

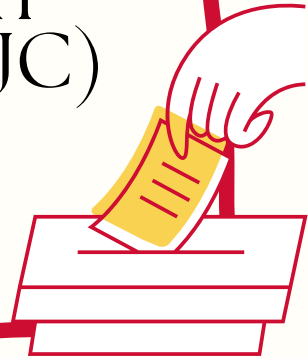
# The Inquiry.

live fact-checkers at presidential debates  
political discussions in classrooms  
democratic celebrity endorsements  
student election campaign

Fall 2024

# Should student election candidates (STUCO and JC) be able to campaign?

PRO: Sofia Chun '28



When it comes time to elect our leaders for the Student Council (STUCO) and the Judicial Committee (JC) at Choate, we make important decisions about who will shape the initiatives and verdicts impacting our daily lives. These leaders are our advocates and representatives; they ensure that students can actively shape the community we live in. But how can we make informed decisions as voters if we don't fully understand what each candidate stands for? This is exactly why allowing candidates to campaign is vital. Campaigning provides a transparent platform for candidates to share their ideas and strengthens the democratic election process at Choate.

Choate opposes campaigning because they do not want inequitable factors like economic resources (for purchasing promotional items) or media presence (promotions on social media) to put any candidate at a disadvantage. However, without campaigns, we are left with a vague sense of what candidates might bring to the role if elected. While it is possible to gather information about the candidates without campaigns, this falls far short of the insight we need to make thoughtful decisions about those who will influence policies and changes. Campaigning enables candidates to present their platforms clearly. It pushes us to see beyond just a familiar face and really understand what they stand for and how they might make a difference.

Currently, Choate gives candidates the chance to deliver one short speech. But there are obvious downsides to this. There tend to be anywhere around eight to ten people giving speeches during one meeting block, and for most audiences, the content blends together after the third or fourth speech. Candidates thus turn to sensational ways to stand out from a chorus of similar policy proposals. Instead of weighing each candidate's genuine intentions, the crowd now hinges their vote on someone's sex jokes or hysterical delivery. A criteria that is based on people's abilities to make filthy jokes or provoke a crowd doesn't sound any fairer than one that might depend on your social network (all elections already do, anyway). Instead of pooling all stakes into a 90-second speech, campaigning gives us a shot at seeing the full picture. It lets us observe how candidates act under pressure, how well they listen, and whether they're really committed to the race. One speech simply isn't enough to determine if someone is the right fit to lead; we need to be able to see their character and commitment in action over time.

There's a common misconception that campaigning primarily benefits the most popular students. But without campaigns, name recognition becomes an outsized factor. Campaigning levels the playing field by giving every candidate, whether it's the head of BoarPen or a new student adjusting to Choate, the chance to make their vision come to life. Most of the time, it's not that people don't want to get acquainted with one another but that there is no reason or occasion (like a shared class, team, or club) to make conversation. If people were not familiar with you before, the election is a perfect chance to branch out—because everyone has a vote and a stake. Without campaigns, elections would boil down to a name game. Campaigns are more substantive, making elections about ideas and real plans, not just reputation or elusive impressions.

Yes, campaigns can come with challenges, including time constraints, but that's exactly why they're such a valuable part of the process.

Leadership isn't easy. If a candidate is serious about representing their peers, they'll need to figure out how to handle those challenges, just like they'll have to as STUCO or JC reps. Managing a packed schedule is part of the job. If a candidate can't find the time to balance campaigning with their other responsibilities, how will they cope with the demands of leadership once elected? Campaigning allows us to see candidates in action, especially under pressure, which is crucial for understanding how they'll perform if elected. They are a proving ground for leadership. If a candidate can't clearly express their ideas or listen to the needs of the student body during a campaign, how will they manage when faced with real challenges on STUCO or JC?

Finally, taking a stand for campaigning does not mean that the school cannot set financial guidelines to ensure fairness for all candidates. In the same model as club funds, there could be a budget for each candidate's campaign. The specific amount would depend on our school administration, but in order to ensure that students are not spending out of pocket, all purchases could go through school staff (like how the SAC purchases requested items for club events). Managing resources for merchandise, form events, and other initiatives has always been an important part of representatives' work. Why shouldn't we assess a candidate's ability to maximize limited funds during the election?

At Choate, we pride ourselves on being a community that values open dialogue and thoughtful leadership. Elections should be more than listening to a speech and just filling out a ballot. Allowing students to campaign ensures that our elections are based on demonstrated hard work, creativity, and good ideas. It makes sure that leaders are chosen for the right and real reasons and keeps the entire school community engaged in the process. Let's create a campaign culture at Choate so we can select leaders who will listen to us and work to make our school a better place for all.

