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Obstacles to Voting and Some Possible Solutions

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President John F. Kennedy once said, “the ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all” (Kennedy). Despite the rights of voters in the United States being protected by the Fifteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-Fourth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments, many obstacles to voting remain today. For example, 34 states require voter registration before Election Day, national, state, and local elections are mostly held on a workday, many college students cannot use school ID as proof of residency, and many of the homeless population remains unable to utilize same-day voter registration due to an inability to prove residency (“Legal”).

To tackle these obstacles, the best strategy involves looking towards countries with high voter turnout. Compared to the United States’ 55.7% voter turnout in the 2018 midterm elections, 87.2% of Belgium’s voters participated in their 2014 national election (Hutt). Compulsory voting proves the most notable difference between voting policies in the United States and Belgium. As the result of an 1893 law, Belgium requires voting of all people aged twenty-one and older. Those who do not vote face a penalty of €10 (\$11.15), which increases for each election missed (Timsit). In addition to compulsory voting, Belgium also encourages voting for all by holding elections on Sundays, sending voting cards (that specify how to vote) two weeks prior to election days, and allowing automatic registration at the polls (“Voting”).

By implementing compulsory voting, a culture that encourages voting, and legislation that lessens voter requirements, the United States can surmount remaining voting obstacles.