

2.28 How to Become an Informed Voter

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SPEAKERS

Jasmine Bradshaw, Carter Bradshaw

- J** Jasmine Bradshaw 00:00
You're listening to a First Name Basis bonus episode: "How To Become an Informed Voter."
- J** Jasmine Bradshaw 00:12
Welcome to First Name Basis, a community of parents committed to making the transformation from good intentions to confident action. Join us each week as we cover critical topics and answer the questions you've never felt comfortable asking. We'll use the lessons we learn to teach our children about race, religion and culture. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw.
- J** Jasmine Bradshaw 00:45
Hello, First Name Basis fam. I am so glad you are here. Okay, I know that I said that I was going to take a break, but obviously I can't help myself. There are so many things that I need to talk to you about, and so I just had to come back for another bonus episode. Today we're going to be talking about how to become an informed voter.
- J** Jasmine Bradshaw 01:09
But before we start, I want to tell you about something really exciting. So I love podcasting — obviously, I can't stay away. It really has changed my life. My friends, I am so grateful for each of you that listen every single week, I feel like I have really stepped into my purpose with this podcast, being able to share a message that I know has touched and changed so many families is such a blessing. Well, what I want to share with you is that the podcasting course that I took in order to learn how to start my podcast and learn how to grow my podcast is open for enrollment. So when I was trying to figure out which course I was going to take in order to learn how to start my podcast, I was looking around at all the different options, and I landed on Podcast U.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 02:01

Now podcast U stands for Podcast University and is run by two of my dear dear friends, Rachel Nielson of the "Three in 30" podcasts and Monica Packer of "About Progress." These two are seriously the best teachers. They are like a power couple. Think the Jay Z and Beyonce of podcasting. I decided specifically on Podcast U because Rachel and Monica are busy moms who are dedicated to serving and loving their family but also wanted to host a really meaningful and impactful podcast. And I knew that that's what I wanted to do.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 02:42

And let me tell you, the timing of it all felt absolutely ridiculous. When I started my podcast, I was working full time and had a toddler who wasn't even two yet. And then as soon as I stopped working, I got pregnant with our second, little Holly girl. And now here I am with an almost three-year-old and a tiny baby. And I'm still finding time to do my podcast because that is how much I love it. So if you've ever thought about starting a podcast, or you have a podcast already and you want to learn how to grow your podcast, I'm telling you Podcast U is the perfect fit for you. Monica and Rachel are both teaching free classes so that you can get an idea of their teaching style and learn more from them before you decide whether or not you want to enroll in Podcast U. So Monica is teaching a class called "Three Things You Must Know to Start Your Podcast," and Rachael is teaching a class called "Three Reasons Your Show Isn't Growing and What You Can Do About It." So if you're interested in checking out Podcast U and taking these free classes, just go to firstnamebasis.org/podcastU and you can sign up. I will definitely put this link in the shownotes so that you don't have to remember it off the top of your head. [First namebasis.org/podcastU](http://firstnamebasis.org/podcastU).

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Jasmine Bradshaw 04:00

All right, so let's jump in. I have heard from so many of you that you are feeling overwhelmed and confused about voting, and that is totally understandable. This election season feels like an absolute whirlwind. You're feeling like there's so much information out there that you have to sift through, and you're right. We need to be careful these days about what we are reading and what we're taking in as truth. The reality is that reading one-off articles on social media does not make you an informed voter. Voting is a big responsibility, and you should take the time that you need to be as informed as you can be when you're ready to cast your ballot. My friends, I love voting. It's so important to me to vote because I know that there was a time in our country when people like me were kept from the polls, and I feel like it's my responsibility. I owe it to my ancestors who fought for this right for me to vote in a way that is informed and will create progress for my community. I truly believe that when marginalized communities make progress, we all make progress. Dr. King wrote the "Letter from Birmingham Jail," and in this letter, he says, quote, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny, Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." End quote. So what he's saying there is that when we take the time to lift up communities who have been oppressed, and communities who have been marginalized, we will all benefit. And I think that our vote is one way that we can do that.



