

The United Church of Moscow
The Justice Table: Democracy, Voting, and Economic Justice
Sunday, September 27, 2026

How Should Churches Engage In Politics?

The Johnson Amendment (1954):

A tax code provision stating that churches and other nonprofit organizations can lose their tax-exempt status if they participate in, or intervene in "any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office." Nonprofits are still allowed to engage in nonpartisan civic work, such as voter registration drives, public education, and hosting candidate forums that do not favor a specific person. They can also speak out on broad social and political policy issues.

Does the Johnson Amendment impede on our freedom of speech?

In 2025, several churches won settlements against the IRS for violating the Johnson Amendment, citing concerns about freedom of speech. Following this incident, the IRS now says it will allow houses of worship to endorse candidates for political office without losing their tax-exempt status. They compared religious institutions' endorsement of candidates to a "family discussion."

Today, the Johnson Amendment still stands, but is largely unenforced by the IRS. To date, only ONE church has lost its tax exemption status over politics (1992).

In practice, the only thing stopping a church from platforming a political candidate/party is the integrity of the church and the church's leadership.

The Johnson Amendment may seem like a violation of free speech, but it can also be viewed as a protection of the separation of church and state.

Christian nationalism is a political ideology that seeks to merge Christian identity with national civic life, asserting that a country, specifically the United States, is defined by Christianity and that the government should actively promote or enforce this religious identity. Christian nationalism relies on the breakdown of the Johnson Amendment to accomplish the merging of Church and State.

Even if our church advocates for different political candidates/parties than the loudest contemporary examples of "Christian nationalism," if we violate the Johnson Amendment, we too, are practicing Christian nationalism.

The only thing stopping a church from platforming a political candidate/party and practicing Christian nationalism is the integrity of the church and the church's leadership.

Should the Church be Political?

“‘Politics’ is just another word for our public life together - the decisions that we make as a community that affect all of us. So, in that way, our life together as the church is very political because another word for politics is community.” - Rev. Dr. Elle Dowd; activist, pastor, community organizer

From the National Latino Evangelical Coalition:

Voting is one way we practice love of neighbor. Before casting your ballot, take time to look beyond campaign slogans, party labels, and political personalities. Ask not only, “What matters to me?” but also, “How will my vote affect my neighbors?” No candidate or political party perfectly represents the will of God. Our ultimate hope does not rest in an election, a government, or a political leader. Our hope is in Jesus Christ. Still, our votes matter. Christians have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to participate thoughtfully in public life. We can vote with wisdom, seek justice, show mercy, protect human dignity, and work toward the good of our communities.”

If engaging in politics can help us love our neighbors better, but we want to maintain the separation of church and state, what is our guiding policy?

Crafting a Church Political Engagement Policy:

Theological Foundation - what is the purpose of our political engagement?

Legal Boundaries - candidate endorsements, prohibition of church resources, nonpartisan events, etc

Permitted Civil Activities - in what ways will we engage?

Resources

ACLUND.org, “The Danger of Christian Nationalism,” July 1, 2024.

BaptistNews.com, “Opinion: 17 rules for Christian engagement in politics,” July 10, 2007.

ChristianityToday.com, “What Is Christian Nationalism?” February 3, 2021.

Congress.Gov, “Recent Litigation Highlights Debate About IRS Enforcement of Prohibition on Political Campaign Activity Against Churches,” July 2, 2026.

Institute for Free Speech, “Recommendations to the IRS on the Johnson Amendment,” June 3, 2025.

nalec.org, “Beyond Election Day: NALEC Releases “With Love,” a Guide to Faithful Voting,” September 18, 2026.

NPR, “IRS says churches can now endorse political candidates,” July 8, 2025.

NPR, “The Johnson Amendment In 5 Questions And Answers,” February 3, 2017.