

Digital Democracy - Young Voters & Local Government

Our Team



Katy Shi



Alex Gill



Ana Carolina Mexia



Trina Sarkar

Problem Domain

Our problem domain with Digital Democracy is local governments, and more specifically civic engagement of new voters with their local governments. Right now, many young adults know nothing about their local governments and care only about the presidential elections, despite local governments having a massive impact on quality of life and issues like education and infrastructure.

Initial POV

We met [Auden](#) and [Ashley](#), two college students. We were amazed to learn that two students with similar backgrounds had such [differing amounts of knowledge](#) about their local governments. It would game changing if there were an easy way for Ashley to have the [same amount of knowledge](#) as Auden.

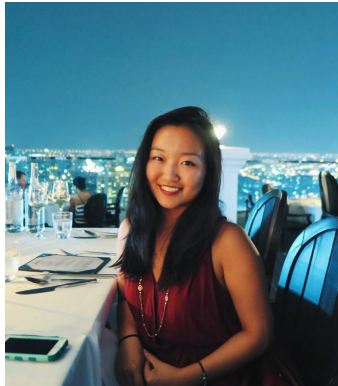
Additional Needfinding

After some consideration, we decided to narrow our focus to new voters. To find out more about our initial POV, we interviewed more college students - some Stanford students, some non-Stanford students.

Connie

We interviewed Connie, a 20 year-old Stanford student who studies Management Science & Engineering. We decided to interview her because she had a general interest in politics and was involved in her local government in high school but has become completely disengaged since moving to Stanford. From her we learned that even a person who was engaged with her local government feels completely uneducated when it comes to voting in local government issues. She clearly said that being educated about local gvt is **hard** and that she feels unequipped to vote when she is so uneducated. When we asked her how she prepared to vote she said that she skimmed the pamphlet that was emailed to her and sometimes googled some of the names but she

wishes there was an easier way to learn more about the issues in the pamphlet without having to go through a lot of information. Overall, Connie contributed to our initial pov from Ashley's perspective and highlighted the importance of making the acquisition of local government knowledge easier.



Sergio

We interviewed Sergio Rebeles, a Senior Student from Visalia CA, Majoring in Biology. He is fairly interested in politics and **how it affects our society**. He mentioned that in general he prepares to vote by reading New York Times and The New Yorker but that he doesn't really prepare to vote for local government issues because he is not very interested in them. In fact he said he doesn't really care about any local government issue unless they directly impact him. Therefore the main thing we got out of our interview with Sergio is that people only care about local government issues when they are **directly impacted by them**. In addition he mentioned that he would read about local government issues if the information was readily available to him which again heightens the importance of making our product **low-effort**.



Christina

We interviewed Christina Gill, a recent graduate who majored in mathematics and philosophy from Dartmouth. Christina grew up in a very politically-engaged household, consistently keeps up with politics, and studies diligently before voting. We decided to interview Christina to better understand **how engaged voters prepare for elections**. Christina noted that often when she encounters ballot measures about which she knows little or has

no instinctual opinion, she likes to know **which organizations that she trusts support which measures**. For example, when encountering women's issues, she often would like to know if Planned Parenthood or the Women's League supports such pieces of legislation to help guide her vote. Additionally, she sometimes is frustrated by **her friends' lack of political knowledge** because it stunts her ability to fully debate issues.



Three Revised POVs

We met Connie, a Stanford junior from San Jose, CA. We were amazed to realize that Connie wonders how "she is allowed to vote" consider her lack of knowledge about local government. It would be game changing if Connie had an easy, low-commitment way to learn more about local government before election time.

- How might we educate new voters on their local governments?
- How might we centralize information about local gvt?
- How might we use new voter's existing interests (tech? education?) to engage them in local politics?

We met Sergio, a senior from Visalia, CA, who is voting absentee this election. We were amazed to learn that Sergio is solely preparing for the presidential election because he feels disconnected from his local government. It would be game changing if Sergio had an easy way to keep up with his local government while he is away in college.

