



VOTING

With the recent Ukrainian voting saga and election in Iraq, I found it fitting to base this issue of Fresh AIR on voting. This issue explores what voting means to young people from Argentina, Hungary, Mexico, the United States, and Canada. It presents perspectives from countries where democracy is less established to those where

the freedom to vote is taken for granted. What emerges are contrasting problems that arise from attitudes taken towards elections and voting.

The concept of true democracy is quite idealistic. It conjures up mighty notions of egalitarianism, emancipation, equality, free enterprise, freedom and justice, yet, who is to say that these ideals cannot be realized, if only in part? It is certain however, that if we are not on guard against attitudes of indifference and cynicism, these democratic standards will be impossible to meet. As global citizens we should challenge these attitudes towards voting.

Of course there are many ways to do this, but voting is the simplest and easiest action anyone who is free to do so, can take. Rather than wasting our time combating the shameful problem of voter apathy, an increase in voter turnout would allow for more focus to be put on promoting democracy where it is not yet present.

I find it very hopeful that all the opinions presented in this issue, stressed the importance of voting, especially amongst youth. If global democracy is ever to be achieved, substantial voter participation will be the key. If we, as young people, make an effort to fulfill our democratic duties, we will surely contribute to the global realization of the sought for ideals of democracy.

I hope this issue inspires you to vote if you were planning otherwise, and affirms all of you who do already vote.

Theo Di Castri
Editor



Voting in Argentina

The last presidential elections were held in May 2003. That was the first time I participated in a presidential election. I had always wanted to exercise my right to vote. The situation in Argentina, after the severe economic, social, political crisis of the 2001-2002 period had left the political atmosphere completely devastated. Therefore, as a young, first-time voter, it was really complicated to decide on which candidate to place my hopes for the future of the country.

This leads me to a deeper issue. The truth is that democracy is still ripening in my country. People do not trust their representatives. Therefore, there is no strong political system. Political parties are extremely divided as well as the citizens in Argentina. The struggle for power and economic stability creates many other problems.

I believe this country has strong possibilities to grow in every sense, but it still needs to mature in every sense as well. Unless the people start believing more substantially in the ruling class, this country has little chance of consolidating itself as a truly united nation.

Elizabeth I. Feller



“The truth is that democracy is still ripening in my country. People do not trust their representatives.”



Voting- A Hungarian Perspective



Hungary is a republic with plural parliamentary democracy since 1990. The state is represented by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the President of Parliament and by the President of the Supreme Court. Citizens vote for a party, who form the cabinet. There are two main parties on both wings: FIDESZ (Young Democrats) and MDF (Hun. Democratic Forum) who are conservative represent the right, MSZP (Hun. Socialist Party) and SZDSZ (Free Democrats) who are liberal represent the left.

In Hungary you have to be 18 to vote. Every citizen has the right to do so. Our next parliamentary election will take place in 2006, when the four year cabinet period is over. I am going to be eighteen by then, so I can vote too, which I am very excited about!

"There are no fears or dangers in voting; on the contrary, citizens are encouraged to vote."

I think most of the young people vote, but many times they are not well informed or they are influenced by their parents too much.

People tend to ignore the elections, because they are disappointed in the politics. Some became ignorant over the years. There are

no fears or dangers in voting :on the contrary citizens are encouraged to vote. However, many do not appear at different elections. There are not only parliamentary elections. Referendum can be possible as well in important issues. Such

voting took place this December. This referendum was unsuccessful because of the low ratio of participation. This sadly reflects the ignorancy of the majority of people towards politics and politicians.

Fanni Keresztes

opposition parties who were defeated by insignificant numbers of votes. These elections, however, challenged Mexican population to continue backing the opposition parties and demanding fair elections.

Eventually after the victory of an opposition party in 2000 people started trusting the elections and valuing their votes. Nowadays, almost four years since PAN won the presidential elections, people do not doubt that elections from now on are going to be fair.

