

Arguments **in favor** of compulsory voting

As you read, make notes about the arguments, considering:

- Is the argument strong?
- Why or why not?

- A. Compulsory voting laws do increase voter turnout. Studies show that compulsory voting increases turnout by 7 to 16 percent. In Australia voter turnout is about 95 percent.
- B. Compulsory voting increases voting among people who are poor, less educated, and were previously disenfranchised, or denied the right to vote. Today, indigenous people in most countries are still less likely to vote. This is true of Latinos, young voters, and African Americans living in the United States. Recall that several U.S. states required voters to pass literacy tests. This practice discriminated against people who could not read. Compulsory voting gives an equal voice between the majority of people and those whose ancestors were disenfranchised.
- C. Elections with high rates of voter participation are more legitimate because they better represent the will of the people.
- D. Citizens are required to pay taxes, register for the military, and fulfill other responsibilities for the common good. It is reasonable to require voting, which is, after all, a defining feature of democratic governance.
- E. Compulsory voting educates voters. If people know they must vote, they will pay closer attention to the issues. All voters will go to the polls with information at hand.
- F. Compulsory voting laws build positive civic attitudes by reinforcing that voting is a vital part of democratic citizenship.
- G. Many candidates and political parties use negative campaigns to “scare” people to go to the polls. Mandatory voting would reduce the incentive to air negative advertisements.

Arguments **opposed** to compulsory voting

As you read, make notes about the arguments, considering:

- Is the argument strong?
 - Why or why not?
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- A. Democracy is about freedom, including the freedom to choose to participate. Authoritarian governments often coerce people to vote and to attend political rallies to give the appearance that their leaders are popular. Voluntary voting makes democracy more reflective of the people's actual choices.
 - B. People who are happy with the way things are may feel no need to vote. Low voter turnout may be a sign of overall voter satisfaction with the current system. Similarly, people will vote if they really care about the election results.
 - C. People who do not know or care about the candidates or the issues will not make wise or informed decisions. They may simply vote for someone at random and cancel the votes of people who do care. Forcing uninterested people to vote turns the idea of choice into a farce.
 - D. Citizens can challenge corruption or fraud by not voting. People should not have to vote for politicians they do not trust. Some voters deliberately spoil their ballots in protest. They will do this to show their disapproval of the candidates. Compulsory voting does not guarantee that people's votes will be counted properly or will not be tampered with. When everyone votes in a corrupt election, the results seem legitimate when, in reality, they are not.
 - E. Sometimes people are afraid to vote and should not be forced to do so. For nearly 50 years after they had the constitutional right to vote in the United States, many African Americans were intimidated or harassed when they tried to vote.
 - F. There are easier ways to increase voting. Democracies should better educate potential voters about the issues and the candidates' plans. Then, people will know what is "at stake" and why they should bother to vote. In the state of Maryland, where voter turnout in the September 2010 primary election was described as "dismal," the state legislature called for new voter registration and education programs. Voluntary voting promotes thoughtful voting.
 - G. Voluntary voting inspires people to take personal responsibility for their democracy. Compulsory voting does not.