted from whether discrimination exists to whether the government will continue eroding policies that protect people from it.
- LGBTQ rights, gender-affirming care, education, public accommodations, reproductive freedom, racial equity programs, workplace protections, and other safeguards are being contested through legislatures, executive actions, agency regulations, funding decisions, and litigation.
- This means some of the most consequential decisions impacting marginalized communities may continue to be passed over and worse, deeply dismantled.



(What's at Stake)

Democracy: Who Gets to Participate?

What are the primary considerations and who controls the process? Under the oversight of federal agencies, local government(s) must determine many things:

- What are the approved types of identification?
- What documents are required to register?
- Where voting sites, also known as polling locations, are located?
- How congressional and legislative districts are drawn?
- How voter registration lists are maintained?
- What are early and mail-in voting procedures?
- How ballots are counted and challenged?

These fights matter because changing who can participate impacts who holds power. We've witnessed that voting restrictions can affect everyone differently based on different identities and statuses.

- Documentation requirements, polling locations changes, restrictions on how volunteers and poll watchers are treated, voter-roll purges, disability access and a host of other barriers can disproportionately affect communities already navigating structural inequities.

CONNECT THE DOTS

When You Hear: "Election Integrity"
Ask:

- What exactly is changing?
- Do current laws already cover this?
- Who will have additional requirements placed on them?
- Could someone I love who is an eligible voter have difficulty registering or casting their ballot?

Knowing more requires moving beyond the words being thrown at you, and examining the policy underneath the statement.

LOCAL AND STATE ELECTIONS MATTER

- Governors, state legislators, attorney generals, secretaries of state, judges, city/county officials (Mayor, Constable, Sheriff, Coroner, County Clerk, etc.), school boards, and ballot initiatives determine many state and local policies and programs that are in part funded with federal dollars.
- This is why the impact of the midterms cannot be understood by watching federal elections alone.
- A state legislature determines how federal programs are managed down to efforts to restrict or expand needs across the state.
- A state governor can sign or veto legislation.
- An attorney general can challenge federal policy in court and push back against rogue presidential administrations.
- A secretary of state, often known as the Chief Election Officer, plays a significant role in managing voter rolls and certifying ballot measures.
- A school board makes decisions about curriculum, books, student protection, and school policies.
- When considering local and state elections, consider the daily lives people live and how they can be impacted before Congress passes another law.



Your Vote Has Power — Why the Midterms Matter

Here's what your vote actually impacts:

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Legislation, federal spending, investigations, oversight, and impeachment. Each House seat is up every two years which means check your ballot before voting.

U.S. SENATE

Votes on legislation and federal spending flow back and forth from the Senate and House. The Senate confirms federal judges and many presidential nominees. Senate control can determine whether a President can successfully move major appointments through Congress.



GOVERNORS & STATE LEGISLATURES

This sector controls enormous areas of everyday policy and laws in a local and more personal way. Key programs (food assistance, housing, etc.) healthcare, education, voting, taxes, and application of various laws (criminal, family, civil, etc.).

STATE & LOCAL OFFICES

- Attorney generals, secretaries of state, judges, mayors, prosecutors, country officials, and school boards can wield significant authority over how laws are implemented, the use of discretion, and how communities experience government.
- The office they hold may appear at the bottom of the ballot but their area of concern may have more influence over your daily life than the politician you see on the news.

So it's November 3rd, you've voted–NOW WHAT?

Election Day does not end the policy fight. It determines who holds the power, the pen, and the keys to liberation.

- The people elected in 2026 will have to prove themselves and begin shaping the political terrain leading into the 2028 presidential election.
- Many of the tasks mentioned will commence for a new cycle: introduction of legislation, congressional investigations, the start of state legislative sessions and the allocation for funding forprograms, etc.
- Many communities will also begin to see the financial impacts of the *"One Big Beautiful Bill"* and the cuts to programs like Medicaid, Medicare, food assistance, and housing assistance, etc. To learn more, **check out the latest briefing**.

This is why civic engagement cannot begin and end with simply voting.

