

Should voting be made compulsory?

In the UK, unlike other countries, people don't have to vote in elections if they don't want to.

What you need to know

- On Thursday 8 June, people around the UK voted in a general election. However, not everyone took part.
- Voting is a democratic right. It means that citizens of a country that has a democracy are allowed to have a say in how their country is run.
- In some countries, like Australia, voting is compulsory. This means that people have to vote. The law in Australia says that all citizens aged 18 and over have to register to vote and go to the polls – or they face a fine. In the UK, it isn't compulsory to vote.



In the UK, we live in a democracy. This means that British citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote in elections to choose which political party they want to lead the country. It hasn't always been this way. For example, women were not allowed to vote until 1918 – and only then if they were over 30. Now, almost everyone over the age of 18 can vote, whether in elections, or in special votes known as referendums. Last year, for example, the UK's voters were given a choice about whether or not the UK should remain in the European Union. Although 72.2% of registered voters headed to the polls (the highest voter turnout since 1992), that still means that around 13 million people who could have voted, didn't. In some countries, voting is considered so important it has been made compulsory. People have to vote, by law.

Just because people have the right to vote, does that mean they should?

Yes – voting isn't just a right, it's a duty

At last week's general election, lots of people didn't vote. That wouldn't happen in Australia, where people who don't vote can expect a fine. Voting is an essential part of living in a democracy; everyone is responsible for helping to choose who runs the country. The right to vote has also been fought for by generations of courageous men and women. We owe it to them not to take our rights for granted. Compulsory voting would also give everyone more of a reason to learn about political issues and to form their own opinion. Importantly, research shows that many of the people who don't vote come from poorer backgrounds. This means that politicians may not waste time trying to win their vote if they know they won't vote anyway. If voting were compulsory, politicians would have to look out for the interests of everyone, not just the wealthy and well educated, who are currently more likely to vote.

No – voting should be a free choice

Voting should be about choice, and this should include the choice not to vote. Failing to turn up to the polls can also be a powerful protest. Why should someone cast a vote if they don't think there's a candidate who represents their interests, or they don't believe true change is possible? Alternatively, people may not feel they know enough about current affairs to be able to vote responsibly. If they've been too busy to study the important issues, it's better not to vote at all. Besides, studies have shown that countries with compulsory voting have a higher number of spoiled ballots (a ballot is the piece of paper a voter uses to show their choice). For example, a person may turn up to vote but fail to complete the ballot paper properly, so it won't count. Even worse is the possibility of people voting for a random candidate, just because they have to. This could lead to candidates being elected for the wrong reasons.

YES 3 reasons why it should be compulsory to vote

- 1 People around the world have suffered and continue to suffer for the right to vote. It's disrespectful to take our rights for granted.
- 2 Everyone has a responsibility to keep up to date and vote on important issues.
- 3 Compulsory voting means politicians have to listen to everyone. Without that, politicians might ignore people who don't vote.

NO 3 reasons why you shouldn't have to vote if you don't want to

- 1 Forcing people to vote goes against the whole point of democracy. Voting is a choice.
- 2 Refusing to vote can be a powerful form of protest.
- 3 Compulsory voting doesn't work. Sure, people turn up at polling stations, but many of them spoil their ballots so their vote doesn't count. That's not good for democracy.

THE WEEKLY POLL

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