

Your Voice Your Choice

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SPEAKERS

Benjamin Mendoza, Janelle Eley, Julia Anna Adrian, Heather Belk, Thad Kousser

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Heather Belk 00:00

Hi. Welcome Tritons to Triton Tools and Tidbits. I'm your host Heather Belk. And this week our episode is about why voting matters. Featuring Professor Thad Kousser, Ben Mendoza, Julia Adrian, and Janelle Eley. We're excited to have you experienced our podcast. Let's dive in. All right, well, today I'd like to introduce our panelists who are here to have this conversation about why Tritons should vote. And I'd like to invite them to each introduce themselves. They each are Tritons in their own way and have a relationship with UC San Diego, and also with voter engagement. So, we'll start with Professor Thad Kousser.

Thad Kousser 00:41

Hi, I'm Thad Kousser. I've been a professor at UC San Diego for 17 years and I now Chair of the Department of Political Science. And in that time, I've had the joy of working with so many politically engaged students who have come together for election night parties and mayoral debates like the one that we're having on October 8 this year. And seeing the passion that so many tribes have for politics.

Heather Belk 01:05

Great, thank you for being with us. We also have Ben Mendoza.

Benjamin Mendoza 01:09

Hello, my name is Ben Mendoza pronouns they, them. I work in the Student Promoted Access Center for Education and Service, also known as SPACES. I'm an advisor there. And thank you so much for having me today. The reason I love doing this work is because I'm passionate about community advocacy and community engagement. And one way that shows up is by voting and through getting involved civically. That's one reason I love this. So, thank you so much for having me.

Heather Belk 01:42

Great. Thank you. We also have Julia Adrian.

Julia Anna Adrian 01:45

Hi, my name is Julia. I'm using she pronouns. And I'm the Vice President of External Affairs for the Graduate Student Association. I moved to the US from Germany about four years ago. Over the last

four years, I transitioned from first feeling like I didn't really have the right to have a voice in this country where I can't vote, to being very civically engaged and love to talk about voting all the time. So that's me. Thanks for having me.

Heather Belk 02:17

That's great. Thank you for joining us. And then Janelle.

Janelle Eley 02:21

Hi, thanks so much for the introduction. Hi there, my name is Janelle. I use she/her pronouns. I'm the director of the Civic Engagement Office and External Affairs of AS [Associated Students]. I'm an undergraduate student. I'm entering my third year and I'm a poli sci student. I'm just incredibly passionate about civic engagement and about voting in general. And this is my first time voting in a presidential election. So, I'm really excited to just get out the vote and try to get as many people as I can. Voting. Thank you.

Heather Belk 02:46

Fantastic. That's really cool. Thank you so much for joining us, all of you. I'm really excited to hear this conversation today. I want to start with the question, what would you say to a Triton who feels like voting isn't enough given the outcome that occurred in 2016, when college students did turn out and record numbers relative to college students in years past? And given the context of 2020 and national conversations about systemic racism?

Janelle Eley 03:13

I can start and take this one if that's okay. I love this question. But I think that I would tell my generation to keep showing up. I think that one thing that we're really good at that we showed so far is that we go to protests, we organize protests, and we educate our family and our friends. And we use social media. We participate in these debates in these discussions. I think that if we back up our vote with tangible effort and things like this, it'll be so much better for us. Another thing is getting involved in local politics, but you can write to our local officials and get involved locally. I think that my age group 18- to 35-year-olds, we do make up the majority of the electorate. But we just don't show up in the numbers that we should.

Julia Anna Adrian 03:49

It's true. I would agree that voting isn't enough, but it is certainly necessary. So, we should all go and vote. And then on top of that, talk with everyone about voting. Inform ourselves and inform each other. And just be educated about what our power is as citizens.

