Affirmative: Democracy

By Josiah Hemp

***Resolved: In a democracy, voting ought to be compulsory.***

This case rests on the first phrase: “in a democracy.” Because a democracy really is the rule of the people through the rule of the majority, compulsory voting is often necessary to make the democracy a democracy. Arguments about whether this form of government is the best form of government are entirely irrelevant, because the resolution already answers the question of where we are: “in a democracy.”  
The “LD is value debate” in me is reacting to this: “but LD is about values not policy. We should be trying to achieve the best value not just a specific set out goal.” But NSDA LD is technically not required to be value debate. The name of the event is just “Lincoln-Douglas,” not “Lincoln-Douglas value.” In fact, many of the resolutions are really policy resolutions, including this one. It is asking us to implement a specific policy (compulsory voting) to meet the needs of a specific body (a democracy). Thus, although this case will be structured like a value debate case, keep in mind that this is in one sense a policy resolution.  
You do not have to believe pure democracy is a good form of government to make this argument. In fact, I do not. Again, democracy is not the subject of debate. It is merely the setting for the debate.

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Affirmative: Democracy

““For, if liberty and equality, as some persons suppose, are chiefly to be found in a democracy, they will be attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.”—Aristotle.[[1]](#footnote-1) Voting is a vital aspect of democracy. Without voting, democracy cannot be democracy. It is because of this that I ask you to affirm the resolution: resolved: in a democracy, voting ought to be compulsory.

DEFINITIONS

Democracy

Merriam Webster’s Dictionary “Democracy.” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy> Accessed August 12, 2020.

“government by the people

“especially: rule of the majority

“b: a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections”

Compulsory voting

FindLaw.com 2020 (Created by FindLaw's team of legal writers and editors. All authors, including former authors, are attorneys or writers who specialize in legal content) “What is Compulsory Voting?” March 16, 2020. <https://www.findlaw.com/voting/how-u-s--elections-work/what-is-compulsory-voting-.html>. Accessed August 13, 2020.

“Compulsory voting occurs when a state or nation requires all of its citizens to vote. In many countries today, voting is required by law. But in most cases, the penalty for not complying is so mild that the term "compulsory" is a bit of a misnomer.”

RESOLUTIONAL ANALYSIS: DEMOCRACY

The resolution does not ask us whether a democracy is a good form of government. It also does not ask us whether a government where compulsory voting is in place will be a better government. It simply says “in a democracy, voting should be compulsory.” It asks us if compulsory voting is a necessary policy for a democracy.

VALUE: Democracy

This is why our value should be democracy. We must determine if compulsory voting is an important tool to maintain the essence of democracy. Our resolution does not ask us about the merits of democracy or even of the merits of compulsory voting under other systems or other tests. It merely asks if voting should be required in democracy.

CONTENTION 1: Democracy is rule of the whole people

Etymology of Democracy

The Oxford Dictionary, Oxford University Press 2020 “Democracy.” Lexico.com <https://www.lexico.com/definition/democracy>. Accessed August 13, 2020.

Democracy comes from

“Late 16th century from French démocratie, via late Latin from Greek dēmokratia, from dēmos ‘the people’ + -kratia ‘power, rule’.”

Government by the whole population

The Oxford Dictionary, Oxford University Press 2020 “Democracy.” Lexico.com <https://www.lexico.com/definition/democracy>. Accessed August 13, 2020

“A system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives.”

To make a democracy a democracy, the people must rule. This is simply by the definition of democracy

CONTENTION 2: Compulsory voting has the whole people rule

Compulsory voting reinforces the principles of democracy

MELISSA DE WITTE, 2018, “Stanford political scientist makes the case for mandatory voting” <https://news.stanford.edu/2018/11/30/case-mandatory-voting/>. NOVEMBER 30, 2018. Accessed August 12, 2020.

“In an article published in the American Journal of Political Science, Chapman builds on existing scholarship to make the case for mandatory voting. Chapman sees voting as a special occasion for all citizens to show to elected officials they are all equal when it comes to government decision-making.

“‘The idea of compulsory voting is that it conveys the idea that each person’s voice is expected and valued,’ said Chapman, an assistant professor of political science in Stanford’s School of Humanities and Sciences. ‘It really offers this society-wide message: There is no such thing as a political class in a democracy. Voting is something that is for everybody, including and especially people at the margins of society.’

“If everyone votes, it reminds public officials they are accountable to all citizens – not just the most vocal and active, said Chapman, who is also on the advisory board of the McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society.”

