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2017 ANNUAL REPORT

# BALLOT **PEDIA**

The Encyclopedia of American Politics

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# PIPELINES: BALLOTPEDIA, AMPLIFIED

We live in a time of changes and the disruption of old industries. We're used to it by now. The media business is no different. We all know the profound impact the Internet has had on print media. Ballotpedia.org was born because of these changes.

In the world of the Internet, a new shift is underway. We call it the *pipeline shift*. Tech giants including Amazon, Apple and Facebook are leading the news industry in a new direction. The impact on traditional media is similar to the impact of Uber and Lyft on the taxi industry. Rideshare companies don't own their cars; they just own the *pipeline* that connects a customer to a car. In the same way, the biggest news companies of the future will not own their news. They will simply be the *pipelines* that connect readers to all of their news in one stop.

What's the world's biggest newspaper? It's Google. More people get their news from a Google search every day than through any other source. Ballotpedia was the 125th most highly-trafficked website in the country over the November 2016 election because Google loves Ballotpedia.

For years, Google was the *one place* you needed to go for your information needs. For a decade, they had a well-established captive audience. But now, they are unexpectedly in a pitched pipeline battle.

Apple also has a captive audience in anyone who owns an iPhone or an iPad. Apple is constantly improving its menu of default apps in an effort to provide *everything* its users need.

And Facebook has launched a news product for *its* captive audience—Facebook News. Not to be left out, Amazon's voice-activated digital assistant, Alexa, is aggressively adding more and better streams of information.

Watching Big Tech fight it out for pipeline dominance, we see that we need to be in all those pipelines. When we are, our content will be easily available not just for people who find their

information on Google. It'll *also* be readily available to readers who get their information via Apple, Facebook, or Amazon. This means that the support you extend to Ballotpedia is significantly boosted: One article appearing on many platforms is better than one article appearing only on Google.

For our first ten years, Ballotpedia had a simple business model: "Build it, and they will come". And build it you did! Thanks to you we now have over 260,000 articles about all things political. And they did come! We have over **850 million lifetime pageviews**. Over 60% of our articles rank in the top three of relevant Google searches. About 15% of American voters used Ballotpedia for research in the six weeks leading up to the November 2016 election.

"Build it and they will come" is no longer good enough. Our new model is "...AND meet people where they are." If people are reading the news in their email, we will be there with our specialized e-newsletters. If people are reading the news on Google, we will still be there. If people are getting their news from Apple or Facebook, we will meet them there. If people are asking political questions of Alexa, with your help, Ballotpedia plans to meet them there.

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During 2018 and into 2019, we expect our articles to be syndicated on the Big Tech platforms. We expect to be sending better emails to over one million email addresses. We expect our content to be featured even more prominently on Google. In short, we want to dominate the emerging news pipelines with our content. Through all of these growth areas, we expect to have broader reach to voters and greater impact in elections than ever before.

# WHO ARE BALLOTPEDIA'S READERS?

In 2017, we contracted with the Sorock Research Group to conduct an in-depth study of exactly who reads Ballotpedia. The results were fascinating!

Through the study, our readers revealed that facts matter to them—that our mission to avoid bias at every level has been met with approval and applause. We also heard that there aren't many places readers can turn to get rigorous, vetted, and sourced material that allows them to make up their own minds about the political scene.

## OUR STUDY SHOWED THAT BALLOTPEDIANS:

**Are more interested in truth than in affirming their own worldview**

**Are less interested in who's writing than in seeing information sourced, footnoted, and extensively researched**

**Care about an America that can disagree and yet feel united—by dialogue that is focused by a central set of facts rooted in accuracy**

**Our readers' response to the survey was overwhelming, heartening, and essential as we find ways to better serve a broad audience. Here is some feedback from our readers in their own words:**

*"When I'm on the site, I can be either 30,000 feet above the ground or in the weeds."*

Stafford, 38, MA

*"Ballotpedia lets me skip the news and go straight to the primary source. That way, I can avoid being swayed by disinformation."*

Judy, 70, CA

*"There's so much hype now – everything is totally overblown – that I have almost totally disengaged from the news I used to read."*

