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# The Value of Voting

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## Videos:

“Why does your vote matter? | US government and civics | Khan Academy”  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Vf\\_mmb0ED4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Vf_mmb0ED4) (3:11 minutes)

“What does it cost to vote your conscience? Prof. Geoffrey Brennan”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTciIglgf80> (3:12 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 viewpoints in these two videos?
2. Should one of the viewpoints we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
3. Geoffrey Brennan said the probability that one vote will decide an election is “infinitesimally small.” Does this mean voting has little value? Why/Why not?
4. John Dickerson said that the 2000 U.S. presidential election was basically decided by a difference of 537 votes, a particularly close margin. Does this fact make you value you the right to vote more or less? Why?
5. Geoffrey Brennan said, “[V]oters are much more likely to *vote* according to their consciences than they are to *act* according to their consciences in the normal arena of action.” Why do you think this is? What does it tell us about voting?
6. John Dickerson mentioned that in addition to voting for political candidates, voters decide on referendums regarding individual issues like marijuana legalization and health care. How does the coverage of referendums compare to the coverage of political candidates? Is there more or less coverage? Why do you think this is?
7. Geoffrey Brennan argued that because each individual’s vote is unlikely to change the outcome of an election, it makes it easy to base your vote on flimsy or immoral reasoning. Do you agree with this? Do you think voters base their votes on bad reasoning because they don’t value their votes? Why/Why not?

8. John Dickerson said, “[W]hen a vote takes place...it’s not just for the policies of the day, it’s also for the policies that may yet come.” What did he mean by this?
9. Geoffrey Brennan said that politicians are more likely to appeal to voters’ emotions than to their reason and rationality. Have you found this to be true? Do you think politicians appeal more to people’s emotions or reason? Why/Why not?
10. John Dickerson argued that voting is valuable even if the candidate or issue you vote for doesn’t win, because it expresses public opinion in a way that can influence politicians. Do you agree with this argument? Why/Why not?
11. Geoffrey Brennan said, “[F]ew people choose which basketball team to cheer for on the basis of interests or reason.” What did he mean by this? Do you agree? Why/Why not?
12. John Dickerson said we shouldn’t take the right to vote for granted, because some people don’t have it. Do you agree with this? Does it make sense to vote for the sake of honoring the right to vote itself? Why/Why not?
13. John Dickerson and Geoffrey Brennan both talked about voting as a form of expression, but how did their evaluations of this differ?
14. 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?
15. What else would you like to learn about this topic?
16. 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. “Should Voting Be Mandatory?” <http://stosselintheclassroom.org/both-sides-should-voting-be-mandatory>