NOTE: This transcript was generated using an automated transcription service, and may contain typographical errors.

**Civics 101**

**Episode: Why Vote?**

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:02] We've spent a lot of time in this series explaining mid-term elections why they happen how they work. Who runs in them what shows up on the ballot. And I feel like we got there you know midterms Crash Course accomplish.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:18] Why do I feel there's a but in here.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:21] But our goal. I mean it's the title of the first episode. Our goal was to convince people that midterms matter. You know full disclosure we definitely have an agenda. We were trying to prove a point.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:34] Yes that's true. But midterms do matter. Of course they matter. They can change the course of politics they change the law.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:42] But I'm stuck on that final step. Participation showing up to vote because midterms are going to happen whether people turn out for them or not.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:51] That is actually my least favorite excuse for not voting.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:54] OK. Hear me out. We started with the goal of proving the power right. The worth of this election. And I think we partially felt we needed to do that because a lot of people don't care and we know that because we can look at voter turnout numbers and see that people just don't show up for the midterms the way they do for presidential elections.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:16] This is understandable when you're voting for the leader of the free world the largest office in our country it's bound to bring people out voting for the president is huge and it's in an obvious way and that's not really the case with smaller local offices that are on your ballot in a midterm.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:32] And that fact isn't going away right no matter how you Gussy them up. The midterms are missing that one crucial thing.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:38] Hannah if at this stage you're trying to convince me that midterm elections are not a big deal. I'm not only going to lose it but I got Dan Cassino on Speeddial right now.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:50] OK I would not dare try to do that to you. Especially not at this point. But all I'm saying is I think we need more more what more of a reason to turn up and to vote on Election Day.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:03] You got something?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:05] I think I do. Which is good because this is Civics 101. The podcast refresher course on the basics of how our democracy works. I'm Hannah McCarthy.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:18] I'm Nick Capodice.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:19] and today on Civics 101 we're going to turn the focus on you dear listener because it isn't the president who makes or breaks an election it's you your five minutes in the voting booth are more than just an exercise in civil participation. Choosing to vote is like saying Hey look over here. You better listen to me because I have got your job in my hands.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:40] I hear you. Hannah and I don't need convincing. But if we're going to go there with voting then I have to say there are plenty of people who do show up to vote every year and still feel like legislators ignore them.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:51] You are absolutely right. That was the case for a lot of voters and that's where I want to start. With the frustrating truth about making your voice heard speaking up is not just about election day. It's a lot of work and it needs to be happening all the time.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:03:10] One of the problems I think with voting is that people think it's a passive action that you do in every two years you do with every four years when in fact it's what you do between elections that actually energize the constituency during a campaign and during an election.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:27] That is Cheryl Cook Kallio everybody high school teacher and former member of the California Assembly.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:03:32] And you know you'll hear people say well I didn't know this was going to happen or I didn't know this is going to be on the ballot. A lot of this is is prepped for years in advance and so voting is extremely important. But paying attention between voting and applying your civic knowledge between voting is equally as important to get the result. And to me a good result is one that represents a broad constituency.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:58] But what does applying your civic knowledge actually look like? We always hear you know you got to get involved but you know give me the instruction manual.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:06] It means a lot of things but why don't we start with the obvious you know knowing what you're voting for because let's be honest we've all likely encountered an office on the ballot on Election Day that we didn't even know was up for election or maybe we didn't even know what that office was.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:04:23] It makes me sick because I've seen that so many times and literally or worse yet who's running right who's running.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:32] All right. We hear stuff along these lines pretty often right. You know stay informed do the research don't complain if you don't vote and maybe don't complain if you vote without doing your homework first. And that advice can start to turn into white noise. But Cheryl cares about this and to be honest so do I. Because you are definitely, not maybe Nick, definitely electing people and voting on ballot measures that will change your life.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:04:59] Let me jump in here because look I know it's not super easy to figure out who and what you're voting for. And I guess is this what you mean by the work? I've pored over so many ballots not just from our state New Hampshire but from every state in the union. They're all completely different. They all have totally different rules and it's frankly overwhelming.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:16] It is overwhelming and frustrating and it's my job to research this stuff. But you know passivity is easier or soft focus is easier.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:28] And the thing is I don't have to know the world will go on rolling without my knowing exactly who I just helped to elect sheriff. But I'd rather just know who it is. I'm voting for. That way I don't wonder if I helped elect somebody who maybe goes against my morals and luckily we've got thousands of journalists and analysts around the country clamoring to provide us with that information.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:05:52] I think that people need to be informed and in order to be informed they have to look at a variety of sources. If the only place that you're getting your information is off of Facebook or Fox News or MSNBC you're only getting half of the story. When I see a story come up and I look at the source of the story. I then physically look for other articles that may be done from a different perspective. It takes work and part of the issue with living in a democracy is you have to be constantly vigilant.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:06:27] I guess if you want the government by and for the people to actually reflect what the people want then the people have to know how to ask for what they want how to establish it. It's just it's such a huge task. I don't feel like any of us can show up on election day knowing everything.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:06:44] I think that's completely true. And as Cheryl sees it you don't have to be an expert in your options.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:06:51] It's important to recognize that you can't know everything. And so for me if I'm in an area that I'm unfamiliar with I will call a person that I think is an expert or here's the one thing that people don't do enough and that is call the office of their elected official. If I'm really confused about something and I know the bill was authored in a particular office or I know somebody who's opposed to that in a particular office I will call up and ask for the information. That's what their job is is to give you that information.