GRADUATE CAPSTONE PROJECT

CONCEPT, RESEARCH AND PROTOTYPE FOR AN ORIGINAL PRODUCT

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First, a story…

A few weeks before an upcoming election….

The day of the election….

I guess I'll show up to vote anyways.

Oops… I didn't even realize these referendums were on the ballot.

I probably should have studied more.

Hmmm. Being an American is pretty hard these days.
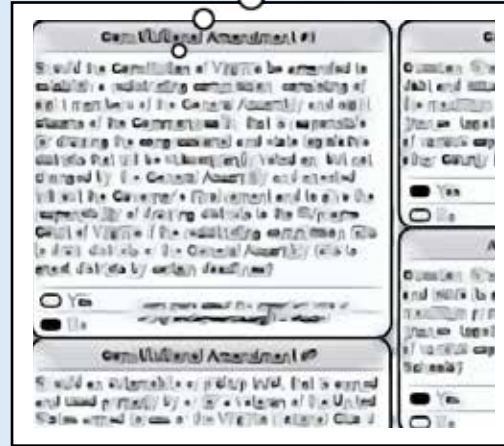
What problems are we solving?

1 Many people don't enjoy following politics but believe in the privilege of casting a vote. Voters sometimes don't feel completely knowledgeable about the candidates when it's time to cast their vote.

2 Voters can encounter petitions and referendums on the ballot that they had not studied before showing up to vote. Wording on ballots can be hard to understand and confusing.

What problems are we solving?

3 — Many political content sources do not offer balanced perspectives and are not enjoyable to consume.

4 — Voter turnout for lesser elections (voting for offices besides Presidential) is substantially lower.

Problem Statement

The current methods for understanding political issues are frustrating and confusing for many people who want to be knowledgeable before casting their ballots. The political process in the United States is limited by this frustrating barrier to voting.

What process will we use?

Double Diamond **Design Process**

General Problem Statement

Specific Problems

Iterative Process

Specific Solutions

RESEARCH	INSIGHTS		IDEATION	PROTOTYPES
User Centered Empathetic	Needs/Values Touchpoints		Brainstorm	Specific Solutions

DISCOVER	DEFINE	DEVELOP	DELIVER

developed by the British Design Council 2005
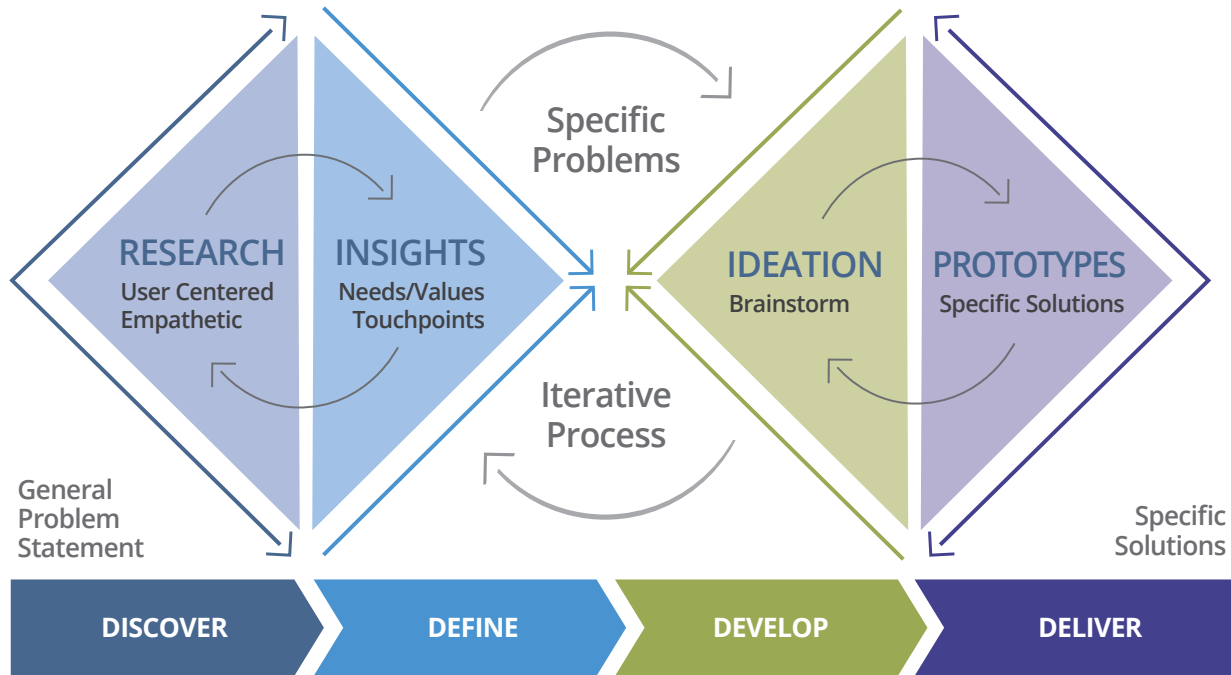
THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT:

