Explain and evaluate the claim made in Galston and Dionne’s article, “Should Voting Be Compulsory?” Then, state and defend your own claim about whether or not voting should be mandatory for all eligible citizens. To strengthen your argument use evidence from Galston and Dionne’s article, “Should Voting Be Compulsory?,” as well as evidence from other texts, literature, and/or personal experience.

Remember that a strong argument includes insightful evidence, logical reasoning, and appropriate stylistic elements.

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1. **Before you read**: Consider the following question - What is the relationship between freedom and responsibility?
2. **As you read:** underline or highlight important details that inform you about the story and its meaning. In the right-hand column, note any questions, conclusions, or confusion that you will bring to your discussion.

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| **Vocabulary** | **Text from “Should Voting Be Compulsory?”** | **Text-dependent Questions & Annotations** |
| ***Summons (v):*** *call for; request the presence of*  ***Libertarian (n):*** *a person who believes in the doctrine of free will.*  ***Draft registration (n):*** *a system in which young people are required to join the armed forces of a country for a period of service*  ***Civic (adj):*** *relating to the duties or activities of people to their town, city, or local area*  ***Microcosm (n):*** *something (such as a place or an event) that is seen as a small version of something much larger*  ***Disparities (n):*** *a great difference.*  ***Electoral (adj):*** *of or relating to an election or to the process by which people are elected*  ***Eroded (v):*** *to gradually destroy something*  ***Electorate (n):*** *the people who can vote in an election*  ***Divisive (adj):*** *causing a lot of disagreement between people and causing them to separate into different groups*  ***Hyper- polarization (n):*** *an increase in potential difference across something*  ***Fervent (adj):*** *felt very strongly: having or showing very strong feelings*  ***Quadrennial (adj):*** *occurring or being done every four years*  ***Biennial (adj):*** *occurring or being done every two years*  ***Radically (adv):*** *in a* [*radical*](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/radical) *or extreme manner*  ***Abolition (n):*** *the act of officially ending or stopping something* | **1** When we receive a **summons** for jury duty, we are required to present ourselves at the court. Should we treat showing up at the polls in elections the same way?  **2** Although the idea seems vaguely un-American, it is neither unusual, nor undemocratic, nor unconstitutional. And it would ease the intense partisan polarization that weakens both our capacity for self-government and public trust in our governing institutions.  **3** It is easy to dismiss this idea as rooted in a form of coercion that is incompatible with our individualistic and often **libertarian** political culture. But consider Australia, whose political culture may be as similar to that of the United States as the culture of any other democracy in the world.  **4** Alarmed by a decline in voter turnout to less than 60 percent in the early 1920s, Australia adopted a law in 1924 requiring all citizens to present themselves at the polling place on Election Day. (This is often referred to as mandatory voting, although Australian voters are not required to cast marked ballots.)  **5** Enforcing the law were small fines (roughly the same as for routine traffic tickets), which increased with repeated acts of nonparticipation. The law established permissible reasons for not voting, such as illness and foreign travel, and procedures allowing citizens facing fines for not voting to defend themselves in court.  **6** It also required citizens to register to vote (much as the United States has **draft registration**) and the Australian authorities have created systems to make registration easy.  **7** The results were remarkable. In the 1925 election, the first held under the new law, turnout soared to 91 percent. In the 27 elections since World War II, turnout in Australia has averaged 95 percent.  **8** It is hard to doubt that there is a causal connection between the law and the large change in Australians’ voting behavior. And there is additional evidence from the Netherlands, which operated under similar legislation from 1946 to 1967. During that time, turnout averaged 95 percent. After the Netherlands repealed this law, turnout has fallen to an average of 80 percent.  **9** The impact of such laws can extend well beyond the act of voting. In Australia, citizens are more likely than they were before the law was passed to view voting as a **civic** obligation. This norm helps explain why the negative side effects that many feared did not materialize.  **10**  For example, the percentage of ballots intentionally spoiled, left blank, or randomly completed as acts of resistance has remained quite low. The Australian experience suggests that when citizens know that they are required to vote, they take this obligation seriously. Their sense of civic duty makes them reluctant to cast uninformed ballots and inclines them to learn at least the basics about issues, parties and candidates.  **11** The most straightforward argument for near-universal voting is democratic. Ideally, a democracy will take into account the interests and views of all citizens so that its decisions represent the will of the entire people. If some regularly vote while others do not, elected officials are likely to give less weight to the interests and views of non-participants.  **12** In practice, this might not matter much if non-voters were evenly distributed through the population, so that voters were a **microcosm** of the people. But that is not the case: In the United States, citizens with lower levels of income and education are less likely to vote, as are young adults and recent immigrants.  **13** Changes in our political system have magnified these **disparities**. The decline of formal political organizations, including political machines, has reduced mobilizing efforts that were often year-round propositions and frequently gave life to political clubs that served as centers of sociability as well as **electoral** action.  **14** The sharp drop in union membership since the 1950s has further **eroded** connections between citizens of modest means and lower levels of formal education to electoral politics. In their heyday, national civic institutions organized along federal lines performed these functions as well, but they too have undergone a relentless decline.  **15** These factors were partly offset by a democratization of the **electorate** through the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that empowered African Americans, particularly in the South, and by the 26th Amendment to the Constitution that lowered the voting age to 18 throughout the country in 1971.  **16** But with the exception of a few states that provided for registration on Election Day itself, the inclusion of younger voters into the electorate was not matched by changes in voter registration laws to make it easier for younger Americans, who tend to change residencies more frequently than their elders, to be included on the voter rolls.  **17** As it is, registration rules are biased in favor of those with relatively stable residential patterns. The combination of the decline in political mobilization and the rise of a younger electorate mean that turnout in presidential elections has fallen off since the 1950s.  [. . .]  **18** Universal voting would help fill the vacuum in participation by evening out disparities stemming from income, education and age. It would enhance our system’s ability to represent all our citizens and give states and localities incentives to lower, not raise, procedural barriers to the full and equal participation of each citizen in the electoral process.  **19** If citizens had a legal obligation to vote, managers of our electoral process would in turn have an obligation to make it as simple as possible for voters to discharge this duty.  **20** The weakening of the Voting Rights Act by the Supreme Court has allowed many states to impose new requirements on voters and to cut back on early and Sunday voting. Universal voting would change the presumptions in favor of broad democratic participation and put states on the side of promoting that goal.  **21** It would also improve electoral competition. Campaigns could devote far less money to costly, labor-intensive get-out-the-vote efforts. Media consultants would not have an incentive to drive down turnout with negative advertising (even though such advertising would no doubt remain part of their repertoire). Candidates would know that they had to do more than appeal to their respective bases with harshly **divisive** rhetoric and an emphasis on hot-button issues.  **22** This brings us to a benefit of universal voting that goes to the heart of our current ills. Along with many other factors, our low turnout rate pushes American politics toward **hyper-polarization**. Intense partisans are more likely to participate in lower-turnout elections while those who are less ideologically committed and less **fervent** about specific issues are more likely to stay home.  **23** Although responding to strong sentiments is an important feature of sustainable democratic institutions, our elections tilt much too far in that direction.  **24** A structural feature of our system—elections that are **quadrennial** for president but **biennial** for the House of Representatives—magnifies these ills. It is bad enough less than three-fifths of the electorate turns out to determine the next president, much worse that roughly two-fifths participate in midterm elections two years later.  [. . .]  **25** A republic governed under a Constitution that begins with the words “We the people” should want an electorate as broadly representative of the people as possible.  **26** There is a final reason for the country to embrace universal voting, and it may be the most compelling: Democracy cannot be strong if citizenship is weak. And right now, citizenship in America is **radically** unbalanced: It is strong on rights but weak on responsibilities.  **27** With the **abolition** of the universal draft, citizens are asked to pay their taxes and obey the law—and show up for jury duty when summoned. That’s about it.  **28** Making voting universal would begin to right the balance. And it would send an important message: We all have the duty to help shape the country that has given us so much.  [. . .] | In paragraph 2, what makes the idea of compulsory voting seem “un-American” to some readers?  Notice the author’s use of the prefix *un-* or *in-* in paragraphs 2 and 3. How does paragraph 3 support the claim made in paragraph 2?  What unintended consequences of compulsory voting can be inferred in paragraph 5?  What is your estimate of current U.S. voter participation?  In paragraph 8, why might it be “hard to doubt that there is a causal connection between the law and large change”?  Talk to a partner about examples of personal and civic obligations. Can you think of a time when people wind up liking/enjoying things they were initially forced to do?  How has mandatory voting affected Australian citizens’ feelings about voting? Underline the evidence that suggests the change in Australian attitudes towards voting. Do you think this would happen in America?  In paragraph 12, underline the groups that are less likely to be represented in our current electoral system.  In paragraphs 12-14, what are the three factors to which the author refers in paragraph 15?  How does the focus of the author’s argument shift in paragraph 19?  Turn to a partner and talk about the types of “get-out-the-vote” efforts and political advertising you are seeing in today’s election. How would you describe the tone of these efforts?  To what extent do you find the author’s arguments credible/compelling about the benefits of compulsory voting?  Underline the two most compelling reasons that you find in the article so far.  Consider what is the difference between freedom and responsibility? What is your view on compulsory voting? |
|  | *[. . .] article has been excerpted* |  |