
Should Voting Be Mandatory?

Videos:

“Should we make people vote?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-w5fKfIYp4> (4:58 minutes)

“Should You Be Forced to Vote?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzTtsIf43WY> (3:47 minutes)

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
3. In the Harvard Kennedy School video, Jacob Beizer said that in the U.S., voter turnout tends to hover below 60% in presidential elections, and even lower in midterm elections. Were you aware that voter turnout was this low? Does it surprise you? Why/Why not?
4. Jason Brennan said one reason that mandatory voting is a bad idea is because most citizens are badly informed. Would mandatory voting encourage citizens to become more informed? Why/Why not?
5. Jacob Beizer said that in countries with mandatory voting, people who don't vote are subject to small fines. Do you think this is fair? Why/Why not?
6. Jason Brennan said, “Citizens appear to make systematic mistakes about the most basic issues in economics, political science, and sociology.” Can democracy work if citizens aren't educated on the issues? Why/Why not?
7. Jacob Beizer summarized the case for mandatory voting thusly: “By requiring participation in elections, government will have more legitimacy and be more representative of the populace.” What did he mean by this?
8. Jason Brennan said studies show that “people do not vote selfishly.” Why do you think that is?

9. Jacob Beizer cited a study which found that only 38% of unregistered nonvoters expressed confidence that election results represent the will of the people. Is this a healthy attitude to have in a democracy? Why/Why not?
10. Jason Brennan said, “If we make bad decisions at the voting booth, we contribute to bad government; needless wars; homophobic, sexist and racist legislation; lost prosperity and more.” Does this statement change the way you think about voting? Why/Why not?
11. In the Harvard Kennedy School video, Miles Rapoport compared mandatory voting to jury duty. Is this a fair comparison? Why/Why not?
12. Jason Brennan said, “All citizens should have the equal right to vote, but if someone wants to abstain from voting...he should be allowed to do so.” Do you think people have the right to *not* vote? Why/Why not?
13. Miles Rapoport said that implementing mandatory voting would also require making it easier to vote. Do you think it should be easier to vote? Why/Why not?
14. Jason Brennan summarized his argument by saying: “Mandatory voting guarantees high turnout, but not better government.” Do you agree? Why/why not?
15. Miles Rapoport said that under a mandatory voting policy, “none of the above” would be an option on every ballot. Do you think this is a good idea? Why/Why not? What would be the significance of having a “none of the above” option?
16. Can you think of any other ways to increase voter turnout, without making voting mandatory?
17. Should we strive for high voter turnout? Why/Why not?
18. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
19. What else would you like to learn about this topic?
20. For more on the topic of voting, check out these Both Sides of the Issue entries:
 - a. “Should Everybody Vote?”: <https://stosselintheclassroom.org/both-sides-should-everybody-vote/>
 - b. “The Value of Voting”: <https://stosselintheclassroom.org/both-sides-the-value-of-voting>