

An Election Year Survival Guide

Your vote counts! In fact, it counts *so much* that **over a billion dollars** could be spent in the coming months to influence it in any way humanly possible.

You see, it's not just about political advertisements anymore, or automated telephone "robocalls," polls, or the televised debates. It's now also about the prospect of "**Super PACs**" and the virtually **unlimited funds** such "Political Action Committees" can use to influence the outcome of an election.

How can you possibly survive the avalanche of advertisements, the relentless rhetoric, and the political propaganda yet to be unleashed? Quite *well*, actually – *if you prepare yourself now!*

Please be prepared to...

- **not be easily swayed by words, images, or feelings.** *Positive* political advertisements try to *portray* (or *overstate*) a candidate's **strengths**. The uplifting background music, attractive imagery, and reassuring statements of a professional announcer are all designed to make you feel that particular candidate is a good choice – even *if the facts suggest otherwise*.
- **investigate any claims made** – especially **negative ads** which try to denounce or discredit a candidate in any number of ways. The *worst* kinds of these ads attack a person's **character** instead of her or his **record** of achievements or failures. Such ads try to get you to **doubt** or **disregard** a candidate. We invite you to visit the **Media Watchdogs** section of our **Current Interests Center** (thrall.org/current). There you will find potentially useful links to **investigative journalists, news analysts, and fact checkers**.
- **watch for inconsistencies.** Has a candidate **switched positions** ("flip-flopped") on an issue? Were **conflicting** or **hypocritical** statements made? Is a candidate deliberately **unclear** or **evasive**?
- **go beyond sound bites.** Sound bites are **selective quotes, catchy phrases** – words which are **partially presented** and often **taken out of context**. A candidate might use sound bites to twist and misuse an opponent's words in confusing, embarrassing, or publicly infuriating ways. Try to track down the **original and complete statements** (speeches, audio / video, transcripts, etc.) so you can learn *what was really said* and draw *your own* conclusions.
- **dissect the talking points.** Talking points are words, labels, phrases, and arguments **quoted repeatedly** (often using the *same words*) by a candidate and/or that candidate's supporters. This coordinated tactic can be used by political party members to help themselves "stay on message," but it can also be used to repeat something (factual or not) until people *hear it often enough* and *tend to believe it*.
- **watch the numbers.** Don't fall for deceptive digits or fearful figures pulled out of thin air. Consider **who presents** those numbers, what their **sources** are, **when** that information was created, and **why**. Is there any **motive**? Are the numbers **up-to-date, authoritative, complete**? *How were they calculated*?
- **form your own opinion.** Make your own **informed decision** based on **where candidates (and their political parties) stand** with respect to **any issue important to you and your community**.

In a *regular* year, mass media is all about the **hype**. It's even *worse* during *election years*, so try *not* to rely exclusively on news outlets, magazines, websites, radio or television talk show hosts for your complete understanding of a candidate. Please consult **multiple sources** and **use your library**.

Never venture into voting booths *unaware*. Please *ask all the questions* and do the *research* required to reach the truth *before* you cast your vote. **Educated voters are the essence of democracy!**

Please visit our online **Election guide** for more information: www.thrall.org/election2012

We also offer free **Critical Thinking Skills** guides at www.thrall.org/think