J Jasmine Bradshaw 05:53

So today, I'm going to share a four-step process that Carter and I use and have used in every election. And every time we cast our ballot, we feel confident that we are informed voters. So I'm really hoping that this episode will help you ditch the overwhelm and understand that you're not powerless when it comes to figuring this out. Everything you need to be an informed voter is at your fingertips. And I want to remind you that informed voters make their own decisions. You do not need to vote in the same way as anyone around you. You don't need to vote the same as your partner. You don't need to vote the same as your family, as your friends. You need to be confident that you are voting your conscience, and that means that you have to really dig into the information so that you can make a decision that you feel comfortable with.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 06:45

So I made a freebie for you so that you don't have to furiously take notes while you're listening to this episode. I made a voting action plan, and this voting action plan outlines the four steps that I'm going to share with you during this episode. So go to firstnamebasis.org/vote, download your action plan, and fill it out so that you can be a confident and informed voter.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 07:11

All right, the first step on our voting action plan is to put time on your calendar to vote. I know that this sounds really basic and pretty simple, but the reality is that digging through this information and figuring out which candidate is the best choice for you takes some time. So let's put it on your calendar so that you can know exactly when you're going to sit down and dig through and do this research. One of the things that Carter and I like to do is to schedule it for a date night. I know super romantic, right? But really, we love to do this together. So sitting down with each other and going through all the candidates, it's kind of fun. So if you have someone that you can do it with, maybe it's your partner, maybe it's a friend, schedule some time and do it together, and make sure to put it in your phone, because if you're like me, if it is not in my phone, it will not happen. So put that reminder in your phone and put that time on your calendar to do the research and figure out who you're voting for. You'll also want to keep track of those important dates. So if you have a mail-in ballot, figure out when is your ballot due? When do you need to put it in the mail so that it can get mailed on time and be counted? Or are you going to the polls? Are you going to the polls early? Are you going on election day? Make sure all of this stuff, all these reminders, are on your calendar.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 08:36

The second step on our voting action plan is to decide on your non-negotiables. And I'm not saying here that you need to be a one-issue voter. What I'm saying is that you need to take the time to think about and write down the values and the skills that you want your representative to have and to embody. It's important to do this before you even look at any of the candidates and any of the party affiliations, because when you're deciding who you're going to vote for based on your values, you might be surprised by who you end up with. What I've realized, and you probably will, too, is that when I use this values-based approach, instead of using a

partisan approach when I'm voting, I actually align with people from both parties. For me, the values-based approach helps me focus on the person and their platform instead of on their party affiliation.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 09:39

So let me give you an example of one of the non-negotiables that Carter and I have. One of the things that is really important to us is that the candidates that we are voting for are standing on their own two feet. That means that we are not going to vote for somebody if the first tenant of their platform is, "I am pro-this person," or "I support that person." We don't want someone who's going to ride on another politician's coattails. We believe that our candidate needs to have their own platform that reflects what they want to do while they're in office.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 10:18

Another reason why this is a non-negotiable for us is that we don't want somebody who has blind allegiance to another politician. Politicians, like everybody else, make mistakes. And we want to vote for someone who isn't afraid to stand up and speak out when the other people that they are working with are doing something wrong. So when the very first thing on someone's platform is, "I am pro-Trump, or I am pro-Biden," we know that that is not the candidate for us. That's a non negotiable. We need to have somebody who's willing to stand up to the president, whoever it is. We don't want to have a blind follower, someone who has blind allegiance. And if you make that part of your platform, we can only come to the conclusion that that is what you're going to act like if you get into office.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 11:07

Another example of this is if someone said, "Vote for me and we will keep this state red," or "Vote for me and we will turn this state blue," that is not the goal for us. The goal for us is to have healthy families, strong communities, good access to health care, quality education. Those things are what we're focusing on. We are not focusing on the color of the state, because we don't think that that will get us to where we want to be. Once you've decided what your values are, and what your non-negotiables are, it's so much easier to weed people out, especially in local elections. Sometimes in local elections, you have a lot of politicians that you're not familiar with. So when you're looking through their platforms, if you know that these are your non-negotiables, when you're doing the research, you can say pretty quickly, "Oh, that person doesn't align with my values, so they haven't earned my vote."

