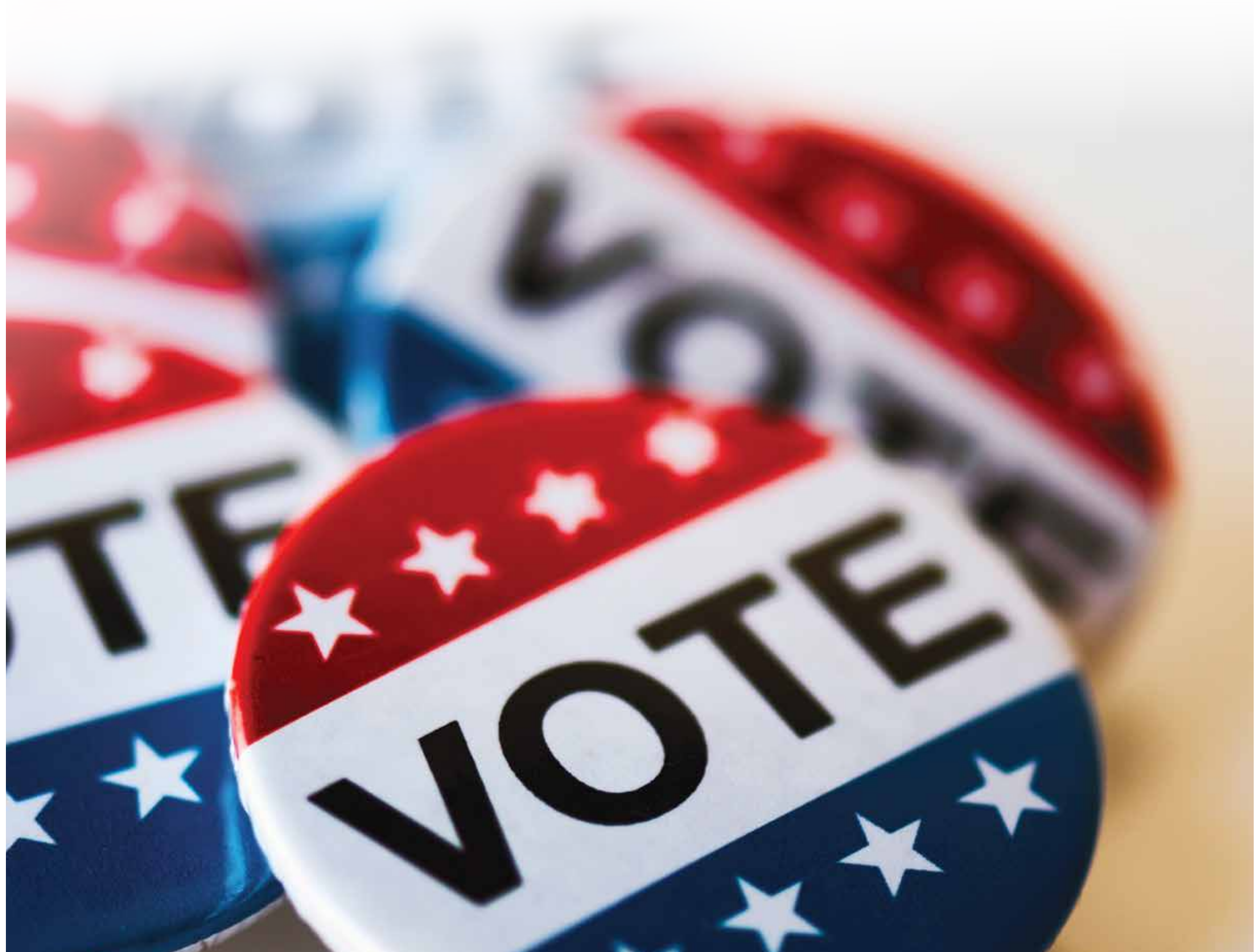




CELEBRATE DEMOCRACY



Democracy in Action

Democracy, of course, requires us to take action on more than just one day each year.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: “Democracy is powered by the will of the people — by their voices, their choices, and their participation.”

Participation goes further than just voting. From helping power elections to helping educate the next generation of American voters, there are many roles in your community where you can put your belief in democracy into action.

Volunteer at schools.

School debate teams, model UN programs and civic education programs for younger students often need volunteers. Contact local schools to see how you might help.

Host a candidate forum.

Host a “coffee with the candidate” event in your home to help a candidate meet voters and share their vision. Aside from opening your home for the event, you’ll likely need to provide snacks and drinks, and then let democracy take its course. If you are involved in a civic organization, you can work with that organization to host a candidate and reach a wider audience.

Volunteer for a candidate.

Identify a candidate you would like to support and ask them how you can help their efforts. Tasks campaigns typically have available to volunteers



© ADOBE STOCK

include phone banking, gathering petition signatures to get them on the ballot, attending events, walking in parades and more.

Sign up to be an election judge. Election judges, also called poll workers, help make sure election day goes according to plan. They inspect voting equipment, verify ballot

counts, set up voting booths and confirm security measures are followed. Contact your local election authority to see what the requirements are to become a judge.

