

Part 2

Argument

Directions: Closely read each of the *four* texts provided on pages 11 through 16 and write a source-based argument on the topic below. You may use the margins to take notes as you read and scrap paper to plan your response. Write your argument beginning on page 1 of your essay booklet.

Topic: Should American citizens be required to vote in national elections?

Your Task: Carefully read each of the *four* texts provided. Then, using evidence from at least *three* of the texts, write a well-developed argument regarding whether or not American citizens should be required to vote. Clearly establish your claim, distinguish your claim from alternate or opposing claims, and use specific, relevant, and sufficient evidence from at least *three* of the texts to develop your argument. Do *not* simply summarize each text.

Guidelines:

Be sure to:

- Establish your claim regarding whether or not American citizens should be required to vote
- Distinguish your claim from alternate or opposing claims
- Use specific, relevant, and sufficient evidence from at least *three* of the texts to develop your argument
- Identify each source that you reference by text number and line number(s) or graphic (for example: Text 1, line 4 or Text 2, graphic)
- Organize your ideas in a cohesive and coherent manner
- Maintain a formal style of writing
- Follow the conventions of standard written English

Texts:

Text 1 – Telling Americans to Vote, or Else

Text 2 – Compulsory Voting

Text 3 – Does Mandatory Voting Restrict or Expand Democracy?

Text 4 – How Compulsory Voting Subverts Democracy

Text 1

Telling Americans to Vote, or Else

Jury duty is mandatory; why not voting? The idea seems vaguely un-American. Maybe so, but it's neither unusual nor undemocratic. And it would ease the intense partisan polarization¹ that weakens our capacity for self-government and public trust in our governing institutions.

5 Thirty-one countries have some form of mandatory voting, according to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. The list includes nine members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and two-thirds of the Latin American nations. More than half back up the legal requirement with an enforcement mechanism, while the rest are content to rely on the moral force of the law.

10 Despite the prevalence of mandatory voting in so many democracies, it's easy to dismiss the practice as a form of statism² that couldn't work in America's individualistic and libertarian political culture. But consider Australia, whose political culture is closer to that of the United States than that of any other English-speaking country. Alarmed by a decline in voter turnout to less than 60 percent in 1922, Australia adopted mandatory voting in
15 1924, backed by small fines (roughly the size of traffic tickets) for nonvoting, rising with repeated acts of nonparticipation. The law established permissible reasons for not voting, like illness and foreign travel, and allows citizens who faced fines for not voting to defend themselves. ...

20 Proponents offer three reasons in favor of mandatory voting. The first is straightforwardly civic. A democracy can't be strong if its citizenship is weak. And right now American citizenship is attenuated — strong on rights, weak on responsibilities. There is less and less that being a citizen requires of us, especially after the abolition of the draft. Requiring people to vote in national elections once every two years would reinforce the principle of reciprocity at the heart of citizenship.

25 The second argument for mandatory voting is democratic. Ideally, a democracy will take into account the interests and views of all citizens. But if some regularly vote while others don't, officials are likely to give greater weight to participants. This might not matter much if nonparticipants were evenly distributed through the population. But political scientists have long known that they aren't. People with lower levels of income and education are less
30 likely to vote, as are young adults and recent first-generation immigrants.

Changes in our political system have magnified these disparities.³ During the 1950s and '60s, when turnout rates were much higher, political parties reached out to citizens year-round. At the local level these parties, which reformers often criticized as "machines,"
35 connected even citizens of modest means and limited education with neighborhood institutions and gave them a sense of participation in national politics as well. (In its heyday, organized labor reinforced these effects.) But in the absence of these more organic forms of political mobilization, the second-best option is a top-down mechanism of universal mobilization.

40 Mandatory voting would tend to even out disparities stemming from income, education and age, enhancing our system's inclusiveness. It is true, as some object, that an enforcement mechanism would impose greater burdens on those with fewer resources. But this makes it all the more likely that these citizens would respond by going to the polls, and they would stand to gain far more than the cost of a traffic ticket.

¹partisan polarization — one-sidedness

²statism — central governmental control of economic and social policy

³disparities — inequalities

45 The third argument for mandatory voting goes to the heart of our current ills. Our low turnout rate pushes American politics toward increased polarization. The reason is that hard-core partisans are more likely to dominate lower-turnout elections, while those who are less fervent about specific issues and less attached to political organizations tend not to participate at levels proportional to their share of the electorate. ...

