



Mandatory Voter Registration – Talking Points

- Mandatory registration is a system that does not accomplish its goal of increased voter turnout but does create problems, such as inaccurate voter rolls.
- The reasons most eligible citizens who could register to vote choose not to register are because they are not interested in the election or the candidates, believe their vote will not make a difference, or do not wish to participate in politics. It is not because they lacked the opportunity to register, as claimed by proponents of mandatory registration. The small portion of people who do not register because of issues with registration are not disproportionately minority, low-income, or less educated citizens.¹
- President Obama’s Presidential Commission on Election Administration emphasized the importance of accurate voter registration records: “Improving the accuracy of registration rolls, for example, can expand access, reduce administrative costs, prevent fraud and irregularity, and reduce polling place congestion leading to long lines.”²
- Mandatory registration could result in many ineligible voters being added to voter registration lists. In addition, individuals could be registered in multiple locations under a mandatory registration system.
- Mandatorily registering citizens when they have decided not to register violates a citizen’s basic rights – the right to express disapproval of the electoral process through non-participation, the right not to participate in the democratic process, and the right not to be unnecessarily tracked or controlled by the government. Perhaps most importantly, it violates a citizen’s right to privacy, as voter registration lists are publicly available records.
- Mandatory voter registration using existing government databases presents logistical problems. Most government databases lack signatures, do not require proof of citizenship, do not distinguish between citizens and non-citizens, and are rife with errors. In addition, persons who are in multiple databases could be registered multiple times without extensive and time-consuming duplicate identification procedures.
- Mandatory registration opens the door for fraud by registering people who have no intention of ever voting in the jurisdiction, are transient, or are otherwise added to the rolls when they should not be. Those who know another person will not vote in an election could vote fraudulently in the non-voter’s name, knowing that the person is registered. Students who are temporarily in a jurisdiction for school without the intent to reside there should not vote in that jurisdiction, but mandatory registration would allow them to vote there.
- There is no evidence that mandatory registration increases turnout. For example, in the 1990s the country of Canada enacted mandatory registration and turnout went down. In the United States, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 greatly increased the number of registered voters but did not make a significant change in voter turnout.³

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008* 14 (July 2012), <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p20-562.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2010—Detailed Tables* Table 10 (Oct. 2011), <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2010/tables.html>.

² Presidential Commission on Election Administration, *The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration* (Jan. 2014), <https://www.supportthevoter.gov/files/2014/01/Amer-Voting-Exper-final-draft-01-09-14-508.pdf>

³ Conference Board of Canada, *How Canada Performs: Voter Turnout*, <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/details/society/voter-turnout.aspx?pf=true>; Jason Marisam, *Voter Turnout: From Cost to Cooperation*, 21 St. Thomas L.R. 190, 202–03 (2008); Randall D. Lloyd, *Motor Voter: A Dismal Failure*, Nevada Journal (Feb. 1999), <http://nj.npri.org/nj99/02/vote.htm>.