Jewish Texts On Voting and Civic Engagement

| 1 Civio Engagement including voting is a mitzuah | | | | |
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| 1. Civic Engagement, including voting, is a mitzvah | | | | |
| Deuteronomy 16:18 | You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. | שֹׁפְטִים וְשְׂטְרִ'ים תְּתֶּן־לְּךָׂ בְּכָל־שְׁעָלֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יְהוֵה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ לִשְׁבָטֵיךָ וְשָׁפְטִוּ אֶת־הָעָם מִשְׁפַּט־צֶדֶק: | | |
| Jeremiah 29:7 | And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the LORD in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper. | וְדִרְשׁׁוּ אֶת־שְׁלַוֹם הָעִ־יר אֲשֶׁר הִגְלֻיתִי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה וְהִתְפַּלְלָּוּ בַעֲדָהּ אֶל־יי כַּי בִשְׁלוֹמָהּ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שָׁלְוֹם: | | |
| Mishna Pirkei Avot 2:4 | Hillel taught, "Do not separate yourself from the community" | ָהְלֵּל אוֹמֵר, אַל תִּפְרֹשׁ מִן הַצְּבּוּר | | |
| Mishna Pirkei Avot 3:2 | Rabbi Chanina, the Deputy High Priest, says: Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, man would swallow his fellow alive. | רַבִּי חֲנִינָא סְגַן הַכּּהֲנִים אוֹמֵר, הֱוִי מִתְפַּלֵּל בִּשְׁלוֹמָהּ שֶׁל מַלְכוּת, שָׁאִלְמָלֵא מוֹרָאָהּ, אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ חַיִּים בְּלָעוֹ. | | |
| BT Berakhot 55a | With regard to Bezalel's appointment, Rabbi Yitzḥak said: One may only appoint a leader over a community if he consults with the community and they agree to the appointment, as it is stated: "And Moses said unto the children of Israel: See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah" (Exodus 35:30). The Lord said to Moses: Moses, is Bezalel a suitable appointment in your eyes? Moses said to God: Master of the universe, if he is a suitable appointment in Your eyes, then all the more so in my eyes. The Holy One, Blessed be God, said to him: Nevertheless, go and tell Israel and ask their opinion. Moses went and said to Israel: Is Bezalel suitable in your eyes? They said to him: If he is suitable in the eyes of the Holy One, Blessed be God, and in your eyes, all the more so he is suitable in our eyes. | אמר רבי יצחק אין מעמידין פרנס על הצבור אלא אם כן נמלכים בצבור שנאמר ראו קרא ה' בשם בצלאל אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה משה הגון עליך בצלאל אמר לו רבונו של עולם אם לפניך הגון לפני לא כל שכן אמר לו אף על פי כן לך אמור להם הלך ואמר להם לישראל הגון עליכם בצלאל אמרו לו אם לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ולפניך הוא הגון לפנינו לא כל שכן | | |
| Midrash Tanhuma, Mishpatim 2:1 | If a person of learning participates in public affairs and serves as judge or arbiter, that person gives stability to the land But if a person sits in their home and says to themselves, "What have the affairs of society to do with me? Why should I trouble myself | מַלְכָּהּ שֶׁל תּוֹרָה, בְּמִשְׁפָּט שֶׁהוּא עוֹשֵׁה, מֵעֲמִיד אֶת הָאָרֶץ אִם מֵשִּׁים אָדָם עַצְמוֹ כִּתְרוּמָה הַזּוּ שְׁמוּשְׁלֶכֵת בְּזָוִיוֹת הַבָּיִת וְאוֹמֵר: מָה לִי בְּטוֹרַח הַצִּבּוּר ?מָה לִי בְּדִינֵיהֶם? מָה לִי לִשְׁמוֹעַ קוֹלָם? | | |

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| | with the people's voices of protest? Let my soul dwell in peace!"—if one does this, they overthrow the world. | שָׁלוֹם עֶלֶיךָ נַפְשִׁי! הֲרֵי זֶה מֵחֲרִיב אֶת הָעוֹלָם. | |
| BT Bava Metzia 59b | Rabbi Yehoshua stood on his feet and said: It is written: "It is not in heaven" (Deuteronomy 30:12). The Gemara asks: What is the relevance of the phrase "It is not in heaven" in this context? Rabbi Yirmeya says: Since the Torah was already given at Mount Sinai, we do not regard a Divine Voice, as You already wrote at Mount Sinai, in the Torah: "After a majority to incline" (Exodus 23:2). | עמד רבי יהושע על רגליו ואמר (דברים ל, יב) לא בשמים היא מאי לא בשמים היא אמר רבי ירמיה שכבר נתנה תורה מהר סיני אין אנו משגיחין בבת קול שכבר כתבת בהר סיני בתורה (שמות כג, ב) אחרי רבים להטות | |
| Responsa of the Rosh 6:10 | Regarding your question of whether two or three citizens in a city may remove themselves from a communal agreement, or from a decree of cherem (excommunication) on something: Know that, regarding communal affairs, the Torah says, "lean towards the majority" (a rabbinic translation of Shemot 23:2). Regarding any matter that the community agrees upon, go after the majority, and individuals must uphold everything that the majority decides for them. For if not, the community will never agree about anything, if it was within the power of individuals to negate the agreement. Therefore the Torah says: regarding everything there's an agreement of the majority, "lean towards the majority." | | |
| Rema on Shulhan Arukh, Choshen Mishpat 163:1 | And with a matter that the community is not able to be in agreement about, all the heads of households that pay taxes should convene and accept upon themselves that each one proclaim his opinion for the sake of heaven, and [then] go according to the majority. And if the minority [refuses to go along], the majority can force them [to comply] - even through secular law and we follow the majority of those stating their opinion. | כל צרכי ציבור שאינן יכולין להשוות עצמן יש להושיב כל בע"ב הנותנים מס ויקבלו עליהם שכל אחד יאמר דעתו לשם שמים וילכו אחר הרוב ואם המיעוט ימאנו הרוב יכולין לכוף אותן אפילו בדיני עכו"ם בתר רוב הנשארים האומרים דעתן | |
| R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, Nineteen Letters 16:4 | To be pushed back and limited upon the path of life is, therefore, not an essential condition of the exile, but, on the contrary, it is our duty to join ourselves as closely as possible to the state which receives us into its midst, to promote its welfare and not to consider our well-being as in any way separate from that of the state to which we belong. | הרדיפה וההגבלה בדרך החיים אינן בעצם תנאי הגלות, ונהפוך הוא, חוב מוטל עלינו לפי היכולת, להאחז במדינה אשר תקבל אותנו לגור בה; להשתדל להוציא לפועל את מטרת המדינה ותועלתה, ובדרשנו את טובת עצמנו, עלינו לדרוש גם את שלומה וטובתה. | |