50 The United States is not Australia, of course, and there's no guarantee that the similarity of our political cultures would produce equivalent political results. For example, reforms of general elections would leave untouched the distortions generated by party primaries in which small numbers of voters can shape the choices for the entire electorate. And the United States Constitution gives the states enormous power over voting procedures. Mandating voting nationwide would go counter to our traditions (and perhaps our
55 Constitution) and would encounter strong state opposition. Instead, a half-dozen states from parts of the country with different civic traditions should experiment with the practice, and observers — journalists, social scientists, citizens' groups and elected officials — would monitor the consequences.

60 We don't know what the outcome would be. But one thing is clear: If we do nothing and allow a politics of passion to define the bounds of the electorate, as it has for much of the last four decades, the prospect for a less polarized, more effective political system that enjoys the trust and confidence of the people is not bright.

—William A. Galston
excerpted from “Telling Americans to Vote, or Else”
<http://www.nytimes.com>, November 5, 2011

Text 2

Compulsory Voting

All democratic governments consider participating in national elections a right of citizenship and a citizen's civic responsibility. Some consider that participation in elections is also a citizen's duty. In some countries, where voting is considered a duty, voting at elections has been made compulsory and has been regulated in the national constitutions or electoral laws. Some countries impose sanctions¹ on non-voters.

Compulsory voting is not a new concept. Belgium (1892), Argentina (1914) and Australia (1924) were among the first countries to introduce compulsory voting laws. Countries such as Venezuela and the Netherlands practised compulsory voting at one time but have since abolished it.

Advocates of compulsory voting argue that decisions made by democratically elected governments are more legitimate when higher proportions of the population participate. They argue further that voting, voluntarily or otherwise, has an educative effect upon the citizens. Political parties can save money as a result of compulsory voting, since they do not have to spend resources convincing the electorate that it should turn out to vote. Lastly, if democracy is government by the people, presumably this includes all people, so that it is every citizen's responsibility to elect his or her representatives.

The leading argument against compulsory voting is that it is not consistent with the freedom associated with democracy. Voting is not an intrinsic² obligation and the enforcement of such a law would be an infringement of the citizen's freedom associated with democratic elections. It may discourage the political education of the electorate because people forced to participate will react against the perceived source of oppression. Is a government really more legitimate if high voter turnout is achieved against the will of the voters? Many countries with limited financial resources may not be able to justify the expense of maintaining and enforcing compulsory voting laws. It has been proved that forcing the population to vote results in an increased number of invalid and blank votes compared to countries that have no compulsory voting laws.

Another consequence of compulsory voting is the possible high number of "random votes". Voters who are voting against their free will may check off a candidate at random, particularly the top candidate on the ballot paper. The voter does not care whom they vote for as long as the government is satisfied that they have fulfilled their civic duty. What effect does this immeasurable category of random votes have on the legitimacy of the democratically elected government? ...

—Maria Gratschew
excerpted from "Compulsory Voting"
Voter Turnout Since 1945: A Global Report
International Institute for Democracy and
Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), 2002

¹sanctions — penalties

²intrinsic — essential

Text 3

Does Mandatory Voting Restrict or Expand Democracy?

Does mandatory voting restrict or expand democracy? For many people who have never heard about the idea, mandatory voting sounds very strict: requiring people to go to the polls on Election Day. In the United States, it seems strange to present an action many consider a right as a required duty. Nevertheless, in many foreign countries, mandatory voting (sometimes referred to as compulsory voting) is an obvious democratic option.

The system in fact is present in more than 30 democracies around the world. However, all policies are not the same. Mandatory voting can be used to elect all political representatives or it can be restricted to specific elections. For example, in France, mandatory voting is only used for Senatorial elections.

The two most notable examples of compulsory voting occur in Belgium and Australia. Belgium has the oldest tradition of [a] compulsory voting system. The system was introduced in 1892 for men and 1949 for women. Today, all Belgian citizens age 18 or over have to vote in every electoral event. If an individual fails to vote in at least four elections, he or she lose[s] the right to vote for the next 10 years and as a result face a general social stigma and specific problems like near impossibility in having a job in the public sector. In Australia, compulsory voting was adopted as a way of integrating the large population of immigrants that the country welcomes and is endorsed through non-voters facing potential fines.

Many people compare voting to taxes. In fact, one of mandatory voting's biggest advocates, former American Political Science Association president Arend Lijphart, uses this comparison in his writings like *Patterns of Democracy*. According to him, just as taxes are a way to feed the national economy, voting can be seen as a way to feed the civic economy. Moreover, when compelled to vote, citizens begin to be more involved in political life and in turn are encouraged to take a more active role in other areas of civic society. And no other change comes close to having as sweeping an impact on rates of voter participation.

