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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 compulsory 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?

### TEACHER

#### Reading Comprehension/Discussion Questions:

- ▶ What does "compulsory voting" mean?
- ▶ What happened in Venezuela after they made voting voluntary and not compulsory?
- ▶ Do you think voting should be an American citizen's civic right or his or her civic duty?

# Unit 2.19 - Should voting be compulsory in local and national elections in the United States? Focus Word Chart

Word	Meaning	Forms		
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes
civic	(adj.) - related to citizenship	civically	civics (n.)	
apathy	(n.) - lack of interest	apathies		apathetic
enforce	(v.) - to put into effect	enforces enforced enforcing		unenforced reinforce enforcer enforcement enforceable enforceability
decline	(n.) - a drop, lessening	decline (v.)		decliner declinable
evidently	(adv.) - apparently		evident	evidence evidentiary evidenced

## Unit 2.19 -

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



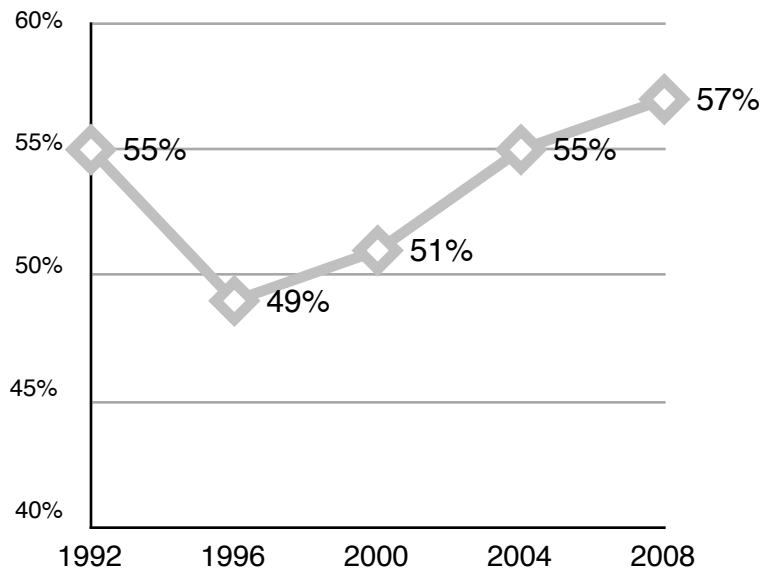
## Problem of the Week

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 year 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?

**Answer:** This *doesn't* mean that 51% of the total number of residents voted. Some residents (like children and, sometimes, felons) are not eligible to vote, so the number of people who voted is 51% of eligible voters, which is a subset of the 281,421,906 U.S. residents.

**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**?

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

## Debating the Issue

### 1. 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.

**E** \_\_\_\_\_  
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### 2. 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 think it's more accurate to say...*

*That's interesting - can you tell why you think that?*

*I think the evidence is contrary to what you're saying because. . .*

*Let me share something from the reading that will help us...*

#### TEACHER

Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own

## Unit 2.19 - Should voting be compulsory in local and national elections in the United States? Science Activity



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

The election for student body president (SBP) is next week.

“Each year, voter turnout **declines**,” says Professor Kahn. “**Evidently**, kids aren’t interested in student government.”

“It’s a shame,” says Professor Seemy. “This year we’re facing a budget crisis. The SBP will help make decisions about cuts. Don’t students care? What about **civic** engagement?”

“I think I know a way to fight student **apathy**,” says Professor Kahn. “Let’s **enforce** a compulsory voting rule. If kids don’t vote: detention!”

“Will compulsory voting improve knowledge about our school's issues?” wonders Professor Seemy. “Let’s find out!”

### Question:

How will compulsory voting for SBP affect students’ knowledge about school issues?

### Hypothesis:

When voting for SBP is compulsory, students will score higher on a quiz about the school’s budget crisis.

### Materials:

- ▶ Professor Kahn’s class
- ▶ Professor Seemy’s class
- ▶ Budget crisis quiz

### TEACHER

#### Real Research

-The fictitious WG study reflects a finding from the actual study cited below: compulsory voting coincided with increased knowledge about political issues, specifically the platforms associated with political parties. Interestingly, compulsory voting coincided with decreased knowledge about individual candidates.