# Should student election candidates (STUCO and JC) be able to campaign?

CON: Ethan Sun '27



Picture this: You're walking down the school hallway when a classmate thrusts into your hands a brightly colored flier with their name and a catchy slogan. You've seen this same layout on someone's Instagram story or the occasional t-shirt in the dining hall... It's the second half of the school year, and elections for student council and judicial committee positions are in full swing. That classmate is one of many campaigning for your vote. But do these shirts, messages, and social media posts really help you make an informed decision? While they might stir up a few grins and cackles, more often than not, these campaigns do little for the election itself. Not only are campaigns distracting, but they also unfairly overshadow qualified candidates. Fairness and competence should be paramount qualities for roles involving the student council or judicial committee. Elections without campaigns allow for a more equitable, focused, and genuine election process.

Currently, the Choate policy prohibits candidates from engaging in any form of campaigning activities. Only those running for student council president or vice president may craft a poster of their choice and put it up in certain locations. Instead of campaigns, elections rely on students' familiarity with the candidates through interactions within the community and information provided in their short speeches. While this may seem restrictive, it levels the playing field and allows the Choate electorate to focus on what truly matters.

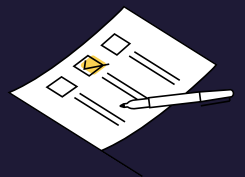
Firstly, campaigns raise the issue of equity. The Choate community includes students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and encourages equal opportunity. Therefore, it is unreasonable to provide unfair advantages to those with greater financial resources in the election for student leadership positions. Elaborate campaigns often involve giving away custom merchandise like flyers, shirts, hoodies, caps, and pins, all with a price tag not covered by Choate's budget and may not be affordable to every student. Therefore, maintaining a campaign-free election process ensures that all students start on an equal footing regardless of financial background. On top of demanding extensive economic resources, campaigning also requires a significant time commitment. Many students balance multiple roles and responsibilities on campus, taking challenging classes and participating in sports, ensembles, and clubs while maintaining their social life. Adding the pressure of creating and running a campaign to an already packed schedule could be overwhelming for many students who might have more commitments than others. Even worse, someone who has a promising vision and a strong work ethic might be discouraged from running solely because of the campaigning process. This is a rampant issue for Choate students who wish to try out a leadership position (and would be excellent for that role) but become disheartened by the sheer volume of essays they have to draft—especially if the process coincides with midterms or term-end. Instead, our current system allows candidates to present themselves authentically without spending hours on self-promotion in what is essentially a marketing contest.

Another consideration is the impact of campaigning on our school's environment. With campaigning, hallways would end up plastered with posters, social media would be flooded with campaign content, and students would wear t-shirts with campaign phrases. This over-emphasizes the election process and could create divisions among students in their voting choices, distracting them from their already packed day-to-day. These pieces of merchandise would likely be thrown out after the election process, surging unnecessary waste.

Imagine having campaign hoodies sit at the bottom of your closet collecting dust, or worse, having to figure out if pins are recycling or trash!

Perhaps there is an argument to be made that campaigns are necessary to inform voters about candidates' abilities and aspirations. However, the current structure at Choate already provides opportunities for students to demonstrate what they represent. For example, STUCO powers transparency through social media, regular in-person updates, and town halls where students can question and evaluate the performance of their representatives throughout the year. In addition, the interconnectedness of the community means that students can form an impression of what their potential JC or STUCO reps are like through daily interactions. This ongoing visibility already ensures that elections are based on a candidate's proven track record and genuine interactions with others rather than promises made during campaign season. And, of course, the speeches are arguably the best part of the election process. Speeches provide a window into the candidates' promises, personality, and public speaking skills. I ran for student council successfully in my third form year. In my speech, I was able to showcase both my humor and my ambitions for improving the school (my vision for the future included a promise to reach Mars before Deerfield). Creative expressions like these allow candidates to demonstrate both their personality and ideas, making the campaigning process unnecessary and trivial.

While allowing campaigns might seem appealing on the surface, our current system already offers numerous benefits that align with Choate's values and goals, promoting equity, a focused atmosphere, and a genuine showcase of leadership based on merit. Roles on the judicial committee and student council require competent individuals elected by their peers, and elections without campaigns allow for leaders to be chosen based on their ideas, character, and capability to make a positive impact at Choate. By continuing our current system, we allow true leadership to shine over slogans and merchandise.