Using Miro boards to collect ideas

English as a 2nd language

Confusing, hard to understand wording on ballot

Language

Are search engine / app algorithms filtering, suggesting, ranking content

Being Informed

How to separate opinion from fact?

Long lines

Transportation

avoiding crowded locations these days

Coronavirus

Content Sources

can get very heated, polarizing

Wonder if source is trustworthy, truthful

Being Present

MIsinformation

Too many sources, too much noise

Out of Town

political ads are mean spirited, not helpful

Barriers to casting your vote

Takes too much time

Being Motivated

wait too late to ask for mail in ballot or update registration

Being Compliant

family, friends, coworkers, church

People wait until last minute to prepare

Time

Voter Suppression

Talking about politics is taboo

Voter Registration issues

No good candidates

Minor elections not as interesting as presidential election

Where can I have an honest conversation?

Voter ID Laws

Voting Statistics
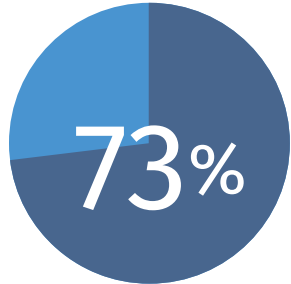
73%
of voting-age citizens
are registered to vote
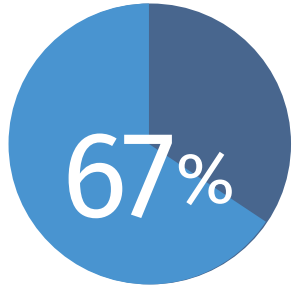
67%
of citizens 18 years and
older voted in the 2020
presidential election
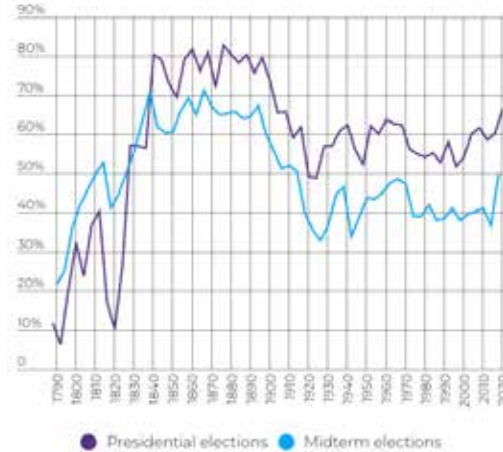(source: U.S. Census Bureau)

Voter Turnout Rates 1789 - 2020
Presidential vs. Midterm Elections

● Presidential elections   ● Midterm elections

60%
of registered
voters show up
for presidential
elections

40%
of registered
voters show up
for midterm
elections

(source: fairvote.org)

Voter Turnout by **Age**
2020 Presidential Election
Lowest % by Age Group

Ages 18-24 **52%**

Highest % by Age Group

Ages 65-74 **76%**

Why didn't you vote?

