

This week's issue:

SHOULD VOTING BE COMPULSORY IN LOCAL AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES?

Crispin Morales is a poor Bolivian factory worker who works 12-hour days. He works every day but Sunday. The last presidential election fell on a Saturday. Although he was given the day off as the law required, Crispin was unable to get to a polling station to vote. (Later, he was glad to hear that his candidate, Evo Morales, won the 2006 election with over 50 percent of the popular vote.) Because voting is mandatory in Bolivia, those who do not vote are punished for not complying with their **civic** duty. Crispin was not allowed to draw his salary from his bank for over two months.

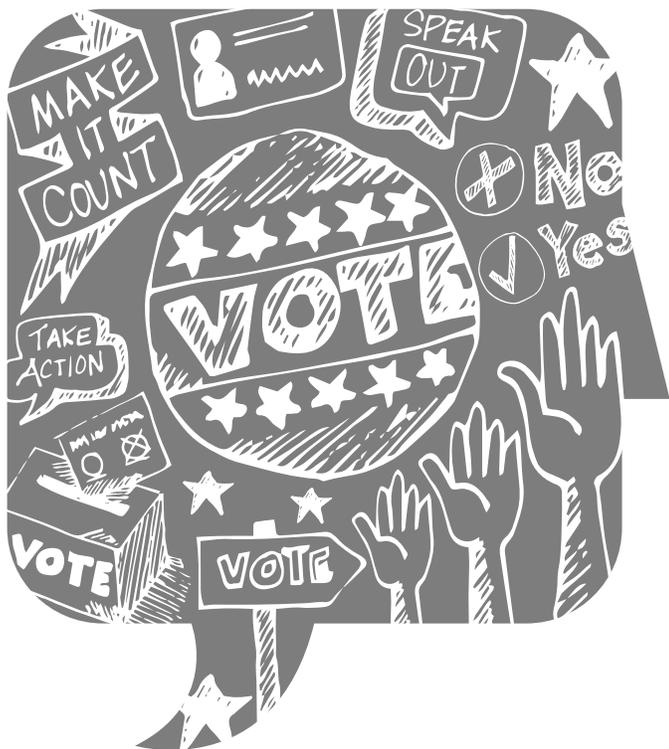
Not all countries with compulsory voting **enforce** this law. If a citizen of Australia or Brazil provides a good reason for not voting (e.g. being in a hospital) it is accepted. Many nations have dropped mandatory voting altogether. For example, Venezuela discontinued mandatory voting in 1993 and saw a 30% **decline** in attendance at the polls.

Low voter turnout is a common problem in countries without compulsory voting. This problem might be explained by voter **apathy**. Of 222 million eligible voters, only 125 million cast their votes in the 2012 U.S. presidential election. By contrast, over 750 million votes were cast during season 10 of American Idol. Some people find it discouraging that voting for American Idol seems to generate more enthusiasm than voting in national elections. Of course, American Idol viewers can vote multiple times during multiple episodes. Nonetheless, some citizens **evidently** feel their vote counts more in television contests than in political contests. Or perhaps they're just not interested in politics.

Mandatory voting seems attractive but it can be misused. In dictatorships, citizens are often forced to vote, but they don't have a choice. The same person is elected every time because the government does not allow other candidates to run for the same position. In March 2014 in North Korea, 99% of the country cast votes all for Kim Jong Un.

But how can democracies have representative governments unless all or most of their citizens vote? Some say the reason to force people to vote is to make sure that the elected government represents the majority of the population. But those against compulsory voting say that being required to vote is a violation of personal liberties. Others say that voting should be seen as a civic right and not a civic duty.

What do you think? Should all Americans be required to vote? Or should voting be voluntary?



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civic | apathy | enforce | decline | evidently

USE THE FOCUS WORDS * and alternate parts of speech

civic (*adjective*) related to citizenship

➡ **Sample Sentence:** In countries where voting is mandatory, those who do not vote are punished for not doing their **civic** duty.

🗨️ **Turn and Talk:** Is trying your best in school a **civic** responsibility?

apathy (*noun*) lack of interest

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Low voter turnout might be explained by voter **apathy**; many voters just don't care who wins.

🗨️ **Turn and Talk:** Which is more dangerous: **apathy** or anger? Explain.

enforce (*verb*) to make sure that a rule is followed

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Not all countries with mandatory voting **enforce** this law.

🗨️ **Turn and Talk:** What is one rule that most of your teachers **enforce**?

decline (*noun*) a drop, lessening

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Venezuela discontinued mandatory voting in 1993 and saw a 30% **decline** in attendance at the polls.

🗨️ **Turn and Talk:** Some communities have had a significant **decline** in crime due to certain policies. What kinds of policies might cause a **decline** in crime?

