You only have 15 minutes and you want to find accurate political news. Who can you trust? Trying to find accurate and unbiased political news plagues all generations. Dean Barley, psychologist and director of the BYU Comprehensive Clinic, said of the media mayhem of today’s politics, “It’s overwhelming. Where do I spend my limited time to make a difference? I don’t know where to start, who to vote for, and I don’t even know who is running!”

We turned to BYU political science faculty members, including the directors of the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy (CSED) and the Office of Civic Engagement Leadership, for help understanding the complex political landscape. They suggest four ways that we can gain a clearer political view:

◉ Identify biases in news sources
◉ Verify online sources
◉ Read opposing views
◉ Participate in the political conversation

IDENTIFYING BIASES
Many citizens seek balanced sources to understand party platforms and public policies, but in today’s world it seems like there is no such thing as unbiased media. This can be frustrating to those who want to make informed decisions and are searching for the facts. Dr. Lisa Argyle, a professor of political science and CSED scholar, described the biases seen in media today. She said, "Journalists make decisions on which stories to cover, what aspects of the story to emphasize, and the words used that lead to some bias no matter how impartial outlets try to be."

With the prevalence of biased sources and “fake news,” Richard Davis, a BYU political science professor and director of the Office of Civic Engagement Leadership, knows that finding the facts can be a struggle. He said, “The average person is either going to say, ‘I am overwhelmed by this’, and check out, or they’re going to pick just one source to read.” Davis warned that looking at only one source will most likely provide individuals with skewed information. Most media
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**Analyzing opposing views**

Not only is it important to identify the quality of our sources, but we also need to read a variety of content from reputable outlets. Pope said that we can get a broad picture of politics by learning what different people think: “If we rely on one source, we are only getting one side of the story.” He says that in his own daily news search, he looks at opposing views and remembers that every publication has something to offer. Pope believes that reading widely “forces you to confront why someone who disagrees with you does.”

Argyle said that reading opposing views presents a challenge for many people: “Psychologically, everyone finds it more pleasant to read things that reaffirm our beliefs, so it is natural to gravitate to those sources that fit with our prior opinions.” To become informed, sometimes we must be willing to step outside our comfort zone. If we only seek information from sources that we agree with, we are susceptible to confirmation bias, or the tendency to interpret new information in a way that supports our current beliefs and to avoid information that challenges those beliefs. To combat confirmation bias, we should seek reputable sources that are both left- and right-leaning. Reading multiple sources and verifying their reputability can take a lot of time and cause many people to feel overwhelmed. Davis suggested that we divide our time between sources: “Take your 20 minutes and divide 10 minutes here and 10 minutes there so you can get different perspectives.” Constantly engaging in political news can also be emotionally taxing. To alleviate this stress, Argyle encouraged us to set limits. She said, “Sometimes it’s OK to disengage for a while to preserve our mental and emotional health.”

**Participating in the political conversation**

Argyle’s final suggestion for navigating politics is to move beyond lurking or arguing on social media to opening up to others in discussion. She said, “I think that talking to other people—actually having a conversation—is a constructive way that people can learn about politics and develop their opinions.”

The Office of Civic Engagement Leadership provides BYU students with opportunities to engage in politics and have these conversations with community leaders. The office holds annual workshops and conferences where students can discuss political topics with members of state legislatures, political party chairs, advocacy leaders, and public officials. The practitioner workshop held each spring includes key note speakers who discuss the importance of political engagement and civility in public discourse. As director of the center, Davis has seen the impact of these programs on students. “They’re learning and they’re growing and expanding their understanding of the political process,” he said. “And they’re engaged with community leaders,” he says.

Through this office, students also join the political conversation by obtaining a minor in civic engagement leadership. This minor allows students to build skills communicating with elected officials, helping shape public policy, and working effectively in government. As part of the minor requirements, students can work in a nonprofit or service organization or serve in a government office. Through experience, they learn to initiate civic engagement opportunities and stimulate civic engagement by others. BYU students can continue to expand their political views through CSED. In this research lab, students conduct semester-long projects on a specific political topic. Through research and literature reviews, they are able to synthesize data and make informed conclusions about political issues. Codirector Pope has seen the benefits of participating in the program: “The students are better able to design projects, think critically, and analyze politics.”

**Taking action**

By following these four steps, BYU political science faculty think we can gain a broader and ultimately clearer view of politics. Most importantly, once we feel we have gathered the best information, we need to make our voices heard by voting. Only then can our political engagement move past our phone screens and social media feeds so that we can each truly make a difference in public policy in 2020.