Most common reason (17.6%):
not interested in the election

Other reasons:
- Not liking the candidates/issues
- Being too busy
- Forgetting to vote

(source: U.S. Census Bureau)

13

Key Learning

20% less turnout for elections other than Presidential

Younger voters (ages 18-24) turnout at the polls
24% less often than voters aged 65-74

Too busy/forgot is a common reason
for missing a voting opportunity

DISCOVER

Preliminary Survey

Research Plan

Desk Research		Preliminary Survey		Competitive Analysis		User Interviews

20 Question Google Form Survey to capture:

Quantitative measures (such as voting frequency)

And **qualitative** (Experiences with following politics and casting a vote)
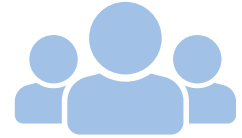
Target Research Participants

Registered voters between the ages of 18-100

Steadfast voters and those who only vote periodically

Preliminary Survey

13 participants

23-67
Age Range

State of Residence

Virginia

Utah

California

Wisconsin
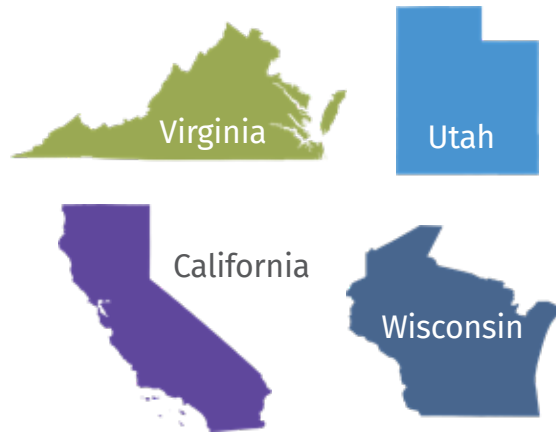
How interested are you in politics?

Little to no interest

Very interested

Preliminary Survey

How do you prepare to vote?

Watch the debates

CNN

BBC
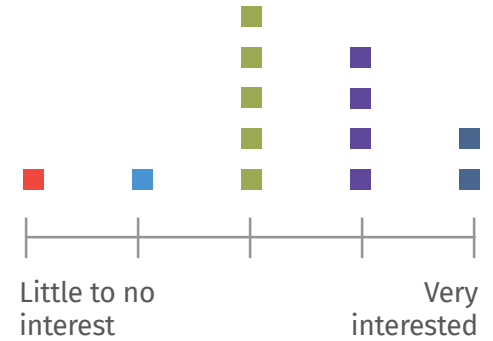
Discuss with friends

Internet

Listen to NPR

not Facebook

MSNBC

politifact.com

Just vote by party

Candidate Websites

Research who is funding the candidates

Social Media

Watch the News

100% said political content producers are biased and untrustworthy.

" There's so much conflicting information. "

" They are very biased. "

" There are a lot of bad sources that put forth convincing incorrect information. "

How Prepared Are You?

" Numerous times I had not done enough research on some of the down-level candidates. In some cases, I didn't even know certain votes were taking place. "

" I feel dumb when I don't even know the two names I'm supposed to from or when I don't understand the real meaning behind a very long worded statement. "

" I end up choosing something from a confusing choice or issue that I didn't research enough about to make an educated decision. "

Key Takeaways

Call of Duty

Survey participants stated inconvenient/unknown dates/times or not being fully knowledgeable on candidates and issues as reasons for missing a voting opportunity or arriving at polls not completely confident.

It's No Party

100% of survey participants said they don't trust the vast majority of political content sources.

Truth Be Told

Several survey participants expressed that is it is not enjoyable to follow politics. They are not sure that they can make an impact, and the political system is too complex and subject to corruption.

Bigger Office, Bigger Turnout

100% of survey participants believe in the right to vote but more than 60% don't vote in all elections: especially the elections for offices other than President.

From Insights to Action

How might we reduce barriers to casting a vote for people who believe in their right and responsibility to vote but do not enjoy following politics?

DEFINE

Target Audience
& Stakeholders

Target Audience

Registered Voters who do not enjoy following politics and believe they should vote more often than they do. Especially younger voters who have lower turnout rates compared to other age groups.

Catie College

Age 20

Single

First time apartment renter

College junior pursuing undergraduate degree in Occupational Therapy 14 hours from home.

