The Benefits Of Compulsory Voting In Democracy

As Theodore Roosevelt said it best, “A vote is like a rifle: its usefulness depends upon the character of the user.” (The Liberty Champion, 2014) The fundamental principle of American politics is that the individual is capable of trying to enact good will through voting and participation in the political system. When more people participate in the political process the will of the people can be heard more succinctly. But over the years the United States trails behind other developed countries in comparison to voter turnout. In a comparison of the 2016 election to elections held recently in other nations the United States ranks as the 30th out of the 35 available nations for voting age population and percentage of registered voters. (Desilver, 2020) Listed in the same article is the important fact that compulsory voting could have impacted the results of voter turnout. Higher voter turnout rates were in areas where compulsory-voting laws were in place, notably Australia and Belgium. (Desilver, 2020) Slightly further down in the same article is Chile’s noteworthy history with compulsory voting. Chile had compulsory voting in place until 2012 when they changed to voluntary voting, and at the same time voting turnout dropped from 87% to 42%. (Desilver, 2020) To have such a big change in voter turnout at the same time as the law for compulsory voting is changed is very interesting, to say the least.

Drawing upon some of these examples it would be beneficial to implement compulsory voting to more accurately represent the populations desires as well as increase the participation of the population into the political process.

An estimate is given that, “60% of the voting age population will note vote” which can be very detrimental.(Black, 2014) When compared to other democracies the lower voting turnouts from the United States stand out to severe degrees.(Black, 2014) This of course is due in part to the fact that other democracies lack the requirement of registration. (Black, 2014)For other democracies such as Italy, Belgium, Greece, and Australia where compulsory voting has been implemented the voter turnout is considerably higher than the United States.(Black, 2014) According to Katherine O’Gorman, if compulsory voting was implemented for the United States then the voter turnout would increase by 30%. This would be advantageous as a 30% increase in voter turnout would allow politicians to more accurately represent their constituents. Citing more global examples of the benefits of compulsory voting, it is important to include the rates across Europe. In Europe, “states with some element of compulsory turnout (approximately 18% of the continent) are all situated in the top 45% for turnout”. (Keaney & Rogers, 2008) The rates alone can provide compelling evidence that the voter turnout may have already been decent before hand, but this is not always the case. The voter turnout from 1922 to 1925 rose from 57.9% to 91.3% after the implementation of compulsory voting in Australia. (Keaney and Rogers, 2008) The average turnout in Australia in the years leading up to the voting changes was 64.2% in 1924 and in nine elections after it had increased by 30% to 94.6%. (Keaney & Rogers, 2008) Australia is only one example of the potential that compulsory voting could bring. A secondary example would be a election study in Belgium, where 30% of people interviewed said they would not participate if the compulsory voting laws were removed. (Keaney & Rogers, 2008)

Aside from the obvious benefits of having the participation of more people voting, the representation would also change slightly and move to a more well represented demographic.

Those of lower economic status are currently underrepresented as they are less likely to vote compared to their higher economic counterparts. . If compulsory voting were implemented then having these votes from groups of lower economic class would increase their representation in society. (O'Gorman, 2008) Another noteworthy factor is the racial inequality in the voting system when comparing the abilities of felons. The voting rates from the states of Florida, Kentucky, and Virginia were impacted by 20-23% of the African American community due to felon disenfranchisement.(Black, 2014) This unnecessary voting prevention not only limits the representation of a valuable part of the communities, but also can be viewed as a secondary punishment despite the capabilities of reintegration into society.