



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

EVERY CONGREGATION COUNTS
EVERY VOTE COUNTS



A Jewish Teen's Guide to Civic Engagement

Why should I be civically engaged?

As Jews we have the responsibility to practice *tikkun olam*, world repair. As Americans, we have the power to meet this obligation by speaking out and making change. As Rabbi Hillel taught, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?" (Pirkei Avot 1:14). To ensure that we as a community are committed to social justice, we must all do our part **now** to be civically engaged.

In the 2016 presidential election, an estimated 50% of registered young voters came out to the polls. That means that half of the young registered voters and countless other eligible, but non-registered, young people **did not vote**. Most young voters reported that the main reason for this was a feeling that their vote doesn't count, and that politics is not relevant in their lives. **We disagree**. Judaism teaches us that each individual is an agent of change --and voting, getting others to vote, and making your voice heard are ways to represent yourself and your community.

Terms to Know*

- **Civic Engagement** is the act of everyday citizens working to better a community through social justice work and political activism.
- **Voter Registration** is a requirement in most states for people eligible to vote before they may cast their ballot. This often takes place through state government websites, in person at voter registration centers, or in advance by mail.
- **Preregistration** is an election procedure that allows people under the age of 18 (16 or 17 years old, depending on the state) to register to vote in advance of reaching legal voting age.
- The **primary election** is the election used to determine which candidates will be placed on the ballot for the general election later in the year.
- The **general election** is the election in which candidates are elected into office.



- The **presidential election** is the election in which US citizens vote for the electors who will vote to determine the President and Vice President of the United States (through the Electoral College).
- **Midterm elections** are elections in which US citizens vote for their Congresspeople—either their Representatives (who have two year terms) and/or their Senators (who have six year terms) depending on the year.
- **Ballot measures** are questions or issues that appear on ballots for voters to approve or reject.
- **Ballot initiatives** are petitions that, if a certain minimum number of registered voters sign them, will bring about a public vote on a bill or constitutional amendment.
- **Absentee voting** or **vote-by-mail** is for voters who are not able to go to the polls or prefer to vote remotely. These voters may mail in their ballots before Election Day. Some states require a reason to vote by absentee ballot while others do not.

**Definitions from NYTimes, USA.gov, NCSL.gov, Independent.co.uk, Ballotpedia, and Vote.org*

Commonly Asked Questions

When Can I Vote?

There are numerous opportunities to vote, including the primaries, midterm, presidential elections, and local elections determined by your state and county. Generally the primaries are in the summer and the general elections (midterm and presidential) are in November of that same year. Alternatively, special elections may occur at any time, whenever a governmental position requiring voting is unexpectedly vacated.

When Can I Pre-Register to Vote?

In thirteen states, including California, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah and Washington, plus the District of Columbia, 16 year-olds can pre-register at any time to vote!

In the four states of Maine, Nevada, New Jersey, and West Virginia, you can pre-register once you turn 17.

Other states and territories have diverse laws regarding pre-registration. [Click here to find more information on pre-registration age requirements in your state.](#)



Now that I know I can pre-register, how do I do so?

For a physical registration form, go to any registered polling area in your state and simply ask for one; the registrars will be overjoyed to provide a form. In a total of 36 states plus the District of Columbia, you can save some paper and register online.

Under 18 and want to get involved?

- Lobby, or go to your representatives and/or candidates to advocate for important issues
 - Call your representative's office and ask for the scheduler's email so you can email them to schedule an appointment
 - Prepare by answering the questions: Why is this issue important to me as a Jew? Why is this issue important to me as an American? Do I have a personal story or connection? What is my concrete ask?
 - Make sure to arrive early
 - Follow up with a thank you note or provide them with any materials that they have requested
- Call your representatives
 - Capitol Switchboard: (202)-224-3121
- Send letters
 - [Click here to find your representatives](#)
 - [Click here to find your senators](#)
- Volunteer with Get Out the Vote efforts and organizations
 - Find local organizations
 - Work on a campaign
- Order the Religious Action Center's [voter pledge postcards](#) to hand out to friends or leave in your synagogue
- Volunteer on a campaign
 - [Click here to find your candidates](#)
- Participate in national voter registration day
 - Find local registrars and volunteer at/organize an event
 - Flyers: Use premade [RAC flyers](#) or create your own with information about local events or how to be civically engaged



- Spread the word on social media
- Repost from both well-known organizations and your activist friends
- Create or help spread viral movements
 - Phone calls/ texts to send reminders to vote and encourage others to vote
 - Repetition is key
 - Keep track of who your contact
 - Make sure they know when and where to vote
 - Tell them why it is important to you that they vote

[For more information, you can visit the RAC's Civic Engagement Campaign website here.](#)