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:07:26] OK. That's the kind of work you couldn't do before an election in the month leading up to it. Right. That's Election Day centric work. But I want to go back to this idea that Cheryl has about civic knowledge because there's the kind of passivity that means not showing up to vote. And then there's the kind of passivity of not knowing who or what you're voting for before you do show up. But to Cheryl civic engagement also has to take place in the off season like being a baseball fan who pays attention to the draft and then watches spring training.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:07:58] Except these players are in charge of making law. So the stakes are a little higher.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:08:02] Slightly higher. Yeah and the actual law making the job that we essentially hire our legislature to do that is what is going on in the off season. That's what's going on between elections. So the most important part of engaging with your rep or your senator is not the act of voting. Aside from the issue of actually getting to the polls and being sure you're allowed to vote and we will get to that later. The impact of Election Day itself is largely psychological. But the law making that comes after that. That is what makes your life better or worse. That is what keeps your schools operating and your streets safe.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:08:45] And it's about approaching democracy what's important. What do you need to do before an election. You know what we're talking about is exactly what illustrates the importance of paying attention between elections that it really isn't about just sitting around and twiddling your thumbs. I had a student had once said to me you know I don't care about those government stuff which of course caused me to have you know hyperventilating and he said you know when it's never going to make a difference to me. And I sat there sat down and I said you know right now probably nothing I said but the minute that you want to walk your daughter to school and you recognize that there needs to be a stop sign at the corner. It will become very important to you. And he looked at me and said You're right.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:09:34] We all turn out for the presidential elections and any kind of trickle out for the midterm elections. And then you know the rest of the time how many of us show up when the work is actually being done. I think there's this sense that our metaphorical microphone only appears in the voting booth and then that the rest of the time we have to sit around and watch things happening to us or at us but we're allowed to comment on laws before they happen we're allowed to ask for a stop sign.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:10:02] And the people who can make that stop sign happen and can make you or your kids save are often the very people up for election or re-election during the midterms.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:10:12] Something that's really easy for me to forget is that you can go online and look up your senator or your state rep governor's number and you could just give them a call. You can ask them questions about what's going on in your city. You can tell them that you need that stop sign at the end of your road or tell them you're opposed to a bill or let them know about a problem at your school.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:10:32] Decisions are made by people who show up and you only show up on Election Day. Then you're not doing your due diligence and you're likely to be somewhat disconcerted over the outcome at least in some areas.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:10:46] One of the only obstacles I can foresee for this is it's a matter of numbers. So what if I'm the only one who wants that stop sign or what if my state representative or legislature just doesn't seem to care.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:10:57] I mean that's definitely something that happens but it all comes back to voting. If you turn out to the polls and people who share your beliefs turn out alongside you then you've established that broad constituency that Cheryl was talking about earlier.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:15] For example let's say youre a 47 year old Wisconsinite who loves the color green and loves swing sets and believes in unionized playground companies. You want the playground Union to build a green swing set in every city in the state.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:11:30] I feel very passionately about this.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:31] You do and a lot of people around your age feel the exact same way.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:11:35] OK so we are going to be golden right? If if we all want these union built Kelly Green swings sets we're going to get them right?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:43] Ah but let's say only a handful of people in your swing set devoted demographic actually vote.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:11:49] OK that's not great.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:50] No it's not great. Because the thing is it doesn't really matter if you all feverishly desire to see union belt green swing sets dotting the Wisconsin landscape if you don't vote. Your legislators pay attention to those who show up to the polls. If your demographic does not why should they pay attention to what you want in the meantime?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:12:10] That's pretty dark.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:12:11] That's politics my friend.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:12:13] Right now if young people would vote if we got the vast majority of students that are 18 years old voting in California they could change how we charge for college education. You would all of a sudden have a group of legislators that would be paying very close attention to this demographic. It's because they don't vote some of these things are passed.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:12:40] That's crazy. I mean we don't usually talk about legislation in terms of voter turnout. The idea is that your person either wins or loses and they go about their business of working for you or not but it sounds like. And tell me if I've got this right. If your demographic turns out in full force then your demographic's going to get more attention than other demographics even if you both voted for the same person.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:13:03] Exactly. It's just like Cheryl says that people who candidates pay attention to are the people who vote in large numbers. So white people vote more than people of color. Older people vote more than younger people. Rich people vote more than poor people.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:13:19] And by the way as we've mentioned in a couple different episodes whiter older richer tends to also describe the demographic of the people we actually get to vote for. But on the subject of who is turning out to vote our country by and large makes it way easier for that white wealthy older demographic to vote.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:13:40] Which brings me to my next point the point Cheryl made about college aged voters not turning out. You cannot boil that down to young people being lazy or something.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:13:50] So you know you're in your parents home you're going off to college you change residences. How many times while you're in college four years are in training or wherever else you go to become an adult. You forget to register and then you can't decide are you going to vote in the city that you're going to college in. Are you going to vote in the town that you came from. You have to make that decision. In some state they make it very difficult for people to vote by mail. So if you are going to college in you know North Carolina specifically had a rule about this or a law about this not too long ago that they didn't want students voting on the college cities that they live in but you're not going to drive home to vote on a Tuesday. So you are basically taking away their right to vote unless you allowed them to vote absentee. I mean they've changed that law now but it is a way to suppress voter participation by making it difficult to register and making it difficult to change your registration.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:14:52] Now I do want to say the people who work on tightening voter registration access say they're doing it to prevent voter fraud. But the defacto result of this is that there are laws all over the country that make it tricky for college kids to vote for people of color to vote for lower income people to vote for trans people to vote.

