
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Compulsory voting



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Rob...

Neil

... and I'm Neil. Hello.

Rob

Hello, Neil! Today we're talking about voting. Now I'm sure it's something you've done Neil?

Neil

Of course – and earlier this year we had a general election in the UK where I voted. And I'd feel guilty if I didn't exercise my right to vote. Now a **right** in this case means somebody's legal claim to vote.

Rob

In a **general election** we vote for a government that runs the whole country, but we also have local and European elections too sometimes.

Neil

Yes but voting in the UK is optional – so you don't have to do it, whereas in some countries voting is compulsory - and **compulsory** means something that you have to do.

Rob

So if you were in Australia, where the government passed a law that made voting compulsory, you would have had to pay a fine of \$20 for not voting.

Neil

And that's because the Australian government believes that voting is a duty and not just a right.

Rob

Duty means something you have a responsibility to do.

Neil

And it's your duty Rob to ask me today's quiz question!

Rob

Yes, sir! So can you tell me, what is a constituency? Is it ...

- a) the people who live in and vote in a particular area?
- b) the politicians who make and change the laws of a country?
- or c) a town or district that has its own government?

Neil

Well I'm no expert on politics... but I'm going to go for c) that's a town or district that has its own government.

Rob

OK. Well, we'll find out later on in the show whether you're right or wrong. Now it's time to hear what a truly young person has to say about compulsory voting.

Neil

Oh right, unlike me you mean? Well, here's Michael Yip, who is a student at Warwick University and therefore much younger than me.

Michael Yip, student at Warwick University

A lot of the people that I speak to just say 'I don't care' or 'I don't really know what's going on' and in this way, another reason why I'm quite cautious about this is because it could sort of engender this sort of slapdash attitude towards politics where you know it's sort of seen as, you know, being conscripted for national service ... you just want to get it over and done with.

Rob

So Michael says he is cautious about the idea of introducing compulsory voting. So why is that, Neil?

Neil

He thinks forcing young people to vote will **engender** – or give rise to – a slapdash attitude. Now what does **slapdash** mean, Rob?

Rob

It's a good word, isn't it? It means doing something quickly and carelessly.

Neil

Oh you've never do that, would you? Now, Michael compares compulsory voting to national service. **National service** is compulsory government service that usually means military service and is also known as **conscription**.

Rob

So when it's something you haven't chosen to do, or which you actively don't want to do – it's a case of getting it **over and done with**.

Neil

And that means finishing something difficult or unpleasant as quickly as possible.

Rob

Young people might just **pick a political party out of a hat** – which means to choose randomly – rather than making an informed choice.

Neil

So some people think that politicians need to improve political education. Now let's listen to broadcaster and writer Rick Edwards talking about this.

Rick Edwards, broadcaster and writer

If you said to politicians, 'Right, 3.3 million first-time voters are definitely going to vote', then they will have to speak to them and they will have to make an effort to go to where they are and I think that's the change it would create.

Rob

So compulsory voting would mean a responsibility for the politicians too.

Neil

That's right. They need to engage and educate young people. Otherwise reluctant voters may deliberately **spoil** – or waste – their votes.

Rob

The government could also include a 'none of the above' option on the ballot paper.

Neil

Can you explain a bit more about that Rob?

Rob

Well, it means you tick this option if you don't want to vote for any of the listed political parties.

Neil

An interesting idea. Well my option for now is to get the answer to the quiz question.

Rob

OK, well, I asked: What is a constituency? Is it ... a) the people who live in and vote in a particular area? b) the politicians who make and change the laws of a country? Or c) a town or district that has its own government?

Neil

I said c) a town or district that has its own government.

Rob

Well, you ticked the wrong box, Neil! The answer is a) the people who live in and vote in a particular area. Now, did you know the UK is currently divided into 650 areas called parliamentary constituencies, each of which is represented by one MP in the House of Commons? And each constituency can have a different area. The largest is Ross, Skye and Lochaber in Scotland measuring approximately 12,000 square kilometres. The smallest constituency is Islington North in London measuring a little over seven square kilometres. Now, can we hear today's words again please, Neil?

Neil

OK. We heard:

right

general election

compulsory

duty

engender

slapdash

national service

conscription

over and done with

pick (a political party) out of a hat

spoil

Rob

Splendid! Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. I hope it got your vote! You can hear more programmes at bbclearningenglish.com. Please join us again soon.

Both

Bye.

Vocabulary

right

(here) somebody's legal claim to vote

general election

a vote for a government that runs the whole country

compulsory

something that you have to do

duty

something you have a responsibility to do

engender

give rise to

slapdash

doing something quickly and carelessly

national service

compulsory government service that usually means military service

conscription

(same as national service)

over and done with

finishing something difficult or unpleasant as quickly as possible

pick (a political party) out of a hat

to choose randomly rather than making an informed choice

spoil

waste