Goals
- Find a part time job in the next month
- Balance social time and study time
- Pay off school loans

Needs

Daily to-do list for important responsibilities

Heavily dependent on technology for social connection to friends and family back home

Motivations

Would probably complete the steps to get an absentee ballot but only if it is not too time consuming and can be accomplished online

Interest in Politics

Little to no interest — Very interested

Voting Frequency One presidential election

Political Information Sources Facebook, family, friends

Technology Competence ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ High

Devices

Quote about Voting ❝I feel dumb when I don't even know the two names I'm supposed to from or when I don't understand the real meaning behind a very long worded statement. ❞

Brian Businessman

Age 43

Married, 3 young kids
Homeowner
Manager of a national insurance sales team

Goals
- Purchase new family vehicle
- Retain top talent on team
- Get to the gym more often

Needs
Ability to work from the road most weekdays

Self discipline to unplug and not check work email after hours

Motivations
Wants quality education for his kids and affordable healthcare: monitors local school system ratings and healthcare legislation.

Interest in Politics

Little to no interest — Very interested

Voting Frequency All presidential and some lesser elections

Political Information Sources Twitter, NPR, MSNBC, CNN

Technology Competence Above Average

Devices

Quote about Voting "There are a lot of bad sources out there that put forth convincing incorrect information."

Stephen Steadfast

Age 67
Married, 3 grown kids, 2 grandchildren
Homeowner
Non-profit program director

Goals
- Reduce time on social media
- Attend every seasonal theater performance with wife as annual ticket holders
- Set retirement date

Needs
Assurance that online activities are private

Smart phone apps that save time as opposed to waste time

Motivations
Values recommendations from social network

Frequently attends local government town halls

Interested in running for school board council

Interest in Politics

Little to no interest — Very interested

Voting Frequency   Every election

Political Information Sources   Debates, network news, church and family

Technology Competence   Average

Devices

Quote about Voting   "It's important to exercise our right to vote to ensure we have a choice in who we believe should be our leaders."

Key Stakeholders

Political Candidates

Would like to be correctly quoted and represented, want voters to be informed about them

Voting Authorities

Would like to ensure information about registration and voting procedures are correct, want voters to be confident in accuracy of election results

Political Content Creators

Would like to provide helpful information to voters to inform their decision

DEFINE

Competitive
Analysis

Acti Vote

Description A safe, impartial environment for voter research.

Launched 2019

Delivery Web and app versions

Installs 10,000+ (Google Play)

App Store Rating 3.8 / 5 (Google Play)

Key Features Political matrix showing user and candidates: national vs. international, government vs. individual focus, left vs. right. Real-time polling. Share opinions with candidates. Learning modules about policy and democracy.

Opportunities for Improvement A lot of promising features but all navigation is locked until user completes a 10 part political issue survey. The 2nd question is user's stance on abortion (yikes).

Reviews Reviewers complain there is not enough local election content. Reluctance to use the sharing feature because of today's political climate.

Differentiators Daily suggestions on how to Build Your Civic Habit could help users stay engaged more often than just around election time.

Value Proposition Create a habit of daily civic engagement and cast your vote in each election.

DIRECT COMPETITORS

VotingSmarter

Description	Find your political soulmate.
Launched	2020
Delivery	web and iOS app
Installs	could not find
App Store Rating	4.4 / 5 (App Store)
Key Features	Candidate Matchmaker feature is marketed as a dating app for elections: allowing users to swipe right or left on candidates and see how well they match with a candidate. Simple questionnaire with 16 issues.
Opportunities for Improvement	Not sure if they are invested in their original offering: focus seems to be changing to a Google Chrome extension that allows you to see where companies stand on political issues.
Reviews	Reviewers enjoy the simplification but not sure this app offers meaningful insights.
Differentiators	Dating app lingo and references are pervasive; Obviously targeting younger voters who are notorious for low turnout. They are proud of 1000s of hours of research condensed into 5 minutes of enjoyable politics.
Value Proposition	Fast, fun election coverage with the familiar feel of a dating app. It's like #Hinge4Politics.