**Edgar Saldivar:** [00:15:11] You know the voter ID requirements can be very burdensome to poor individuals to people of color to the elderly who don't often have the ability to obtain the records or pay the fees the state requires to have photo IDs for example.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:28] This is Edgar Saldivar he's a senior staff attorney at the ACLU in Texas and Edgar makes clear that although these laws do not explicitly block minorities from voting they do in some cases make it more difficult.

**Edgar Saldivar:** [00:15:43] There are numerous ways that state legislatures have made it burdensome difficult or sometimes impossible to cast a ballot for individuals who are eligible to vote. And rather than extending access to the ballot what we've seen as a trend to make voting much harder rather than easier.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:16:11] And it's not just registration that poses a problem. A polling place can be moved at the last minute or maybe you show up and you find your name has been purged from the voter roll.

**Edgar Saldivar:** [00:16:21] Right so a voter roll essentially is a listing all the persons that are registered in a particular precinct.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:16:29] Now Edgar says that there are a lot of ways a person's name might be purged from the rolls in a city or state. Maybe you've moved or you've been incarcerated or become mentally incapacitated. All of these he says are lawful reasons to purge someone from the voter rolls.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:16:44] However I've read tons of articles specifically in the last 10 years about people who are definitely eligible to vote and they show up and they're told nope sorry you're not on the list.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:16:54] Yeah that does happen.

**Edgar Saldivar:** [00:16:55] Some states have taken a sort of overly aggressive efforts to purge voters. Oftentimes voters who aren't eligible to vote whether may be sort of a kind of administrative mistake that caused it, you know they go vote and they realize that they are not on the voter rolls.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:17:14] So it sounds like you've got to have your rights down pat before you even go to your voting station.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:17:17] That's exactly it. Edgar says that if you are eligible to vote meaning you're a U.S. citizen. You'll be 18 on the day of the election. You're a resident of the state county and district where you are casting your ballot and you are not in prison or on parole for a felony conviction. Then it is your constitutional right to vote.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:17:38] But what if your attempt is thwarted. What if you know that you're eligible to vote you've waited in line for a few hours. You show up and they say Buzz off buddy you're not on the voter rolls.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:17:48] OK. First and foremost what you have to do is ask for a provisional ballot and a receipt. If you ask for this provisional ballot it is required by law that they give it to you. And then after the fact they will assess on a case by case basis whether or not your vote is valid.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:18:06] And then if you have any other problems because things do crop up you can call this number. It's 8 6 6 our vote so that's 8 6 6 6 8 7 8 6 8 3. They're are a nonpartisan election protection coalition. They're national. They'll know what to do.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:18:27] But let me just give you a specific example. Right. So a lot of trans rights groups are trying to look out for people who might be denied at the polls. The ACLU of New Hampshire for instance has put together a fact sheet explaining that yes if you have changed your name you need to reregister under that name.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:18:45] However if for example your I.D. appears to show someone of a different gender you cannot be denied the right to vote.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:18:51] All right come prepared maybe even write these things down before you go. Just to be on the safe side. But still I can totally see myself being intimidated by the prospect of being denied a ballot even if I know my rights.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:19:04] Yeah in a case like that it can be worth a quick Internet search to figure out if there's an election day carpool program near you that can offer support. in Tennessee for example. There's even a ride share app for the LGBTQ community in Chattanooga that helps people get to the polls. And you know what Nick. If all else fails you can always call your attorney general and verify your right to vote and you can do that right at the polling place.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:19:30] Can I check in for a minute here. Sure. So we started this episode with you saying you're going to give people just one more reason to turn out on Election Day for midterms. And you've given us a couple and some how tos.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:19:42] OK good. That is what I was going for.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:19:43] But I think there's one big thing missing actually. The people who can't vote yet. Young people. People who are going to be able to vote in the future or just don't have that constitutional right yet in their lives. So many of the laws. So many of the laws that we make in this country have to do with those people but they don't get a say.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:20:10] Or do they.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:20:12] Do they? Is this a trick.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:20:14] I mean I say they do. I say young people are instrumental to effecting change.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:20:19] Go on.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:20:20] OK. Point number one and please bear with me on this one. Young people are the future.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:20:27] Oh Hannah is everybody rolling their eyes out there?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:20:30] But it's true.

