

Leading Through Divisive Elections

LANGUAGE MATTERS

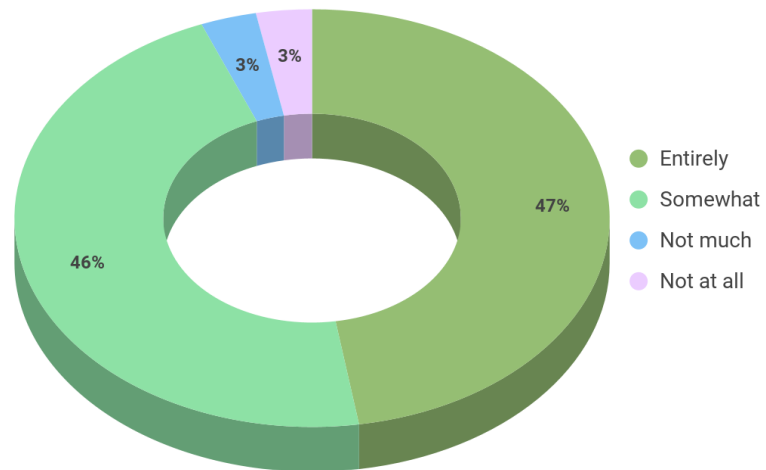
1. Elevate **facts over misinformation**.
2. Elevate the **humanity** of the situation.
3. Help activate values and **show positive social norms**.
4. Ground your focus on your **local community's** present situation.
5. **Avoid harmful language:**
 - Do not describe people as inhuman (animals, zombies, etc.)
 - Do not use the language of war (battle, ambush, etc.)
 - Refrain from disaster language (flood the streets, violence exploded, etc.)



WHY OUR VOICES ARE NEEDED

As Christian leaders, our voices play a tremendous role in shaping the values our congregants hold.

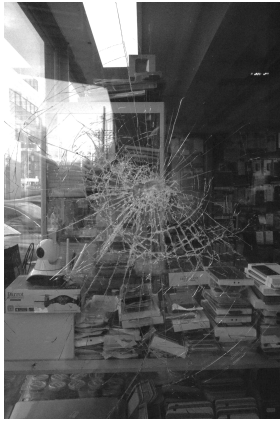
A January 2022 Barna Research survey asked practicing Christians, “**Would you trust a Christian pastor for guidance on having difficult conversations about sensitive topics?**” Most indicated that they would.



WHEN COMMUNICATING ABOUT THE ELECTION

Be aware of language, behavior, and fear that increase the risk of violence.

1. When approached with fear and apprehension, remind your community of the **hope and comfort of Christ**.
2. Communicate responsibly and **ground your words and actions in Christ's teachings**.
3. Set positive norms by declaring Scriptural teachings about **loving one another**, serving one another, and other “one another” commands.
4. Provide clear and accurate information in real-time. Position your church as a **trusted resource** to share content that has been vetted for accuracy or bias.



WHEN COMMUNICATING ABOUT VIOLENCE

The majority of Americans condemn violence around the election and its results. But if violence occurs, here's how to talk about it.

- **Be specific.** Call out sin when it occurs, but avoid implying that an entire group is responsible for the behavior of individuals. If you are talking about a group, ensure that it's an actual group acting in an explicitly coordinated way.
- **Be careful of alarmist or speculative language.** Only communicate facts that are verifiable, and caution against misinformation and sensationalism.
- **Communicate that your church is a safe place.** Explain that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of peace, and any hint of malice within the church will not be condoned.

ON ELECTION DAY

Be prepared to respond as peacemakers in the face of uncertainty.

1. Respond in a **pastoral voice** to troubling behavior and words within your immediate community by reminding them of Christ's teachings on loving our neighbors.
2. Remind your community of **biblical values** if they are acting or speaking out of fear, hate, or uncertainty.
3. Identify leaders within your congregation who can **deliver updates, provide support**, and help stop troubling behavior and rhetoric.

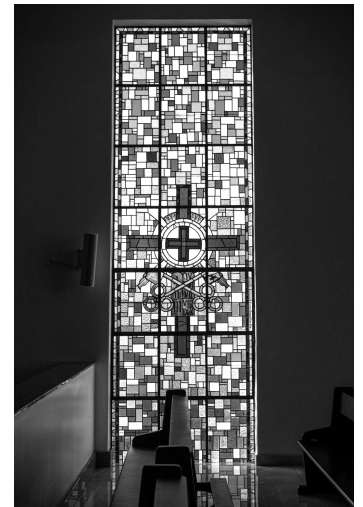
Share clear guidance on how to participate constructively on election day, such as:

- Helping community members find the information they need to vote.
- Thanking those who are working the polls.
- Engaging positively on social media.
- Providing physical support to those who may need a ride to the polls.

AFTER ELECTION DAY

Continue to model biblical peacemaking and help your community remain grounded in Christian values.

1. **Communicate steadfastness.** Inform people that the vast majority of Americans are invested in making the democratic process work peacefully.
2. Continue to **share information** on a regular basis. Show people that you are engaged in the issues they care about.
3. Remind people that **election results might not be immediately known.** Recounts, audits, and delays can be a normal and expected part of the process.
4. Ground your communication in facts and **shut down misinformation** as it circulates within your community.
5. Urge people to place **their ultimate trust** not in political parties but in the kingdom of God.



The Matthew 5:9 Fellowship is a network of Christian leaders shepherding their communities to live out the Gospel and place their identity in Christ above partisanship and societal divisions. In this time of great division, the Fellowship connects leaders grappling with division in the US and supports them to speak and act effectively to build a future in which all human beings are treated as image-bearers of God regardless of earthly divisions.

Learn more at matthew59.org.