

## ***You Have No Choice but to Have a Choice***

"The overwhelming majority of the world's democracies uphold and protect their citizens' right to choose whether or not to vote", says the Australian Senator Nick Minchin in his argument in favour of voluntary voting". As I see it, compulsory voting should not be perceived as a restrictive, anti-democratic measure, because it is through compulsory voting that the dual nature of voting -both as a civil right and as a civic obligation- can be captured.

As we all know, voting contemplates our entitlement to democratically participate in the choice of our political authorities. But the idea underlying our right to vote is that, as citizens, we all have the obligation to contribute to the adequate functioning of the democratic machine. Legislation should reflect the way reality is perceived by a given society and, should voting become non-mandatory, this idea of obligation would be lost. Also, to be entitled to a right does not always mean that we can choose not to exert it. Education, for instance, is a human right, and it is also compulsory at the primary level. It is important to notice, as it is argued in the article "Compulsory Vs Voluntary Voting", that there is no such thing as "compulsory" voting anyway; rather, what is compulsory is attendance at a polling station on election day. No citizen is being forced to cast a vote, and someone who does not take interest in politics can always choose to cast an informal vote. Most importantly, mandatory voting is not "going against the grain of democratic society", as Byrne argues. Rather, it is a way of materialising a right which has been fought for through modern history in order to protect democracy. We should respect this struggle and exercise our right to vote.

Many times it is argued that people vote just because they are "dragged" to the electoral booth, and in Argentina this is no exception. The Argentinean voting system is mandatory, and on many occasions it has been said that we Argentineans cast "donkey votes", or that we would not attend a polling station if voting was non-mandatory. I cannot help but think that this is to underestimate Argentinean citizens. Compulsory voting does not mean forcing apathetic citizens to cast a vote, but it is many times a way of ensuring that lower income sectors of society, or people who live in remote areas, can attend elections, and that all social sectors without distinction participate. If irresponsible or "donkey voting" exists in Argentina, it is a phenomenon related to education, and not to the compulsory character of the voting system. Although the sense of civic duty needs to be further strengthened in Argentina, I dare say that the vast majority of citizens would vote under a voluntary system too.

Compulsory voting is not going against the grain of democracy, but rather strengthening its foundations. We should take pride in our possibility to vote, and understand that it is mandatory because it is in essence a civic duty. We should not equate massive participation with donkey voting, because irresponsible voting is a matter of education, and not of percentage of participation. It is vital that we show respect for the long-standing struggle for our right to vote and exert it as an obligation.

Nadia Crantosqui