DIRECT COMPETITORS

iSideWith.com

Description	Rate candidates, discuss your views.
Launched	2012
Delivery	Website only, no app version
Installs	n/a
App Store Rating	n/a
Key Features	Helpful categories for key political issues. Quiz results feed a candidate match algorithm. Frequent polls collected into data tables. Users rate candidates with qualities such as Honesty, Intelligence and Leadership.
Opportunities for Improvement	Would an app version increase user base? Pop up and banner ads are frequent interruptions. Web pages are slow to load.
Reviews	Well-known tool promoted in NY Times, PBS and educators.
Differentiators	Very active discussions with 20,000 to 60,000 replies on timely political issues. Millions of unique answers to the political issue surveys per day.
Value Proposition	Big Political Data to understand where citizens really stand on today's issues.

Voting App Feature Comparison Matrix

FEATURE	ActiVote	VotingSmarter	iSideWith.com
Upcoming Election Dates	●		◗
Voter Registration Status	●		
Voter Polling Location	●		
Local Voting Content	●		
Sample Ballot	●	◗	
Issue / Referendum Guide	●		
Definitions of Voting Terms	●		
Candidate Overview	●	●	●
Candidate/User Match	●	●	●
Political Stance Survey / Polls	●	●	●
Discussions	●		
Send Comments to Candidate	●		
Social Sharing	●		●

DEVELOP

Feature Ideas

FEATURE IDEAS:

Brainstorming In Miro

International Trade / Security
Domestic Policy
Education
Women's Issues

list key issues
for voter to
rank

Demographics:
Age, Gender,
Race, Home,
Education,
Family, Party

Recent quotes

Visual
representation of
where voter and
candidate align
on issues

Candidate
information

Voting history

Survey to capture
voters issues
most important
to them

Photo

Graphic
representation of
Conservatives to
Progressive Left
and everything in
between

Historical figure
they most
admire

**What could we create
to remove barriers?**

Dictionary of Key
Terms

Primary Elections, General
Elections, Runoff Elections,
Special Elections, and
Presidential Preference
Primaries, etc.

Concise information that
does not require a lot of
time to consume

Clear language
for petitions
and
referendums

Neutral,
trustworthy
information

Status of their
voter registration

How to request
an absentee
mail in ballot

Countdown clock
to next voting
opportunity

what you need
to bring to the
polls

This product is not for
discussion of politics in
general. It is focused on
the information you need
for the next upcoming
voting opportunity.

We are not aligned or affiliated with any
party. Our goal is to empower citizens to
make informed votes. We believe in
evaluating a candidate based on where
they stand on important issues : not on
what party they belong to.

We strive to share knowledge that
creates action. The goal of our products
is to find the flow and the essence in a
complex environment.

Sample
ballot

Notification for
Lesser upcoming
election you may
not be aware of

Address / times
for polling
location

How will we be different?

Demonstrate value and build trust before asking users to share their political stances.

Don't offer every possible feature: just the essential ones.

What are our key features?

| Neutral, trustworthy content | Reminders in time to prepare to vote and on voting day (including lesser elections) | Voter registration status and voting location | Sample ballot: increase awareness of decisions to be made | Simplify referendums and ballot language for clarity and understanding |

What do we want to build?

An app to simplify the pre-vote homework.

Introducing Vote Notes, the app to quickly and intelligently get up to speed for the next voting opportunity. No noise, no commentary, no bias. Just exactly what you need to get to the polls fully prepared.