Shineman, V.A., (2009, April 2). Isolating the effect of compulsory voting on political sophistication: Exploiting intra-national variation in mandatory voting laws in Austrian provinces. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association 67th Annual National Conference, The Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, IL. Retrieved on February 22, 2010 from

[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/3/6/0/4/7/p360474\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/3/6/0/4/7/p360474_index.html)

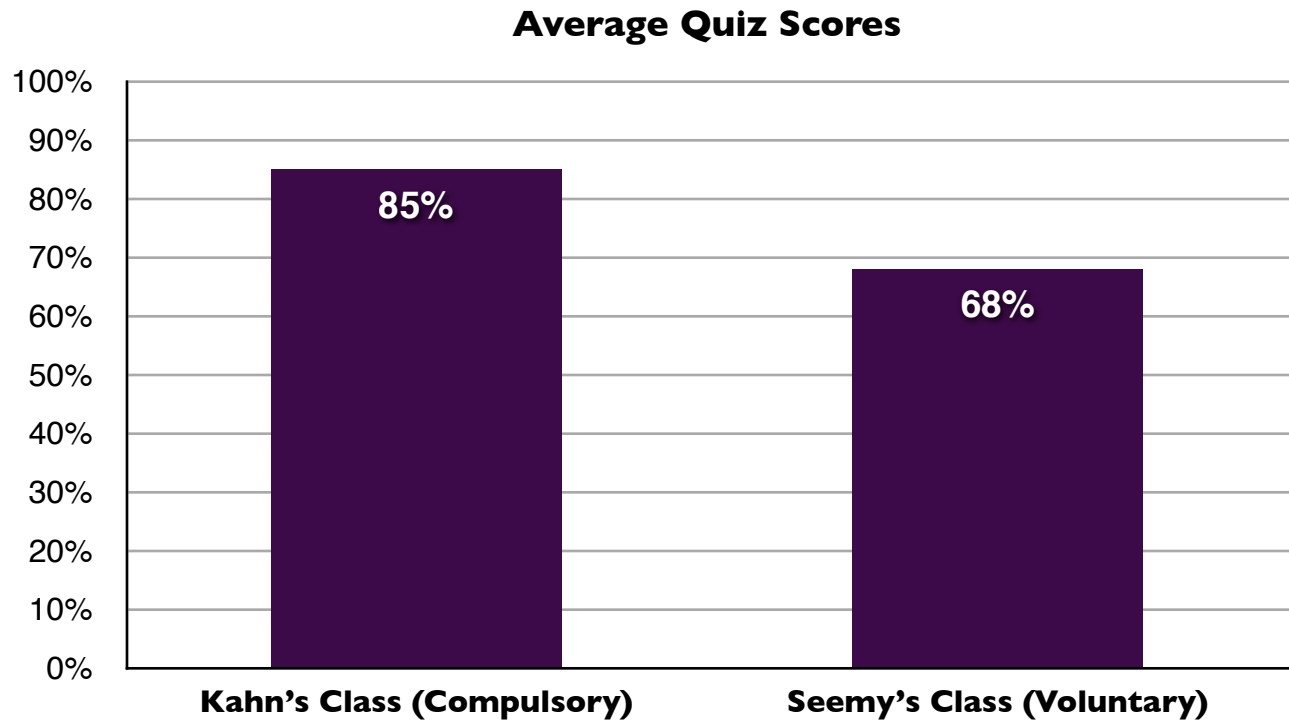
#### Classroom Discussion

Summarize the real research. (When voting is compulsory, people tend to know more about civic issues.) Are students surprised by this finding? Why or why not? How does the finding connect to this week’s topic? Which side(s) of the debate could it support?

## Procedure:

1. Make voting for SBP compulsory in Professor Kahn's class.
2. Make voting for SBP not required in Professor Seemy's class.
3. Hold election for SBP.
4. Give both classes the budget crisis quiz.
5. Calculate the average quiz score for each class.

## Data:



## Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

Supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

In the classroom where voting for SBP was compulsory, students scored higher on a quiz about an important civic issue: the budget crisis.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



## Writing Prompt

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

### Focus Words

civic | apathy | enforce | decline | evidently

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

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### TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation books as needed.

### A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

#### Good Start

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

#### Pretty Good

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

#### Exemplary

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

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