# Should there be live fact-checkers at Presidential debates?

PRO: Francesca Howard



Politicians lie. They embellish their resumes, cherry-pick data, and distort the truth like it's their job—because, in many ways, it is. Politicians will say whatever earns them the most applause, retweets, and, most importantly, votes. From unintentional exaggerations to outright fabrications, misleading statements have long been at the heart of political discourse, and social media has made it even easier for misinformation to spread faster than ever before. According to a 2020 study conducted by MIT, false news stories are 70% more likely to be retweeted than the truth. As a result, voters are left struggling to discern between fact and fiction. This widespread lack of transparency poses an existential threat to the integrity of the democratic values our nation holds dear.

A healthy democracy relies on a well-informed electorate. In his Farewell Address, George Washington urged the new nation to create and nurture “institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge” in ways that would secure an “enlightened” public. Similarly, the Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that in a republic where the government derives its power from the consent of the governed, the ability of the electorate to make informed choices among candidates is of utmost importance. As former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis once said, “The greatest menace to freedom is an inert people.” Hence, building a well-informed electorate is essential to a constitutional democracy.



However, these ideals often are swept under the rug the moment presidential candidates hit the debate stage. Presidential debates are supposed to serve two key purposes: allowing candidates to explain their policy positions and challenge their opponents' ideas. But both functions depend on one thing—truth. In a perfect world, we'd have candidates who speak only the truth and respectfully exchange well-researched ideas. But in reality, presidential debates have strayed from their purpose, becoming platforms for candidates to push their own agendas without any regard for the truth. As a result, voters are not just poorly informed but also horribly misinformed.

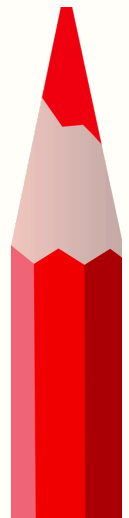
There is a simple remedy to this growing problem: fact-checking. Fact-checkers are moderators who, at set intervals throughout a debate, can momentarily pause their questioning to correct falsified information. Since debates fail to provide sufficient opportunities for candidates to correct themselves and each other, it is crucial to incorporate live fact-checking into our debate protocols to promote an informed citizenry and preserve our democracy.

Having fact-checkers present will, in and of itself, lower the likelihood that politicians will slip up. Politicians often draw conclusive opinions without backing them up with evidence. If they know they'll be challenged, they'll either refrain from making misleading claims or be forced to substantiate them. By incorporating real-time fact-checking into debates, we would discourage candidates from lying and set the record straight immediately. The two will work hand in hand. As former President Barack Obama put it, "A democracy requires accountability, and accountability requires transparency."

There is clearly a right and wrong way to approach fact-checking. More often than not, critics of fact-checking object not to fact-checking itself but rather to how it's executed. Hence, the real question should not be whether fact-checking is necessary, but how can we ensure it is done properly?

For one, beyond their role as moderators, fact-checkers are journalists with a responsibility to uphold the truth. That means they must double-check everything and know their facts cold. In addition, it is important for fact-checkers to stay impartial and apply the same level of scrutiny to all candidates. Someone who denounces only one side is not a fact-checker but rather a tool in a political campaign. Everybody lies, and fact-checking should reflect that. But it is important to note that fact-checking should also not be applied haphazardly. Instead of butting in to clear up minor discrepancies—like whether unemployment was 10% or 12% in 2018—fact-checkers should focus on pointing out more egregious distortions. This would ensure that the fact-checking process is not nitpicky. Moreover, when done right, fact-checking should not derail the flow of debates. Fact-checkers do not need to give lengthy, drawn-out explanations whenever a candidate distorts the truth. Fact-checkers do not need to be pedants. The purpose of their interjections is not to have their ‘gotcha’ moment in the spotlight. Rather, they can deliver quick, concise corrections necessary only to ground the conversation. They exist only to serve the American public.

This is not a Republican or Democrat problem. It is a truth problem, and a truth problem requires a truth solution. We live at a time when over 70% of Americans don’t trust the government to do the right thing. We need transparency now more than ever. Live fact-checking during debates is the most effective way to combat misinformation, hold politicians accountable, and restore overall trust in the electoral process.



# Should there be live fact-checkers at Presidential debates?

CON: Sofie Leenheer '27



On September 10, 2024, the highly anticipated debate between Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump took place, leading many voters to dispute the topic of live fact-checking. Many bold and, in some instances, completely false claims were made during this debate and many prior debates. This raises the question of whether or not live fact-checking should become an integral part of these events. The truth of the matter is that fact-checking would have detrimental effects on each candidate's campaign and would lead to more harm than good. While the candidates should not be given a free pass to use complete lies to make their arguments more convincing to voters, they should not be fact-checked on every claim they make in real-time. Live fact-checking during Presidential debates would undermine the respective candidate's ability to persuade their voters, take away valuable time from the debate, and is simply not necessary.