Benjamin Mendoza 04:11

First, I want to validate that feeling. I know voting doesn't feel like enough right now. We've spent decades of watching elections not going the way folks wanted. And then having to see the ramifications of that play out in real life. It's really difficult. That's okay and that's valid. And I think we need to sit in that. But sometimes voting doesn't feel like enough. Sometimes voting feels more like a slogan and less like a solution. What I personally like to do is focus on the concrete ways of what voting actually gets us and being honest about how much work it really takes to create an effect change. Something Janelle said was voting from the top to the bottom. But the way I like to look at it is more voting from the

bottom up. For me that really hits home that local politics is where we can create the most change. One example of that I like to use is this past June at the San Diego city council meeting, there was a vote on the increased budget for law enforcement. And regardless of where you fell politically on that issue, I think it's a great example. I encourage you to look at the roles of the city council members, those folks had the power to vote to either increase the budget or not. And those members of the City Council are elected by people like you, people in other communities and the people of San Diego. Those folks are the ones that are able to make those big budget decisions. That's just one small way that your vote for this city council members do have ramifications on things that you may or may not care about. And that may affect your life or not.

Thad Kousser 05:51

I think that's a great example of where you can go beyond just voting. Because I absolutely agree that voting alone isn't enough, right? Politics isn't a spectator sport. And voting is just the first way. And one way in which we try to change minds, change policy, and change society. And so, if you -- what we've seen over the past few months is that your generation is incredibly passionate about changing social justice. And if you want to do that, well, there are a set of policies that flow from that. Finding the bills, state legislature, the San Diego City Council, the county supervisors are considering. Educating yourself on that and reaching out and directly contacting those people who represent you. Whose job it is to earn your vote in the next election, by pushing policy in the direction that we want as a society. All of those things are things that actually bring change. I say this, as someone who's worked for politicians at the state and federal level, they listen. They want to represent their constituents. They want to hear from you, especially if you take advantage of all the opportunities, we have at a university to find out about those issues, educate yourself, and make your voice heard.

Heather Belk 07:10

That's really cool. That's really awesome feedback. It actually really relates to my next question that I would love to hear from you all, because you're talking about voting down the ballot, right? Or bottom to top, which I really love that concept. Which means that there is more than maybe just these national offices that folks maybe are paying more attention to or feel like they're receiving more information about. But there's a lot more than that on a ballot, including in San Diego, right? We have a mayoral race coming up and lots of other things. And we've heard feedback from Tritons, that one of the reasons they don't vote is because they don't feel educated about what's on the ballot. They're worried that they'll make the wrong decision, because they haven't spent enough time reading the ins and outs of some of these down ballot language. How would you recommend that students get informed over the next month or so?

Janelle Eley 08:04

I definitely think that one of the reasons why my generation isn't showing up in the numbers that we need to be showing up in is because a lot of us aren't educated. And a lot of us don't even really know where to start. Me personally, a great source that I'm using to get all my information is vote411.org. It gives you personalized voter information for your county and your ballot specifically. And I do want to let Tritons know as well, the League of Women Voters is hosting a California ballot measures discussion on October 16, where they can go and get nonpartisan information and education on propositions. And really how to correctly fill out their ballot. Another thing that I'm also hosting with my office on October 24, I'll be hosting a filled your ballot to virtual zoom party where I'll be there to answer

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any questions that folks in students may have about their ballots. And then another thing that I will say too, is I don't want students to feel afraid to reach out to the student government. If they don't have anywhere to start, then feel free. Find your voting Coalition on campus, reach out find us on social media, because we'll be able to provide nonpartisan voter information and just hopefully be able to answer any questions that you may have. If we can answer those questions, then hopefully be able to direct you in the direction where you can get the answers. Then one other really great resource, the Secretary of State's website has a really great voter guide that you can also find some information on getting yourself educated.

Benjamin Mendoza 09:25

The last time I voted, I utilize KPBS voting Guide, which usually comes out around this time. They are nonpartisan, so that's something to be aware of. That there are nonpartisan voting guides and partisan voting guides. Some of the nonpartisan that I've used include Voters Edge, Ballotpedia, and many others. Some of the more partisan -- and what I hear folks talking about all the time in terms of looking for recommendations -- is looking to their political parties to see who they are to see who they have endorsed, which is one thing you could do. But I would definitely encourage you to do a little more research and not just take what the parties are saying, as the end all be all for recommendations. Definitely do your research to see what issues and what candidates best align with your values. And then vote that way.