- How might we insure that people who vote absentee are actually informed about their local governments?
- How might we prevent people from abstaining on their local government elections?
- How might we detract people from blindly voting along party lines in local government?
- How might we help college students navigate absentee voting vs. engaging in a new local government?

We met Christina, a 21-year old passionate voter who knows a great deal about Portland policy. We were amazed to find that she is frustrated by her friends' lack of knowledge or interest about local government and their inability to help her navigate the voting process. It would be game changing if she had a way to connect and share information with other voters.

- How might we help engaged new voters connect and teach non-engaged voters?

-



1 How might we educate

Ballot-
explainer
1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Vox-style
Explanations
of local
gov.

Trending topics
on Facebook,
but from
hometown
(Chrome extension)

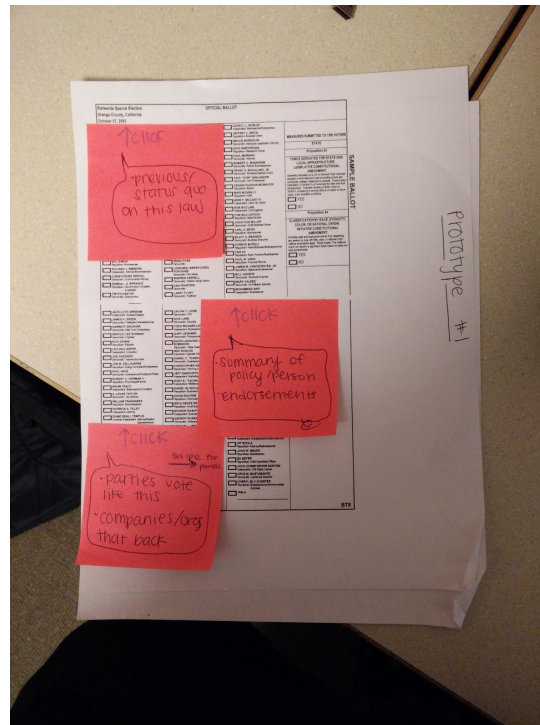
Local newspaper
delivery to
door

Three Experience Prototypes

Ballot App

a) We assume that most people are seeing the ballot for the first time in the voting booth. For this reason, we were thinking of creating an app that informs people on their ballot by allowing them to interact with it and learn more about the policies and positions.

b) We made our prototype by printing out a ballot from a previous election year and attaching Post-Its to areas that would allow users to click on the app to expand.



c) We tested our prototypes by explaining the product to users and asking if the design was intuitive and what they thought about the product

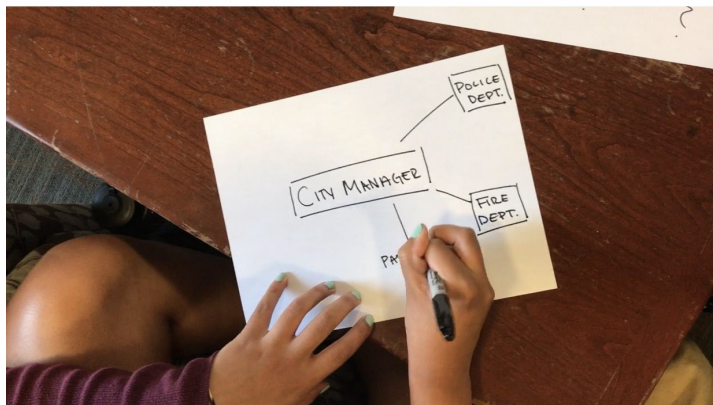


d) We learned that we need to make the interactive parts of our ballot application more obvious and intuitive. It was very difficult for people to know the premise of the app without any guidance/start instructions page. All of our testers, however, liked the idea of replicating the actual ballot in the application so that it would be exactly what they would see in the voting booths come November.

e) The assumption was very valid. Most people had not seen this year's ballot and were completely unfamiliar with the layout of the ballot. In regards to this complication, we want to add more tips and summaries about the different sections on the ballot (i.e. what information can be found on a ballot) aside from summarizing the actual policies/positions being run for. We realized we needed much more scaffolding after we tested our prototype on users.