***decline** (*verb*) to drop or become less

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Teen smoking **declined** from 36% in 1997 to 16% in 2013.

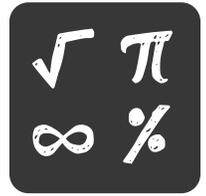
🗨️ **Turn and Talk:** What can be done to ensure that teen smoking rates **decline** even further?

evidently (*adverb*) apparently

➡ **Sample Sentence:** **Evidently** some citizens feel their vote counts more in television contests than in political contests.

🗨️ **Turn and Talk:** Your friend says to you, "**Evidently**, you must have been up late last night!" Explain how he or she might know that about you. What evidence might your friend have used?

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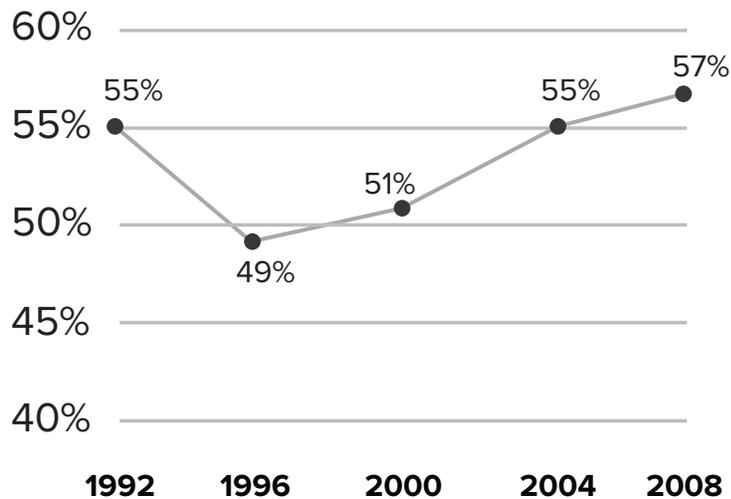
DO THE MATH

Many people see voting as a **civic** responsibility. Some people are worried about **declining** voter turnout and rising **apathy** about who gets elected to the United States government. Millions of Americans vote for their favorite American Idol singer, but many Americans never vote for president. Some people say that Americans **evidently** don't care very much about politics. One idea to increase voter turnout is to make and **enforce** compulsory voting laws. However, is voter turnout really **declining**? What do the numbers tell us?

Option 1: According to the graph, which election year had the greatest **decline** in voter turnout compared to the election before?

- A. 1996
- B. 2000
- C. 2004
- D. 2008

Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections



Option 2: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of the United States in 2000 was 281,421,906 residents. The voter turnout that same year was 51% of eligible voters. Does this mean that, in 2000, 51% of 281,421,906 residents voted? Why or why not?

 **Discussion Question:** If voter turnout has stopped **declining**, should we be satisfied? Or is it evident to you that more people should vote? Does voter turnout of 50% or 60% indicate **civic apathy**? Is good citizenship something that we should **enforce**?

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THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

Ms. Kahn’s science class is practicing working with information and presenting it in different ways. “Scientists need to be able to organize and interpret the data that they collect,” says Ms. Kahn, “as well as explain it to others. Majesta has brought in a data table about voter participation in 2011 that she found on the internet to share with us.”

“I’m not sure if this information backs up the idea that compulsory voting really works,” says Majesta. “I mean, Mexico has compulsory voting and it has one of the lowest voter participation rates in the data table.”

“But in Mexico they don’t really **enforce** the voting rules,” says Sergio. “My uncle always votes—he says it’s his ‘**civic** duty’—but none of my cousins ever bother.”

“Well, **evidently** Australia takes its voting law seriously,” suggests Majesta, “because they’ve got a really high voter turnout rate.”

“There are a lot of variables that could affect the rate of voter turnout,” says Ms. Kahn. “Access and ease of voting, level of education, **apathy**, and enforcement affect whether people vote or not.”

“Hold on!” says Sammy. “Ms. Kahn, this table is confusing. The percentages are all over the place. Can we find a way to make the information more clear?”

Here is Majesta’s table.

Country	% of registered voters who voted	Has compulsory voting
Australia	93%	Yes
Canada	61%	No
Chile	88%	Yes
Greece	62%	Yes
Israel	80%	No
Italy	75%	Yes
Mexico	63%	Yes
Russia	64%	No
Spain	69%	No
United States	71%	No



How is the current table organized? What are the benefits and drawbacks of this organization?



How could the information from Majesta’s data table be presented in a way that might make it more clear or easier to understand?



Discuss whether or not you think voting should be compulsory. Use the data from the table to help make your argument.