Compulsory voting creates “a more complete democracy”

Waleed Aly 2017, (Waleed Aly is a columnist and broadcaster and a politics lecturer at Monash University.) “Opinion: Voting Should Be Mandatory.” The New York Times, Jan. 19, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/opinion/voting-should-be-mandatory.html>. Accessed August 12, 2020.

“On balance, the overriding result of compulsory voting is a more complete democracy. One that includes the voices of those most easily discouraged from turning up: poorer people and minority communities, for instance. One that refuses to hand power to someone whose plan is to keep turnout low, hoping to appeal to an impassioned minority rather than a nation at large.”

The majority’s choice is elected

Professor Rodney Smith and Associate Professor Anika Gauja 2019, (the Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney.) “Hot topics: voting and elections: Compulsory voting - for and against.” Library Council of New South Wales. <https://legalanswers.sl.nsw.gov.au/hot-topics-voting-and-elections>. Accessed August 12, 2020.

“Compulsory registration and voting increase the legitimacy of elected representatives. Candidates winning seats in parliament really do win a majority of the people’s votes. In countries like the United States, where the turnout can be low, candidates can win with much less than a majority of the eligible vote.”

APPLICATION: Voter turnout

Democracy is rule of the people. But for the people to rule, they have to exercise their ability to vote. Compulsory voting increases voter turnout.

NINA JAFFE-GEFFNER 2015, “The Pros and Cons of Requiring Citizens to Vote.” FairVote, (non-profit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to election reform) OCTOBER 23, 2015 <https://www.fairvote.org/the_pros_and_cons_of_requiring_citizens_to_vote>. Accessed August 12, 2020.

“Not surprisingly, one of the main arguments which champions of the policy present in favor of compulsory voting is that it leads to drastically higher voter turnout rates. Australia serves as a prime example of such an effect. Prior to Australia’s implementation of compulsory voting in 1924, the voter rate had sunk to around 47% of registered voters. After the adoption of mandatory voting, turnout rates soared, with the current level resting at over 80% of the eligible population (and over 90% of registered voters). This percentage should be considered in comparison to the U.S., in which only 57% of eligible voters turned out in the 2012 presidential election.”

Peter Orszag 2012, (Peter Orszag is vice chairman of global banking at Citigroup Inc. and a former director of the Office of Management and Budget in the Obama administration. The opinions expressed are his own.) “Opinion: Make Voting Mandatory.” Bloomberg June 19, 2012, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2012-06-19/voting-should-be-mandatory>. Accessed August 12, 2020.

“Mandating voting has a clear effect: It raises participation rates. Before Australia adopted compulsory voting in 1924, for example, it had turnout rates similar to those of the U.S. After voting became mandatory, participation immediately jumped from 59 percent in the election of 1922 to 91 percent in the election of 1925.

The political scientists Lisa Hill and Jonathon Louth of the University of Adelaide note that ‘turnout rates among the voting age population in Australia have remained consistently high and against the trend of steadily declining voting participation in advanced democracies worldwide.’”

Because compulsory voting builds a better democracy where the people truly do rule, we should affirm that in a democracy voting should be compulsory.

Negative Counter-Brief: Democracy

This counter-brief rejects nearly all of the affirmative’s claims. It begins with a brief rebuttal to the value of democracy. LD debaters look at values in a wide variety of ways, but it is legitimate to claim that democracy, while it could be an acceptable criterion, is not a value. Things that are inherently important, such as justice or human rights or national security are values. Democracy is merely a system. For more on democracy, see next week’s Negative case.  
Next, this brief responds to the claim that a democracy by definition requires compulsory voting. Then it covers the claim that the voice of the majority is heard better with compulsory voting. Finally, it responds to the application on voter turnout.

Democracy is not a value

Merriam Webster’s Dictionary “Value.” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/value>. Accessed August 13, 2020.

“something (such as a principle or quality) intrinsically valuable or desirable”

The problem is that democracy is not intrinsically valuable. It is a system of government. In fact, it is a deeply flawed system of government. Democracy is not necessarily a good thing. Thus the entire premise of the case is false because we cannot value democracy as an end to itself.

