

Your Civic Duty!

Have you done your civic duty? If you're over 18 years of age in Canada, it's likely you've been asked this question on election day at least once, and rightfully so. Voting is an integral part of a legitimate democracy; when voter turnout is assured so too is the legitimacy of the candidates who are elected. Just as nations fight external threats of aggression against their freedom, they must also then fight the internal threat of apathy in the voting populace. Some will argue that putting the masses to the polls with the stick leads to uninformed voters casting a ballot, but that is of little concern. Therefore, despite the inherent freedom that comes with democracy, voting must be compulsory.

A free and democratic society is not one without rules, or laws, or obligations to the state. Voting can be made compulsory just as is jury duty or paying taxes. Uncompelled, these obligations would go uncompleted; apathy would be allowed to manifest itself. Apathy is what Australia faced in its elections before 1924 when voter turnout reached lows of 24% of registered voters (Rosenberg, 2018). The impact of compulsory voting was immediate and sustained. Since the introduction of mandatory voting, turnout hasn't dropped below 90% (Evans, 2006).

When voter turnout is high, the will of the people is assured. In elections where voting is voluntary a small fraction of the population can impose its ideology on the whole electorate. In 2005, an election in the United Kingdom resulted in 21% of registered voters electing a majority Labour government when turnout was only 61.4% (Evans, 2006). It is much more realistic to believe that elected officials represent the real will of the populace in an election where voter turnout is high. Candidates for office are forced to speak to issues that relate to the whole populace when the voting electorate is the whole populace.

Compulsory voting does send voters to the polls whether informed on the issues and the candidates' positions or not; however, ballots cast by uninformed voters is not unique to compulsory voting jurisdictions. Uninformed voters go to the polls even in voluntary elections; they even take matters into their own hands. To ensure they've done their duty but haven't influenced the outcome voters are known to cast ballots for "none of the

above.” In 2016 in the state of Nevada more than 2.5 percent of votes cast were marked that way (Bump, 2018). Compelled voters have the same freedom.

Compulsory voting ensures that the will of the people is known; when the will of the people is known, democracy can thrive. The legitimacy of our elected officials is assured. Whether you vote because you want to, or because you’re compelled to, you are making democracy better. You are doing your civic duty, and I thank you very much.

References

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