

Does my vote really matter?

In this issue I was given the task of creating a Journal devoted to exploring the practice of Voting. During the last two months I gathered a number of intelligent and thoughtful articles on various aspects of our voting practices.

At the same time, in my mostly rural county in southern Oregon, the upcoming mid-term election is giving county residents another opportunity to vote on funding law enforcement. Since we lost federal funding several years ago property owners have been asked to foot the bill to pay for the short fall. They roundly refused each time. Our rather extraordinary situation has garnered national notoriety and for good reason. If you call for help on a weekend you won't get it. There is no one there. Even during the week it's a pretty iffy situation. There simply isn't the manpower (or woman power)! I own 5 acres and would be asked to pay a substantial amount more than I already do, so I understand the resistance, especially with so many people out of work or struggling to make ends meet.

All of this came together in my mind as I set about writing the introduction to this issue. I was interested in why we sometimes don't vote and what the voting habits of other countries are. Through my research I found that the easier it is to register and to vote, the more likely people are to do it. Australia automatically registers voting age people and they have gone to online voting as well, giving them a 95% turn-out on election day! These seem to be important factors. But heredity turns out to be another. If your parents vote regularly you are more likely to as well. Countries such as Italy, and states like Minnesota, have strong voting traditions and always have a high turn-out on election day.

I kept bumping up against the idea - particularly in presidential elections in the USA - that our vote doesn't really matter. It's the Electoral College that picks the President and sometimes they don't follow the popular vote (ie: George W. Bush vs. Al Gore who got 543,895 more votes than Bush!). This made me wonder what would happen if no one voted - which led me to an intelligent and thought-provoking article by writer and activist Keith Farmish. Had I found his interesting essay early on, this issue may have taken a slightly different direction. As it is, I hope you find that it plants seeds and sparks thoughtful discussions, and above all, makes the voting process more than a mindless duty or something you simply dismiss because you just don't care.

Barbara Allen

---

Quote from a wonderful article on voting for the Common Good

“What does it mean to be a citizen of this great nation? It means embracing a vision of nation that is not preoccupied with my rights, my pocketbook, and my safety. To be a citizen is to care

for the greater good and not just my good. Yes, it is very American to be strong enough to pull oneself up by the bootstraps, but it is also very American to look down again and help another person do the same. I believe that being a good citizen means voting for and supporting those programs and initiatives, those laws and governances, that make us all better in character and that engage us in the great American dream of liberty and justice for all.”