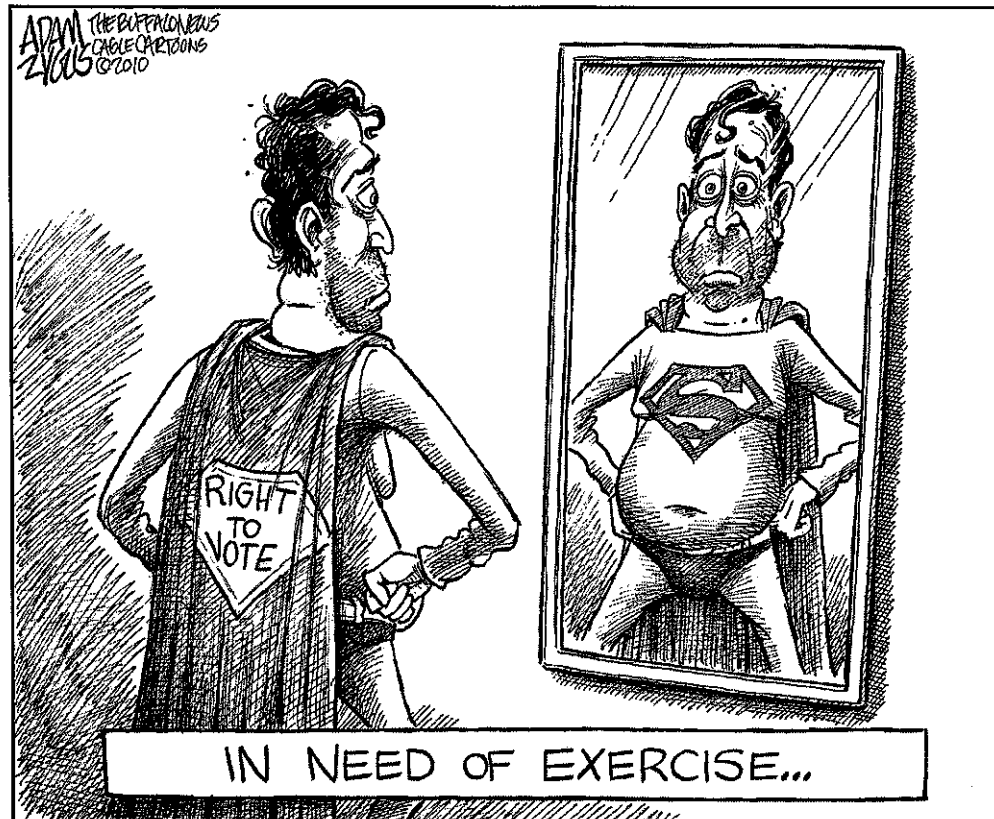


Should Americans Be Required to Vote?

EV



Source: Adam Zygjis, "Exercise Your Right," Buffalo News, November 2, 2010.

Overview: Everyone knows that voting is important in a democracy. However, just because voting is important does not mean everyone does it. In recent presidential elections, barely 60% of registered voters have participated. Why don't more people vote? The purpose of this Mini-Q is to look at the reasons Americans do not vote, why it matters, and a possible solution for increasing voter turnout.

The Documents:

Document A: Selected Countries with Compulsory Voting (chart)

Document B: Voter Turnout by Education Level and Age (chart)

Document C: Is It Time To Consider Mandatory Voting Laws?

Document D: Vote. Or Else!

Document E: Peru Trip Report

Document F: Civic Interest and Voting (cartoon)

Document G: Must You Vote?

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

Hook Exercise: Homework in Study Hall

Directions: Imagine that everyone in your school has a compulsory (required) study hall every day. The principal says the purpose of school is to learn, and students learn better (and get better grades) when they do their homework in study hall.

Everyone knows the principal has a point, but a lot of kids just prefer to read or text or talk with friends. The trouble is, a lot of these kids are the same kids who really need to study!

The principal has asked you to help choose the rule for next semester's study hall. Here are four options:

Rule 1: Students can decide for themselves whether to do their homework in study hall.

Rule 2: Students don't have to do homework in study hall if they have at least a B average.

Rule 3: Students who do their homework in study hall (or complete it) will get a vending machine credit in the lunchroom.

