

The COVID-19 pandemic has made this election year unlike any other.

There are logistical challenges, as many of the usual forms of engagement with candidates, such as meetings and town halls, are happening virtually instead of in person. There is a renewed push to expand mail-in voting.

But the pandemic has also surfaced questions of justice and vulnerability. While the impacts of COVID-19 are being felt globally, it is not affecting everyone equally. Those most vulnerable in the U.S. and around the world are the least able to weather the crisis.

Countries that already have weak health care systems, in some cases due partly to U.S. sanctions, are ill-equipped to respond. Many in the U.S. and around the world do not have the choice to work from home and must choose between keeping themselves safe and supporting their families.

Individuals, churches and businesses have stepped up to respond to the challenge. But the need for coordination and leadership by governments, at the local, state and national levels, is also clear.

Scripture teaches us that governments play an important role in preserving order and promoting justice (Romans 13:1-7) but they can also abuse their authority (1 Samuel 8:10-18). In this election year let us pray for elected leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2) and discern which candidates will best use their offices to care for those who are vulnerable (Isaiah 10:1-2).

This resource contains suggested questions for candidates on the following issues:

- Addressing climate change
- Ending gun violence
- Ensuring sanctions do not harm civilians
- Welcoming immigrants



## Register to vote

For U.S. citizens, voting is a privilege and a responsibility that should not be taken for granted. If you or others in your community are not yet registered to vote, please visit [votervoicenet.org/MennoniteCC/voterregistration](https://votervoicenet.org/MennoniteCC/voterregistration). More information is available from the Our Faith, Our Vote initiative at [ucc.org/ourfaithourvote](https://ucc.org/ourfaithourvote).

## Participate in town hall events

Many who reside in the U.S. still struggle for the right to vote. Even those who are not registered voters, however, can find opportunities to engage candidates. At the time of this writing, candidates are not holding in-person town halls but many are holding “tele-town halls” via Facebook or phone. These events provide an opportunity to engage candidates and to let them know that their constituents care about issues of peace and justice.

Here are some tips:

1. Find out what events, whether virtual or in-person, are being hosted by local, state and national candidates. Many of these are listed at [townhall-project.com](https://townhall-project.com). You can also follow your members of Congress on Facebook or sign up to receive emails directly from their offices.
2. Before the event, research issues that you care about. Come up with one or two clear, well-worded questions to ask the candidate(s). The ones listed on this resource can give you a place to start.
3. Ask the question(s) politely but firmly. Ask open questions that invite more than a “yes” or “no” answer.

The following questions are intended as a guide for your interactions with candidates, as well as your own reflection as you evaluate candidates' stances.

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## Addressing climate change

Environmental disasters are increasing, from droughts in Chad and El Salvador to devastating hurricanes in Vietnam. The United States is the largest historic emitter of greenhouse gases and has a great responsibility to respond appropriately to climate change. The intersections of climate change with migration, food security, health and conflict highlight the importance of U.S. foreign assistance and U.S. participation in international agreements.

- What is your stance on the U.S. role in the Paris climate agreement? How should the U.S. work with other countries to address climate change?
- What steps would you take to respond to natural disasters and severe droughts that contribute to global hunger and migration?

*Adapted from "Election Resource: Climate Change" by the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions. See the full resource at [washingtonmemo.org/environment](http://washingtonmemo.org/environment).*

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## Ensuring sanctions do not harm civilians

Unilateral economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. often carry severe consequences for civilians in countries like Iran, Syria, Cuba, Venezuela and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Sanctions raise the prices of basic commodities such as food and fuel and make it difficult to maintain critical infrastructure such as water and sanitation. The U.S. should ensure humanitarian exemptions to sanctions and lift decades-long sanctions that have proven to be ineffective in promoting policy change.

- How will you work to ensure that U.S. sanctions do not worsen suffering in civilian populations?
- How will your foreign policy platform prioritize diplomacy over military action and coercive measures such as sanctions?

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## Ending gun violence

Nearly 40,000 people in the U.S. were killed by firearms in 2018. Annually the U.S. has more deaths as a result of firearms than any other wealthy country. Polls show strong support among voters for bills to prevent gun violence, such as strengthened background checks. But meaningful gun violence prevention legislation has not passed in more than 20 years.

- Polls by Gallup, NPR and others show strong support for legislation to strengthen background checks and other initiatives to help prevent gun violence. What is your stance on this legislation?
- What steps would you take to address gun violence, which takes the lives of more than 100 people in the U.S. each day?

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## Welcoming immigrants

Most migrants currently coming to the U.S.-Mexico border are from the Central American countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. All three countries face high rates of violence, corruption and poverty. U.S. foreign assistance to the region has been inconsistent and politicized, dependent on these governments' willingness to cooperate with draconian U.S. immigration policies.

Furthermore, the Trump administration has essentially ended the right for migrants to seek asylum, or protection from violence or persecution, in the U.S. (read more at [mcc.org/safe-refuge](http://mcc.org/safe-refuge)).

- How will you ensure that U.S. assistance to Central America addresses root causes of migration and is decoupled from immigration enforcement?
- What proposals do you have to protect asylum seekers escaping violence and persecution?