Thad Kousser 10:19

Finding out both the facts about an initiative, but also, there are other groups that maybe shared the values of. Maybe that's a party, maybe that's an interest group. If you share their values, you might want to take their advice. One of these great sources californiachoices.org. It's another nonpartisan source. Allows you to find out all the information for yourself, but also allows you to see what all the big political players in California, what ballot initiatives that they've endorsed. Then you can create your own endorsement, like your own voter guide and share it out on your social.

Julia Anna Adrian 10:49

If you have no idea what's on the ballot right now. There's nothing to be ashamed about. You still have plenty of time to register to vote and to get informed. Listening to these podcasts is the first step and you still have time to be informed. One more thing that I want to say is that if there's really a ballot measure or a race for a position, that you really don't know what's the right vote, it's okay to not cast that vote. You can go and cast all the votes for the positions and races that you have a voice. And if there's something where you really don't know if you should vote yes or no, or who to pick, it's okay to leave that blank. Lastly, I think you can really make this fun. So, what I do with my friends is we just divide up all the propositions and everyone just picks one. And then you get together and make it a little review party, you know. You can use the Associated Student ones, or the League of Women voter ones, but it's also really fun to just do it with your friends and hear their voices.

Janelle Eley 12:00

Voting is so much more than just voting for the presidential election. It's so much more than that. We have all of these local positions, all these propositions and all these measures. And again, it's if we don't -- if we're not educated about them and we don't know what they are, then we're completely missing out on 95% of the ballot. And probably the most important part that's going to affect us in our

day to day lives. So that's just something else I wanted to add because I think that it's super important. And something that we definitely keep in mind, as election season approaching.

Heather Belk 12:27

I really love this idea of getting your peers involved and having these conversations and attending these events that UC San Diego's hosting. But then also making it fun with your friends. Because I think that hearing from others is also a real motivating factor for folks. Understanding how different ballot initiatives will realistically impact your peers or your family or your area is one of the best ways to get involved and to learn. And hearing from those that are around you, who you may agree with or disagree with, but hearing what they think and how they think it will impact them is really valuable. That actually kind of also brings us to our next question, which is just hearing from each other. I would love to hear from each of you. Julia, I know you can't vote. So, I'd love to hear from you why you are passionate about making sure that others vote. And for those of you that are able to vote why? Why do you vote?

Thad Kousser 13:29

I was lucky enough to grow up in a family that always cared about politics. Both of my parents worked in student movements in the 1960s to make things better in their in their community in their university. Throughout his whole life my father has worked with a lot of groups and putting in the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, on pushing for voting rights all across the country and in California for groups that were denied it. So, seeing how hard many groups work to get the chance to vote makes me know that every time I have that opportunity, I need to follow up on that good fortune by casting a ballot. By being educated. By knocking on other people's doors and trying to try to convince them to vote for candidates and causes I believe in. And it's something that I've passed onto my family. In the last election, I dragged my son out and he got excited about it. And we spent four hours knocking on doors and precincts in the San Diego City Council race. So, seeing how much people have struggled for the right to vote has always inspired me to make sure that I vote because I'm fortunate to have that opportunity.

Benjamin Mendoza 14:40

For me, I vote because I definitely want to see change. I believe in social justice. And I think one small way of starting that change is by voting. Voting is that first step for me. I look at it as the first step to change. Backing candidates who align with my view, who are going to bring the change I want to see. Either at a city council level, state level, or nationwide. I truly believe that voting has the power for change. And I think as a collective, if we work together, we can create that change that we want to see. The other thing is, I vote for the people who aren't able to vote. For our undocumented communities who don't have that right to vote. Who aren't able to speak out on their own behalf, and really voice what they're feeling about our current administration or current state representatives. So, voting for all of those voices who are silent, who don't have that power to vote.