Rule 4: Students who do not do their homework in study hall will get detention.

Task: With a partner, list at least one pro and one con for each rule option. Then, select and "star" (*) that rule which you think is best. Be prepared to defend your position.

	Pros	Cons
Rule 1		
Rule 2		
Rule 3		
Rule 4		

Should Americans Be Required to Vote?

The right to vote is a big deal. Whenever a government collapses or is overthrown, one of the first things people demand is the right to vote for their leaders. During the revolutions of the “Arab Spring” in 2011, people in Egypt and Tunisia and Libya all demanded free and fair elections. Voting is considered so important that most people equate it with democracy itself.

Elections in new democracies are very important, and voter turnout is usually high and enthusiastic. In 1994, when South Africa became a full democracy, people stood in line for more than eight hours in order to vote. In Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, people proudly displayed their purple index fingers – proof that they had voted in the election.

The United States of America is also a democracy, but many Americans do not vote. Since World War II, no presidential election has ever involved 65% or more of registered voters! Turnouts for state and local elections are even lower. How does American democracy make decisions without an **electorate** to make them? And does the number of voters really make a difference?

Why Voting Matters

Voting is important for democracies in several key ways. A democracy functions with the **consent of the governed**. In other words, the people – either directly or through their representatives – decide who will lead the country and what the country will do.

People express their consent or disapproval in many different ways. They can write letters or make visits to elected officials. They can demonstrate in favor of causes they support or protest against things they don’t like. They can take direct action to bring attention to problems. They can gather to learn and work together to persuade other people or to make improvements

in their communities. The most obvious way of expressing consent, however, is by voting in elections.

Voting also shows that a government has the support of the people. In dictatorships, governments also have elections, but often the ballot only features one candidate. Such elections demonstrate the power of the dictator to control the voting, not the power of voters to control their leaders.

Increasing Voter Turnout

Despite the importance of democracy in

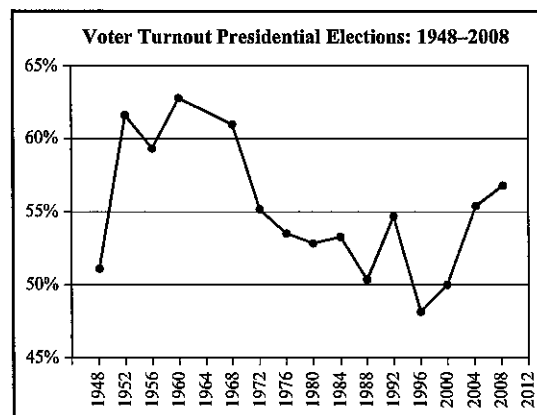
America, voter turnout is still low, particularly with certain populations. This has led some people to worry about the **legitimacy** of our government. They have proposed many different ways to increase voter turnout.

One proposal suggests making the voting process more convenient by permit-

ting mail-in ballots, same-day voter **registration**, and early voting. Another idea is that the United States should make voting easier by turning Election Day into a national holiday so everyone has time to vote.

Some other democracies, such as Australia and Peru, deal with the problem of low voter turnout by requiring their citizens to vote. To have an effective **compulsory** voting system, a country usually needs three things: a national voter registration database (to keep information current), rewards to encourage voters, and punishments to discourage non-voting.

Your task is to examine the following evidence and decide whether the United States should make everyone do their democratic “homework” and require them to vote, or whether our current electoral system should be left alone. In other words: *Should Americans be required to vote?*



Background Essay Questions

1. What are three reasons why voting is important to democracy?
2. What are three ways that voter turnout might be increased?
3. What is compulsory voting?
4. Define these terms:

electorate

consent of the governed

legitimacy

registration

compulsory

EV

Timeline

1790 – Only white male adult property-owners are allowed to vote.

1810 – Last religious voting restriction is removed.

1850 – By this date, almost all white males can vote.

1870 – 15th Amendment gives former slaves (males only) the right to vote.

1889 – Florida introduces poll tax. Other southern states follow.

1920 – 19th Amendment grants women's suffrage.

1964 – 24th Amendment bans poll tax.

1971 – 26th Amendment grants 18-year-olds the right to vote.

