

Not Sure How to Vote? Try John Adams' Advice.

As summer comes to a close and autumn shows its face, the time for election season to kick into high gear has (finally) arrived.

Where people fall on the political spectrum and the candidate they vote for is often influenced by the steady stream of information they get from the media. But as a number of [left-of-center journalists](#) pointed out in recent weeks, that information is increasingly one-sided. How do we ensure that we are being exposed to a variety of ideas so as to better form our political beliefs and opinions?

John Adams [supplied an answer](#) to that question in 1761. In a word? Read.

"We know it to be our Duty, to read, examine and judge for ourselves, even of ourselves what is right. ...

The English Constitution is founded, tis bottomed And grounded on the Knowledge and good sense of the People. The very Ground of our Liberties, is the freedom of Elections. Every Man has in Politicks as well as Religion, a Right to think and speak and Act for himself. No man either King or Subject, Clergyman or Layman has any Right to dictate to me the Person I shall choose for my Legislator and Ruler. I must judge for myself, but how can I judge, how can any Man judge, unless his Mind has been opened and enlarged by Reading. A Man who can read, will find in his Bible, in the common sermon Books that common People have by them and even in the Almanack and News Papers, Rules and observations, that will enlarge his Range of Thought, and enable him the better to judge who has and who has not that Integrity of Heart, and that Compass of Knowledge and Understanding, which form the

Statesman.”

We would do well to consider Adams’ words this election season. Are we basing our political ideas on a single source, or are we looking around, reading a variety of materials, and then drawing upon those ideas to formulate our own?

If more Americans followed this pattern, perhaps we would experience a more informed and civil election season than the one we’re expecting.

Image Credit: Library of Congress