Given Lijphart's arguments, would compulsory voting make sense in the United States? Not necessarily— for many Americans the right to vote also implies the right not to vote. In fact, some people might even interpret mandatory voting as a violation of [the] First Amendment's prohibition of compelled speech. Moreover, mandatory voting opposition argues that a forced electorate would not necessarily be the most politically intelligent electorate.

Some apolitical citizens might choose candidates arbitrarily or for the wrong reasons because they do not want to be fined or punished for not doing their hypothetical duty. Finally, voters in fact gain a certain kind [of] influence from their ability not to vote — elected officials can't take their vote for granted.

Whether you are an advocate for or against mandatory voting, the concept is a thought provoking idea that should not be overlooked just because it seems so foreign to the United States. But it should never be used to avoid tackling the root of political disengagement.

Democracies don't just need active citizens; they need educated and active citizens, which is why at FairVote we advocate for strong learning democracy programs for students. Americans also need faith in the power of elected officials to represent them effectively and the motivation that comes from elections having real choices from across the spectrum. Such changes can't happen overnight, the way passage of compulsory voting could take place. But they are essential building blocks of a successful democracy.

—Wael Abdel Hamid
adapted from “Does Mandatory
Voting Restrict or Expand Democracy?”
<http://www.fairvote.org>, October 18, 2010

Text 4

How Compulsory Voting Subverts Democracy

...Democracy is an achievement that has come about through determination, hard work, struggle, even bloodshed. On these grounds alone, it deserves to be honoured. But democracy can only be honoured if we appreciate the gift we're fortunate enough to possess in the first place. Sadly, a considerable number of people do not appreciate it, and have never given the matter a moment's thought. I'd argue that the massive indifference towards politics that now pervades the general populace will only be overcome by removing the compulsion to vote. Politicians would then be forced to argue their cases with more conviction, and to educate their constituents about the historical struggle that was necessary to achieve what most of us now take for granted.

People have to be persuaded of the importance of voting to the democratic process. Yet compelling people to do so subverts our democratic rights. Democracy is about freedom; it is the antithesis of compulsion. Compulsory voting raises a question we shouldn't even be asking: whether voting is a civil right or a civic duty.

The right *not* to vote in an election is as fundamental as the right to vote. Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights refer to people's rights to "freely chosen representatives". This right is something we each possess and can each choose to use, but it should never become a dictate. ...

It's certainly true that in countries where voting is voluntary, like the USA and UK, voter apathy is highest among the poor and uneducated. It's also hard to dispute the fact that, because these people—in Western countries at least—do not vote, they're ignored, and because they're ignored, they don't bother to vote. But the argument falls down with the claim that, by forcing these people to vote, politicians will be compelled to pay attention to them, and take steps to improve their situation. It's much more likely politicians will fight for the welfare of the poor and uneducated if they have to go out and *seek* their vote. ...

Those who believe countries with compulsory voting are more democratic argue that it legitimises democracy, that the election results in countries like the USA, where voting isn't compulsory and voter turnout is low, do not accurately reflect the country's political opinion. But I believe that not having an opinion *is* an opinion, that being indifferent to the outcome of an election and disliking all of the options put before one are both opinions. If people don't turn out to vote, they're definitely stating their opinions, many of which are both strongly held and well thought through. ...

Perhaps the clinching argument as to whether or not compulsory voting is more democratic is that, according to the experts, coercing¹ everyone to the polling booth in fact makes little or no difference to the final outcome. The experts (academics, pollsters and civil servants) have all calculated that in the last four Australian federal elections the results would have been the same even had the voting been voluntary. ...

Although falling voting figures around the world may be a worry, compelling people to vote is not the answer. Too many people feel they're powerless in the face of both the political system and the huge, undemocratic power of the modern corporation. They also feel that one politician is little different from another, and that none of them is going to deal in a meaningful way with any of the big issues. So it takes a politician who can galvanise² the public to get them voting. In the 2008 US Presidential election,

¹coercing — forcing

²galvanise — excite into action

45 people sensed a new political star in Obama, someone who would make a difference,
and voter turnout was the highest for forty years. ...

50 Numbers are unimportant. Quality rather than quantity should be the focus of a healthy
democracy. Voting should be carried out by those who care, by those who want to vote. It
isn't too hard to argue that those who want to vote deserve to be heard more than those who
do not. Is it truly worth listening to someone who has nothing to say or who doesn't *want* to
say anything? ...

—Peter Barry
excerpted from “How Compulsory
Voting Subverts Democracy”
<http://quadrant.org.au>, September 1, 2013
