



# 10 Ways You Can Change U.S. History

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This may be the most important election of our lifetimes. So much that we care about is at stake. With the electorate so evenly divided, the efforts of a few people in both local and national races could be decisive. Are you wondering what you can do between now and November 2? Here are my top 10 ideas for making a difference—and staying sane—in the coming months.

**1 Make a realistic commitment.** I know you are already busy doing lots of good work. How much can you add during the election months ahead? An hour a week? One major project? Ask yourself what won't burn you out, will be satisfying, and can make a difference. Talk with family and friends to gain their support.

**2 Get out the vote.** Our democracy can't work if people aren't voting—and half of us don't. An Indian tribe near my home held a salmon dinner at which registering to vote was the price of admission. Think about that as a twist on your family's reunion. Or bring voter registration forms to a farmers' market or craft fair. You can download your state's voter registration form at [www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org) (or call 888/868-3762). In the 2000 election, the difference between the Bush and Gore votes was small in 16 states. Consider traveling to one of these "swing states" to help register voters before the election or get people to the polls on election day. (See [www.drivingvotes.org](http://www.drivingvotes.org))

**3 Help safeguard the vote.** Most of the new electronic voting machines leave no paper trail. So if there are suspicions about the results, there's no chance for a recount. You can encourage your election officials to use safe voting technology. Learn about the legislation pending in Congress that could address concerns about electronic voting. You can join the Clean Voting Crew of election monitors to make sure votes are counted fairly on election day. (See [www.blackboxvoting.org](http://www.blackboxvoting.org))

**4 Pay attention to local elections.** The national races are riveting, but local judges, state legislators, school boards, and county commissioners also determine a lot about our lives. But it can be hard to keep track of all the issues and candidates. Ask four friends to join you, each researching a different race or issue. Then share what you've learned over pasta and wine. How hard is this?! A great place to start is the League of Women Voters' website, [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org). Under "voter information" you can click on DemocracyNet, enter your address, and get a list of your state and national candidates.

**5 Share your views.** Talk to that 19-year-old who "knows" her vote doesn't count. Discuss an issue she cares about and encourage her to check out [www.rockthevote.org](http://www.rockthevote.org), where she can register on-line. Write a letter to the editor or an e-mail to friends. Call in to a talk show. Be informative, clear, and brief, and speak from your heart. The fact that you care matters to people.

**6 Donate and volunteer.** I too wish we had real campaign finance reform. But for now, money makes a big difference. I'm loosening my purse strings for people and organizations I believe in. Hold a coffee for a candidate or campaign you support, and encourage your friends to join you in making a contribution. And every campaign needs volunteers—pick your favorite and find out what you can do.

**7 Join a conversation—**outside your comfort zone. We all prefer to talk with people who see the world the way we do. But democracy is about understanding each other. Check out Let's Talk America ([www.letstalkamerica.org](http://www.letstalkamerica.org)) and consider joining or hosting a conversation. You may find yourself better prepared for that awkward conversation with your brother-in-law.

**8 Support independent media.** How we think about an issue has a lot to do with what we've read, heard, or seen. The corporate-owned media have way too much clout. Give money, time, and encouragement to your community radio station, an informative website, or a magazine that reflects your values, so they can reach more people.

**9 Keep your sights on the long term.** It will take far more than one election to bring about the deep changes needed to reverse the damage to our planet and create a society that treats everyone fairly. Make your political work count toward building lasting networks, organizations, and relationships. Get your organization involved in coalitions that can work together over the long haul.

**10 Hold a party.** This election will bring both good news and bad news. Gather with friends on November 3 to celebrate the good, comfort each other about the bad, and regroup to keep making a difference. Make it fun. The future depends on our being in this for the long haul.