- Vote. Pay Attention. Ask questions. Follow the money. Read beyond the headline. Know who represents you. Watch what they do after they win.
- **HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE**, regardless of party affiliation.

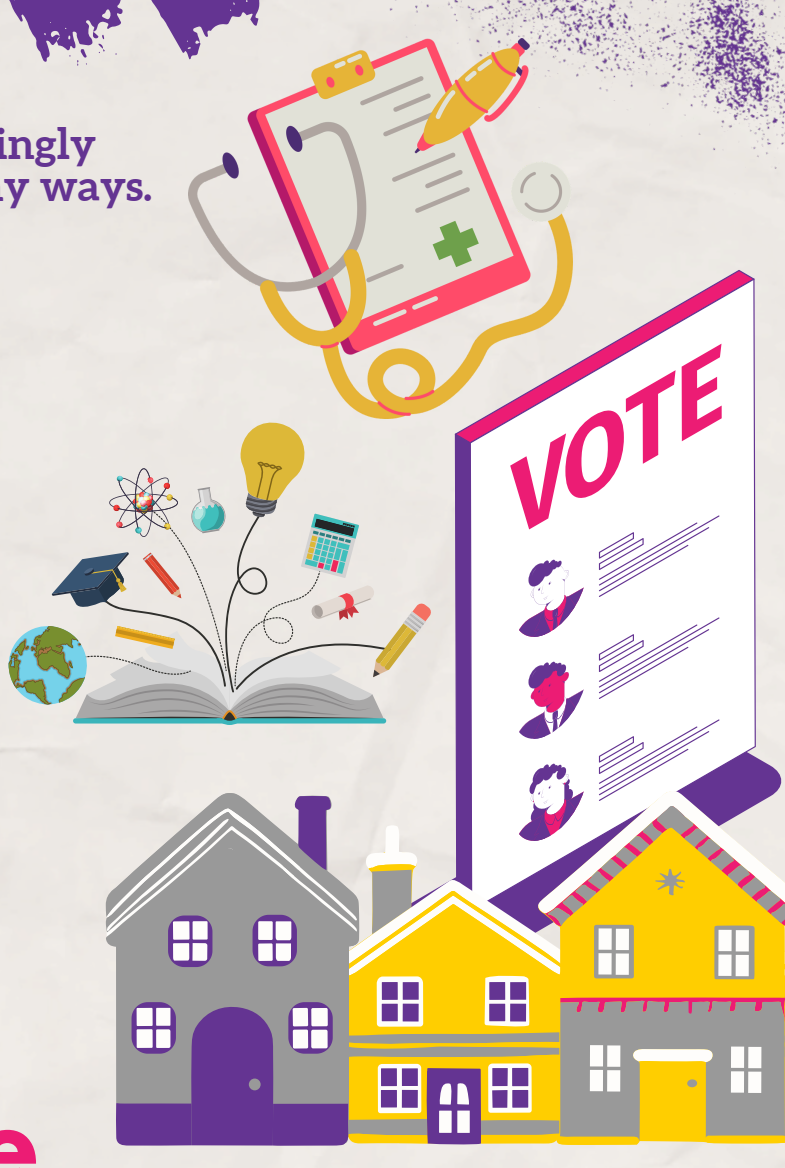


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Most importantly, remember that seemingly separate struggles are connected in many ways.

- Healthcare is an economic issue.
- Housing is a civil rights issue.
- Immigration is a family issue.
- Voting rights are a disability, racial-justice, economic, and LGBTQ issue.
- Education is a democracy issue.
- Affordability is a civil rights, economic, family, disability, and democracy issue.

This is about more than affording groceries and gas. It is about whether people have stability, security, and electoral power to build and maintain their livelihood.



The Bottom Line

We are living through a time that requires leaders who move with integrity and ask the tough questions, even if it means pushing back against institutional and political norms. Many have been left wondering and navigating systems that ask:

- Who belongs?
- Who gets protection and access to civil rights?
- Who gets heard?
- Who gets to participate?

The midterms will not answer every one of those questions. They will determine who gets the power to demand answers and push against the status quo. Know the policy, know who represents you, and what is at stake. **Before you cast your vote, check out our voter guide for more information.**

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