

“The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men.” Because I agree with these words of former President Lyndon B. Johnson, I stand firmly **Resolved: In a democracy, voting ought to be compulsory.**

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, **ought** is defined as implying obligation or advisability.

Compulsory voting is defined as a system in which electors are obliged to vote in elections or attend a polling place on voting day. If an eligible voter does not attend a polling place, he or she may be subject to punitive measures..

The value that the affirmative defends is governmental legitimacy. Since a legitimate government must fulfill its obligations to its people, a legitimate democracy must strive to be consistent with its core ideals. Thus, **the criteria is being consistent with the fundamental characteristics of democracy.** As defined in his book Democracy and Its Critics, Robert Dahl explains that in addition to the concept of “one-person-one-vote”, democracies have four distinguishing characteristics:

1. **Effective participation**
2. **Enlightened understanding of issues**
3. **Control of the political agenda**
4. **Inclusiveness**

Whichever debater’s position is most consistent with these characteristics is being most consistent with democratic legitimacy and should win the debate.

My single contention is that compulsory voting is most consistent with the fundamental characteristics of democracy.

Subpoint A: Compulsory voting creates higher voter turnout rates.

Engelen, Bart. "Why Compulsory Voting Can Enhance Democracy." Acta Politica. 2007. Web. 17 Aug. 2013.
<<https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/135547/1/article..>>.

Bart Engelen states:

"Although this seems immediately plausible, I want to show that **[I]ntroducing compulsory voting does indeed raise turnout.** I only give **[A] brief overview of empirical findings,** since I mainly want to focus on the normative arguments why compulsory voting is desirable. For more in-depth empirical analyses, I refer to a number of other studies, which all conclude that compulsory voting effectively raises turnout. A first method is to **compare turnout levels in countries where voting is compulsory with those where it is not. Such cross- country comparisons show that average turnout in the first is about 10 to 15 percentage points higher than the second** (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998, 246– 247; IDEA, 2004, 26; Jackman, 2001, 16315; Lijphart, 1998, 8). **The only two member states that have compulsory voting in the European Union had turnout levels of about 90% in the 2004 European Parliament election, which sharply contrasts with the average of 45.6%. There is wide consensus among researchers that the most important institutional factor in explaining turnout levels is compulsory voting.**"

The impact is that compulsory voting is far more likely to get voters to the polls, and is thus most consistent with effective participation.

Subpoint B: Compulsory voting increases awareness and political engagement in the long run.

Engelen 2 states:

"Completely analogously, the data show that turnout always drops when such laws are abolished. Moreover, turnout levels continue to drop in such countries. This suggests that **[C]ompulsory voting helps solidify some kind of habit or social norm that erodes only gradually in time. Even when such laws are not actively enforced, they engender compliance.** Here, as well as in countries where enforcement is not very strict, **[S]anctions are mainly a symbolic reminder that voting is compulsory:**

‘[C]ompulsory voting can be very effective in raising turnout in spite of low penalties that are imposed for failing to vote, (usually similar to a parking violation), in spite of the **lax enforcement,** (usually much less stringent than parking rules are enforced), **and in spite of the secret ballot** which means that an actual vote cannot be compelled in the first place’ (Lijphart, 1998, 2). When citizens are no longer compelled to vote, the social norm and civic sense of duty to vote gradually vanish. This results in declining turnout levels, manifesting themselves first among the youngest citizens, who did not yet internalize the norm to vote (Franklin et al., 2004, 121– 122). The fact that young people abstain more than others and that average turnout is declining indicates that the legal obligation, the social norm and the civic sense of duty to vote coexist and reinforce each other (Keaney and Rogers, 2006, 18–20).”

Additionally, when citizens are forced to engage in voting, they are far more likely to become politically aware.

Engelen 3 continues:

“Having to vote anyway, citizens might well want to know what the vote is about and what the alternatives are. In this respect, compulsory voting can be said to provide incentives for politically alienated citizens to become more informed about and engaged in politics. However, even if it does not succeed in reducing political apathy, compulsory voting has the advantage of making this problem more visible and easier to interpret. “

The impact is that citizens compelled to vote are far more likely to internalize their responsibilities as citizens of a democracy and become more informed about issues, thus promoting an enlightened understanding of issues by voters.

Subpoint C: Compulsory voting minimizes the influence special interest group within government.