First, adding the aspect of live fact-checking to Presidential debates would significantly take away from the individual candidate's ability to convince their voters. These debates are the first time candidates can address the nation on a large scale, with this past debate obtaining over 67 million viewers. How the candidate carries themselves and chooses their words during this debate is one of the most crucial parts of their campaign. Live fact-checking would take away a candidate's ability to be persuasive toward voters, which, in a sense, is the entire point of a debate: to prove that your side or take on a topic is stronger than the opposing side.

More importantly, the statements that voters believe require fact-checking are often just broad statements that do not have one true answer. In this past debate, Kamala Harris made the claim that "Donald Trump left us the worst attack on our democracy since the Civil War." Although many have argued that this claim holds no truth, there is no clear answer that everyone can agree upon. This is the result of the frequent usage by candidates of phrases such as "the worst" or "the best" so as not to be held accountable for incorrect statements, as it can be argued that it is simply an opinion and not a fact. Fact-checking these hyperbolic statements complicates a Presidential debate. How can a statement be fact-checked when it does not have one completely agreed upon or correct answer? Therefore, adding live fact-checking to these debates would not only undermine the candidates' messages but also damage the fairness of the debate.

Proponents of fact-checking fail to address this key question: why would it be necessary to have live fact-checking when journalists and news networks can do so in the aftermath of the debate? Adding the component of fact-checking during the debate would take away valuable time by pushing a candidate to admit they were incorrect, time that could be better spent asking pressing policy questions. More importantly, if a candidate says something completely false during a debate, it should be up to the voter first to try and see through their lies before being told by an external source if they were correct or not. It would be best for both candidates to speak freely during the debate, especially if what they are saying is false. This allows voters to discern their political ideas without external intervention.

Thus, live fact-checking would not only complicate Presidential debates but also have detrimental effects on candidates' campaigns. It is clear that this system should not be implemented in future Presidential debates.



# Should teachers express personal opinions on the election in class?

PRO: Addy Hawthorne '27



Think back on your previous Choate teachers. How accurately do you think you could guess who they'll be voting for in the 2024 election? Probably very accurately. This is because teachers, particularly in the humanities, express their political opinions all the time. At some point in your Choate career, I am sure that you have had a lesson on how sources that are overly partisan aren't reliable. Your teacher has probably also given you an example of a source they think can be counted on to be free from any bias. But the source that your teacher chooses as the best source often reflects their political opinions. The question that we should be asking ourselves is not whether teachers should express their political opinions but rather if they should be upfront about it. Instead of pretending to not let politics influence their lessons, teachers should be open and honest about their political biases and tell their students to always be skeptical.

Achieving neutrality is impossible. And by trying, teachers usually end up avoiding important but polarizing subjects. From what I have witnessed, teachers try to be politically unbiased by doing one of two things. They either try to pick sources they see as completely neutral or they try to showcase a variety of perspectives. Both are counterproductive. If a teacher has to pick one source that they deem free from political bias, they have to decide what they think is the neutral or centrist view to have.

When studying the Civil War, for instance, students in many Southern states still learn that it was fought primarily over states' rights. Their teachers see this as an unbiased opinion and choose textbooks accordingly. Instead of recognizing this as an interpretation that could be questioned, students may understand this as definitive truth.

The other and far more common approach at Choate is to try to capture all sides of a complex issue. Similar to the "choose the unbiased source" option, this inevitably implicates a political choice. First of all, there are countless angles on the vast majority of issues and at least some of them don't deserve to be showcased. I don't think, for example, that students at Choate in their science classes should be taught that the Earth might be flat. But if the end goal is to present a full range of viewpoints as an attempt at impartiality, then this would be necessary.

Teachers often try to get around this problem by giving one right wing, one left wing, and one centrist interpretation of an issue. But, there is no single right wing take on any issue. Should a teacher choose Donald Trump's take or Chris Christie's? On the left, President Biden's or Jill Stein's? Even centrism is multilayered. So should this teacher assign an article from CNN or The Wall Street Journal?

Now that we've established how neutrality is impossible, why is it better for educators to be upfront about their political opinions? The answer is that when they do so, students do not blindly accept their teacher's opinions as the "correct" ones. An understanding that teachers have their own opinions and biases leads students to try thinking for themselves. The constructive skepticism that comes with transparency will incentivize students to question their teachers and more broadly all of their sources.