Sketches
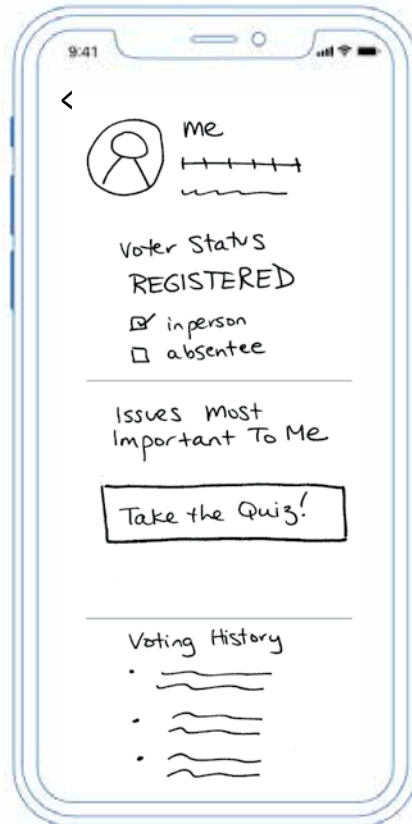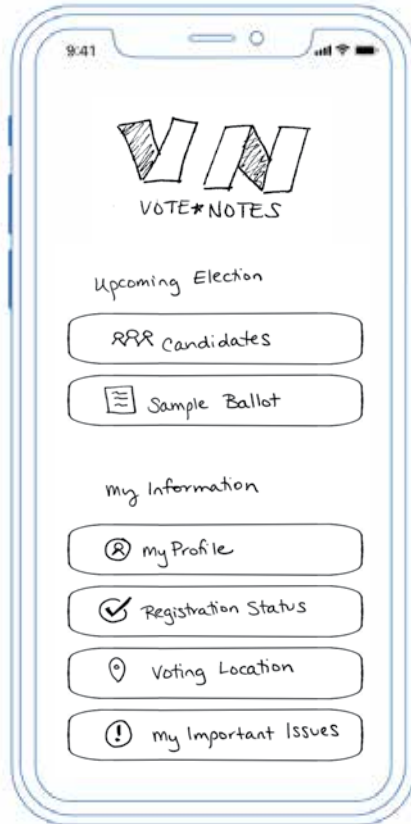
DELIVER

Prototypes

TASK FLOW 1:

Log into the app and set a reminder

TASK FLOW 2:

View your profile and specify the issues most important to you.

TASK FLOW 3:

View the candidates for the next election.

Usability Testing

4 participants selected from preliminary survey

23-67 Age Range

30 minutes In-Person

Test Plan and Results

4 individual in-person usability tests were conducted with the low fidelity prototypes. Testers were asked to complete 3 task flows.

Task 1: Log into the app and set reminders for the next voting opportunity.

Results: 4 out of 4 testers accomplished the task without difficulty.

Feedback: One tester suggested text or a visual aid be present on the screen to let the user know that more than one reminder option can be selected.

Usability Testing

Task 2: View your profile and specify what issues are most important to you.

Results: 4 out of 4 testers accomplished the task without difficulty.

Feedback: 1 tester asked why a photo was included if the profile is not shared with anyone.

2 testers commented the wording of some of the political issues was not neutral. The wording suggested a position such as Gun Rights. If the app is supposed to be unbiased, all issue choices should be altered to be neutral.

Task 3: View the candidates for the next election.

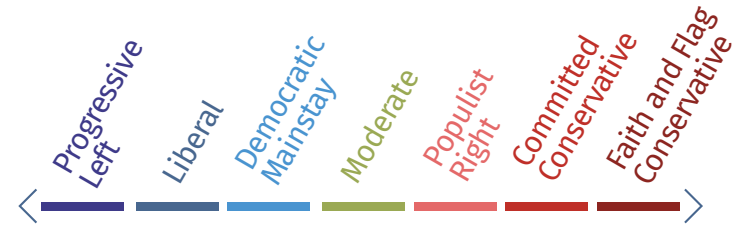**Results:** 4 out of 4 testers accomplished the task without difficulty.

Feedback: Candidate match may not be meaningful without more information to determine stance on detailed issues.

Usability Testing

Additional Findings

At the conclusion the tasks, feedback was also solicited on the political "left to right scale" that is part of the survey (task 2). Where would you plot yourself on this scale? The assumption was that this information would be needed in order to show a user which candidates had views similar to theirs (task 3).

Testers commented that they are not on the same location on the scale for every issue. They are more conservative or more liberal for different issues so the scale was not very meaningful and may be misleading.

