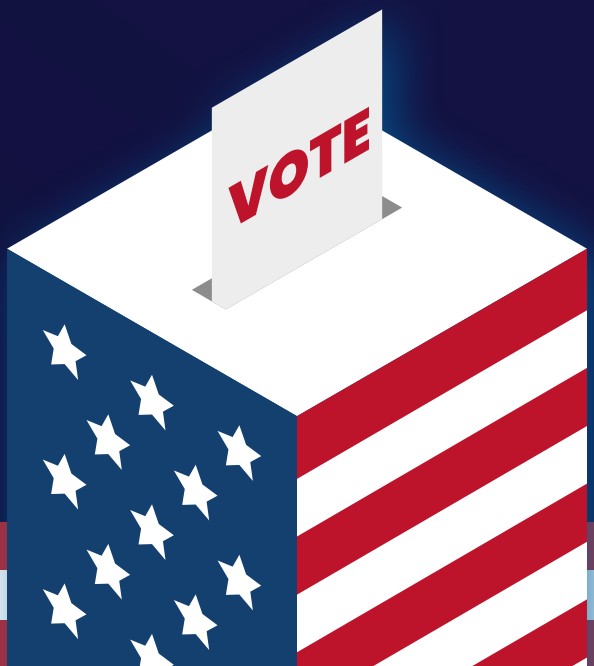
ISRAELI AMERICAN COUNCIL

LOCAL ELECTIONS 101

READY, SET, VOTE!

COMMUNITY GUIDE

YOUR QUICK GUIDE TO
VOTING IN YOUR CITY



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WHY YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Voting locally is about more than political parties. It's about advocating for your community, protecting your home, and using your voice. Participating in elections is a civic and communal responsibility that allows citizens to secure a future for their cities that reflect their own values. Voting is the cornerstone of democracy.

As Israeli Americans, we know what civic engagement looks like. Since October 7, we've stood together, for Israel, against antisemitism, and for a united, resilient community. But right here, in our second home, it is easy to become complacent. Make sure to vote in EVERY election for which you are eligible, because local elections control much more than you may realize!

Who decides what our children learn at school?
Who responds to antisemitic incidents?
Who approves budgets for safety, parks, education, and local services?

NOT THE PRESIDENT - BUT LOCAL OFFICIALS!

Participating in local elections is how we protect what matters most:

Our children's education
Our safety in the streets
Our religious and cultural identity
The fight against antisemitism

There is a strategic importance to participating in local elections too, it's not just your civic duty. Local offices often serve as steppingstones to higher political positions. Engaging in local elections allows the community to support candidates aligned with their values from the outset.

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UNDERSTANDING THE LEVELS OF U.S. ELECTIONS

Elections in the U.S. take place at three main levels: federal, state, and local. Each level is responsible for different functions, but decisions at all levels impact our lives on daily or weekly bases.

FEDERAL

Positions:
President, Senate, House of Representatives

Responsibilities:
Foreign policy, federal laws, immigration, taxation

STATE

Positions:
Governor, Senate and State Assembly, Attorney

GeneralResponsibilities:
Education, housing, transportation, public health, state laws

LOCAL & MUNICIPAL

Positions:
Mayor, City Council, School Board, District

Attorney, Sheriff Local JudgesResponsibilities:
Public schools, local infrastructure, police, zoning

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THE POSITIONS AND MEASURES THAT IMPACT US

HOW LOCAL VOTES SHAPE OUR DAILY LIVES

Local elections are an opportunity to raise our voices and influence the communities in which we live. They affect the issues that matter most in our daily lives - from our children's curriculum to police patrols, city safety ordinances, local economic development, and more. Taking part in these elections is an essential step toward securing a safe and prosperous future for ourselves and for generations to come.

What Do We Vote for in Local Elections?

1 MAYOR

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES: Leads the city, manages municipal departments, public initiatives, budgets, city services, and enforces policies.

