



Should Voting Be Mandatory in the U.S.?

CORE Q

HILLARY CLINTON and Donald Trump are all over the news, but that doesn't mean Americans will vote for either of them next fall—or for any candidate for that matter. Only 54 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the 2012 presidential election, including 41 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds. Voter turnout for the 2014 midterm election was even lower—about 36 percent, the lowest for a national election in 72 years.

Having millions of eligible voters stay home on Election Day is a major problem, says Barry C. Burden, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. “Voting is how politicians hear from their **constituents**,” he explains. “If only 40 percent of people are participating, it means politicians will be listening more to some people than others.”

Some people say that requiring citizens to vote would make

more Americans' voices heard. (Voting is already **compulsory** in more than 25 countries, including Australia, Belgium, Mexico, and Thailand.) Plus, supporters of that idea say, voting is one of our civic responsibilities. But many other people contend that forcing citizens to vote would be un-American.

Should voting be mandatory in the United States? Here's what two professors have to say.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: (TOP LEFT) HILLARY CLINTON; (TOP MIDDLE) THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON; (TOP RIGHT) NAACP; (BOTTOM LEFT) THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON; (BOTTOM MIDDLE) THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON; (BOTTOM RIGHT) THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON.

YES Everyone should be required by law to vote. Democracy doesn't work if a large portion of the population doesn't participate.

Mandatory voting is the best way to encourage politicians to focus their attention on *all* Americans, not just the middle and upper classes.

Because wealthier Americans are more likely to vote, government policies are disproportionately geared toward their interests. Unfortunately, the people who most often fail to vote are the ones who are already left behind—the poor, the unemployed, the less educated, and the homeless.

If voting were mandatory in the U.S., people would be inspired to pay more attention to campaigns—and current events. Compulsory voting would also allow candidates to spend less time and money on getting voters to the polls, and more on explaining where they stand on key issues.

Australia has had mandatory voting for federal elections since 1924. People who don't cast ballots have to pay a fine of about \$20. As a result, about 94 percent of eligible voters turn out. On top of that, perhaps because more people are involved in choosing their representatives, Australians report high levels of trust in government and satisfaction with the way democracy works. By comparison, a recent poll by the Pew Research Center found that just 24 percent of Americans trust the federal government.

Voting is more than a right—it's a responsibility. If Americans want their government to truly be of the people, by the people, and for the people, everyone has to go to the polls on Election Day.

—LISA HILL

**Professor of Politics and International Studies,
University of Adelaide, Australia**

NO The government shouldn't force people to vote. Doing so would flood the polls with millions of uninformed voters. Some Americans know a lot about politics, economics, foreign affairs, and current events. Others know hardly anything. Requiring uninformed people to vote would be like forcing them to fly an airplane or perform surgery without training.

Elections have high stakes. Our votes help influence matters of war and peace, poverty and prosperity, justice and injustice—not just in the U.S., but all over the world. Bad decisions at the polls can result in devastating wars, damaging laws, and disastrous economic policies.

Some people argue that voting is a civic responsibility. In my view, Americans who choose not to vote can exercise their civic duties in other ways, such as volunteering to help their communities or serving on a jury. But if they *do* vote, they owe it to themselves—and others—to be informed about the issues on the ballot.

Furthermore, having a right to do something doesn't mean you should be *required* to do it. For instance, we have the right to write novels or do science experiments, but it would be a violation of our individual freedom if the government forced us to do those things. Why should voting be any different?

There are better ways to fix low voter turnout in the U.S. One option is to make it easier for people to register to vote.

We could also lengthen the hours the polls are open or have Election Day on a weekend instead of a Tuesday. Such changes would be more effective—and more democratic—than forcing people to vote whether they want to or not.

—JASON BRENNAN

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Mandatory voting is the best way to ensure that elected officials represent the interests of all Americans.

Forcing Americans to vote would flood the polls with millions of uninformed voters.

**YOUR
TURN**

Who do you think makes the stronger argument? Why?



Click here to **Vote** yes or no: Should voting be mandatory in the U.S.?