

# ELECTORAL MANDATE

## Should American citizens be required to vote?



For nearly half a century, voter turnout in presidential elections has declined, dropping as low as 51 percent in 1996 before rebounding to almost 60 percent in 2004. Concerned observers worry that the decline reflects the belief of many American citizens that they cannot make a difference.

In recent years, people have developed varied opinions about voter participation. Some say it does not matter that so many people do not vote as long as they have the right to do so. Others say nonvoting is harmful to democracy because it encourages politicians to serve the



interests of the “haves,” who tend to vote, rather than the “have nots,” who don’t.

Many reforms to increase voter participation have been proposed, including making voting mandatory and fining those who fail to vote. In countries that have a voting requirement, such as Australia, Belgium and Chile, turnout is high. Proponents of mandatory voting say it will create an electorate that reflects We the People, encouraging elected officials to respond to more citizens. Critics say forcing people to vote denies citizens the right *not* to vote as a protest against the choices they have in an election.

## Should American citizens be required to vote?

### YES

- Mandatory voting will increase participation, encouraging politicians to respond to the interests of more citizens.
- Voting is a responsibility of citizenship and people who shirk this responsibility should be penalized.
- Higher voter turnout makes for a more truly democratic election process.

### NO

- Requiring people to vote denies people the right not to vote or protest the choices they have in the election by staying home.
- Voting is a right, not a responsibility, and free citizens should be able to exercise their rights at will without being forced to do so.
- Requiring people to vote will increase the number of uninformed voters who are more likely to choose unqualified candidates.