Scale of Political Stances

Progressive Left · Liberal · Democratic Mainstay · Moderate · Populist Right · Committed Conservative · Faith and Flag Conservative

adapted from Pew Research 2021 political typology graphic

" I'm not right or left on all issues. I think about each issue independently. "

Next Steps Based on Testing Findings

Changes incorporated into the mid fidelity prototype based on user interviews and usability tests with the low fidelity prototype:

Home page
- Removed My Important Issues from Home Page navigation
- Added bottom navigation to highlight key features

Candidates
- Removed political slider
- Removed candidate matching feature that was to be based on political survey responses
- Added candidate photos, bios

Sample Ballot
- Added sample ballot including link to candidates and translation of referendums into clear language

My Profile
- Removed user profile picture and political slider
- Altered survey from ranking domestic and international issues in order of importance to agree/disagree on 3 timely political issues
- Added information for registration status, voting location including directions and link to change voter information
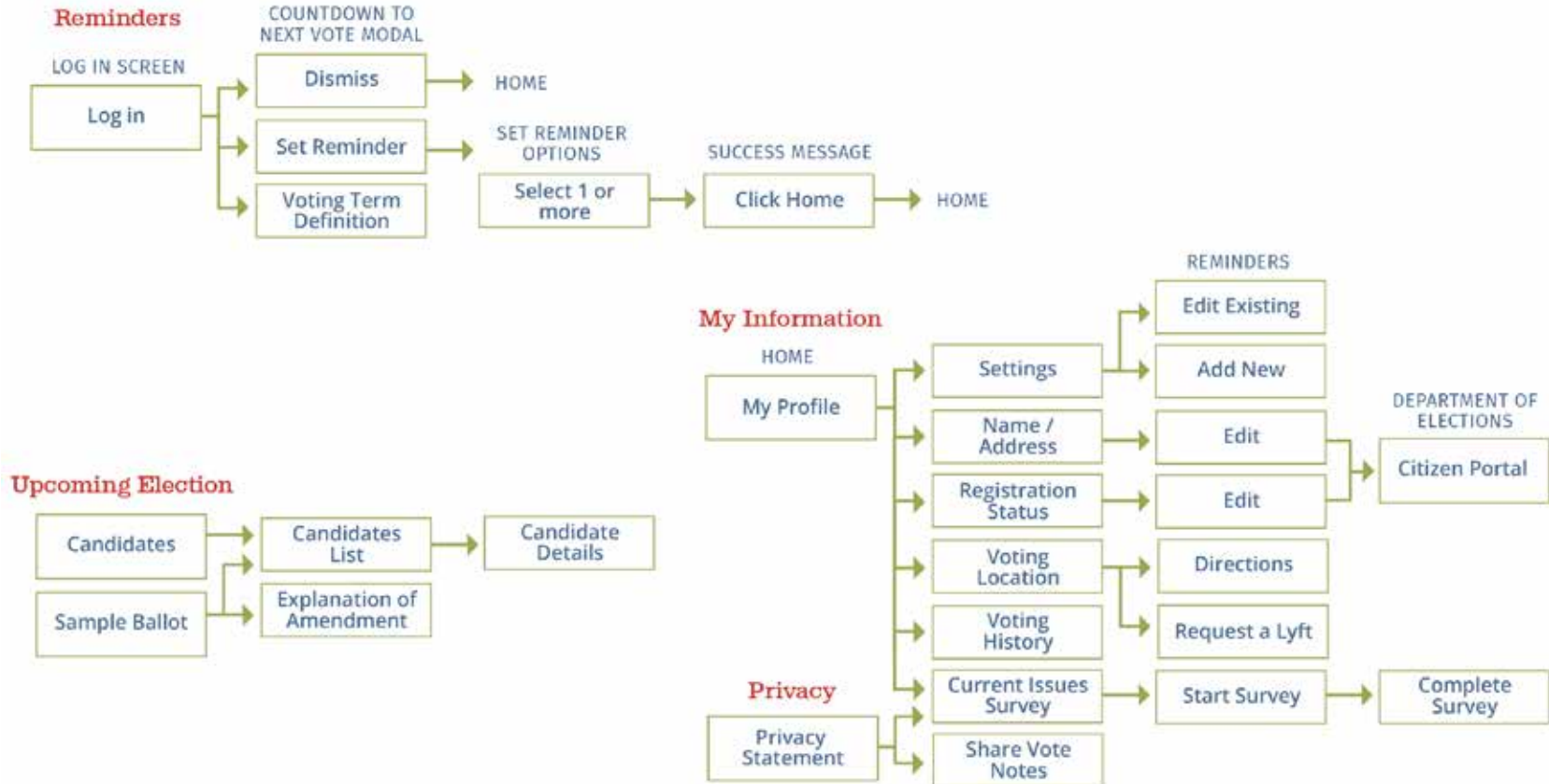
Privacy
- Added privacy page to build trust, explain why this political content source is different
- Added ability to share app

Reminders
- Added view/edit upcoming reminders page
- Push notification before local election, local impact message

Content Planning / Screen Flow

The need for this product was based on assumptions. The assumptions were confirmed or validated through desk research, user surveys, user testing and user interviews. The assumptions were turned into insights that directly informed the creation of product features.

