



We've all heard the old axiom, "If you don't vote, you don't get to complain."

But in today's political landscape, there are plenty of people out there who do vote, only to wind up with representatives who forget all about their campaign platforms the moment they take office.

This kind of "bait-and-switch" is not only hypocritical, it's unfair to those who care enough to go out and cast their ballots. It's no wonder a vast number of Americans show no interest in participating in the political process – they've seen first-hand how little their voices mean to their elected officials!

It's time for the country's leaders to stop compromising the values they were elected to uphold, and the first step in that process is listening to their constituents – not just on the campaign trail, but after they're in office and responsible for, among other things, upholding our nation's Constitution.

The good news is, there's never been a better time for candidates and legislators to engage in meaningful conversations with their constituents.

Until recently, concerned citizens were advised to "call their congressmen" when a bill they felt strongly about was up for a vote. This wasn't bad advice by any means, but it could also be an intimidating prospect.

Calling one's congressman involves finding a phone number and taking the time to get one's thoughts in order – perhaps even writing a script – before picking up the phone and calling. A lot of people get nervous calling the local Domino's to order a pizza – making a bold, opinionated statement to a politician (or, let's be honest, that politician's aid) could look like a pretty tough assignment!

Writing a letter (whether postal or email) is much less daunting, but it's also not guaranteed to get the recipient's attention. It's easy to imagine a large pile of letters stacking up on an elected official's desk, never to be opened or read.

But all that is changing, thanks to technology.

Yes, we live in an age when misinformation and propaganda from all sides clog up social media feeds and (at best) confuse voters. But we also have incredible opportunities to reach out to Americans of all ages and give them hope that there are potential solutions to the issues they care most about. And the more they see politicians who stand by their convictions – even after they're elected – and give them an opportunity to be heard, the more they'll feel inclined to participate, and the stronger we'll become as a nation.

Today's technology stands to improve political engagement in three distinct ways.

First, it can offer voters both facts and viewpoints. Platforms like [ISideWith](https://www.isidewith.com/) (<https://www.isidewith.com/>) compile massive amounts of data regarding political candidates and issues, allowing site visitors to participate in polls, engage in discussions, and discover where they stand compared to others in a variety of demographics.

ISideWith is a nonprofit, nonpartisan service; it simply allows citizens to evaluate the complex factors surrounding each issue and helps them determine where they stand, as well as which politicians stand on the same ground. This can only result in more educated voters, which is important in any democratic system.

Second, digital tools that allow for direct communication between public servants and the public they serve are becoming a thing, and everyone stands to benefit ... except those politicians who refuse to embrace today's technology and start listening.

I recently signed up for an account on [YourVote](https://www.yourvote.com/) (<https://www.yourvote.com/>), a new app that allows political candidates and lawmakers to ask their constituents questions and receive answers in real time. The app costs you nothing to download and use, and responses are anonymous, providing a safe environment for citizens to share their honest opinions. No more calling or writing your congressman and wondering if he or she got the message! If your

representatives use YourVote, they'll know exactly how you'd like them to vote on every bill that crosses their desks.

Finally, technology provides transparency, something that has been sorely lacking on Capitol Hill for ... well, ever. If you're not sure how your representative voted on a certain issue, you can go straight to [Countable](https://www.countable.us/) (<https://www.countable.us/>) and find out. Simply search for your representative and see every bill he or she has voted on and what his or her vote was. You can also share your opinions on upcoming bills with your legislators, although with this app, there is no way to know if they received your message.

Many people are fond of the expression, "actions speak louder than words," and in the case of politics, this is a truth we should all take to heart. It doesn't matter what a politician tells you; it's the choices he makes that demonstrate what's truly important to him.

We live in a remarkable age. Technologists are exploring the use of blockchain technology to improve accuracy and security in elections. Candidates are engaging with their followers via social media and opening dialogues that never would have been possible before. And tools like YourVote are giving elected officials the ability to gain insight into their constituents' most pressing concerns in real time.

As we move further into the 21st century, attention will be drawn to those politicians who do what they say they'll do and listen to the voices of their constituents, because both are critical to the future of our country.

The technological tools of today (and tomorrow) will give citizens a better chance to be heard, as well as the information they need to make more informed voting decisions moving forward. Those politicians who think they can rely on the status quo to stay in office are in for a rude awakening.

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