**Peter Levine:** [00:20:32] So I think it's important for young people to realize that they have a lot of power and they're actually exercising it.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:20:37] This is Peter Levine. He's the academic dean at the Tufts University Tisch College of civic life.

**Peter Levine:** [00:20:43] They're a very big Voting Bloc. They are gonna run the country. Whatever happens in. 15 20 25 years. So the skills that they learn now. For running the country are really important. Whatever happens the way that they vote does determine the outcome of elections even if they don't vote at the numbers they should. So they do swing elections. So they are actually exercising power so I don't buy the hype that they're just disengaged. Some of them are but some of them aren't.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:21:08] But still he's talking about the young vote. What about the young nonvote.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:21:12] So Peter has been doing research on civic engagement of people from kindergarten through senior year of high school and he's been doing it for over a decade now. So he knows that first of all if you learn about voting when you're young you can be a good voter by the time you actually get there.

**Peter Levine:** [00:21:28] So the pattern in America is that people gradually become voters. Each decade until people get into their 80s. They vote at a higher rate and it seems that people sort of overcome the barriers they learn how to do it. They tune into some issues and get an idea who they're going to vote for and when they do that they're much more likely to vote against it. You could say voting is habit forming. And for the very youngest the habit has only formed for about one in five in the midterm elections.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:21:54] So get in the habit of being a voter before you're actually a voter.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:21:58] Yeah but that isn't it. You know you can actually do something long before you're a member of the electorate. For one thing. What is more compelling more sympathetic than a young person demanding say justice or support? And What is more disappointing than a legislator who ignores that young person's call. Not to get all cynical about this but you know it's good PR to pay attention to young people.

**Peter Levine:** [00:22:25] So even if you don't have the vote you can work in other domains. But the other thing is you can influence older people have the vote. So. Certainly the Parkland students are demonstrating that you can have a big influence on voters even if you're too young to vote yourself.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:22:39] And on of these ideas that Cheryl Cook-Kallio talked about that civic engagement is about what happens between the elections, like swaying legislators is less about voting day than it is about how you get at them when things are in session. Is there a way for underage people to get their say?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:22:55] This is one major thing that Peter kept coming back to civics is not limited to government and exercising your voice isn't limited to being of voter age.

**Peter Levine:** [00:23:04] So you can change the world in lots of ways and that that opens up a whole range of things you can do. One thing is there are in other institutions and communities apart from the government the ones that the government runs they're in the school or any neighborhood.

**Peter Levine:** [00:23:16] They might be in a religious location they're in a family. And all of those institutions can be changed so you can if you can't change the law through voting you might be able to change your school's policies through talking to the Administration at the schools.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:23:34] So those things that are quite a law like let's say you're suspended for something that you think is unjust. You can go to the mattresses over something like that. You can disagree with policy and you can make people listen to you about it long before you get to actually vote for anything.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:23:54] And you can work for politicians too. You can volunteer or you can show up at rallies offer feedback like Bakari Sellers said eat cold pizza in a church basement. You can make it so by the time you might have to deal with a challenge to your right to vote you know your rights better than anybody because you've been preparing for this your whole life.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:24:12] I mean my big takeaway from all of this is that the lack of voter turnout is this kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. They say young people don't vote and so young people don't get attention from legislators and so they feel disenfranchised and that literally disenfranchises them. They then don't vote. The same goes for any group of people who feel like they're on the outs.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:24:35] So I guess the best medicine is to prove those numbers wrong.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:24:39] Yeah I couldn't agree more. Per usual. We're going to end this episode on the story of an historic midterm. Nick do you have one for us?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:24:49] I sure do.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:24:50] All right.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:24:51] This one. Go vote dammit.