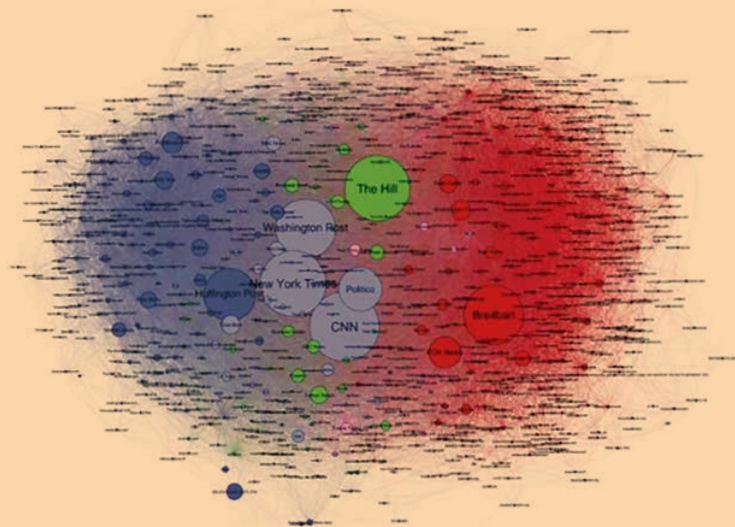
Joseph, 33, MI

*"I've lost family over sharing articles because this country is so overwhelmed and angry. Ballotpedia is that mutual place where we can avoid infighting and enable intelligent discussion."*

Cathy, 58, OR

*"I'm an information junkie, and whatever I look for at Ballotpedia I tend to find."*

Karen, 48, CA



This graph was published in the Columbia Journalism Review. They examined many thousands of stories published about the 2016 presidential election. Each story was analyzed to see who shared it on social media. The political propensities of social media sharers were also analyzed. From this comparison, the study concluded that if you think people stay in their own political news bubbles, you aren't imagining things. Stories published on conservative websites are shared almost exclusively by conservatives on social media, and vice versa for stories published on liberal websites. Seeing this reality is one thing that inspired us at Ballotpedia to better understand our readers, since one thing we know about our readers is that they do not stay in their own bubble.

# SPOTLIGHT: DALLAS COUNTY VOTER OUTREACH EXPERIMENT



In 2017, we experimented with reaching out to voters directly. Not everyone is going to look for their political information on Google, right?

In Texas, every odd-numbered year, there are November elections on proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution. A generous donor provided the funding to allow us to send a series of pre-election emails and conduct a social media campaign about the proposed amendments targeted to voters in Dallas County. The goal with this experiment was to see if a direct outreach campaign to voters would improve voter turnout in historically low-turnout elections. We were *absolutely thrilled* with the results.

## HERE ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR DALLAS COUNTY OUTREACH EXPERIMENT:

Our Facebook posts were seen **52,114 times** and received **over 260 engagements**

We sent **over 400,000 emails** in the three weeks leading up to the November 7 election.

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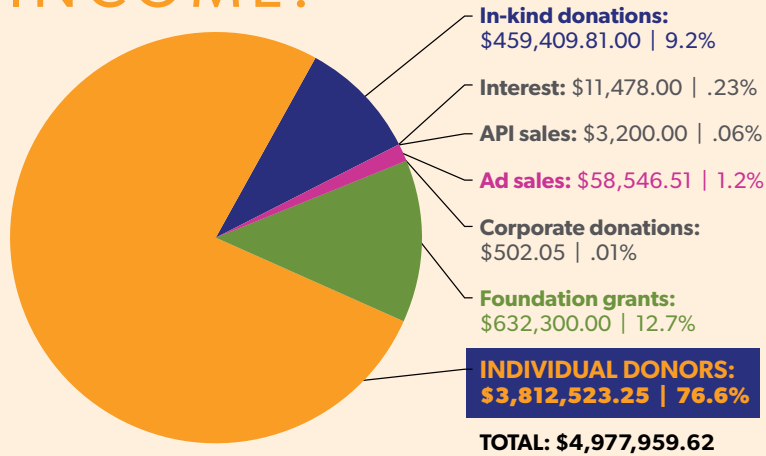
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## IMPACT:

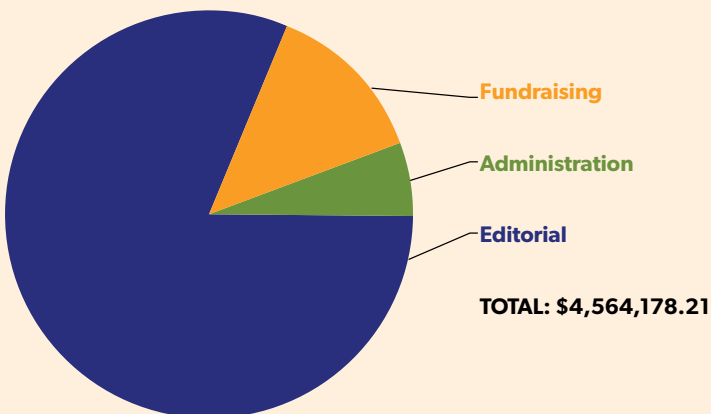
Voter turnout in Dallas County was **12% higher** than turnout in the other 253 Texas counties. In fact, 2017's turnout was the second highest in Dallas County since 2009. Additionally, the 2017 election was only the fourth time since 1993 that Dallas County turnout has eclipsed statewide turnout.