| Rav Moshe Feinstein Letter, October 3, 1984 | On reaching the shores of the United States, Jews found a safe haven. The rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights have allowed us the freedom to practice our religion without interference and to live in this republic in safety. A fundamental principle of Judaism is hakaras hatov recognizing benefits afforded us and giving expression to our appreciation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each Jewish citizen to participate in the democratic system which guards the freedoms we enjoy. The most fundamental responsibility of each individual is to register and to vote. Therefore, I urge all members of the Jewish community to fulfill their obligations by registering as soon as possible, and by voting. By this, we can express our appreciation and contribute to the continued security of our | | |
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| | community. | | |
| Chazon Ish | On Election Day, the Chazon Ish ran into a fellow Jew. "Did you vote yet" inquired the Chazon Ish. The person responded, "No." "Why not," the Chazon Ish persisted. The person responded, "I don't have the three Israeli pounds to pay the poll tax." The Chazon Ish would not give up. "Do you own a pair of tefillin," he continued. "Of course," the person replied. "Well, go and sell your pair of tefillin and use the funds to pay the poll tax so that you can go and vote," said the Chazon Ish. | | |
| Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein | There are a lot of warm, fuzzy reasons to vote, but as a halachist, I am limited to citing two compelling reasons why one is actually obligated to do so. The first is an overarching principle of Jewish life that translates again and again | | |
| | into normative behavior: <i>Hakarat ha-tov</i> , recognizing the good that someone or something has provided you. This is a great country for Jews. It is a minimal expectation of citizenship that we participate in the electoral process, and I see it as nothing less than obligatory to show our appreciation of this great country by acting on that expectation. | | |
| Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein (continued) | The second reason may be more controversial. In 1984, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the preeminent halachist of the late 20th century, wrote in a letter that all observant Jewish citizens of this country are obligated to vote. He wrote this during an election season in which many people felt the outcome was a foregone conclusion and any individual vote would have no value. Nonetheless, Rabbi Feinstein wrote—at the urging of some people in the know—that there are always people scrutinizing the voting habits of different communities, and that Jews have an obligation to vote in such a way that they will do the most good for | | |

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their community. And he called it an exercise in "nosei b'ol ha-tzibbur"—the rabbis command one not only not to shirk community responsibility, but to seek out ways in which one may help ease the community's burdens. So, he argued, where there are consequences for the community—consequences that he did not spell out—all Jews should vote.

| Jewish support for majoritarian rule requires action to be taken to combat voter suppression | | | | |
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| Exodus 23:2 | Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou bear witness in a cause to turn aside after a multitude to pervert justice | לְא־תִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵי־רַבִּים לְרָעֵׂת וְלֹא־תַעֲנָה עַל־רִ`ב לִנְטִת אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְהַטְּת: | | |
| Rashi on Exodus 23:2 | But I think that if one wishes to explain the verse so that every thing should fit in properly, its exegesis must be as follows: לא תהיה אחרי רבים f you see wicked men wresting judgment do not say: since they are many I will incline after them; | וַאָנִי אוֹמֵר לְיַשְׁבוֹ עַל אָפְנָיוּ כָּפְשׁוּטוֹ כָךְ פִּתְרוֹנוֹ: לֹא תהיה אחרי רבים לרעת. אִם רָאִיתָ רְשָׁעִים מַטִּיון מִשְׁפָּט, לא תֹאמֵר, הוֹאִיל וְרַבִּים הֵם הִנְנִי נוֹטָה אַחֲרֵיהֶם: | | |
| Rashbam on Exodus 23:2 | If, in your opinion, the majority are about to commit an error in judgment, do not remain silent because they are the majority, but state your view. This applies even if you know beforehand that they will not accept your viewpoint but that of the majority | לא תהיה אחרי רבים לרעות - אם הם דנים שלא כדין לפי דעתך ואף על פי שלא יאמינו לך כי אם למרובים. | | |
| Jerusalem Talmud Avodah Zarah 16a:1 | Rav Yochanan said: I have a tradition from Rav Lazer bei Rav Tzadok that any <i>gezeirah</i> that a <i>beis din</i> legislates, but which the majority of the community does not accept, is not a valid <i>gezeirah</i> . | אמר רבי יוחנן מקובל אני מר' לעזר בי ר' צדוק שכל גזירה שבית דין גוזרין ואין רוב ציבור מקבלין עליהן אינה גזירה | | |