J Jasmine Bradshaw 12:09

I really do think that when you take a values-based approach to voting, you'll realize that so many of us are working towards the same things. We all want to be happy and healthy and safe. We just have different ideas of how we're going to get there. So figure out what your values are, and what that looks like, and then decide which candidates align with that instead

of basing your decisions on the R or the D after someone's name. Carter has a really good example of when he got a phone call from someone asking for their support. And when he asked about their platform, they were not able to define it for him.

C Carter Bradshaw 12:49

A couple of months ago, I got a phone call out of the blue from somebody asking if I would sign my name on a petition to get a particular candidate on the ballot. And I was caught off guard. I didn't expect a phone call but I said, "Okay, sure. I'll listen." I said, "Tell me about their platform," and then they were caught off guard and they said, "Well, this is someone that goes to the same church as us." So this wasn't just off of a voting list. I think they'd used our church directory to get my contact info. And they called me and said, "This person goes to the same church as you," and kind of described his family, said he's got a bunch of kids. And I was just confused. I was like, "Okay, my question was, 'what is his platform?'" I said, "Maybe you can't describe it all for me here on the phone, that's fine. Does he have a website I can go to? Maybe I can take a look." And they had no answers for me. They couldn't describe one policy position or anything about the platform. And there wasn't anywhere for me to look for more detail. So I declined their invitation to sign any petition in support of a candidate that I knew nothing about in terms of their platform. And I was tempted to feel kind of guilty. They were they were pleading with me, "Please just sign the petition, get them on the ballot." And the more I thought about it, I thought, "No. It's your responsibility. If you're going to ask for my support, you need to be able to tell me what it is that I'm supporting. So if you can't do that, then no, you have not earned my vote or even my signature to get you on the ballot."

J Jasmine Bradshaw 14:19

I know it sounds silly, but now that I've pointed that out to you, you will actually notice that a lot of candidates depend on these party affiliations as a big part of their platform.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 14:32

Okay, the third step on our voting action plan is to use your voting tools. There are a number of tools that are offered to us as voters so that we can make these informed decisions. The first place that I like to start is with the voters' guide. So Arizona has a voters guide that they send out to everybody with all of the candidates and the candidates get to put in a one to two paragraph summary about themselves. I love the voters' guide because the candidates are limited to one to two paragraphs. This means that you're going to get a really good idea of what their priorities are. If I only had a paragraph or two to explain what my platform was, I would only include what's most important. So I focus on what they put in the guide. And then if I like what I see, I will move on to my next voting tool, which is the candidate's website. So I head over to their website to get a better idea of the details of their platform and how they break down the issues. For example, right now, police reform and criminal justice reform is at the front of everybody's minds. So if there's a candidate who doesn't address that in their voters guide or on their website, then that means that it's not a priority for them. And because that's a priority for me, that's probably not the right candidate for me. So that's just an example of how I use the voters guide in conjunction with the website to see if someone is a good fit.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 16:05

I know that you might feel like you already have your mind made up on some of these candidates, but I think that it's really important that we treat the opposing candidate in the way that we wish people would treat the candidate that we are leaning towards. That was kind of confusing to say. But what I mean is, if you are voting for someone and you really liked their platform, you owe it to the other candidate to give them a chance to go on their website and look around and figure out what the opposing candidate's platform is. Because that's what you would want people to do for you, right? That's what you would want people to do for the candidate that you are planning to support. And I think that's where we're going wrong. So much in this election, we're not listening to one another, we're not really digging into the candidates and what they're saying and what they are supporting. Like I said, when you dig into a candidate based on your values, and based on their platform, you might be surprised by who you align with and who you end up voting for.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 17:07