# FINANCIALS

## INCOME:



## EXPENSES:



# SOCIAL MEDIA STATS

TOTAL SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS:

**110,409**

TOTAL MEDIA MENTIONS:

**10,426**

EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS:

**183,341**

DAILY NEWSLETTERS:

**2** *The Brew and Number of the Day*

WEEKLY NEWSLETTERS:

**4** *The Tap, Heart of the Primaries, Bold Justice, and California Counter*

MONTHLY NEWSLETTERS:

**1** *Ballot Bulletin*

# MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



**Teen Vogue** reached out to us about conducting an interview regarding local politics. This resulted in Daniel Anderson being quoted extensively in their *Guide to Your Local Election Ballot*.



Ballotpedia worked with Peter Loftus of the **Wall Street Journal** on a thorough review of an Ohio ballot measure for the November 1, 2017, article, "*Ballot Measure to Cap Ohio Drug Prices Unleashes Expensive Ad Battle.*"



Claire Rush  
@ClaireARush

Follow

Shout out to @ballotpedia for being such a crucial resource for local and state elections. Ballotpedia's Daily Brew is one of the few email newsletters I actually read every day!

1:49 PM - 8 Nov 2017



Jay Ting Walker  
@Jaytingwalker

Follow

@ballotpedia You guys are amazing. I have no idea how you keep up with all the tiny local elections but thank you for your work.

7:04 AM - 9 Mar 2017



Reformist Party  
@Reformist\_OFCL

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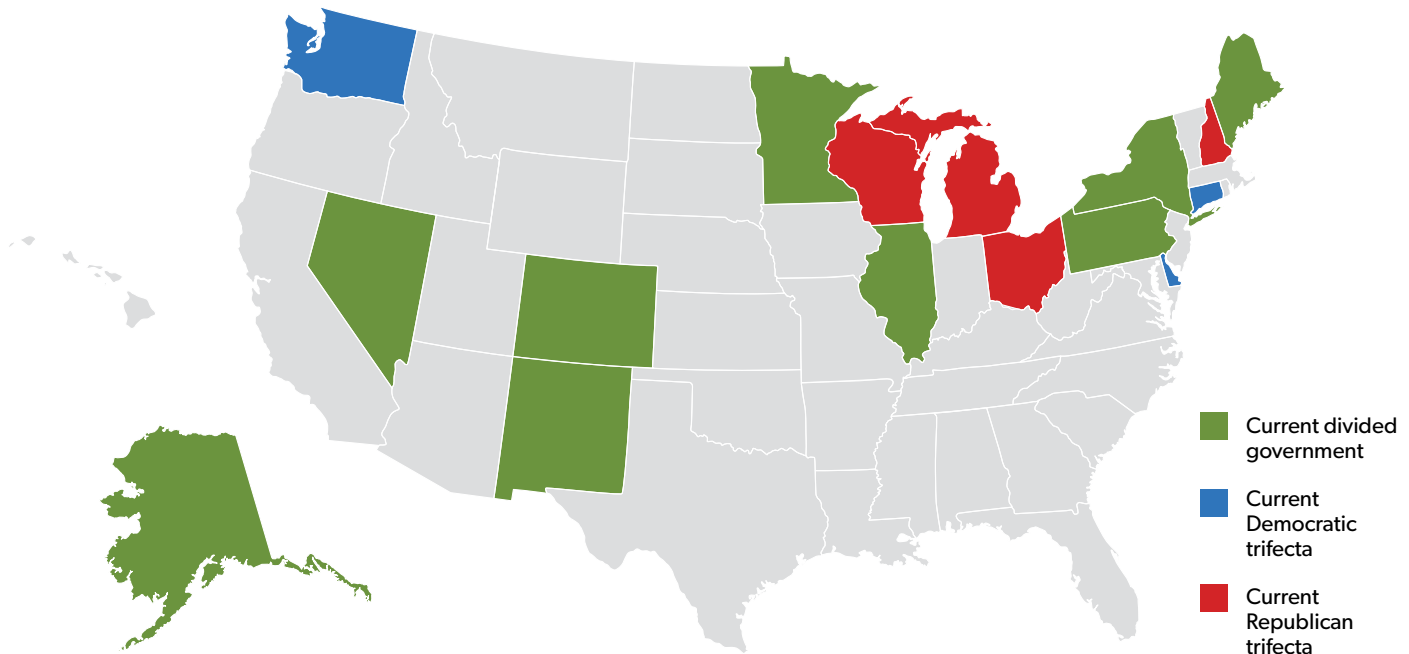
Perhaps one of the most unbiased sources for election & political news. If you're going to give your money to anyone give it to @ballotpedia