Document A

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), March 2009.

Note: Below is information from 13 of the approximately 40 countries that have a form of compulsory voting. Nearly 160 countries do not have compulsory voting.

EV

Selected Countries with Compulsory Voting Systems

Country	Penalties	Year Introduced	Comments
Argentina	1, 2, 4	1912	
Australia	1, 2	1924	
Belgium	1, 2, 4, 5	1893 (men)	Women in 1949
Bolivia	4	1952	Compulsory at 18 if married; 21 if single
Brazil	2	1934	Voluntary for illiterates and those over 70
Ecuador	2	1936	Compulsory for literate persons ages 18-65
Greece	5	1926	Penalties like denial of a passport, or a driving license were officially lifted in 2000
Italy	5	1945	Some sanctions, like trouble getting day care
Mexico	5	1917	
Netherlands	-	1917	Practiced from 1917 to 1967
Peru	2, 4	1933	Until age 75
Turkey	1, 2	1987	
Uruguay	2, 4	1934	Law not in practice until 1970

Document Analysis

1. What country has had compulsory voting the longest?
2. What are the possible consequences to someone who doesn't vote in Peru?
3. How can this document be used to argue for requiring people to vote?
4. How can this document be used to argue against requiring people to vote?

Document B

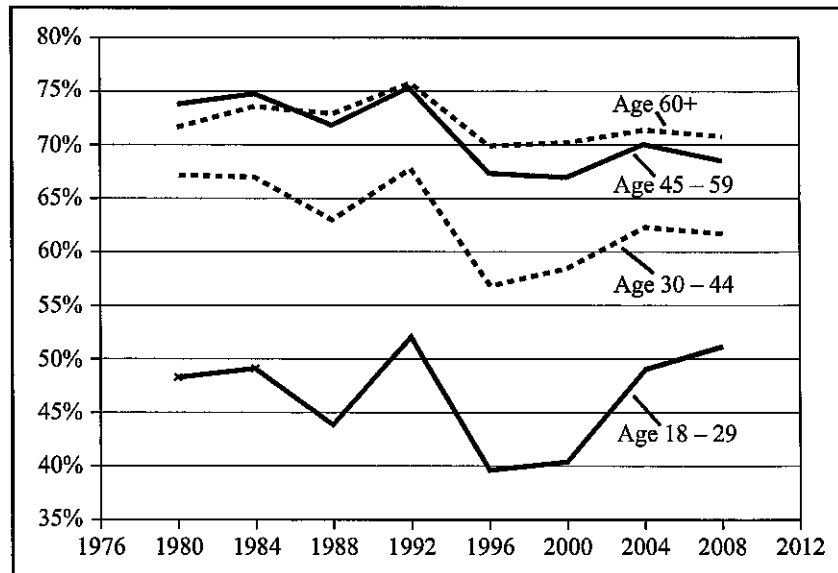
Source: United States Elections Project, George Mason University. May 17, 2010.

Education Level	2004	2008
Less than H.S. Diploma	39.5%	39.4%
High School Diploma	56.4%	54.9%
Some College to Bachelor's Degree	72.2%	71.5%
Post-Graduate Education	84.2%	82.7%

Voter Turnout by Education Level

EV

Voter Turnout by Age



Document Analysis

1. In 2004, what was the difference in voter turnout percentage between people who had some college or a bachelor's degree and people who did not have a high school diploma?
2. What can you conclude about the relationship between how much education a person has and the likelihood that person will vote?
3. In 2004, what was the difference in voter turnout percentage between people ages 18-29 and people ages 60 and over?
4. What can you conclude about the relationship between a person's age and the likelihood that person will vote?
5. How can you use this chart to argue for compulsory voting?
6. How can you use this chart to argue against compulsory voting?

Document C

Source: John W. Dean, "Is It Time To Consider Mandatory Voting Laws? Worsening Voting Statistics Make A Strong Case," *FindLaw's Writ*, February 28, 2003.

Note: John W. Dean was legal counsel to President Richard M. Nixon.

