

How Do We Get People to Vote? (Focusing on Texas)

Voter turnout in Texas is terrible.

In 2016, only [58% of eligible voters](#) in the United States turned out for the presidential election. In Texas, it was even worse, at 51%.

In 2016, only Hawaii (42%) and West Virginia (50%) fared worse. Florida, which has 4 million fewer voting age people than Texas, tabulated over 1 million more votes overall. Even more striking is that only 43% of Texas' voting age population showed up, which is 2nd lowest in the United States. Texas turnout has been abysmal for decades. According to the [Texas State Historical Association](#), the last time more than [50% of Texas adults voted](#) in a presidential election was the year 1900.

The problem with voter turnout is even more exacerbated in [local elections](#) than in presidential races. In 2015, only 6% of eligible voters participated in the mayoral races for Dallas and Fort Worth. Turnout in Austin (13%), Houston (18%) and San Antonio (11%) were only [marginally better](#). For comparison, 59% of eligible voters participated in Portland's mayoral election. Oregon has all mail-in voting and automatic registration when you get a license or state ID. Unlike Texas, Oregon makes it far easier for its citizens to vote.

Why is it hard to vote?

Across the US hundreds of thousands of nonvoters want to vote, but can't. In 2016, 4 percent of registered voters did not vote because of "registration problems," according to a Pew Research Center [analysis](#) of Census Bureau data. Many would-be voters face a range of barriers: voter ID laws, registration difficulty or criminal records. An estimated [10 percent](#) of adults in Florida, for example, can't vote because of a felony conviction.

Some people who want to vote but can't have been removed from the voting rolls. Across the country, the rate at which people are being purged from the voting rolls, a process historically intended to keep records updated, has increased substantially compared to a decade ago, according to a report from the Brennan Center [published](#) this summer. The analysis found 4 million more people were purged between 2014 and 2016 than in the equivalent period between 2006 and 2008.

Legal obstacles are an important part of the nonvoter story, but there are many millions of Americans who can vote and yet choose not to. Their reasons are vast: Some are apathetic or too busy. Others don't like their choices, they don't think their vote matters, they think the system is corrupt, or they don't think they know enough to vote.

Is it difficult to vote in Texas?

Texas has made it difficult to register voters. Voters have to register at least one month before the election. Texas does not have automatic registration. ID requirements also make it difficult for many Texans to vote—estimates are that 600,000 eligible voters were stymied by ID requirements in 2016.

Additionally, Texas has [added layers of regulation](#) to prevent people from becoming Volunteer Deputy Registrars. In Texas, if you want to help people register to vote, you must attend—in person—training offered by your county. Registering voters is not particularly complicated, but [Texas](#) has made it as difficult as possible for people to get the training required to register voters.

How can voter turnout be improved?

Two states, Oregon and Washington, offer the option to anyone to vote by mail (in Oregon, that's the only way to vote). Colorado, Arizona, California, Montana and Hawaii allow voters to request permanent mail-in voting. Voters in these states can sign up to automatically receive a ballot every election. Some states, Texas among them, offer voting by mail for special classes of people.

Several countries, among them Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Luxembourg and Singapore, have compulsory voting. In some countries, people who fail to vote are fined (\$26 dollars in Australia).

Pass laws that cause voters to be automatically registered—for example when they apply for a drivers license or state issued ID.

What can individuals do?

- Get the required training to become a Volunteer Deputy Registrar.
- The League of Women Voters of Texas has a [fantastic list of links](#) and resources to help activate voters and Get Out The Vote.
- Share the [I Will Vote](#) link to encourage people to check to see if they're registered to vote (and if they aren't, to get registered.)
- Canvass for a candidate running in your district. The personal connection of one voter talking to another has been proven, year after year, to be the most effective action affecting turnout.
- Help eligible voters get an appropriate ID so they can vote.
- Support laws that encourage voter registration. For example, according to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), 15 states and the District of Columbia offer same day registration in some capacity. The [U.S. Vote Foundation reported](#) voter turnout in states with same day registration was seven percent higher than non-same day registration states.