Help register voters. Helping others get registered to vote is a way to see democracy in action. Appointments are often made through local

political party organizations, bona fide civic organizations, such as the League of Women Voters or directly through your local election authority.

Donate to causes and candidates. Running an election or advocating for a cause takes money. Printing literature, running ads, holding events and setting up an office space

all require funds. Donate to help make a difference.

Participate in meetings.

Attend meetings of your local government units, such as city council, county board, school board or library district. Most public bodies allow for public comment. Sign up to speak about issues that matter to you.

Become an Election Judge

Election judges, or poll workers, are trained citizens who operate polling places on Election Day and during early voting.

They help ensure elections are conducted fairly, securely and efficiently, regardless of political party.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Here is a look at an election judge's typical responsibilities.

Opening the polling place.

Inspecting voting equipment, verifying ballot counts, setting up voting booths, signs and accessibility equipment and confirming security seals are intact.

Checking in voters. Verifying voters are registered, confirming names and addresses and issuing the correct ballot or activating a voting machine.

Helping voters. Explaining how to use voting equipment (without influencing votes), assisting voters with disabilities or language needs, and directing voters to the correct precinct, if necessary.

Maintaining a fair voting environment. Ensuring election laws are followed, keeping campaign materials and electioneering outside the required distance from the polling place, and protecting voters' privacy and the secrecy of the ballot.

Processing special ballots. Issuing provisional ballots



© ADOBE STOCK

when eligibility questions arise and helping voters who need to replace a spoiled ballot.

Closing the polls. Securing ballots and voting equipment, reconciling the number of voters with the number of ballots cast, completing required paperwork and preparing election materials for delivery to the local election authority.

WHO CAN BECOME AN ELECTION JUDGE?

Requirements for becoming an election judge vary by state, but generally applicants must:

- Be registered voters (though some states allow high school students to serve in limited roles).
- Attend training before the election.

• Be able to work a long shift, often beginning before polls open and ending after all ballots are accounted for.

Many jurisdictions try to recruit judges from different political parties to promote transparency and public confidence in the election process.

WHY THEY MATTER

Election judges are one of

the most visible parts of democracy in action. They help ensure every eligible voter has the opportunity to cast a ballot. They help protect election integrity and help resolve routine issues at the polling place. Perhaps most importantly, election judges build public confidence by conducting elections in an open, impartial and professional manner.

American Democracy Quiz

Can you answer these 12 questions about the principles of American democracy from the United States citizenship test?
(Source: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services)

1. What is the supreme law of the land?
2. What does the Constitution do?
3. The idea of self-government is in the first three words of the Constitution. What are these words?
4. What is an amendment?
5. What do we call the first 10 amendments to the Constitution?
6. What is one right or freedom from the First Amendment?
7. How many amendments does the Constitution have?
8. What did the Declaration of Independence do?
9. What are two rights in the Declaration of Independence?
10. What is freedom of religion?
11. What is the economic system in the United States?
12. What is the “rule of law”?

Answers

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. the Constitution | (from Great Britain), or declared our independence (from Great Britain), or said that the United States is free (from Great Britain) |
| 2. sets up the government, or defines the government, or protects basic rights of Americans | |
| 3. We the People | 9. life, liberty, pursuit of happiness |
| 4. a change (to the Constitution), or an addition (to the Constitution) | 10. You can practice any religion, or not practice a religion. |
| 5. the Bill of Rights | 11. capitalist economy or market economy |
| 6. speech, religion, assembly, press, petition the government | 12. Everyone must follow the law; or leaders must obey the law; or no one is above the law; or government must obey the law. |
| 7. 27 | |
| 8. announced our independence | |



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY

SEPTEMBER 15

The United Nations General Assembly has designated Sept. 15 as International Day of Democracy.

The day was established in 2007 by the UN General Assembly to celebrate the ideal of democracy, and to review the state of democracy across the world.

The theme for 2026 is “Bring Human Rights into Focus.” The theme was announced by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which coordinates

the annual global theme for the observance. It emphasizes that democracy and human rights are inseparable, encouraging governments, legislatures, civil society organizations, schools and citizens to strengthen democratic institutions by protecting fundamental rights and freedoms.

In a 2025 press release about the celebrations, the U.N. wrote: “Democracy is as much a process as a goal, and only with the full participation of and support by the international community, national governing bodies, civil society and individuals, can the ideal of democracy be made into a reality to be enjoyed by everyone,

everywhere.”

This Sept. 15, look for locally organized events, such as a community service day or a “Meet Your Local Government” open house. You could also celebrate by attending a public meeting, volunteering for a civic organization, learning about local government or helping neighbors register to vote.

Teachers often take advantage of the day to educate students about democracy. Ideas for activities include mock elections, a student debate tournament, a Constitution trivia contest, or hosting a local veteran, judge or other public servant to speak.

Businesses can also celebrate the

International Day of Democracy. Consider hosting a morning civic conversation over coffee, sponsoring an essay or poster contest, displaying American flags and civic-themed window decorations, or encouraging employees to participate in community volunteer projects.

It’s also a good day to check in on your own voting status. If you have moved or your name has changed, check to be sure the correct information is on file with your local election authority.

