How to be a Smart Citizen

Timeline: This event plan has multiple videos and activities that should last about 2 hours. Times listed are estimates and may vary based on group size and moderator style. **If desired, you can divide it into two sessions.**

Introduction (3 minutes) Remember to keep it short!

- Introduce yourself as a YALI Network member who wants to start an important conversation in your community about elections and how to be 'savvy citizens'.
- Briefly explain what the YALI Network is.
- Highlight the main themes of the event:
  - **Importance of Voting:** Democracies need active, informed, responsible citizens to be healthy. Voting is one of the core functions citizens must fulfill.
  - **Promoting Peace:** Elections should never be violent. Everyone should urge their communities to refrain from violence during and after the elections.
  - **Importance of Transparency:** Transparency and good governance are fundamental to society and impact everything from the management of resources to economic growth to trust in government.

Explain the Structure of the Event (1 minute)
Give participants an agenda to follow for the session. Walk them through what to expect. At each item in the agenda, explain all directions and activities fully and clearly before you begin.

Ice Breaker (10 minutes)
Note: Watch out, these can take a long time if everyone introduces themselves to the full group!

Suggested Activity: Introduce Yourself in Pairs in 20 Words or Less
Have participants choose a partner and introduce themselves to each other in 20 words or less:
- Tell participants to include their name, where they are from, and one elected leader (past or present, native to your country or from another country) that makes them feel inspired.
- Ring a bell or ask people to switch partners at 1 minute. Repeat this 3 or 5 times.

[For more ice breakers, see http://www.icebreakers.ws/]

Segment 1: Elections and Voting

Activity: Small Group Brainstorm (10 minutes)
Challenge small groups to name 6 or more reasons voting is important in a democracy.
- Split participants into groups of 3-5 (as appropriate for event size).
- Give 3-5 minutes for brainstorming.
- Have one or two people from each group present their ideas to the whole group.

Activity: Large Group Discussion to Summarize Activity (5 minutes)
- Did most groups come up with the same reasons?
- What were the most unique examples presented?
- How do these ideas apply in your country?

Activity: Watch Lesson #1 from the YALI Network Online Course, Understanding Elections and Civic Responsibility: Getting the Most From Your Vote (7 minutes)

Find the lesson at yali.state.gov/courses/elections/

Activity: Large Group Discussion (15 minutes):
Lead the discussion with these questions:
- How do the examples from the small group brainstorm on why voting is important compare to the content presented in the video? What was similar or different? What was surprising?
- What issues are important to you and your community for elected officials to address? What issues have candidates talked about? Have their promises been general or specific?
- Lots of people complain about vote buying, but it continues to be a problem. In a democracy, an elected official owes people the policies promised during his or her campaign. But when voters accept a little bit of cash instead, they weaken the 'social contract' that holds the elected official accountable for governing well on behalf of the needs of the people. What are your ideas for reducing or eliminating vote selling? How can you convince voters that choosing candidates who can deliver results will pay off much more than the cash parties offer for their vote?

Segment 2: Promoting Peace

Activity: Read the [#IPledgePeaceUg Takes a Stand Against Election Violence](#) Blog (5 minutes)
You can provide the link to the article for people to read on their own devices, provide printed paper copies of the article, or project it onto a screen for a group reading. Do whatever works best for your group.

Activity: Discussion in Pairs (10 minutes)
After reading the blog, share these questions for pairs to discuss:
- What is election-based violence?
- What do they think are the main goals of inciting violence during an election season?
- What examples of election-based violence have the participants witnessed (either in their own country or notable examples from recent elections)?

Activity: Large Group Discussion (15 minutes)
Lead the discussion with these points:
- How have youth played a role in inciting election-based violence? Why?
- What is grassroots organizing? How can youth use that method to take a stand to prevent violence in their local elections?
- What can other engaged citizens do to voice their disagreement with a particular candidate's stance or irregularities in the system governing their country's elections without using violence?