WHY IT MATTERS TO EVERYONE? The mayor directly affects daily life - from infrastructure investments to emergency responses.

WHY IT MATTERS TO OUR COMMUNITY? The mayor can allocate security funding for Jewish institutions, speak out during times of antisemitism or hate, set the tone on religious freedom, and shape the city's stance on, and relationship to, Israel.

2 CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES: Legislate, municipal budgets, urban planning, transportation, social services, taxation, and support for local organizations.

WHY IT MATTERS TO EVERYONE? City council members decide how our neighborhoods are shaped and which services are funded.

WHY IT MATTERS TO OUR COMMUNITY? They can support or oppose initiatives related to Jewish community needs, public safety, and city declarations involving Israel or hate prevention. City councils have the power to potentially define antisemitism with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Definition (IHRA).

3 BOARD OF EDUCATION

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES: Oversees the public education system (K-12), makes curricula decisions, sets hiring policies, budgets, and contracts with unions.

WHY IT MATTERS TO EVERYONE? School boards are vital to how our children are taught, what they are taught, and by whom they are taught.

WHY IT MATTERS TO OUR COMMUNITY? School boards decide whether and how the Holocaust, Israel, and Judaism are taught, whether Jewish holidays are excused absences, and how antisemitism and discrimination are addressed in schools.

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4 SHERIFF

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES: Enforces laws at the county level, manages jails, courthouse security, and executes warrants.

WHY IT MATTERS TO EVERYONE: Sheriffs provide community safety and manage law enforcement beyond city police departments.

WHY IT MATTERS TO OUR COMMUNITY: A sheriff who is sensitive to minority concerns will enforce fairly, address hate crimes seriously, and protect Jewish institutions during sensitive times and holidays.

5 DISTRICT ATTORNEY (COUNTY PROSECUTOR)

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES: Determines which criminal cases to prosecute, sets charging and sentencing policies, and leads local justice efforts.

WHY IT MATTERS TO EVERYONE: DAs impact fairness in the justice system and how communities experience law enforcement.

WHY IT MATTERS TO OUR COMMUNITY: DAs decide which crimes get prosecutes as hate crimes and play a central role in deterring antisemitism and violence against our community.

6 LOCAL JUDGES

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES: Preside over civil and criminal cases in city or county courts, issue rulings, orders, and sometimes interpret rights protections.

WHY IT MATTERS TO EVERYONE: Judges uphold justice, defend rights, and shape policy through their rulings.

WHY IT MATTERS TO OUR COMMUNITY: Judges may rule on matters related to religious freedom, hate crimes, education, or the protection of Jewish community institutions.

7 BALLOT MEASURES / PROPOSITIONS

WHAT IT IS: Laws or funding initiatives proposed for direct vote by the public- covering taxation, education, zoning, infrastructure, or another municipal function.

WHY IT MATTERS TO EVERY CITIZEN: These initiatives allow citizens to directly shape policy instead of lawmakers voting for measures at the city council, or state legislature.

WHY IT MATTERS TO OUR COMMUNITY: These measures may include funding for Jewish institution security, education budgets, or city resolutions on foreign policy - such as calls for ceasefires or positions on Israel.

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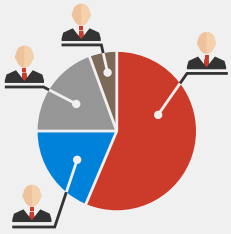
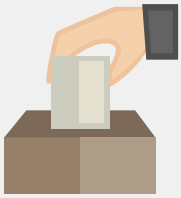
WHAT DRIVES VOTER TURNOUT IN U.S. LOCAL ELECTIONS

KEY MOTIVATORS IDENTIFIED BY RESEARCH 2020-2025



CIVIC DUTY & COMMUNITY IMPACT

Many voters are driven by a sense of responsibility and the belief that their participation directly influences local governance and community well-being.



