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

Word Generation - Unit 2.19

## Focus Words

civic | apathy | enforce | decline | evidently



## WEEKLY PASSAGE

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 and, 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 dropped mandatory voting in 1993 and saw a **decline** or drop in attendance at the polls of 30%.

Low voter turnout is a common problem in countries without compulsory voting. Low voter turnout might be explained by voter **apathy**. In 2005, American Idol viewers cast over 500 million votes, but only 122 million votes were cast in the 2004 U.S. presidential election.

**Evidently** some citizens feel their vote counts more in television contests than in political contests. Perhaps they have decided that politicians have their own agenda and won't listen to the will of the people.

Mandatory voting seems attractive but it can be misused. In dictatorships, citizens are often forced to vote for the

same person every election because the government does not allow other candidates to run for the same position. In Paraguay, General Stroessner was "elected" by a wide majority every four years for almost 40 years.

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 government elected 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?

# Should voting be compulsory in local and national elections in the United States?

## FOCUS WORDS OF THE WEEK

**civic** : (adjective) related to citizenship

FORMS:

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EXAMPLES OF USE:

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NOTES:

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**apathy** : (noun) lack of interest

FORMS:

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EXAMPLES OF USE:

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NOTES:

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**enforce** : (verb) to put into effect

FORMS:

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EXAMPLES OF USE:

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NOTES:

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**decline** : (noun) a drop, lessening

FORMS:

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EXAMPLES OF USE:

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NOTES:

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**evidently** : (adverb) apparently

FORMS:

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EXAMPLES OF USE:

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NOTES:

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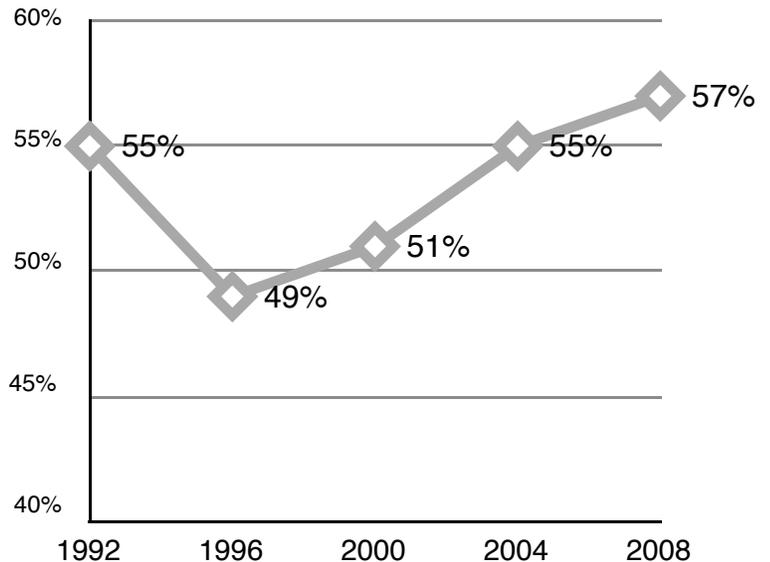
## PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

Voting is a **civic** responsibility. Some people are worried about **declining** voter turnout and rising **apathy** about who gets elected. 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 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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## THINKING 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 data that they collect,” says Ms. Kahn, “as well as explain it to others. Majesta has brought in a data table about compulsory voting 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 a **decline** in voter turnout,” says Ms. Kahn. “Access and ease of voting, level of education, **apathy**, as well as 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	Voter participation	Is voting compulsory?
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.

These voter participation percentages are based on the following source: Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) Report, “How’s Life? 2013” [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/economics/how-s-life-2013\\_9789264201392-en#page1](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/economics/how-s-life-2013_9789264201392-en#page1), page 59. The percentages are taken from “2011 or latest available year.”



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## DEBATING THE ISSUE

### Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

**A** Because democracies are based on a citizen's right to choose, citizens should not be required to vote. Voting should be a matter of choice.

**B** To ensure that we have a government that represents us, US citizens should be required to vote.

**C** We should educate all US citizens about the importance of participating in voting. We need citizens who know who their leaders are and what they are doing.

**D** Voting doesn't really matter in the end. Politicians do what they want and we have no control over what they do or what they spend.

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### Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

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# GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

*I believe that...*

*I agree with you, but...*

*You make a good point, but have you considered...*

*Can you show me evidence in the text that...*

