

Participation in Democracy

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The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men.

—Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson, [signing of the Voting Rights Act \(video\)](#), 06 August 1965

I often have people say to me that they are worried or concerned about what is happening recently in the United States and the world, but they feel helpless to do anything. But every person can contribute to making a difference through direct service to those in need, practical actions, or even a listening ear. But also, we can all contribute to change in the political arena.

Pope Francis, during a [pastoral visit to Trieste in 2024](#), stated:

We have something to say, but not to defend privileges. No. We need to be a voice, a voice that denounces and proposes in a society that is often mute and where too many have no voice. ... This is political love. ... It is a form of charity that allows politics to live up to its responsibilities and get out of polarizations, these polarizations that impoverish and do not help understand and address the challenges.

So practically, what can each of us do?

First, believe that your vote does make a difference. In 2024, only 65% of eligible citizens voted. The winning margin in the 2024 presidential election was small in historical terms. In local elections where the turnout is often low, a small number of voters make big decisions that affect what happens in school districts and in cities and counties. Twenty-nine elections in 2024 ended in ties; many more elections were won by a small margin.

Second, find out what non-partisan organizations are active in your state in voter education, registration, and participation. In many areas, the [League of Women Voters](#) is very active. The [Center for Common Ground](#), [When We All Vote](#), and [Election Protection](#) all have assistance and resources to facilitate participation in voting and voter education. The [Brennan Center for Justice](#) has great resources on research, education, and advocacy.

Third, there are many other ways to participate. Non-profits and members of religious communities cannot support partisan politics nor those running for political office with

posters, signs, and donations. However, religious can participate in partisan activities such as phone banking, post carding, etc., since these are done without identification as a religious or identification with the religious community. With the increasing scrutiny of non-profit organizations in today's political environment, the importance of caution by those belonging to non-profits is very important. This also applies to those working for non-profits, particularly those non-religious in leadership roles. The accusations toward the Southern Poverty Law Center are a cautionary example.

These are examples of participation in the voting process:

- Educate voters on the voting process by passing out information on requirements for voting and/or distributing non-partisan voter guides at places of worship, food pantries, farmers' markets, and other venues
- Support, oppose, or host a community conversation on a ballot measure
- [Write op-eds or letters to the editor](#) on the importance of voting, for or against voter ID laws, or on other issues (if written in a non-partisan manner)
- Research and share objective information on those running for political office, particularly for county, city, and school board elections, as there is often little public information on these candidates
- Attend County Board of Elections meetings
- Research and share information on ballot issues. Share your reasons to support or non-support the ballot issues
- Participate as:
 - poll chaplains
 - poll workers
 - poll protectors
- Postcard, text, and phone campaigns encourage people to register and to vote

From the Bulletin of the Resource Center for Religious Institutes, Summer 2024:

But does it really matter? The answer must be yes. Not simply because intervening in political elections risks the tax-exempt status and could impair the benefits according to churches and charities. But because, through the Church, we have a higher standard to seek an altogether different kind of

engagement without political system. The goal is not a uniform outcome among all Catholic voters.

The Church seeks to guide people in an understanding of faith and their responsibility to exercise their rights as citizens. The aim is instead to sufficiently form consciences so that each Catholic acts on the call to seek the dignity of every person, promote the common good, and protect the weakest among us. That guidance, taken to heart by all of our religious communities and ministries, is likely to prove a more enduring guideline for Church involvement in the political activities of our society than all the examples combined.

Pope Francis, again in Trieste: “As Catholics, on this horizon, we cannot be satisfied with a marginal or private faith. ... This means not so much to be heard, but above all to have the courage to make proposals for justice and peace in the public debate.”