SOCIAL NORMS & PEER INFLUENCE

Awareness that peers and community members are voting can motivate individuals to participate, emphasizing the role of social expectations in voter behavior.

ELECTION TIMING

Aligning local elections with federal or state elections ("on-cycle") significantly boosts turnout. For instance, Baltimore's shift to on-cycle elections increased local voter participation from 13% to 60%.

VOTING ACCESSIBILITY

Implementing measures like mail-in ballots, early voting, and user-friendly voting systems enhances participation, especially among younger voters and minority groups.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Higher education levels, homeownership, and older age groups correlate with increased voter turnout in local elections.

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WHY LOCAL ELECTIONS MATTER FOR JEWISH AND ISRAELI-AMERICAN COMMUNITIES RISING CONCERNS

ANTISEMITISM AND ANTI-ZIONISM

There's a documented rise in antisemitic incidents and anti-Zionist sentiments in the U.S., making it crucial for Jewish communities to have representation that acknowledges and addresses these issues. According to the ADL (Anti-Defamation League), 2024 saw a record-breaking 9,354 antisemitic incidents in the U.S., and a staggering 344% increase over the past five years. On average, more than 25 incidents per day were reported-over half of which were directly related to Israel or Zionism, particularly in the aftermath of the October 7 Hamas attack and the ensuing war in Gaza.

COMMUNITY SAFETY AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Local governments play a pivotal role in ensuring the safety of neighborhoods and the protection of religious freedoms, directly impacting Jewish communities.

SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

Local officials play an influential role in shaping public and political discourse, including on international matters like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since October 2023, more than 100 U.S. cities-including Chicago, Detroit, Seattle, and San Francisco-have passed non-binding resolutions calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, reflecting mounting grassroots pressure to shift U.S.

foreign policy. In contrast, other municipalities have taken a clear pro-Israel stance. Austin Mayor Kirk Watson joined a solidarity rally for Israel, and New York City Mayor Eric Adams reaffirmed his strong support, including marching in the Israel Day Parade. These contrasting local actions highlight the power of municipal leadership in reflecting community values and shaping the broader national conversation. Active civic participation is critical to ensuring that pro-Israel voices are heard and represented at the local level.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Influence Through Turnout: Jewish voters have demonstrated higher turnout rates compared to the general population, amplifying their influence in elections. For example, in a recent New York district election, Jewish voters constituted 23% of the vote despite being only 9% of the population.

Shaping Future Leadership: Local offices often serve as stepping stones to higher political positions. Engaging in local elections allows the community to support candidates aligned with their values from the outset.

Engaging in local elections is not just a civic duty but a strategic move to safeguard the interests and values of the Jewish and Israeli-American communities. Your vote has the power to shape a more inclusive and supportive local environment.

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WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO VOTE IN LOCAL U.S. ELECTIONS?

To vote in local elections such as for mayor, city council, or school board, you must meet the following criteria

CITIZENSHIP

You must be a U.S. citizen. Lawful permanent residents (green card holders) & other non-citizens are not eligible to vote.

AGE

You must be at least 18 years old by Election Day.

RESIDENCY

You must reside in the voting district according to your state's requirements.

VOTER REGISTRATION

You must be registered to vote by your state's deadline.

NO DISQUALIFICATION DUE TO CRIMINAL CONVICTION

In many states, individuals with felony convictions may face restrictions on voting rights.

VOTER IDENTIFICATION

Some states require a valid form of ID to vote, depending on local or state laws.

MENTAL COMPETENCY

In some states, individuals who have been declared mentally incompetent by a court may not be eligible to vote.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
LOCAL ELECTIONS

Voting & Registration

Q: How do I register to vote?
✔ Visit **vote.gov** according to your state.

Q: Can I register online?
✔ In most states, yes. Check your eligibility at **nass. org/Can-I-Vote**

Q: Can I register and vote on the same day?
✔ Yes – in some states it's allowed.
Check if your state allows it at **nass.org/Can-I-Vote**

Q: Do I need an ID to vote?
✔ Requirements vary by state – check what applies in yours.

