Why Do Americans Vote in the Middle?

The person, the team or the promise?

Pick a side

1. Choose a representative: a friend, an organiser or a confident speaker. Why?
2. Can you support someone's idea without joining their group?
3. What makes a promise believable?

Get the story

Imagine choosing a class representative. One candidate is your friend, another has the best plan, and a third belongs to a group you usually support. Would you always make the same choice? Real elections are more complicated, but this familiar problem helps explain why people sometimes choose candidates from different political parties.

Every two years, the United States holds elections for Congress. When these take place halfway through a president's four-year term, they are called midterms. In November 2026, voters were not choosing a president; they were choosing representatives and, in some states, senators and governors. The Associated Press projected that Democrats had won control of both chambers of Congress.

At every congressional election, all 435 members of the House of Representatives face voters. Senators have six-year terms, so only about a third of the Senate is elected at a time. These elections can change which party has the power to pass laws and investigate the government, even while the president remains in office.

A US ballot usually gives voters separate choices for separate offices. For example, a voter might choose a Republican for governor but a Democrat for the Senate. This is split-ticket voting. It can happen because people prefer one candidate's experience, personality or local plans. Voting across party lines does not necessarily mean abandoning your political beliefs.

Get the story / continued

Spain works differently in important ways. Voters normally choose a closed party list for the Congress of Deputies, so they cannot select their favorite person from different lists in that election. However, voters can select individual candidates in Spanish Senate elections. It is therefore too simple to say that Americans vote for people and Spaniards only vote for parties.

Once elected, American representatives can disagree with their party's leaders. Spanish MPs are not legally required to obey a party either, although party discipline is usually stronger in practice. In both countries, political groups can reward cooperation or put pressure on members who dissent.

So what makes a good representative? Is it someone who always supports a party's program, or someone willing to disagree when constituents need something different? The answer may depend on what kind of trust voters expect.

You may not be old enough to vote nationally, but you can practise judging promises. Ask what the person controls, who else must agree and how you could check progress. A friendly personality can help someone communicate. A practical plan can help people decide. Which matters most when they point in different directions?

Word power

representative - an elected person who speaks or acts for voters

constituents - people represented by an elected official

split-ticket - supporting candidates from different parties in separate races

majority - more than half of a group or its seats

party line - a party's official position

dissent - to express disagreement with a group

Prove it

1. Why are the 2026 elections called midterms?

A. They take place halfway through a presidential term

B. They elect a new president

C. They happen every six years

2. What is a reason to split a ticket?

A. To vote twice in one contest

B. To prefer different candidates for different offices

C. To avoid choosing candidates

3. What makes Spain's Senate an important exception?

A. It does not have elections

B. It chooses the US president

C. Voters choose individual candidates

4. What is true of Spanish MPs?

A. They are not legally bound by an imperative mandate

B. They must always follow party orders by law

C. They cannot join parliamentary groups

Quick mission: Ballot detective

Two fictional candidates promise better transport. One controls the budget; the other has a popular slogan. Decide what information you would need before choosing.

This or that?

Choose a side. Give a reason. Respond to a different view. Opinions earn points for reasons, not agreement.

1. A friend with a weak plan or a stranger with a strong plan?
2. One group for every role or different groups?
3. Group loyalty or disagreement on one issue?
4. A big promise or a small realistic change?
5. A confident speaker or a careful listener?
6. Vote now or ask another question?

Watch / notice / question

Use the optional short video linked on your student page, or use the article as a report. Identify a main claim, supporting evidence and an unanswered question.

Student page: https://bilingually-curious.pages.dev/student/teens/midterms-voting/

Have something to say

1. Should friendship affect your vote?
2. When would you choose someone outside your usual group?
3. Does a popular candidate make a good leader?
4. Which promises can students realistically keep?
5. When should representatives disagree with their team?
6. Is changing your mind a strength?
7. How could a quiet candidate explain their ideas?
8. Should every difficult decision be explained?
9. What makes voting easy to understand?
10. How can people who cannot vote have a voice?
11. What would you ask every candidate?
12. How would you judge a representative after six months?

Make your case

In a fictional school election, choose a council chair and an activities organiser. Alex's group proposes a quiet study area and a costly festival. Sam's group proposes a homework survey and affordable weekly clubs. You can choose different groups for each role.

Plot twist: Students can recommend changes but cannot decide the homework policy. Reassess the promises.

Final outcome: Explain two choices, one trade-off and one question you would ask before voting.

Useful language

I would choose ... because ...

One advantage is ..., but ...

I see your point. However, ...

What evidence supports that?

Could we agree on ...?

I used to think ..., but now ...

One more idea

Write a three-question candidate interview that reveals more than popularity. Swap and improve one question.

Exit ticket: one useful word, one idea you questioned and one question you still have.

Source links, optional media and the interactive game: https://bilingually-curious.pages.dev/student/teens/midterms-voting/