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COMPULSORY VOTING: AN EPISTEMIC PERSPECTIVE**

Abstract

Compulsory voting is defended as the most effective institutional mechanism for ensuring high turnout in response to the problem of insufficient participation in democratic elections. Although arguments in favor of this practice implicitly rely on assumptions about knowledge, competence, or the quality of democratic decision-making, the epistemic dimension of compulsory voting has so far not been examined in a systematic way. This paper analyzes how epistemic considerations enter existing normative arguments in favor of compulsory voting: arguments based on rights and duties, arguments concerning democratic legitimacy, and consequentialist arguments. It examines both the scope and the limits of epistemic justification for compulsory voting, as well as some explicitly epistemic objections to the practice. The paper addresses the question of whether compulsory voting can be defended on purely epistemic grounds and concludes that, although the epistemic approach

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plays an important role in its defense, it is not sufficient on its own to justify compulsory voting.

Keywords: voting, compulsory voting, democracy, epistemic democracy, participation, democratic legitimacy

INTRODUCTION

High turnout is commonly regarded as a desirable feature of democratic decision-making. Virtually all democratic theories view broad participation as one of the ideals of democracy, although they justify it in different ways, linking it to political equality, democratic legitimacy, civic duties, collective rationality, or the quality of collective decisions (Katz 1997, 243–244). However, in many contemporary democracies, participation is far from universal, and it has also declined significantly compared to two decades ago (OECD 2024). For many democratic theorists, this is a cause for concern. Low turnout calls democratic legitimacy into question, gives disproportionately greater influence to social groups that vote more frequently, and signals that future generations may be even less interested in participating in the electoral process (Hill 2014; Lever 2010; Lijphart 1997). One possible solution to this problem lies in institutionalizing the practice of *compulsory voting*.

Compulsory voting can be defined as a legal obligation to appear at the polling station on election day (Birch 2008, 2). Despite the name, this practice does not impose a duty to actually cast a vote. In countries where such a law exists, voters are allowed to submit blank or invalid ballots, and in some cases, they are not even required to accept a ballot at all (Lijphart 1997, 2). What is compulsory, then, is attendance at the polling station, while con-compliance is met with more or less strict sanctions (Birch 2008, 7–10). Nevertheless, data show that in the vast majority of cases, where citizens are required to appear at polling stations, they do indeed vote, and the proportion of uncast, invalid, or blank ballots is extremely low (Hill 2014, 116). For this reason, proponents of compulsory voting emphasize that it is the most effective measure for increasing turnout, far more effective than measures based on voluntary voting.

Normative arguments for and against compulsory voting usually approach this issue from the standpoint of individual rights and duties, questions of democratic legitimacy, or the expected consequences of such a practice. In this paper, we approach the debate from a different angle, focusing on its *epistemic dimension*. By "epistemic", this paper refers to considerations concerning political knowledge, beliefs, voter competence, and the reliability of decision-making processes. An epistemic perspective on compulsory voting, in this sense, does not denote a single, unified theory, but rather a way of evaluating democratic institutions and practices in terms of how they affect the quality of political judgment and the outcomes of collective decision-making. This includes questions about whether citizens possess sufficient knowledge to participate responsibly, whether democratic procedures tend to produce correct decisions, and whether institutional arrangements can improve or undermine these capacities.

While contemporary literature examines the epistemic dimension of democracy, focusing, for example, on the reliability of majority rule, the role of political knowledge, and the responsibilities of voters (Estlund 2008; Goodin and Spiekermann 2018; Landemore 2013), these insights have not yet been systematically integrated into debates on compulsory voting. Normative arguments concerning compulsory voting often rely, implicitly or explicitly, on assumptions about voters' competence, the informational role of elections, and the conditions under which democratic decisions can be considered reliable. The aim of this paper is to make these epistemic assumptions explicit and to assess their role in justifying compulsory voting. Before assessing a standalone epistemic argument for compulsory voting, we examine how epistemic considerations operate within existing normative arguments and what their implications are. In doing so, we offer a more systematic account of the epistemic dimension of compulsory voting and clarify both its justificatory potential and its limits. The central claim is that, although epistemic considerations can strengthen familiar arguments in favor of compulsory voting, they cannot by themselves provide a sufficient justification for the practice.