Q: I will be 18 after the registration deadline but before election day. Can I vote?
✔ Yes, you can "pre-register" by submitting your voter registration form before the deadline, even if you are not yet 18. As long as you turn 18 by the date of the election, and you meet all other voting eligibility requirements, you should be all set.

Q: How do I know where to vote?
✔ Use **nass.org/Can-I-Vote**

Voting Options

Q: What's the difference between early voting and Election Day voting?
✔ Early voting takes place before Election Day at designated polling sites.

Q: What is mail-in voting?
✔ You can vote by sending your ballot through the mail, depending on your state's deadlines.

Q: Can I vote by mail and also in person?
✔ No. If you already voted by mail, you cannot vote again.

Q: How can I track my mail-in ballot?
✔ Most states offer tools for that on their election websites.

Q: I have an address in the U.S. but I live in Israel. Can I vote?
✔ Yes. As long as you are a U.S. citizen, who is registered to vote. You simply have to register for an absentee ballot to be able to vote from abroad.

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Ballot

Q: I made a mistake – what do I do?

✔ At the polling place – ask for a new ballot.
By mail – contact your election office about "ballot curing."

Q: What is a provisional ballot?

✔ A provisional ballot is used if your eligibility is in question. It's counted only after verification.

General

Q: What if I can't vote on Election Day?

✔ Vote early or by mail – plan ahead.

Q: I'm not a citizen – can I still be involved?

✔ Absolutely! You can attend meetings, volunteer, educate others, and stay engaged.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

For clear, nonpartisan answers to over 50 voting-related questions - including ID rules, voting methods, deadlines, ballot correction, and more:

Visit Ballotpedia's 2024 Election Help Desk
United States municipal elections, 2025 - Ballotpedia

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WHAT CAN YOU DO BEFORE THE ELECTIONS?

RESEARCH AND LEARNING 1

- Read about the candidates - on your city's official website or via **BallotReady.org**
- Attend candidate meetings and campaign events to ask questions
- Send emails or public questions to candidates on issues that matter to you (education, antisemitism, community funding, etc.)

SHARE INFORMATION AND LEAD CONVERSATIONS 2

- Start a WhatsApp or Facebook group for eligible local voters to get informed together.
- Host living room gatherings - small meetups at home to discuss candidates.
- Volunteer on, or donate to, campaigns that align with your beliefs and values.
- Share guides in Hebrew (like this one!) and short videos explaining local elections.
- Comment on candidates' post and encourage attention to community issues.

SHOW UP IN PERSON 3

- Attend city council meetings - presence matters!
- Organize a group voting day: meet up, go vote together, take a photo and share

SMART COLLABORATIONS 4

- Partner with organizations: IAC, ADL, SWU, school parent groups, community centers and more
- Ask them to include election info in newsletters or social media
- Invite a candidate to a community event for open conversation

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KEY RACES U.S. LOCAL ELECTIONS FALL 2025

Tuesday, November 4, 2025 – General Election Day

Key races + direct links to helpful voter information:
Remember: registration deadlines vary state by state!

KEY STATE ELECTIONS

New Jersey Gubernatorial
Virginia Gubernatorial

KEY CITY ELECTIONS

New York City Mayoral
Boston Mayoral
Miami Mayoral
Jersey City Mayoral

HOW TO VOTE

1. Register to vote at **vote.gov**
2. Check your registration status at **nass.org/Can-I-Vote**
3. Choose how you want to vote: early, by mail, or in person
4. Learn about candidates at **ballotready.org** or your city's website
5. Vote - and encourage friends and neighbors to vote too!

DONATE TO EMPOWER CHANGE

JOIN IAC VOLUNTEER ACTION: ACTIVISM@ISRAELIAMERICAN.ORG