Democracy does not require all citizens to vote

Characteristics of democracy

"Compulsory Voting" International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. Encyclopedia.com. 11 Aug. 2020 <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/compulsory-voting>

“In order to be termed democratic, a regime must have certain characteristics. Even though political theorists debate the scope and depth of the characteristics of a democracy, there is a common understanding that certain minimum requirements comprise a democratic regime. In Democracy and Its Critics (1989), Robert A. Dahl identifies seven characteristics that should typically exist in a democracy. These are elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information, and associational autonomy. The practices of these and similar characteristics vary from country to country. Inclusive suffrage in most representative democracies is understood as a requirement, allowing citizens the opportunity to influence their government through voting, and universal suffrage is seen as a sufficient condition. In some regimes, however, inclusive suffrage has been made mandatory by the introduction of compulsory voting.”

In other words, to be a democracy everyone must have the RIGHT to vote. However, some democracies have chosen to require voting. Thus, the definition of democracy does not require mandatory voting, and only some democracies do require it.

Compulsory voting does not improve democracy

Compulsory voting works against the majority

NINA JAFFE-GEFFNER 2015, “The Pros and Cons of Requiring Citizens to Vote.” FairVote, (non-profit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to election reform) OCTOBER 23, 2015 <https://www.fairvote.org/the_pros_and_cons_of_requiring_citizens_to_vote>. Accessed August 13, 2020

“Dampening the voice of the majority. An additional concern under a compulsory system is that people who are uninformed (or simply do not care about the outcome of an election) may end up voting randomly. The impact of ‘random’ votes ends up being particularly detrimental because it fails to increase civic engagement and may skew election results.”

Increased turnout does not mean increased participation in the political process

"Compulsory Voting ." International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. Encyclopedia.com. 11 Aug. 2020 <https://www.encyclopedia.com> .

“Compulsory voting tends to increase the number of invalid votes. Voters who do not have clear preferences but are still forced to the polls protest by voting blank or casting an invalid vote. According to David Farrell in his Electoral Systems (2001), the highest share of invalid votes in the 1990s was cast in Brazil, where the share was 19 percent. In Brazil, compulsory voting is weakly enforced.

“Compulsory voting does not seem to contribute to a politically literate electorate. According to Kimmo Grönlund and Henry Milner in their article “The Determinants of Political Knowledge in Comparative Perspective” (2006), Belgium, a European country with a proportional electoral system and a multiparty system in combination with strictly enforced compulsory voting, deviates from its relevant European family in the dispersion of political knowledge. Political knowledge is highly dependent on the level of formal school education in Belgium, a pattern that is more typical for newly developed and developing countries, and not typical for European old democracies with proportional electoral systems.

“Compulsory voting interferes with the logic of rational voting and abstaining. Since educated voting always involves personal effort, such as acquiring information and comparing parties’ policies, it is rational that many people do not want to vote. In his book Economic Theory of Democracy (1957), Anthony Downs deduced that if voting were costless only people with preferences would vote and people with no preferences would abstain. In a system with compulsory voting the odds that a single vote is decisive are less than in a system where voting is optional and some people always abstain. The incentives to form an informed electoral opinion in order to cast a vote are therefore low in systems with strictly enforced compulsory voting. Contrary to policymakers’ efforts to engage citizens politically by introducing compulsory voting, the system is more likely to increase the probability of uninformed and randomly assigned voting than to educate citizens. In the mid-2000s, however, there are no reliable comparative data on the effects of compulsory voting on political knowledge and informed voting.”

Increased turnout does not mean increased participation in the political process (2)

Paul David Webb (Chair, British and Comparative Politics, University of Sussex, Brighton, England. Author of The Modern British Party System and Trade Unions and the British Electorate. Associate and Reviews Editor of Party Politics.) Heinz Eulau (Emeritus Professor of Political Science, Stanford University, California. Author of The Politics of Representation and others.) Roger Gibbins (Professor of Political Science, University of Calgary, Alberta.) Melissa Albert, Swati Chopra, Aakanksha Gaur, John Higgins, Jeannette L. Nolen, Michael Levy, The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Election ." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. January 22, 2015. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/election-political-science>. Accessed August 13, 2020.

“In some countries, notably Australia and Belgium, electoral participation is legally required, and nonvoters can face fines. The concept of compulsory voting reflects a strain in democratic theory in which voting is considered not merely a right but a duty. Its purpose is to ensure the electoral equality of all social groups. However, whether created through laws or through social pressure, it is doubtful that high voter turnout is a good indication of an electorate’s capability for intelligent social choice. On the other hand, high rates of abstention or differential rates of abstention by different social classes are not necessarily signs of satisfaction with governmental processes and policies and in fact may indicate the contrary.”

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