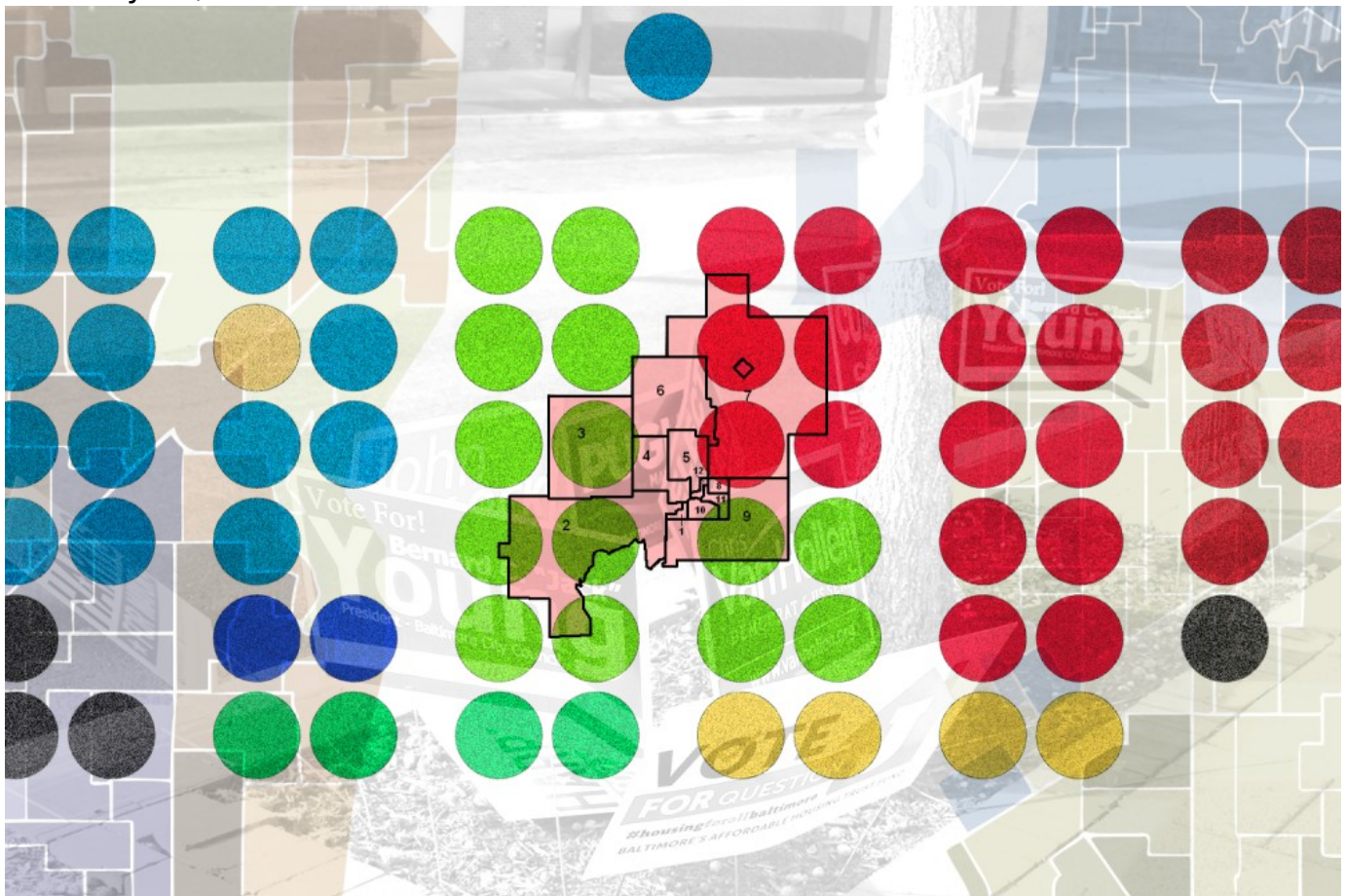


## Politics close to home

What's the next right thing we can do? It might be getting involved at the state or local level.

From the Editors

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Century illustration (Source images: Wikimedia Commons)

A close reader of the *Century* might notice that our recent issues have featured several articles on the theme of bracing for the next four years in the United States. That includes this issue, in which [Richard Lischer explores the competing](#) pulls of resistance and reconciliation felt by Christians living in unjust societies.

If we needed to choose one word to summarize the way many of our readers, writers, and editors feel at this moment, it might be *overwhelmed*. And when a big problem—whether it’s a wildfire, a personal health crisis, or a wave of authoritarian executive orders—feels insurmountable, it can be tempting to shrug our shoulders and do nothing. In any of these cases, the antidote to inertia might be to embrace a phrase attributed to Carl Jung, popularized by recovery communities, and featured in a song from the Disney movie *Frozen 2*: “Do the next right thing.” It is worth noting that the word *thing* is singular, not plural. In other words, do one thing. Choose one good, manageable action and then take it.

What sort of actions might we consider as the next right thing at the outset of this administration, when US democracy hangs in the balance? One good place to start our search is local politics. The internet is littered with lists that claim to provide the best three or five or 15 ways to engage on this front. Even the most helpful of these lists, given their plentitude and the number of ideas they promote, can contribute to the overwhelm. But what if we consider their most common suggestions through the lens of Jung and Princess Anna, looking only for our one right step to take next?

**Learn about your community’s government.** Lisa, a former city council member near Kansas City, told the *Century*, “The best first step is one you can take right from your desk. Learn who the actors are in your local politics. Who is on your council? What are they voting on? Which journalists are reporting on it?” **Attend a city council, zoning committee, or school or library board meeting.** Nearly all such meetings are open to the public, provide agendas in advance, and include opportunities for attendees to speak. You may not change the outcome of a vote, but you can certainly build relationships with your representatives. **Volunteer for a local political campaign.** While national and state-level campaigns may be run by professional political operatives, local campaigns rely mostly on volunteers. So you can make an enormous difference with your phone calls, door-knocking, or organizing. Amy, who is running to be a judge in Pennsylvania, says, “Don’t be intimidated if it’s your first time volunteering. For many candidates like me, it’s our first time running and we need your help!” **Work to increase voter turnout.** Participating in voting drives is especially important ahead of local elections that aren’t coupled with national ones, since turnout is normally much lower in those cases. Voting drives help people register to vote, educate them on the different ways they can vote, and physically help them get to their polling locations.

What is your next right thing?