Janelle Eley 15:39

I love that answer. Yeah, I think it's so easy sometimes to lose faith in the American political system. Even as someone who is sort of new to voting can also see that. But I think that ultimately, at the end of the day this is my future. And this is all of our future. And all of our voices matter. I want everybody to remember that that we truly have the power for change.

Julia Anna Adrian 16:01

Yes, thank you all for voting for me. As I can't vote in the US, though I can vote in Germany. I vote because I see it as a duty to vote. I also see it as a duty to be civically engaged. Our legislators have real power, they can decide how fast climate is going to change. They can decide what happens to international students, as we've seen just a couple of months ago, where I almost had to leave the country within 10 days. So, it's really important who your legislative representatives are. And that's why I vote.

Benjamin Mendoza 16:39

I think that is also what fuels me is knowing that our process of politics in our country is so complex and so complicated, convoluted. I want to make it more accessible to folks who don't feel like they're aware of what the measures are, what a proposition is, who the candidates are, don't even know what city council does. That's what really fuels me to get involved in these processes like civic engagement and voting and getting out the word about the census. Because getting in -- because our community deserves a seat at the table. And one way of doing that is meeting people where they are at and making all of these things a lot more accessible to them.

Heather Belk 17:20

Awesome, thank you so much for sharing that. I think, hopefully, a lot of folks who are listening to this podcast resonate with some of those things. But also feel inspired by some of those things. Recognize some of the reasons that they might be motivated to vote and to take part in this process. I do have one more question for you all before we head into closing statements, which is, do each of you already have your plan to vote? Are you going to vote by mail? Are you going to vote early? Are you going to vote in person? Do each of you already have your plan decided? Are you still sorting it out?

Thad Kousser 17:23

Well, this is a great question because this is one of the essential questions that people all across the country are looking for. And it's an area where in a study that a group of us at UCSD just published last week, we show that there's been a huge partisan polarization over how people want to vote. Now more than half of Democrats plan to vote by mail nationally and fewer than a quarter of Republicans. That means there could be a real difference between what we see on election night as the reported results, and what we see when all the legitimate ballots are cast. There's the side of me that makes me want to make sure my voice is heard in those first few totals that are reported on your TV screens. One way to do that is to send in your ballot really early. You can use things like the secretary of state's new "where's my ballot" ballot tracking app to find out just like with a FedEx shipment or an Uber. Like where it's coming, where it's going, where it's landed, right? Or the other way to get your voice heard early is to go to one of these new poll places. It won't look like the traditional neighborhood polling places. In my neighborhood, there'll be one super poll with about 10,000 voters, but I'm sure some of the youth reform folks can tell me exactly what it's gonna look like for students on campus.

Janelle Eley 19:09

I'll be using "where's my ballot." I'll be voting early through mail. I've changed my registration from San Diego County. So, I'm now in LA County voter because I've moved back home, and I'll be volunteering as a poll worker here in my own county. But I know that on campus at UCSD, we do have one polling location. It's going to be at REMAC. And it's not just November 3, it's October 31 to November 3. So,

there's really no excuse to vote this year because we have that multiple day period. We have early voting, we have mailing voting, and so I'm really excited.

Benjamin Mendoza 19:39

I will be voting early. I will also be voting by mail. Something my partner and I are doing for the first time is putting together our very own voter guide. Because we want to do that research about the ballot the measures candidates. It's something we've never really done before. But the way we looked at it is as kind of this method of accountability in terms of doing that research, so we're putting something together to share with our friends share on social media, as a fun way to keep us motivated to do that research. As well as making sure that our networks are informed about what's on the ballot.

Heather Belk 20:18

Awesome. Thank you so much. Yeah, we're really excited. Similar to the super poll that you described in your neighborhood, Professor Kousser, we will have that exact same super poll on campus. So, we're so excited for our residents to be able to have that opportunity and RIMAC Arena. And it's going to be a really neat experience to have those four days, October 31 to November 3. We're thrilled. Any closing statements anything you all feel like you want to make sure our Tritons hear about voting, being prepared to vote, where they can go or anything that you want to make sure that they know about related to voting as a UC San Diego student.