Another voting tool that I love to use is ballotpedia.org. So it's just an amazing website where they take all of the candidates, and they take all of their positions on different issues, and they put it in one spot so it's really easy for you to find. If there's something that is missing from their website — let's say that on their website, they didn't say anything about immigration, and that's really surprising to me, because I would think, "Oh man, this person seems like a candidate who would be interested in talking about immigration. Maybe I couldn't find it on the website, or maybe it's missing?" — I hop on over to Ballotpedia and I look and see what it says on there about their stance on immigration. So if you ever can't find something, Ballotpedia is a great tool to use.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 17:07

Another voting tool that I love to use are campaign texts. Now at first, I was so annoyed — do you know when you get those texts from the campaign that say, "Hey, this person is running for governor? Do they have your support?" At first I was like, "Leave me alone," but then I realized, wait a minute, this is a great way to get more information about the candidates. So what I'll do is I text back, and I always text back the same thing. I just text back, "What is their platform?" The person on the other end will respond to you with the most important points from the candidate's platform. It's similar to the voting guide in that they don't have that much space. They're not going to send you 50 texts describing each tenet of the platform and every single detail about it. They're just going to pick the most important things, the things that that candidate is prioritizing. So from those texts, you can get a lot of information about where the candidate is putting their most of their energy, and what they care about the most. So after I respond, "What's the platform," I get the response text from the person on the other end, I screenshot that response, and then I put it in an album in my phone. That way, when I sit down with my ballot — I have a mail-in ballot — so I get to sit down and fill out my ballot and take the time that I need, which I know is a huge privilege and blessing that a lot of people don't have access to. But when you're sitting down to research the candidates, whether you're mailing it or going to the polls, I would get out my album with all of my screenshotted texts and go through and see which platforms I align with, which platforms are good for my values and

stuff like that. I really actually enjoy reading through things. When the candidates have that limited space, I think it gives you a great snapshot into what it is that they think is most important.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 19:53

The last voting tool that I would really encourage you to use â€” and this one I know is a lot little bit controversial â€” you have to use the media. It seems like right now so many people want to paint the media as the boogeyman. I've heard people say stuff like, "I just can't tell what's true," or "It's a time suck." Well, the media shares current events. We need to prioritize staying up to date on what is going on in the world and what's going on in our country through the media. Like I said at the beginning, you are not powerless. There are reliable news sources out there, you just have to figure out what they are. I love this quote from the last episode of the "Three in 30" podcast. Last week on "Three in 30." Rachel Nielsen interviewed Sarah and Beth from Pantsuit Politics, and they had an amazing conversation about how to have grace-filled political conversations. I am going to link that show in my show notes because I think it is such a good episode and I think everybody needs to hear it. But they said something in that episode that really stuck out to me. I wrote it down word for word, because I didn't want to mess it up. They said, quote, "We don't subscribe to the belief that the presence of bias makes something untrue." End quote. I thought that was so important to point out, because so many times I hear people say, "But the media is biased, so I can't trust it." Well, the thing is, the media is biased, because it's written by people. And all people are biased. So we can try to do things that limit our bias, right? We've talked about that in other episodes, the things that we can do to make sure that our biases are staying at bay. And there are news sources that try to limit their bias and there are other news sources that don't. So we need to figure out what are those news sources that are more in the middle, more neutral, the ones that are trying to limit their bias? And then we need to depend on them to stay up to date on current events.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 22:03