Khan Academy style videos

- a) We assume that people want to learn about local government, but do not want to put in the effort to learn more about their local governments. We thought that short, easily accessible, and "dumbed-down" videos about local government organization structure, policies, responsibilities would be a great way to present high volumes of information in a low-effort manner.
- b) We created the prototype by drawing on white blank pieces of paper and talking as we drew -- in the



traditional style of an informational video such as Khan Academy. It then became a flipboard, so we drew on one page for one subject, speaking as we went, and then flipped to a new page for a new topic.

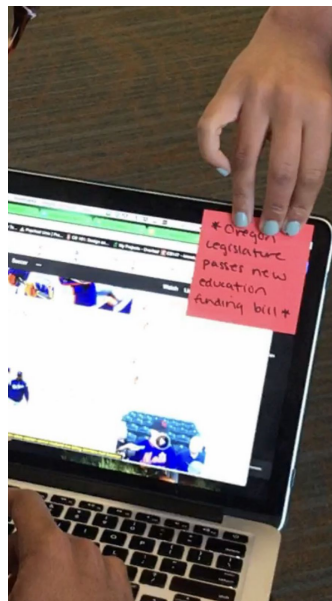
- c) We tested our prototype by presenting this video to users and asking them how they liked the video format and if the information was easily digestible. (Video in Presentation)
- d) We learned that while many people enjoyed the format of the video and thought that the idea was innovative, they were hesitant when we asked them if they would actually search for these videos and watch them in real life. We learned that having a format that was not directly forcing people to intake the information may not be effective for a population that is looking for low-effort ways of learning about government. They simply did not find it interesting enough to subscribe to.

- e) The assumption was valid, in that people want information about local government, but in a minimal effort, easily digestible format. We thought that this format would be Khan Academy style videos, but we quickly realized that this may not be true.

Chrome extensions - push notifications

a) We assumed that most college students have a difficult time keeping up with news about their local government from their home towns or home states. We assumed that although they wanted to be able to informatively vote in an absentee ballot, they were not able to do so because of lack of connections to hometown news.

b) We built this prototype by putting Post-its on the top right corner of a person's laptop, as if they were receiving random push notifications whenever there was a local government update for their personal local government. It was supposed to model a Chrome extension that informed people of their hometown politics.



c) We tested the prototype by asking users to just scroll around on their favorite website, and one of our team members would sporadically attach a post it note to the right corner of their laptop to mirror a push notification. The user could then swipe to dismiss the notification.

d) We learned that there is a fine balance for the number of notifications to update the user with. If there are too many notifications, people could get fed up with the distractions this extension posed and end up deleting it. People liked the idea, however, and found it quite novel. They thought it was a great way to keep in contact with their local news, and the only concern was level of distraction.



e) The assumption was definitely valid, and we received the best results from this prototype testing. We need to find a way to balance the number of notifications that were pushed to the user, but we believe that this is a great way for people to stay involved in politics without having them subscribe to any service or exert too much effort.

Successful Prototype

Based on our findings, Prototype #3 was the most successful. It was the easiest to use because it required no active effort on user's part, besides clicking on the notification if they were interested in the news headline. The user enjoyed the fact that he could live his life and not have to spend extra time opening an app or watching a video. The other prototypes were good in theory, but we overestimated the amount of effort people were willing to put into learning about their local governments. Sadly, people are not interested in watching videos, and the ballot app was too unintuitive. We plan to add a way to moderate the number of notifications, which will reduce the chances people get very irritated at the Chrome extension.