We've been working on ways to make complex political information easier to understand at a glance. One of the best ways we've found to do this is with maps that illustrate what is at stake in elections across the country. We've also come up with two terms to describe different levels of party control in state governments—*trifecta* and *triplex*.

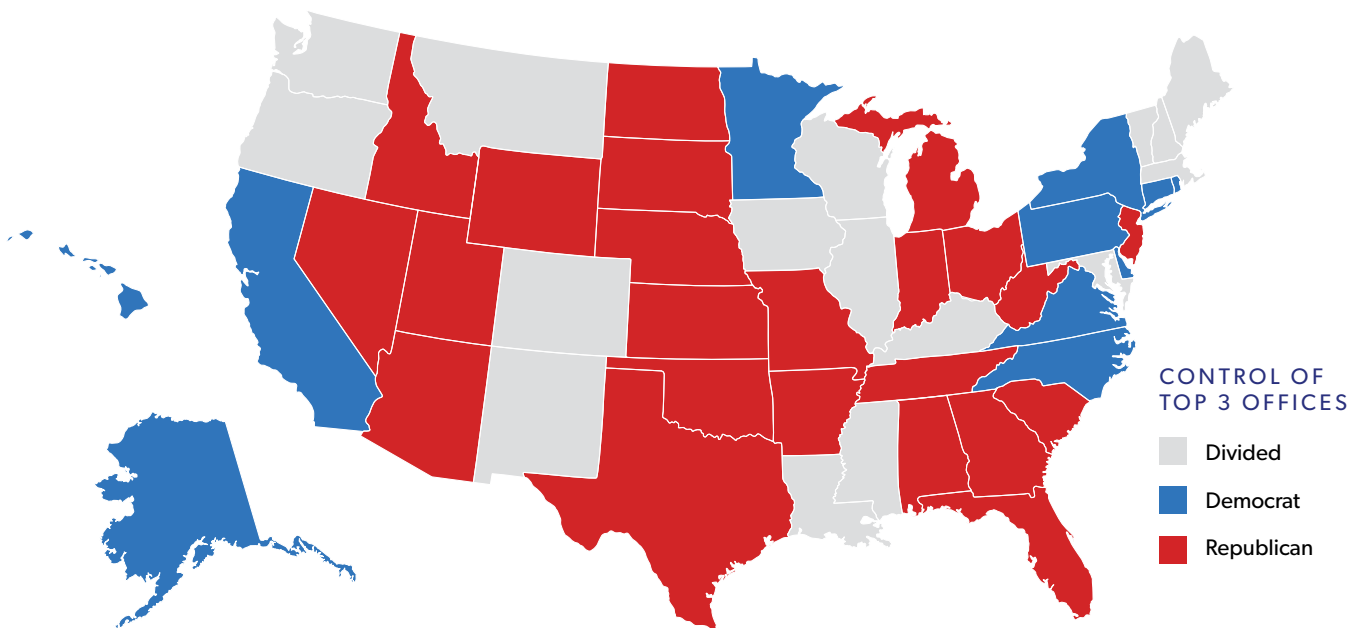
As we look to the 2018 midterm elections, we've once again taken to maps to help us convey to our readers exactly what's at stake in state governments. Understanding the composition of power can be a very effective tool in the hands of voters. Here are three maps we've created for the 2018 elections.

■ Democratic trifecta, no potential change  
 ■ Republican trifecta, no potential change  
 ■ Divided government, no potential change  
 ■ Democratic trifecta, potential change  
 ■ Republican trifecta, potential change  
 ■ Divided government, potential change

## 2018 POTENTIAL CHANGES ONLY



## MAP OF 2017 TRIPLEXES: PARTISAN CONTROL OF TOP EXECUTIVE OFFICES





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