



2024

VOTER ISSUE GUIDE



SHARE THIS VOTER GUIDE WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY — AND MAKE SURE EVERYONE VOTES!

This nonpartisan guide will help you learn about key issues supporting gender equity so you can cast your ballot for candidates who share your values.

It includes sample questions to:

- Help you evaluate candidates' stances
- Ask at public events (virtual and in-person)
- Discuss on social media

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WHEN WOMEN VOTE, WE CHANGE THE CONVERSATION.

Women's voices have the power to shape the future.

Our votes can steer political discourse toward issues that impact our economic opportunity, education, careers — and our futures. From advocating for gender equity and reproductive rights to championing equal pay and access to education, women have the power to influence the direction of our nation.

The choices we make at the ballot box can open doors for generations of women to come. As informed voters, we must support candidates who prioritize equitable access to education, promote opportunities for all women to achieve economic security, and support policies that dismantle barriers to a diverse and inclusive society.

Let's harness our collective power and drive meaningful change. Between now and Election Day, encourage conversation around the issues that affect our families and communities. Ask the tough questions: Where do our candidates stand on issues that matter to women?

When women vote, we change the conversation.

Make your voice heard! Together, we can pave the way for a more just and equitable future for all.

In solidarity,



Gloria L. Blackwell
Chief Executive Officer,
AAUW Action Fund



SEX & GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION IN SCHOOLS

The 2024 election will significantly impact efforts to address sex discrimination in education. Candidates' views on Title IX, gender-based violence prevention, equal opportunities in academic and athletic settings, and campus sexual assault policies can lead to changes in the formulation, implementation, and enforcement of these policies.

A high-quality education is key to improving economic prosperity and gender equality. Access to education that is free of sexual discrimination, harassment, and assault is essential for all students to thrive — especially women.

While we've made progress, bias and discrimination in schools persist. Sexual harassment and assault remain shockingly

prevalent — and underreported — on college and university campuses. LGBTQ+ students' rights are under attack. These issues impact the ability of students to learn or continue their education.

Parenting students face particular barriers while juggling family and school responsibilities that can lead to lower levels of college enrollment and completion.

Gender biases result in girls and women systematically tracked away from science and math throughout their educations, limiting their training and resulting in women, especially women of color, being underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CANDIDATES:

- What role should the government play in addressing systemic issues contributing to sex discrimination in education?
- What measures would you advocate for to address the issue of sexual assault and harassment on college campuses, ensuring the safety and well-being of all students?
- How do you plan to ensure that LGBTQ+ students are fully protected under Title IX, particularly regarding issues such as discrimination, harassment, and access to appropriate facilities and resources in educational institutions?
- What policies would you support to ensure that college students who are also parents have adequate resources and support to successfully complete their degrees?
- Would you support measures to identify and address barriers to participation and success for women and girls, especially students of color, in STEM education?

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Research shows diverse learning environments improve academic performance and retention. While women have made gains in higher education, significant gaps exist for women of color. Black and Latina women earn four-year degrees at much lower rates than white women and are underrepresented in higher education leadership roles.

Despite this need for inclusion, there is growing hostility towards efforts by colleges to address diversity. In June 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* and *Students for*

Fair Admissions v. UNC that struck down race-conscious admissions policies.

Over the past three years, there has been legislation introduced at the state and federal level to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts on college campuses. These bills range from prohibiting the use of public funds on DEI-related activities; banning colleges from having DEI offices or staff; restricting mandatory diversity training; and forbidding institutions to use diversity statements in hiring and promotion.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CANDIDATES:

- How do you view the role of diversity and inclusion in higher education?
- Given last year's Supreme Court rulings on race-conscious admissions policies for colleges, what do you propose to address disparities in representation based on race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in colleges and universities?
- Do you support investments in programs to help low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities prepare for a postsecondary education and succeed once they are there?
- What specific actions or initiatives do you propose to support and foster an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all college and university students?
- What measures would you support – recruitment, retention, and professional development programs – to increase diversity among faculty, staff, and leadership in colleges and universities?