While compulsion of any kind is a restriction, so is the compulsion to drive only on the right side of the road. Requiring citizens to vote is no more restrictive than requiring them to register for the draft. And it is far less restrictive than requiring us, for example, to attend school; to serve on juries, possibly for weeks or months at a time; to pay taxes; or to serve in the military when drafted. In sum, voting is the least a citizen can do for his or her country, and it is not unreasonable to ask US citizens to do this minimal thing. This country should take first place in the world in voter participation, not compete with Zambia and others for last place.

EV

Document Analysis

1. What office did John W. Dean hold?
2. To what does John Dean compare compulsory voting? Compulsory voting is like ...
3. Does the author place greater value on civic duty (what a citizen must do) or liberty?
4. How can this document be used to support compulsory voting?
5. How can this document be used to argue against compulsory voting?

Document D

Source: Filip Palda, "Vote. Or Else!" *Fraser Forum*, February 2001.

Note: Filip Palda is a Canadian economist and university professor.

EV

Italy has mandatory voting and punishes non-voters by sometimes posting their names outside city hall and stamping DID NOT VOTE FOR FIVE YEARS on identification papers. Italy ranks low among western countries in political satisfaction and voters have unfavorable attitudes towards their electoral system. Switzerland and the US, meanwhile, have the lowest voter turnout rates of all western democracies, but among the highest voter satisfaction rates with their political institutions. . . . Those who obsess about voter turnout are perhaps the ones to whom we should pay the least attention. The less legitimate politicians feel, the more they try to pass laws that build around their regimes a Potemkin façade* of citizen involvement. . . . Government cannot paste a happy face on a political system and hope that people are smiling inside.

*A show designed to hide an undesirable fact or condition.

Document Analysis

1. What does "Potemkin façade" mean?
2. How does the author compare compulsory voting to a Potemkin façade?
3. Why does the author say he's opposed to compulsory voting?
4. In this example, does the author place greater value on civic duty (those things a citizen must do) or on freedom?
5. How can this document be used to argue for compulsory voting?
6. How can this document be used to argue against compulsory voting?

Document E

EV

Source: Jimmy Carter, "Peru Trip Report," April 5, 2001.

Note: After US President Jimmy Carter left office in 1981, he began to travel to different countries and monitor elections for fairness. Peru had recently experienced a dishonest election which left its citizens mistrustful of their government.

All poll officials [the people running the voting places] were new because anyone having been involved in last year's fraudulent [dishonest] process was excluded. Although well trained, they were inexperienced, and the complicated procedures and meticulous attention to every detail caused most citizens to wait about an hour before casting their first votes. During the day, however, they overcame this initial problem, and nationwide voting was completed almost perfectly and on time.

Voting is mandatory in Peru, with an enforced penalty of US\$35 for not voting. This is probably the cause of

13 percent of the ballots being blank or null, cast by citizens who refused to vote for any of the candidates or who spoiled their ballots. We could see no possibility of any error in the casting and counting of ballots, and (for the first time in our experience as monitors) there was not a single complaint about the accuracy of the voter's list. A national record of about 15 million voters is maintained, constantly corrected for new registrants, those who move overseas or to a different home in Peru, or die. It was interesting to note from early reports that only two votes in every 10,000 were disputed or challenged in any way in the presidential contest.

Document Analysis

1. What evidence can you identify that shows that voting was compulsory in Peru?
2. What are some components of the compulsory voting system in Peru?
3. Based on what President Carter reports, does the election seem fair? Explain.
4. How can you use this document to argue for compulsory voting?
5. How can you use this document to argue against compulsory voting?

