

Issues of voter turnout and mandatory voting



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Save our Democracy

Voter turnout has been steadily declining over the last few years. The decline of citizens taking part in voting has posed a serious problem to democracy. As democracy relies on active participation of Canadians in the decision-making process that governs Canada. In the act of democracy, when citizens vote for candidates to represent themselves in parliament they advocate on behalf of citizens to make decisions that directly impact us. With respect to voter turnout, it has been steadily declining (Brooks and Menard, 2013, p. 299). In 2008, the country recorded 58 percent voter turnout. It was one of the lowest voter turnouts in history. Since democracy depends on voter contribution for the government to effectivity reflect the will of the people there needs to be implemented mandatory voting to save democracy (Brooks and Menard, 2013, p. 299). Low turnout is unhealthy for democracy because it leads to less responsive, less legitimate and less effective government. Canada should have an electoral reform and adopt mandatory voting as voting is a civic duty and should be enforced, can improve representation of marginalized populations who are less likely to vote and have less access to the political process (Vote Better, 2016, para. 2).

The Canadian constitution is a rule book for the government and is compiled in a series of documents. The constitution provides fundamental rules that govern Canada appropriately. The federal system deals with many concerns involving national defense, criminal law, trade between provinces and money (Government of Canada, 2017, para. 9). On a provincial level, the provinces make laws about civil right, education and property. With respect to democracy, these politicians represent Canadians in the different levels of

government to advocate on behalf of citizens of Canada and can make decisions that directly influence our daily lives (Government of Canada, 2017, para. 10). Each political party that citizens can vote for has different political ideologies that can shape the constitution. For example, one of the biggest changes was women's reproductive rights and that the party you vote for matters in reflecting the will of the people. Prior to 1969, inducing an abortion was a violation of the criminal code (Long, 2017, para. 2). The penalty for a doctor for assisting a woman to end her pregnancy was life imprisonment and two years if the woman was convicted. Later in the century, attitudes began to shift towards an abortion and the elected prime minister of Canada began to reflect the will of the people. Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau in 1969, amended the criminal code that allowed doctors to perform abortions in accredited hospitals if a pregnancy threatened the life or health of a woman (Long, 2017, para. 5). The impact of a person's vote can influence the laws in Canada, this can also be seen in 1990's with the ideology of when Brian Mulroney tried to criminalize abortion once again. In democracy, it is important for citizens to exercise their right to vote as each party has different values, ideologies and by Canadian's exercising their right to vote they are able to accurately reflect the will of people (Long, 2017, para. 14). As new amendments, regulation has direct impact over the Citizens of Canada.

With respect to democracy, In the charter of Rights and Freedoms it argues that " Every citizen has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein" (Roberts and Spano, 2008, p. 2). The right to vote was

a result of a long struggle for equal participation in making political decisions that includes of the right to vote for women, for those who were unable to vote because of a mental impairment and because of a person's race. Voting as a Canadian is a civic duty and it must be enforced considering that voter turnout has been declining. In the 2008 election, the country recorded 58 percent voter turnout. This meant that almost 50 percent of eligible voters did not vote. In Canada, there has been a long-time debate over mandatory voting. In early history, it was debated in 1891, 1892, and 1893 and was introduced by Gulliam Amyot, yet it was attacked by many critics (Courtney and Wilby, 2007, p. 44). Any elector that did not vote had to pay a fine of \$50 or equivalent to \$1000 in the 21st century. Failing to vote could result in being imprisoned for thirty days and being disqualified to vote for the next five years (Courtney and Wilby, 2007, p. 44). In more of the recent years, the idea of mandatory voting began to evolve as it was noticed that voter turnout has been plummeting. In more of the recent years, in 2005; Senator Mac Harb called for an introduction to compulsory voting as he quoted "There is a rising electoral crisis" (Courtney and Wilby, 2007, p. 44). His claim was, that democracy depends on active voting and people are not voting anymore. The bill was going to amend the Canadian elections act in multiple ways such as making it mandatory for eligible citizens to vote, punishable offence if an eligible person did not exercise their right to vote, added the word "none of the candidates" on the ballots that allowed electors to write on special ballot of the name of the candidate other than those on regular ballots and allowed electors to write on a special ballot the name of the candidate other than those on a regular ballot. Failing to vote, could result in 50 dollar fine (Courtney and Wilby, 2007, p. 44). The bill was debated on five different

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occasions, yet was dropped during the second reading stage. All eleven senators took part in the debate, and only two supported the motion and others expressed outright disapproval for mandatory voting. Other senators believed that the bill was violating the freedom of choice. The opposition, Senator Noel Kinsella stated, “ The right to vote in section three of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is inclusive not to vote” (Courtney and Wilby, 2007, p. 44).

However, Harb compared the civic duty to being the same as paying taxes or doing jury duty. Unfortunately, the bill was disapproved and there was no further discussion.

In other parts of the world, mandatory voting is a thing. Currently, there are more than twenty countries around the world that have mandatory voting systems. These countries include of Argentina and Australia (Tucak and Sabo, 2015, p. 187). In many different countries, there are exceptions to the mandatory voting systems. Age, when certain citizens reach a certain age, they do no longer have to partake in voting. In Brazil, mandatory voting stops at the age of 70 and in Ecuador you have to reach the age of 60. Countries with compulsory voting, also except the ill and others if you are part of a certain religious group (Tucak and Sabo, 2015, p. 188). In Australia, when an eligible voter does not perform his civil duty, they will have to pay a small fine of 20 dollars. If the non-voter does not pay his fine, he can end up in court. The court than can request the person to pay a maximum fine of 170 dollars. In Singapore, citizens who do not vote get deleted from registering and have to pay a fine to vote. Australia has adapted mandatory voting since 1924, now Australia has a voter turnout that is over 90 percent.

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(Tucak and Sabo, 2015, pp. 188-199). It would be beneficial to take the lead like Australia so we can properly advocate for citizens' concerns. The candidates that are elected are able to advocate to make laws, yet with voter turnout decreasing. It is challenging for representatives to accurately legitimize decisions. To protect Canadian democracy, enforcing mandatory voting because it depends on active participation to sufficiently reflect the will of the people.

In more recent news, the Trudeau government was discussing on the aspects of implementing mandatory voting and requiring Canadian's to cast ballots in in federal elections in their 2015 election platform, however many were divided on the idea of pursuing mandatory voting. Due to the lack of people wanting mandatory voting. The liberals announced that they will not be pursuing mandatory voting, however they will look at other ways to boost voter turnout (Wherry, 2017, para. 5). As Karina Gould stated, " The electoral system is foundational to any democratic system, and any changes to how we must vote must have the broad support of Canadians" (Wherry, 20167, para. 5).

Even though, mandatory voting would provide benefits to the electoral system. It also poses so negative drawbacks. It is arguable that voting is a right, not a duty and people have the option to refuse to participate as it should not be forced and it does not effectively address the core issues why people do not choose to vote (Vote Better, 2016, para. 3). Overall, the government should have an electoral reform and establish mandatory voting. The benefits outweigh the negatives. It can appropriately address the low voter turnout issue.

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