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY & STUDENT DEBT

For many jobs, higher education is not just an option, it's a necessity. Within the next decade, it is expected that more than 70 percent of jobs in the United States will require post-secondary education or training.

As the education requirement for employment grows, so has the cost. The price tag of college education has more than doubled over the past generation — and student loan debt balances have risen along with it.

Americans now hold over \$1.7 trillion in outstanding student loan debt. Women take on greater debt than men to start, with Black women taking on the most substantial debt burden. Then, when

women graduate, their debt repayment collides with the gender wage gap and racial wealth gap to make it harder for them to repay their loans. As a result, women often put off saving for retirement, buying a home, or starting a business.

For the more than 2 million undergraduate students who are mothers, the gender wage gap and high costs of childcare can make keeping up with loan repayments while supporting a family even more difficult.

The nearly 10 percent of college students who are single mothers have higher levels of debt than other students, and student debt is especially high for Black student parents.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CANDIDATES:

- Do you support increasing the maximum Pell Grant award to ensure that aid covers a greater share of the total cost of college attendance? What other initiatives would you support to increase funding for need-based financial aid to make college more accessible?
- Would you vote to pass the Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS) Act, which would provide vital support for the participation and success of low-income parents in postsecondary education?
- Do you support the streamlined income-driven repayment plans which make it easier for individuals to enroll and improve outcomes for women who are struggling to repay their loans?
- With student loan debt at \$1.7 trillion, what strategies would you use to alleviate financial pressure on borrowers? Do you support proposals to cancel a portion of existing student loan debt?
- How would you address disparities in student loan debt among women, especially Black women and Latinas?

PAY EQUITY

Despite advancements in women's education and state and local pay equity laws, the pay gap affects women across backgrounds, ages, and education levels.

On average, women working full-time are paid about 84 cents for every dollar paid to men working full-time. The gap persists across races, ethnicities, and occupations. The impact is especially devastating for women of color, for example Black and Latina women working full-time making 69 cents and 57 cents on the dollar respectively, compared to non-Hispanic white men in 2022.

Pay equity is a matter of respect and fairness. While the reasons for the pay gap are complex, there are a range of steps that can address these disparities.

Increasing transparency around wages and compensation can help address gender and racial pay gaps by

preventing unconscious bias and outright discrimination that can skew compensation.

Prohibiting employers from relying on salary history to set wages ensures that prior pay discrimination does not hurt a woman's future earning potential.

Giving women tools to challenge wage discrimination and incentivizing employers to do the right thing, will also help address wealth gaps that disproportionately impact Black and Brown women.

Finally, robust pay data collection provides enforcement agencies with better data to enforce civil rights laws and encourages employers to self-analyze their pay practices and address pay disparities.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CANDIDATES:

- Do you think the federal government should play a role in addressing the gender pay gap?
- How would you address systemic factors contributing to pay inequities, such as occupational segregation, discrimination, and barriers to advancement for women of color?
- Do you endorse the Paycheck Fairness Act or similar legislation aimed at strengthening existing laws, such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963, to promote transparency, accountability, and fairness in pay practices?
- What steps would you take to improve data collection and reporting on pay equity metrics, including tracking and analyzing pay disparities within and across industries, occupations, and demographic groups?
- How would you build bipartisan support for these efforts?

PAID FAMILY & SICK LEAVE

Too many American workers are forced to choose between a job, their health, or the health of a loved one whenever they get sick or a family member needs care.

As women continue to be the primary caregivers for children and elderly family members, they continue to disproportionately bear the economic opportunity cost of the lack of paid parental, family, or sick leave. The U.S. lags behind every other industrialized nation regarding this aspect of family care policies.

The benefits of paid parental, family, or sick leave are well documented and have widespread support, yet the vast majority of working people in the United

States still do not have access to this basic protection. The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), provides job-protected, unpaid leave, however its promise remains out of reach for the 40 percent of the workforce not currently eligible for FMLA, which disproportionately are comprised of workers of color.