Nevertheless, abstention from voting remains, this time not because the electorate distrusts the elections, but because they are not satisfied with the changes brought by the PAN's government and doubt whether any other party would be capable of carrying out the deep reforms the electorate demands. For the next presidential elections in 2006, the possible candidates for the



different parties are starting to stand out. Still the electorate's distrust regards not the elections themselves but the politicians that play the leading roles on them. I'm turning 18 this month, thus voting in the next elections for the first time,

and if there is a political issue in which my friends and I always agree is that as things keep looking in the Mexican political horizon there is no one to confidently vote for. When people do not find competent candidates, they start asking themselves "if there is no

one to vote for...why should I vote?" and that eventually increases abstention from voting. Now that the electoral system has changed assuring fair elections, the electorate needs politicians that cover their expectations; politicians that show that can offer their voters more than simply words.

Esteban Ramírez González

YOUR VIEWS

Your opinion counts. Let's hear *your* perspective. Please send in any comments or letters. A selection of the responses will be published in future issues.

Suggestions for future topics or for establishing any other contacts? All (reasonable) ideas are welcome.

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Voting in the U.S.A.

Voting in the USA is a rather sore issue. At best, we have around 50% voter turnout. On the local level, fifteen percent is doing well. The only election anybody cares about comes around every four years, President.

For the presidential election, popular vote (overall score) does not matter. This last election is the first time we have elected a President who actually won the popular vote since 1988. This is made possible by the Electoral College. Each state is given a certain number of votes within the Electoral College. Nearly always, a state's votes go to whichever candidate gained the popular vote within that state. This makes states with more votes, or which may go either way, key battlegrounds, and the other states receive little to no attention.

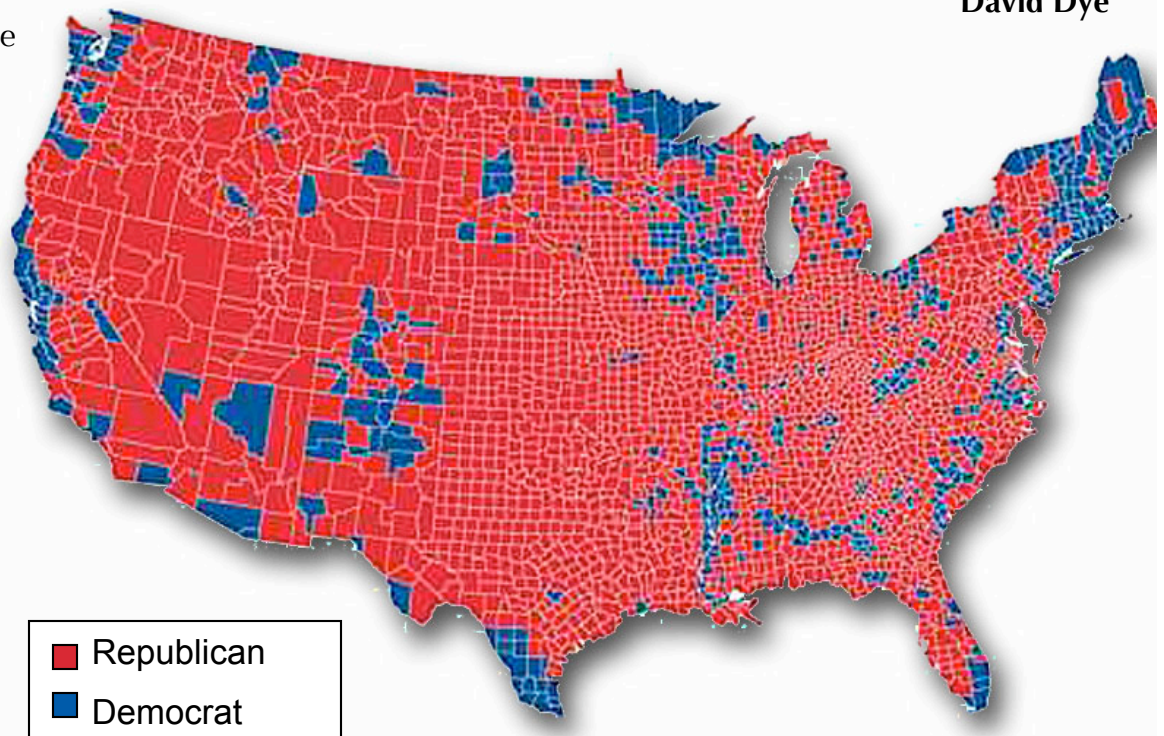
The map below shows a breakdown of how every county (subdivision of state) in the country voted, Democrat (Kerry) or Republican (Bush). (no county voted Green or Libertarian)