Janelle Eley 20:55

One thing that I will say for Tritons and for UC San Diego students, if you want to check your registration status, if you want to update your registration -- keep in mind you have to update your registration every time you move addresses if you want to change political parties -- you can do all of that by visiting UCSD.turbovote.org. We're really encouraging and pushing this link because we're also - UCSD is really getting out there in the Ballot Bowl competition. It's a statewide competition of colleges across the state competing to see how many students we can get registered to vote. And you can also sign up for turbo vote, even if you are an international student. If you can't vote for some other reason, you could still sign up to be a part of that election process and still feel like you're being civically engaged, and you can just get election reminders and sort of use those reminders to encourage your friends and remind your friends.

Janelle Eley 20:59

Yeah Janelle, I believe that we're in first place, right? Right now, UC San Diego has registered the most students in the Secretary -- in the UC system and the Secretary of State Ballot Bowl, right?

Janelle Eley 21:54

Yeah Heather, we are in first place, and I really want to stay in first place. So next week --

Heather Belk 22:01

We want all students in the UC system. To be fair, we also want the most. Other comments?

Thad Kousser 22:09

That's great to hear how well we're doing. In the time that I've been here at UCSD, I've seen interest in politics ebb and flow among our students. In 2014, we actually had one of the lowest turnouts of any

campus around the nation. And then in 2018, we rock -- through the hard work that a lot of student leaders were doing and that a lot of students put in, we've rocketed to the to the top of the nation. More than 70% of Tritons voted in that election. And that election changed things in California, the Congressional District and nationally. And so, whatever the outcome of this one, I'd be thrilled to see UCSD at the top of the UCs.

Julia Anna Adrian 22:44

If you haven't thought about voting at all yet, it's not too late. You can still register, you can still vote, and you can still get informed from the Grad Student Association. We co-host multiple events starting Thursday next week. Every Thursday, we will have an event surrounding some of the races and ballots that are on propositions that are on the ballot this time. So next week, we will have the Morale Issues Forum. The week after we will have a whole session just about Prop 16, which has been endorsed by the UC Board of Regents. So, vote yes on prop 16. And then the week after we will have a nonpartisan review of every other proposition on the ballot.

Benjamin Mendoza 23:33

Vote because we deserve leaders who see us, who hear us, and who are willing to act on our demands. Voting will not save us from harm, but silence will surely damn us all. That to me speaks to the fact that voting is so important and so critical. And yes, it can be simple, and it can be easy. And that's why it's so important to do. You go to the polls because not having your voice heard at this point. The ramifications of that can be catastrophic. Honestly. It's 2020 times are weird. So definitely use your power to vote this election season.

Heather Belk 24:08

I feel like that's a really awesome place to close this conversation because I feel like that's a really powerful thing to reflect on. Thank you. We do want to give you a few reminders related to voting and elections. We want to make sure that you know that the deadline to register to vote in this upcoming election is October 19 in California. So, make sure that you visit [UCSD.turbovote.org](https://ucsd.turbovote.org) to make sure that you've signed up for election reminders. That your election materials are up to date, you've got your right address up to date. And that you're ready for Election Day. We also want to remind you that in-person voting will occur over the course of four days this election year. So, you can start on Halloween, October 31. You can find an in-person polling location all the way to Tuesday, November 3. So, you have lots of options to vote and we hope that you'll take advantage of those. If you enjoyed this conversation, we'd love to invite you to continue the conversation with us by finding us on social media. To start, you can find us at @ AS UCSD CEO. From there you'll find out more about debate viewing parties, our mayoral forum, ballot initiative parties, and other ways you can get involved or get more educated. Thank you for experiencing our podcast on why voting matters. I'm Heather Belk. And I hope you all have a great week, and we'll see you back next week on Tritons Tools and Tidbits.