Additionally, nearly 28 million private-sector workers in the United States — about one-fifth of the workforce — don't have access to paid sick days.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CANDIDATES:

- Do you believe that all workers in the U.S. should have access to paid family and medical leave benefits, including for caregiving and addressing personal medical needs?
- Would you support bills to provide all workers with paid family and medical leave and paid sick days, like the FAMILY Act and the Healthy Families Act?
- Most Americans live in areas without adequate childcare options. For those who have access to center-based childcare, the average cost is more than \$15,000 per year. How would you expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare for all families?
- How would you work with both parties to advance paid leave legislation at the federal level? How would you overcome obstacles to enacting comprehensive paid leave policies?

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS & ABORTION ACCESS

Women should be trusted to make their own informed choices about their reproductive lives within the dictates of their own moral and religious beliefs without government interference.

Reproductive rights and access to abortion care are fundamental pillars in promoting women's education and economic security. When women have control over their reproductive choices, they can better plan their futures, including their educational and career paths.

By having access to abortion care, women can make decisions about their reproductive health that align with their life goals. Autonomy over if, when and how to have children is vital to women's ability to control their lives, bodies and futures.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, access to abortion

care is now wholly illegal or severely restricted in many states. Over the last decade, the courts have created roadblocks to contraception access and creating ambiguity over access to fertility treatments.

Laws restricting access to abortion care and a full range of reproductive health care disproportionately affect low-income women, women of color, and women with disabilities, as they are disproportionately likely to live in those states, and already face substantial barriers to accessing reproductive services and health care worsening disparities in education and economic opportunities.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CANDIDATES:

- Do you support or oppose government restrictions on abortion?
- Do you believe access to abortion care should be legally protected as a fundamental reproductive right?
- Do you support or oppose efforts to restrict access to abortion care through arbitrary gestational limits, waiting periods, and mandatory counseling?
- What legislative initiatives would you support to ensure all have access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including abortion, contraception, and IVF regardless of location?

VOTING RIGHTS

Our democracy works when everyone can fully participate.

Elected officials routinely make decisions about issues that directly impact all of us. From our paychecks to paid leave, access to reproductive health care and access to education, our lives are on the line – and our vote is our voice.

To create real change, we must be part of the conversation, and the most powerful way for us to have our say is at the polls. Yet the right to vote has a long and tumultuous history. Protecting that right – one that many fought long and hard for – continues today as ongoing efforts to suppress the right negates what it means to live in a free democracy.

The freedom to vote is not a political issue – it is a constitutional right. In

the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Shelby v. Holder* decision, anti-voter bills swept the nation disproportionately impacting people of color, women, disabled, young, and old voters.

Americans of all races, backgrounds, genders and zip codes have the same right to vote. The full promise of democracy can be made real by enacting policies promoting safe and accessible elections for all and pushing back on unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud. Such policies include expanding online registration, early voting, and voting by mail.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CANDIDATES:

- What measures would you support to expand voting access and protect the right to vote for all eligible citizens?
- What steps would you take to address misinformation about the integrity of our elections and combat voter disenfranchisement?
- Would you support a bill to expand access to voting and protect the right to vote for all eligible citizens such as the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act?
- What strategies do you propose to promote civic engagement, voter education, and voter empowerment initiatives?

EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

Most Americans wrongly believe the Constitution provides gender equality. However, the 14th Amendment guarantees equality for men but is poignantly silent on women.

While the text of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is simple — “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex” — its impact would be profound. Yet, the progress our country has made on gender equality through the courts and patchwork legislation can be reversed.

The Equal Rights Amendment would provide explicit constitutional protections against gender-based discrimination in

areas like education, employment, and healthcare. Without this, laws regarding women’s rights can be changed or revoked by legislators and judges.

While the Equal Rights Amendment has been legally ratified by three-fourths of states, it still has not been recognized as the 28th Amendment. Publication of the ERA would provide, once and for all, the constitutional guarantee that all men and women are truly equal under the law and that these rights cannot easily be abridged.

QUESTION TO ASK THE CANDIDATES:

- Do you support the publication of the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution, which seeks to guarantee equal rights under the law regardless of sex?



ABOUT AAUW + AAUW ACTION FUND

Since 1881, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) has been a leading voice promoting equity for women and girls.

The AAUW Action Fund advances equity for women and girls through member activism and voter mobilization.

OUR THANKS

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