

Should we be forced to vote?



"Voting is a way of choosing who best to represent you politically and most importantly, a way of exercising your right as a citizen. It gives us authority and power. Recent years have, however, shown an apparent crisis in the political system. There seems to be a growing

public cynicism towards political parties and its leaders, especially in Britain, where only 61% of the electorate showed up in the 2005 general election.

A different scenario is seen in Brazil, where compulsory voting has transformed the country into one of the most participative nations on polling day. When elections get close, the country is injected with a sense of powerfulness and democracy flies high. Mandatory voting was introduced in Brazil in 1934 in order to guarantee a general participation on elections, especially the political minority. Although the policy is often seen as anti-democratic, other countries have adopted the system, which plays a vital role in strengthening political participation.

Although the voter is obliged to show up on both regional and national elections, and a penalty is issued for those who do not (the voter is charged with a fine and cannot get a new passport or any other personal document until further payment), compulsory voting reminds us that not only do we have civic rights, but also a civic duty to society. It gives us the right to complain about government performance. If you can't bother to vote, how can you be expected to have your complaints heard? If you don't engage with the political system, how can it engage with you? Building a nation is certainly not one person's responsibility, but everyone's duty.

Whether the UK should adopt compulsory voting is an interesting debate. I certainly think they should. I keep hearing complaints over complaints upon how can Gordon Brown be a Prime Minister if he has not been elected on democratic basis or why don't we have a say on a Referendum? Nonetheless, on polling day when the British people have the chance to have their say, are they "bovvered"? Forcing someone to vote may indeed go against the principles of democracy, but you see, we all get used to it and life goes on."

Valerie Oliveira, UKYP Intern



"I don't agree with this at all, as I believe it undermines the whole idea of democracy.

Democracy is supposed to be about having a voice and a say on issues that you want talked about. However it is also the right to not have to be involved with an issue: it's the freedom of choice. If voting is compulsory what are you suppose to do if there is no party that agrees with your policy or ideas? Vote for someone you don't agree with?" **Jacob Rix, MYP for Norfolk**



"I personally believe we need to change the system of voting here in the UK. In the Scottish Parliamentary elections, local elections, London Mayoral and European Parliamentary elections, they use a form of proportional representation. Now I understand this may not make a huge increase to the turnout but at least it means every vote does count and the individual voter can make a huge difference in a result."

Liam Beattie, MYP for Scotland

Do you agree with compulsory voting? Debate now at www.ukyp.org.uk/forums