Assumption

Solution

Political content sources are biased and not enjoyable to consume.

CONFIRMED

100% of survey respondents said political content sources are not trustworthy.

Provide unbiased, trustworthy content.

People are busy. Preparing to vote takes time: especially when content sources are not balanced.

CONFIRMED

Survey respondents confirmed not being fully knowledgeable on candidates and issues when arriving at polls.

Save people time with streamlined, neutral content limited to just the next election.

Assumption

Solution

People feel the current political climate is divisive and polarizing.

> **CONFIRMED**

Research participants were reluctant to state their stance on issues and wanted assurance of anonymity.

Don't include discussions or comments. Define privacy features and optional political survey.

A user and candidate matching feature will be key to assist with voting decisions.

> **CHALLENGED**

Competitive products with a required political stance survey received negative reviews. Research participants were reluctant to state their party affliation.

Make the political survey optional. De-emphasize party affliations. Use candidate voting history to give users insight into their position.

Younger voters are less engaged.

> **CONFIRMED**

Younger voters (ages 18-24) turnout at the polls 24% less often than voters aged 65-74.

Include younger voters in research and testing. Promote product to younger audience.

Assumption

Solution

| Local elections are less important. | > | ⊗ **CHALLENGED** | There is 20% less turnout for elections other than Presidential despite the fact that individual votes have a greater impact at the local level. | > | Encourage users to vote in lesser elections. Provide information about local impact. |

| People forget or have a hard time getting to the polls. | > | ⊘ **CONFIRMED** | Research cited forgetting or being away from home as common reasons for missing a voting opportunity. | > | Give users ability to set reminders. Provide steps, deadlines for absentee, mail in ballot. |

How will we measure success?

Reduce time and effort to make voting decisions
(quantitative)

Increase voter turnout: even in lesser elections
(quantitative)

Increase confidence in voting decisions
(qualitative)

Viewed as a reliable and useful resource
(qualitative)

Engagement Metrics

Repeat visits on app
(quantitative)

Political issues quiz completions
(quantitative)

Mid-Fidelity Prototype

Video walk-through of key features:

Set Reminders

View Candidates
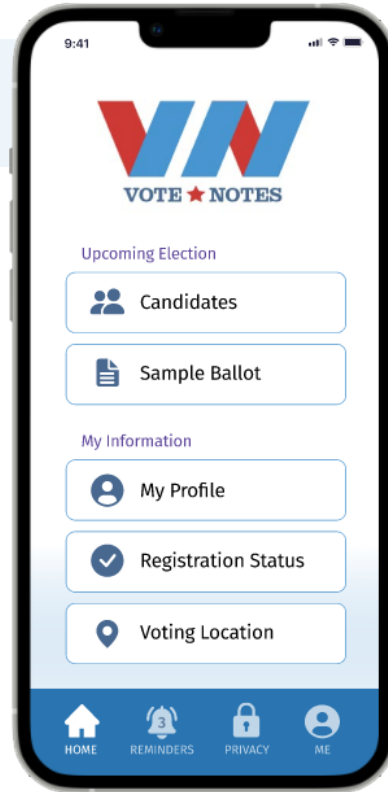
Sample Ballot

Registration Status

Voting Location with Directions

Voting History

Edit / Add Reminders

Privacy

Share this App

View Prototype Video

SOURCES FOR IMAGERY AND INFORMATION

stock photos from rawpixel.com
icons from flaticon.com

Voting statistics from U.S. Census Bureau
https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/04/record-high-turnout-in-2020-general-election.html; https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2021/2020-presidential-election-voting-and-registration-tables-now-available.html

FairVote.org
https://www.fairvote.org/voter_turnout#voter_turnout_101