As you can see, a ridiculous majority of the country (landmass) voted republican. This ridiculous majority was so slim that the election came down to the results in one state deciding the overall winner. This ridiculous majority is really only 52% of the people. Also shown on the map is that nearly every major population center voted Democrat. This disparity is the exact reason why the Electoral College

was created (as well as our Senate). It allows the states and districts which may not have large populations to actually have some effect on the outcome of the election.

Many say the Electoral College is archaic, that it has no place in a modern world. A major reason for its creation was the difficulty in relaying information in the early days of this country. That said, the majority of people with this opinion are from the areas slightly disadvantaged by the system. My personal opinion is that the system should stay, just because it levels the playing field. But then, Kansas doesn't have very many votes, so I may be a bit biased. I just feel that our constitution laid things out well, and for the most part required no change. Things would really be a lot simpler if people stopped trying to get lawyers involved and mess things up. Anyway, as always send your regards, thoughts, harangues to thediidrpepperofevil@hotmail.com

David Dye



A Ukrainian-Canadian Perspective

Holding free and fair elections is one of the values that make up the cornerstone of Canadian society. In the most recent provincial election in Alberta (November 22nd 2004), 54% of the population demonstrated their indifference to this particular value by not bothering to vote.

Since early December 2004, I have been following news from the Ukrainian presidential election and the subsequent demonstrations. For over a month, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians massed together in the centre of their capital, Kyiv, braving freezing temperatures and extreme discomfort to peacefully contest and challenge a falsified election. In contrast, the majority of Albertans couldn't even make it to a voting station.

Even though I am not of legal voting age, I understand that each of us has a duty to democracy. I realize the value of a vote, the power of a ballot, and the responsibility that accompanies it all. As a result, the latest provincial election struck me as particularly disgraceful. At a paltry 46%, voter turnout was the lowest in all of Alberta's near-hundred year history.

Perhaps Election Day was especially overcast and chilly. Perhaps the effort of trudging to the nearest school or community hall to cast a ballot was simply more than our fellow citizens could handle. Maybe the warm glow of the television had more to offer that night than a political party ever could (I mean, voting was invented by *Survivor*, right?). Perhaps if Election Day had a flashy logo and a catchy jingle, Albertans would be more tempted to cooperate.

Needless to say, there is power in numbers. Ukraine's situation has proved it. Unfortunately, when it comes to Alberta's provincial elections, the numbers just aren't there. Apathy has slowly become democracy's ultimate enemy.

Democracy is a right to choice. By neglecting it, Canadians lose their entitlement to a voice. That rhymes, doesn't it? I bet I could set it to music.

Larissa Walkiw

“Apathy has slowly become democracy's ultimate enemy.”

Thousands of demonstrators gather to protest alleged fraud in the presidential elections on the main square of the Ukrainian capital Kiev.



The following charts are of the top 50 countries for voter turnout with parliamentary elections (left) and presidential elections (right). Voter turnout is measured by the number of votes divided by the Voting Age Population figure, and is expressed as a percentage. Statistics are from <http://www.nationmaster.com/>.