NORMATIVE ARGUMENTS FOR COMPULSORY VOTING

The main normative debates about compulsory voting can be grouped into three broad categories (Birch 2008, 40): (1) arguments focused on questions of individual duties and rights; (2) arguments concerned with collective rationality and the legitimacy of democratic decision-making; (3) arguments that appeal to the consequences expected to follow from mandatory participation. These categories sometimes overlap, but distinguishing them clarifies the most common strategies of justifying compulsory voting. Although these debates are not usually framed in epistemic terms, they frequently rely on assumptions about knowledge, competence, and decision-making quality. Making these assumptions explicit is the central contribution of this paper. Before turning to epistemic considerations, the following section outlines the core non-epistemic versions of these arguments.

The first category concerns *individual duties and rights*. Arguments in this category address whether voting is a moral obligation of citizenship, whether such an obligation may legitimately be enforced, and how such enforcement relates to political rights. On the duty side, voting is treated as a civic obligation arising from citizens' membership in, and ongoing benefits from, democratic institutions (Katz 1997, 243). As such, it may be legitimately enforced, much like other socially necessary obligations such as taxation or military service (Birch 2008, 42; Lijphart 1997, 11).[1] By contrast, rights-based discussions focus on whether compulsory voting violates a right not to participate in a democratic process (Katz 1997, 244). Critics argue that enforced turnout violates individual autonomy and freedom of conscience, even when sanctions are minimal (Brennan 2014, 9). The debate thus often turns on whether voting is best understood as a civic obligation or a

[1] The idea that citizens are under a moral obligation to vote is widely assumed in both normative and empirical analyses of electoral participation (Feitosa and Galais 2020), and has a prominent role in rational choice models that invoke a perceived sense of duty to explain turnout that would otherwise appear irrational (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Critics of this idea, however, claim that the mere act of voting is such an undemanding form of political engagement that it cannot plausibly be regarded as a significant form of civic virtue (Lomasky and Brennan 2000, 82–83).

personal liberty (Abraham 1955, 6), and whether its legal enforcement is compatible with liberal democratic values (Wertheimer 1975, 277).[2]

The second category focuses on *collective rationality and democratic legitimacy*. Where turnout is low, electoral outcomes may plausibly be said to reflect the will of only a fraction of the electorate, which raises doubts about the legitimacy of representative institutions and the laws they enact (Lijphart 1997, 2). From this perspective, compulsory voting can be viewed as a necessary (albeit insufficient) means of achieving true representation and, consequently, democratic legitimacy. This argument has two main components. First, compulsory voting is seen as a response to the collective action problem (Hill 2014, 192; Lijphart 1997, 11). Since electoral participation produces a public good, individuals have incentives to free-ride, which may justify coercion to ensure fair contribution (Katz 1997, 243; Wertheimer 1975, 278).[3] Second, full participation is taken to be a necessary condition for democratic legitimacy, insofar as it ensures that collective decisions reflect the views of the electorate as a whole (Birch 2008, 47–48; Hill 2014, 126–127).[4]

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2 Some critics deny that there is a right not to vote, or, more precisely, argue that the right to vote should be understood as a positive political right that does not entail a correlative negative right to abstain. According to this view, the existence of a legally protected entitlement to participate in elections does not imply that citizens have a claim against the state not to be required to participate under certain conditions (Lardy 2004). Interpreted in this way, compulsory voting is taken not to infringe political liberties, especially when voters have the option of casting blank or spoilt ballots (Birch 2008, 43).

3 This problem resembles the classic problem of the rational voter (Downs 1957), but it has one important difference. Whereas the paradox of the rational voter arises from the fact that the influence of an individual voter is exceedingly small, making it irrational to incur the costs of voting, the problem emphasized here is that it is not rational for an individual voter to participate in decision-making, since they can enjoy the benefits of democratic institutions even as an abstainer.

4 There are multiple criticisms of this line of argument. Jason Brennan remarks that the legitimacy argument misses its target since it implies that any government that didn't emerge as a result of full participation must be illegitimate, which would in turn render illegitimate any compulsory voting law imposed by such a government (Brennan 2014, 29–30). Such a criticism can be answered with a claim that there are different levels of legitimacy, and that higher turnout makes democratic decisions *more* legitimate (Hill 2014, 126), which does not mean that decisions made without full participation lack legitimacy altogether. A more substantial challenge holds that there is no clear correlation between turnout and legitimacy, since voting is only one

The third category consists of *consequentialist*, or outcome-based, arguments. One line of reasoning holds that compulsory voting raises citizens' awareness and increases their interest in politics and public life (Birch 2008, 49; Lardy 2004, 314–316; Lijphart 1997, 10). Another emphasizes its potential to improve the quality of democratic decision-making, for example by reducing inequalities in participation or producing policies that better reflect the interests of the broader population (Hill 2014, 197; Lijphart 1997, 10). At the same time, critics point to possible negative effects, including increased administrative costs, resentment toward coercion, or a decline in decision quality if less informed citizens are compelled to vote (Abraham 1955, 8–9; Brennan 2014, 92; Katz 1997, 245).

