

UNDERSTANDING ELECTIONS & CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Getting the Most From Your Vote

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Lesson Description

Choosing who will represent them in government is one of the most important ways that citizens have for influencing the direction of their communities and nations. In this lesson, we take a look at best practices for voter participation in the electoral process.

Lesson Overview

1. Voter rights and responsibilities
2. The benefits of active political engagement by citizens
3. Making informed voting choices
4. Maintaining personal integrity as a voter

Discussion Questions

1. Many young voters believe that their vote doesn't matter when it's time to go to the polls. What are some of the reasons youth mention for not participating in elections? What kinds of messages or tactics are used that have been successful in getting youth in your community to vote? What ideas haven't been tried and why? What are some things you would try? How would you develop or change behaviors in individuals so that they became regular voters? What are some of the best ways to develop a sense of civic participation?
2. Politicians often appeal to voters based on their personalities or party affiliation instead of their specific position on the issues affecting their citizens. Can you identify politicians who have campaigned on specific issues? Have they fared better or worse than those who won't be specific about their platforms or "manifestos"? Why? What criteria should be used for deciding on a candidate? What do you think are effective ways to educate voters about where a candidate stands on a particular issue?
3. Lots of people complain about vote buying at election time but it continues to be a problem. Why is this detrimental to free and fair elections and a healthy democracy? What are your ideas for reducing or eliminating this problem? How can you convince people that this short term gain can lead to long term problems, like corruption?

Development Actions

1. In the lesson, Mr. Uwamahoro recommends creating an advocacy group to hold elected officials accountable for their campaign pledges. Identify specific campaign pledges or promises that candidates made in the most recent election and then draft a plan for what steps an advocacy group might need to follow to hold this candidate accountable. Can you objectively gauge what progress has been made? Think about who you would recruit to be a part of the group and why.

About the presenter: **Thierry Uwamahoro** is a Senior Program Officer with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) where he manages implementation of democracy programs in the Central and West Africa portfolio. Prior to joining NDI, he was a Senior Analyst at Abt Associates where he coordinated implementation of USAID and UKaid-funded health systems. He also managed the Network for Africa community of practice, a forum to promote public-private partnerships to address Africa's health challenges. Mr. Uwamahoro has served as an economic and political contributor for Voice of America's Kirundi and Kinyarwanda programs. He holds a master's degree in International Development from the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh. A Burundi native, he received the *Pacem In Terris* (Peace on Earth) Institute's academic excellence scholarship at La Roche College where he earned a B.S. in Computer Information Systems and Business Management