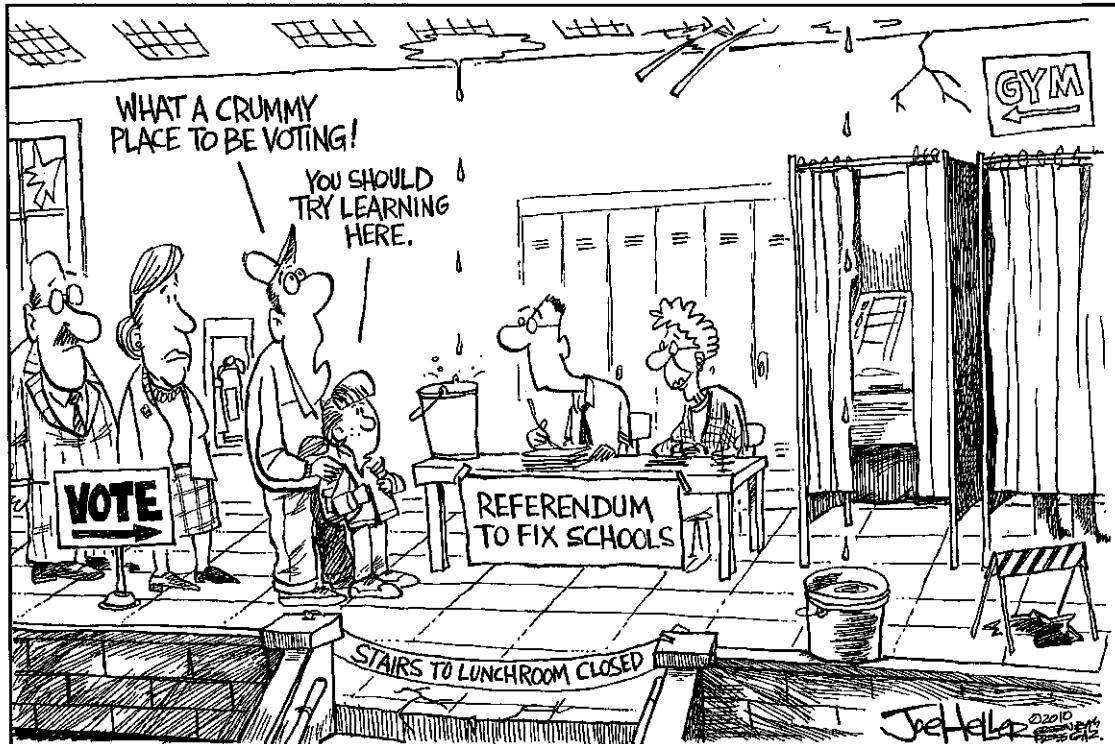
Document F

Source: An Australian supporter of compulsory voting, circa 1924. Cited in Aaron Lijphart, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 1, March 1997.

By compelling people to vote, we are likely to arouse in them an intelligent interest and to give them a political knowledge that they do not at present possess.

EV

Source: Joe Heller, "School Repairs," *Green Bay Gazette*, March 26, 2010.



Document Analysis

1. In the quote, why does the author support compulsory voting?
2. What is the connection between the year of the quote and Document A? Why is that year significant?
3. In the cartoon, what does the father of the student learn when he comes to vote?
4. What is the cartoonist saying about the importance of voting?
5. How could you use this document to argue that the cartoonist supports compulsory voting?
6. How could you use this document to argue that the cartoonist opposes compulsory voting?

Document G

Source: Randy Cohen, "Must You Vote?" *New York Times*, November 3, 2009.

Responding to our country's typically low turnouts, some groups strive to get people to vote, not for anyone in particular, but as an expression of civic virtue (vote for the candidate of your choice, but vote). It is reasonable to urge your neighbors to be informed about issues that affect your community. But it is irresponsible to encourage the unaware to put their ignorance into action so aimlessly. "Just vote" doesn't express civic virtue; it's sentimentality. You might as well urge the unpracticed to use power tools or Rollerblade. Simultaneously. At least they'd injure only themselves.

EV

Document Analysis

1. From what newspaper does this column come?
2. What does "simultaneously" mean?
3. What do you think the author of the quote means when he compares encouraging the ignorant to vote with encouraging the inexperienced to rollerblade and use power tools at the same time?
4. How could you use this quote to argue for compulsory voting?
5. How could you use this quote to argue against compulsory voting?

From Thesis to Essay Writing

Mini-Q Essay Outline Guide

Working Title

Paragraph #1

Grabber

Background

Restating the question with key terms defined

Thesis and road map

Paragraph #2

Baby Thesis for bucket one

Evidence: Supporting detail from document with document citation

Argument: Connecting evidence to the thesis

Paragraph #3

Baby Thesis for bucket two

Evidence

Argument

Paragraph #4

Baby Thesis for bucket three

Evidence

Argument

Paragraph #5

Conclusion: "Although" statement and restatement of main idea

EV