However you decide to celebrate the day, remember that the International Day of Democracy calls on us all to put participation over partisanship.

The UN on Democracy

Democracy means rule or government by the people. It's the power of ordinary citizens, exercised directly or through representatives to shape their own future.

Democracy matters because, at its best, it protects us. It protects our most vulnerable. It gives voice to people that do not have voices.

It's the system that has evolved. It's an idea that has grown over many, many years, over many, many civilizations.

Democracies are facing challenges in today's world. Mis- and disinformation and shrinking media freedom is a real challenge.

A lot of people can find their own truths. They don't know what to believe or they believe what they want.

Linked also to this is a growing lack of accountability that you can say what you want and do what you want, and you don't need to account for that.

Democracy needs to be prioritized.

It's the system of government that our history has

shown to be the fairest, the most inclusive, the most transparent, the most accountable and the most adaptive.

To support democratic values, step one is to engage. Engage means voting.

It means following up on that vote by working with your representative to understand what they're doing, to make sure that the policies that they campaigned on and promised to implement are what is guiding them in terms of their governance.

The UN, since its inception, has had many democratic principles at its core, dating back to the United Nations Charter the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and more recently, initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals.

The United Nations Democracy Fund, or UNDEF, has supported over 1,000 projects in over 130 countries.

And these projects range from voter education in rural communities to civic monitoring that will help citizens track government spending.

Democracy isn't a destination. It's a continuing daily act. It's an idea. It's a philosophy, and it's something that we need to live in our daily lives.



— *John Gilroy*
chief of service,
U.N. Office for
Partnerships





© ADOBE STOCK

Registering to Vote

Registering to vote is one of the easiest ways to participate in democracy.

Whether you're voting for president, governor, mayor, school board or a local referendum, being registered ensures your voice can be heard when decisions are made that affect your community.

The first step is to determine whether you're eligible to vote. In most states, you must be a U.S. citizen, meet your state's residency requirements and be

at least 18 years old by Election Day. Some states allow 17-year-olds to register in advance if they will turn 18 before the election. Eligibility rules for people with felony convictions vary by state.

If you aren't already registered, there are several convenient ways to sign up. Many people register online through their state's official election website. Others choose to register by mail using a voter registration form or in person at designated government offices, such as a driver's license facility or local election authority. Many community organizations also host nonpartisan voter

registration drives throughout the year.

Be sure to register before your state's deadline, which may be several weeks before Election Day. Some states also offer same-day voter registration during early voting or on Election Day.

If you've moved, changed your name or haven't voted in several years, it's a good idea to verify that your registration information is current. Keeping your information up to date helps ensure that you aren't turned away from the polls and your vote is counted on Election Day.

Once you're registered, take a few minutes to learn about the candidates

and issues that will appear on your ballot. Many election offices publish sample ballots and provide information about polling locations, early voting opportunities and vote-by-mail options. Search for local newspaper articles about the candidates, or peruse their websites or social media to be clear about what their positions are on major issues.

Registering to vote takes only a few minutes, but it gives you the opportunity to participate in decisions that shape your community, your state and the nation. It's a simple step that helps keep democracy strong.

Teaching the Next Generation

Strong communities depend on informed, engaged citizens.

Many schools and community organizations are helping young people develop the knowledge and skills needed to participate in civic life long before they are old enough to vote.

Civics education extends far beyond textbooks. Across the country, students gain firsthand experience through activities that encourage leadership, critical thinking, collaboration and public service.

Student government gives young people an opportunity to practice democratic decision-making by representing classmates, organizing events, managing budgets and working with school administrators to solve problems. Debate teams help students research issues, evaluate evidence, and respectfully consider differing viewpoints — valuable skills in an era when thoughtful civil discourse is increasingly important.

Many schools also celebrate Constitution Day each September by exploring the founding principles of the United States. Classroom discussions, guest speakers, mock court proceedings and historical presentations help students better understand the rights and responsibilities that come with citizenship.

Mock elections held during local, state and national election years allow students to



© ADOBE STOCK

experience the voting process firsthand. From learning how ballots are designed to discussing campaign issues and election security, these activities introduce the mechanics of democracy in a nonpartisan setting while reinforcing the importance of informed participation.

For students who are 18 or will soon become eligible voters, many high schools partner with local election officials or

civic organizations to offer voter registration opportunities. Registering eligible seniors before graduation helps ensure they are prepared to participate in their first elections.

Outside the classroom, libraries, museums, historical societies and nonprofit organizations provide additional opportunities to explore civic engagement. Educational exhibits, public forums, volunteer programs and local history

projects help connect young people with their communities while demonstrating how individuals can make a difference.

Service-learning projects combine classroom instruction with meaningful community service. Whether restoring local parks, organizing food drives, mentoring younger students or assisting senior citizens, participants learn that civic responsibility includes contributing their time and talents to

improve their communities.

These experiences teach an enduring lesson: citizenship is more than casting a ballot every few years. It means staying informed, listening to others, volunteering and working together to strengthen our communities. By introducing these values early, schools and community organizations help prepare the next generation for a lifetime of informed and engaged civic participation.