Understanding what kind of bias a teacher has is an important step. It allows students to contextualize what they are learning and understand it more broadly.

Even if students know their teachers may have biases, knowing what they are more specifically gives students the ability to push back or understand alternate views. This doesn't have to be a grand declaration of partisanship. It can simply be a quick comment to students about teaching through a certain lens and an explanation as to why you tend to do that.

Teachers are also then able to talk about polarizing issues in the classroom. It is difficult for any teacher to discuss events like January 6th without conveying to their students which political candidate they support. This should not mean that they just never talk about it. When they stop facing the impossible pressure to be neutral, they will finally broach the topics that truly matter. Neutrality should not be the gold standard.



# Should teachers express personal opinions on the election in class?

CON: Gopika Sheth '27



Classrooms are meant to be places of exploration where students can freely develop their ideas and participate in open, unbiased discussions. But what happens when a teacher, the person tasked with guiding students toward knowledge, starts sharing personal opinions on the election? Suddenly, the learning environment feels less like an open forum and more like a stage for persuasion. Teachers should not express their personal views on elections in class because it introduces bias, pressures students to conform, and risks alienating those who hold different opinions. The classroom should remain a neutral space where critical thinking, rather than political influence, takes precedence.

When teachers share their political opinions, they introduce bias into the classroom. Teachers are figures of authority, and their words naturally carry more weight due to their role as educators. Students tend to trust and value their teachers' perspectives, and while this can be beneficial in many contexts, it becomes problematic when teachers discuss their political beliefs. A teacher's endorsement of a specific candidate or party can blur the line between teaching and influencing, leading students to believe that their teacher's opinion is the "right" one. This can interfere with the educational goal of promoting critical thinking and independence. Even if the teacher encourages debate, students who agree with the teacher may feel validated, while those who disagree may feel unsure about voicing their own opinions.



This dynamic overshadows the classroom environment, preventing students from freely exploring other viewpoints. Also, the danger lies not only in apparent endorsements but also in subtle biases that can shape how issues are presented. Even an offhand comment about a presidential candidate can shape students' perceptions and limit their exposure to balanced perspectives. Teachers should remain impartial facilitators of discussion who ensure students have access to all sides of an issue to make informed decisions.

Furthermore, teachers who express their views on the election will inevitably pressure students to conform. Even if teachers do not intend to do so, power dynamics in the classroom will likely discourage students from voicing opposing perspectives. A student might feel reluctant to challenge a teacher's perspective—not only out of respect for authority but also out of fear of potential academic consequences. Although most educators strive for impartial and meritocratic grading systems, the anxiety of marking a bad impression with something like a clashing political view will never go away. This internal pressure can quash the intellectual diversity that classrooms should nurture. Instead of encouraging debate and discussion, sharing political opinions in class creates an environment where students are more focused on navigating the teacher's expectations than on developing and communicating their thoughts.

To zoom out a bit more, how political opinions affect individual students can also impact the entire class dynamic. Classrooms are meant to be inclusive spaces where students from all backgrounds and beliefs feel respected and valued. When a teacher expresses a political opinion that aligns with some students' views but contradicts others, it can create a divide in the classroom. Students who agree with the teacher may feel empowered, while those who disagree may feel isolated or even marginalized. This increases the likelihood of a subset of students dominating the discussions (which have academic repercussions in a course that weighs participation grades) while the others turn to self-censorship. Consider someone who hails from a politically conservative family but attends school in a predominantly liberal area.

If their teacher frequently expresses progressive views, the students might feel hesitant to share their opinions, fearing judgment or ridicule from both the teacher and their peers. Over time, the classroom becomes an echo chamber where one political viewpoint is reinforced. Such is especially concerning in an already polarized political climate. As active shapers of a whole generation of young people, teachers should be careful not to exacerbate this divide. Instead, educators should encourage constructive dialogue and work to highlight a range of perspectives through neutral presentation.

While some may argue that teachers expressing their political opinions can generate important discussions and model civic engagement, the risks far outweigh the benefits. Yes, encouraging students to be engaged citizens is important, but this is far more likely when teachers do not openly discuss their own standings. Instead of sustaining a safe environment, sharing election opinions introduces bias, creates pressure to conform, and alienates students with differing views. By upholding neutrality, teachers can maintain the classroom as a space for open dialogue—a place where students feel empowered to form and express their own opinions without judgment.

# The 2024-25 Masthead

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We invite all to pick up their pens  
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