Segment 3: Encouraging Transparency and Good Governance

Activity: Videos (10 minutes)
Watch the selected "What's the Harm" videos below (each is 1-2 minutes long):
- Buying Votes: yali.state.gov/harm-vote-buying
- Resisting Transparency: https://yali.state.gov/whats-the-harm-public-officials-resist-transparency/
- Violating Community Trust: https://yali.state.gov/whats-the-harm-in-violating-community-trust/

Activity: Large Group Discussion (10 minutes)
Select one of the videos to lead a discussion around (You can have the group vote). Invite participants to discuss the themes they identified from the "What's the Harm" video using the questions below.

Buying Votes
- Is the candidate's proposal in the video ok or not?

Continue the discussion with these points:
- Vote buying instead of competing fairly for votes, they show a willingness to use illegal means in the political process. They will see it as a successful strategy and use it again in other areas.
- Vote buying interferes with citizens' right to freely decide who represents them and their ability to hold elected officials accountable. If a candidate believes all they need to do to be elected is pay off voters, they have no incentive to be responsive to issues their constituents care about — issues like education and unemployment.
- Vote buying deters aspiring political leaders from running for office because it suggests that money, rather than ideas or experience, is how to win an election.

Resisting Transparency
- Do you think there's ever a good reason for an elected official to "bend the rules?

Continue the discussion with these points:
- Without transparency in government, the public cannot find out if their officials are acting for the right reasons or the wrong reasons, and that erodes their faith in government, regardless of whether the officials are actually corrupt.
- There has to be a balance - having enough transparency that the public can be watchful and can be informed and decide whether or not an official's behavior crossed a legal line, [or] whether or not it crossed an ethical line.
- When you have transparency, people can make their own judgments and determinations.

Violating Community Trust
- Should public servants (like police officers) receive "tips" for doing the job they were hired to do?

Continue the discussion with these points:
- The public cannot have confidence or trust in law enforcement when they think the police are motivated by their own personal agendas instead of their duty to care for the community.
- Anytime the police take some sort of bribe or favor, it affects the execution of their authority. It's corruption and it really undermines public trust and confidence.

- Is a public official who accepts bribes really helping the community?

Encourage participants to review the additional videos in the What's the Harm series -
https://yali.state.gov/series/whats-the-harm/

Event Wrap Up (5 minutes)

Activity: Large Group Commitment to Promoting Peace (5 minutes)
Ask participants to commit to nonviolence during election seasons and to promote peace in their communities. Explain that:
- Electoral **violence and intimidation are not acceptable** in a democratic election. Voters should be completely free to choose the candidate they believe will best serve the country's interests. Your community should not have to tolerate intimidation and violence.
- Political leaders who are committed to democracy and to the country's interests must reject violence. People can **ask leaders to make a public peace pledge**.
- **Hate speech and divisive rhetoric should be rejected**. Comments that break down trust between groups make violence more likely.
- **Electoral fraud also makes violence more likely**, so vote-buying is not just harmful to the democratic process--it can lead to violence. You can help by refusing to sell your vote and encouraging others to refuse to sell their votes.

Tell participants, they can download graphics at https://yali.state.gov/votes/ and share their pledge on their social media platforms.

Closing (5 Minutes)
- If needed, quickly reemphasize the core lessons learned (see introduction).
- Tell participants they can visit https://yali.state.gov/votes/ and learn how to support successful elections, share campaign graphics on social media, and access other content about being savvy citizens.
- Show participants where they can view the rest of the *Understanding Elections and Civic Responsibility* lessons - yali.state.gov/courses/elections/ and the *Responsible Leadership on Transparency and Good Governanc*e course - https://yali.state.gov/course-266/#/. Encourage them to complete all the lessons and take the course quiz to get a certificate.
- Encourage participants to work together to hold this event for others in their community and circle of friends and relatives.
- Ask participants to sign up for the YALI Network at https://yali.state.gov/. Encourage them to plan their own YALILearns event by using the resources available at https://yali.state.gov/learns/