1. Guinea-Bissau	129.1% (1999)
2. Albania	120.9% (2001)
3. San Marino	102.8% (2001)
4. Comoros	100.6% (1987)
5. Papua New Guinea	98.8% (1997)
6. Niger	96.2% (1999)
7. Malta	95.9% (1998)
8. Uruguay	94.6% (1999)
9. Nigeria	93.1% (1999)
10. Cambodia	92.2% (1998)
11. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	91.4% (2001)
12. Uzbekistan	90.7% (1999)
13. Seychelles	90.2% (1998)
14. Greece	89.0% (2000)
15. Angola	88.3% (1992)
16. Cook Islands	87.3% (1999)
17. Somalia	87.1% (1969)
18. Iceland	86.2% (1999)
19. Indonesia	85.7% (1999)
20. Tajikistan	85.6% (2000)
21. Italy	84.9% (2001)
22. Saint Kitts and Nevis	84.8% (2000)
23. Croatia	84.4% (2000)
24. Israel	84.4% (1999)
25. Aruba	84.1% (1997)
26. Belgium	83.2% (1999)
27. Sri Lanka	82.2% (2000)
28. Palau	81.6% (2000)
29. Grenada	80.1% (1999)
30. Mauritius	79.6% (2000)
31. Peru	78.6% (2001)
32. Cyprus	77.6% (2001)
33. Samoa	76.6% (2001)
34. Panama	76.1% (1999)
35. Nepal	75.8% (1999)
36. Burundi	75.4% (1993)
37. Uganda	74.2% (2001)
38. Spain	73.8% (2000)
39. Norway	73.1% (2001)
40. Austria	72.6% (1999)
41. Guyana	72.6% (2001)
42. Suriname	72.3% (2000)
43. Slovenia	72.3% (2000)
44. Antigua and Barbuda	72.3% (1999)
45. Bulgaria	72.1% (2001)
46. Mongolia	71.0% (2000)
47. Solomon Islands	70.7% (1997)
48. Thailand	70.1% (2000)
49. Barbados	68.6% (1999)
50. Benin	65.9% (1999)

1. Guinea-Bissau	116.0% (1999)
2. Seychelles	97.9% (2001)
3. Uruguay	94.7% (1999)
4. Korea, South	92.5% (1997)
5. Angola	88.3% (1992)
6. Iceland	87.0% (1996)
7. Cyprus	85.6% (1998)
8. Israel	84.5% (1999)
9. Singapore	83.7% (1993)
10. Ghana	82.5% (1996)
11. Palau	81.6% (2000)
12. Belarus	81.3% (2001)
13. Burundi	80.1% (1993)
14. Argentina	79.4% (1999)
15. Slovakia	79.2% (1999)
16. Peru	78.6% (2001)
17. Sri Lanka	78.5% (1999)
18. Macedonia,	77.8% (1999)
19. Tajikistan	77.3% (1994)
20. Finland	76.8% (2000)
21. Panama	76.3% (1999)
22. Nicaragua	75.6% (1996)
23. Guinea	75.4% (1998)
24. Togo	74.8% (1998)
25. Mauritania	74.7% (1997)
26. Croatia	74.3% (2000)
27. Kyrgyzstan	74.3% (2000)
28. Maldives	74.2% (1998)
29. Uganda	74.2% (2001)
30. Ukraine	73.8% (1999)
31. Benin	72.9% (1996)
32. Chile	72.8% (1999)
33. Gambia, The	72.7% (1996)
34. Azerbaijan	72.0% (1998)
35. Ecuador	72.0% (1998)
36. Cape Verde	71.7% (2001)
37. Slovenia	71.2% (1997)
38. Kazakhstan	71.1% (1999)
39. Lithuania	70.7% (1997)
40. Sao Tome and Principe	70.4% (2001)
41. Chad	70.0% (2001)
42. Philippines	69.0% (1998)
43. Russia	68.8% (2000)
44. Austria	68.6% (1998)
45. Armenia	65.9% (1998)
46. Dominican Republic	65.3% (2000)
47. Georgia	65.2% (2000)
48. Algeria	63.8% (1999)
49. Central African Republic	63.7% (1999)
50. Tunisia	63.4% (1994)