Now, I bet you're thinking, "How do I figure out which news outlets are trying to limit their bias and which ones aren't?" There is an amazing chart. It's called the Media Bias chart. So there's an organization called Ad Fontes Media, and their mission is to make news consumers smarter and news media better. Ad Fontes Media is a nonpartisan organization, and they've created a media bias chart. So the media bias chart shows a number of different news outlets, and charts them from left to right. So starting on the left, they have "Most Extreme Left," "Hyper-Partisan Left," "Skews Left," "Neutral," "Skews Right," "Hyper-Partisan Right," and "Most Extreme Right." So the chart has all of the different news outlets and where they fall based on all the way from Extreme Left to Extreme Right. And the chart also has this green box around the news sources that are the most reliable. Ad Fontes Media says that anything that falls between Skews Left, Neutral, and Skews Right are the most reliable sources. Now I know that it's impossible for a media outlet to be completely neutral. Under neutral, they have that this means that the news outlet is minimally biased, it's balanced, or it's centrist. So because the media, like I said is written by people and people are biased, it's impossible to not have bias. But these neutral news outlets have minimal bias to them. And they really do try to be balanced. I am going to link the media bias chart in the shownotes. They have two versions of the chart: they have a

static chart and they have an interactive chart. So the interactive chart is cool, because you can see how they rank each of these news outlets and kind of the factors that they're looking at to figure out where they fall on the chart.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 24:12

When you're thinking about the media that you want to consume, I would suggest choosing three sources. So look at the chart and choose something that skews left, choose something that's neutral, and then choose something that skews right, then I would go to each of those sources and look up the same news story. So let's say I want to learn more about the fires that are going on in the West Coast. I would look up the West Coast fires in the news outlet that skews left, the news outlet that's neutral, and the news outlet that skews right. When you look at all three of those sources you will be able to piece together the entire story. Even though each of these outlets has a different bias and a little bit of bias, you want to make sure that you are looking at the story from a lot of different angles so that you can get a really well rounded understanding of what's really going on.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 25:11

My friends, I cannot stress this enough: we cannot get our news from Facebook. Facebook is not a reliable news source. Choose news sources that you feel like you can trust and then refer to them often. And please, please resist the temptation to get sucked into those Facebook rabbit holes.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 25:38

All right, so those are some of the voting tools that I love to use. And I hope those are really helpful to you. And I'm sure there are other ones that you have, whether they are specific to your state or your city, or something that you just know of that you refer to often. Don't be afraid to refer to those as well.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 25:58

We are down to our last step, step four of the voting action plan. And step four is to write down who you voted for. I feel like this is the fun part. Don't forget to write down who you chose so that you can check the results on election night. Obviously, you're not going to forget who you chose for president, but these local candidates, I can never remember their names. And by the time I'm done doing all the research, the names are all jumbled in my head. So when I write down each person that I voted for, I love to sit up on election night and see what the results turn out to be.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 26:35

I really, really hope that this was helpful to you and gives you the confidence that you need to go out and be an informed voter and be civically engaged.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 26:45

Just a reminder, if you want access to the voting action plan that you can fill out yourself and put on your fridge, make sure you go to firstnamebasis.org/vote. And a recap of those four steps in our action plan: first, we

J Jasmine Bradshaw 27:01

are going to put time on our calendars to vote; then we're going to decide on our non-negotiables; after that we will use our voting tools; and lastly, we're going to write down who we voted for so that we can check the results on election night. You can do this. Be true to yourself and be true to your values and use your voice to be a part of this really important election in our country.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 27:29

I am so grateful for you. I love this First Name Basis family and I feel so blessed to be able to create the society that we want together. So please use your voice to stand up for what you believe in and to support marginalized communities. Thank you so much for listening to this episode and being committed to building a community of inclusion. I can't even tell you how happy it makes me when I hear from you guys on Instagram. If you're not yet part of the First Name Basis family, please find us on social media [@firstname.basis](https://www.instagram.com/firstname.basis). Send us your questions. Send us your comments, send us your experiences. We want to hear it all. If you feel more comfortable sending in an email, you can email us at hello@firstnamebasis.org and everything that I talked about in this episode "books, podcasts articles" I will make sure to link in the show notes. Okie dokie. I'll talk to you next week.