Brookie, James H. "The Effect Of Compulsory Voting Laws On Government Spending." Graduate School of Clemson University. Aug. 2008. Web. 17 Aug. 2013. <http://etd.lib.clemson.edu/documents/1219852617/umi-clemson-1745.pdf>

James Brookie explains:

“The final reason why a positive correlation between compulsory laws and government spending was not found is that it may correlate in the opposite direction. An article entitled The Right Versus The Obligation to Vote: Effects on Cross-Country Government Growth stated that it is possible for compulsory voting to actually decrease government spending (Crain and Leonard, 1993). According to the authors, if compulsory voting is able to actually increase voter turnout, or at least rid it of its class bias, then the possibility for transfers from non-voters to voters is less. **The increase in the number of participating citizens would decrease the opportunity for special interest**

groups to lobby the government and in turn decrease the amount of money given to them. If government spending is controlled by the demands of well organized special interest groups, not unorganized regular voters, then these transfers are most likely damaging to the average person. However, the tax burden is spread out over the entire taxpayer base, whereas the benefits are centralized in the special interests. This accounts for why one is much more organized and fervent in Washington and why many citizens rationally do not vote. **Alternatively, if more citizens are forced to vote, their power increases relative to those of the pressure groups** (Crain and Leonard, 1993). **Special interests would no longer be able to take advantage of the rationally disinterested voter.** It may be that this negative effect is countering the other positive effect we discussed in the beginning.”

Because compulsory voting minimizes the influence of special interest groups, it allows the public and not a small portion of society to have greater control of the political agenda.

Subpoint D: Compulsory voting promotes more inclusiveness than voluntary voting.

Justine Lacroix states:

Lacroix, Justine. “A Liberal Defense of Compulsory Voting.” Political Studies Association. Web. 17 Aug. 2013.
<http://www.sciencespo.site.ulb.ac.be/dossiers_membres/lacroixjustine/fichiers/lacroix-justine-publication231.pdf>.

“One obviously does not need to adhere to neo-republican theories to consider that such inequalities in electoral participation pose serious problems of legitimacy for a liberal well-ordered society. One might even draw a parallel with the social question as redistribution mechanisms have also been the butt of criticism by libertarians in the name of free enterprise. Conversely, many other liberal thinkers argue that this is an improper interpretation of the word liberty as this restrictive conception actually concerns the liberty of a few and thus implies constraints for the majority. ‘A much more attractive ideal would be liberty for all ... in other words, the liberal commitment for liberty has resources that may be opposed to the “libertarianism” of the economic conservatives’ (Waldron, 1987, p. 129). That is the reason why the liberal commitment to liberty has been reformulated as a commitment for equal liberty, a principle that justifies solidarity policies which do not infringe on individual rights as they aim at guaranteeing liberty for all and creating the necessary conditions for the full exercise of individual liberty. The same argument can be used to defend compulsory voting. **By encouraging all citizens, even the least motivated among them, to be informed and voice their opinions, compulsory voting would partially thwart the strong social determinants and oblige political parties to pay heed to the more marginalised electors.** As in John Rawls’s model the only acceptable forms of inequalities are those that are beneficial to the least privileged part of the population, **it is all the more difficult to contend that the recorded inequalities in electoral participation may serve the interests of this category of individuals.** From this approach, the defence of compulsory voting echoes Shklar’s observations on democracy. As emphasised by Paul Magnette, ‘in Shklar’s definition of liberalism ... [I]t is first and foremost the liberty of the weakest that is

protected by democracy'. **[Compulsory voting] may not make citizens equal, but 'at least it erodes the submission of the weakest'.**"

The impact of this increased participation from marginalized groups is explained by the Harvard Law Review:

(Harvard Law Review, December, 2007, 121 Harv. L. Rev. 591)

"By triggering a shift in political discourse, compulsory voting would create a virtuous cycle that would alleviate the underlying causes of voter apathy. First, as already mentioned, compulsory voting will reduce the negative tone of campaigns that discourages some potential voters.ⁿ⁴² Second, [C]ompulsory voting can make politics less partisan and divisive, since currently the voting population is much more partisan than the electorate at large.ⁿ⁴³ If the entire population votes, there will be a more balanced representation of the political spectrum. Finally, [C]ompulsory voting can lead to increased government relevance. **By**

bringing in groups that are underrepresented among those who are currently likely to vote, compulsory voting will force politicians to shift their focus to different sets of issues. People who are brought into the democratic process will increasingly find that the government agenda addresses their interests, and this recognition could lead to a greater appreciation of the importance of democratic government. This may increase the utility people get from fulfilling their civic duty to vote, which would in turn lead more

people to see their rational choice as voting, rather than staying at home on Election Day."

For these reasons, I urge an Affirmative ballot in today's debate. I now stand open for Cross-Examination.