

**2026 Francee Sherman Award Essay Question:**

What are the challenges in making informed decisions about issues and candidates before you vote?

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Making informed decisions about issues and candidates before voting is challenging for several reasons, many of which stem from the complexity of modern information environments and the nature of politics itself.

One major challenge is the overwhelming amount of information available. Voters are exposed to news articles, campaign advertisements, social media posts, debates, and opinion pieces causing presenting conflicting perspectives. Sorting through this volume to find accurate, relevant, and trustworthy information requires time and effort that many people may not have. As a result, voters may rely on shortcuts, such as headlines or endorsements, rather than deeply researching each issue or candidate.

Closely related is the problem of misinformation and bias. Not all sources are equally reliable, and some intentionally spread misleading or false information. Even reputable outlets can present stories with subtle biases in tone, framing, or selection of facts. This makes it difficult for voters to distinguish objective reporting from persuasion. Without strong media literacy skills, individuals may unknowingly base their decisions on incomplete or inaccurate information. Healthcare, taxes, or how countries work together can be a very complicated problem.

Lots of details can affect people far into the future. Because of this, people running for office could explain these ideas in very simple ways so more people will like them. When things are explained too simply, making it hard to know what will really happen if that idea becomes a rule. Meaning voters have to choose without fully understanding everything. Feelings also have an effect on how people decide who to vote for. Candidates often try to make people feel strong emotions to win their support: hope, fear and anger. Sometimes people also like to listen to ideas that align with what they already believe. Making it harder to hear different opinions about their own ideas needing to change. Time constraints further complicate the process. Many voters balance work, family, and other responsibilities, leaving limited time to research candidates and issues in depth. Elections may include multiple races and ballot measures, each requiring attention. This can lead to voters skipping certain sections or making less-informed choices.

Finally, trust in institutions can affect decision-making. When voters lack confidence in the media, government, or electoral systems, they may feel uncertain about the credibility of the information they encounter. This skepticism can either discourage participation or make it harder to form clear, evidence-based conclusions.

In summary, making informed voting decisions is difficult due to information overload, misinformation, complex issues, emotional influences, limited time, and varying levels of trust. Overcoming these challenges requires critical thinking, careful evaluation of sources, and a willingness to engage thoughtfully with different perspectives.