EPISTEMIC DIMENSION OF COMPULSORY VOTING

In the previous section, we distinguished between three main normative arguments in favor of compulsory voting, without highlighting their epistemic assumptions. In this section, we make those assumptions explicit. Rather than introducing a separate and independent epistemic argument, this section explores how epistemic considerations support, and at times complicate, arguments within existing normative frameworks. This perspective is important because arguments about compulsory voting do not only concern who participates, but also how well democratic decisions are made. Existing approaches typically address this only indirectly, without systematically examining the assumptions they make about voters' knowledge and competences, and the reliability of collective decision-making. By making these epistemic assumptions explicit, we clarify the structure of existing arguments and reveal both their strengths and their limitations.

form of political participation, and not necessarily the most important one (Lever 2010, 908–909). Moreover, if there is a widespread opposition to compulsory voting, it may lead some of the otherwise abstaining citizens to vote randomly, which could in turn undermine the legitimacy of democratic decision-making (Katz 1997, 245).

Epistemic Elements in Rights-and-Duties Arguments

Even though arguments for compulsory voting grounded in individual duties and rights are usually based on the claim that citizens have a moral obligation to vote, they implicitly raise further questions about the quality of electoral participation. From an epistemic perspective, the normative issue is not exhausted by asking whether citizens should vote at all; rather, it shifts toward the question of *how* citizens should vote. This shift presupposes that voting can be evaluated as better or worse, an assumption central to an epistemic conception of democracy, according to which votes are understood as expressions of beliefs about the correctness of political decisions (Cohen 1986, 34).[5]

Within the epistemic approach, voting is not merely a matter of expressing preferences or fulfilling a formal civic requirement, but an activity that, if performed irresponsibly, could harm the entire collective. Some critics of unrestricted electoral participation argue that, in fact, citizens have a *negative duty* not to vote when doing so would foreseeably contribute to unjust outcomes, or elect bad policies or candidates. According to this position, participation in collective decision-making carries moral risks, and individuals are required to refrain from voting unless they meet certain standards of political competence (Brennan 2011b, 71–72). However, this view also holds that if citizens decide to vote despite these risks, they incur a further obligation to vote competently – that is, to make their electoral choices in an informed and responsible manner (Brennan 2011b, 69).

Other theorists reject the claim that citizens have a duty to abstain, but nevertheless endorse the idea that electoral participation is subject to constraints on knowledge and competence. On this account, citizens are understood to have a *positive* duty to vote, grounded in the idea that they have not only a civic obligation to participate in a democratic process, but also an obligation to possess sufficient political knowledge

[5] What it means to "vote well" is itself a contested question. In the literature, epistemic standards for voting range from minimal requirements – such as basic political knowledge (Lau and Redlawsk 2006) or avoidance of demonstrably false beliefs (Brennan 2011b) – to more demanding accounts that emphasize informed deliberation (Cohen 2005), responsiveness to evidence (Goldman 1999a), or orientation toward the common good (Landemore 2013). In this paper, we take a neutral stance towards these accounts and focus instead on the shared assumption that votes can be epistemically better or worse.

that makes them vote competently, as votes cast without adequate justification can undermine democratic decision-making itself. In other words, this duty is not limited to mere turnout, but includes an obligation to vote well (Klijnman 2021, 91–92; Maskivker 2016, 15–16; Goldman 1999b, 209). Electoral participation is thus treated as morally correct only insofar as it is exercised with regard for relevant evidence and possible consequences of one's vote. This view, therefore, converges with the negative-duty argument on the informational demands that are placed on voters, but diverges sharply on whether abstinence is, in some cases, the primary requirement.[6]

When applied to the question of compulsory voting, this epistemic reframing both strengthens and complicates the case for legal enforcement of the practice. On the one hand, compulsory voting can be defended not simply as a means to increase turnout, but as a mechanism that guarantees responsible participation. If citizens have a duty not merely to vote, but to vote well, then compulsory voting may be justified as a way of institutionalizing this duty and signaling the moral seriousness of electoral decisions. On this interpretation, compulsion becomes a means of reinforcing citizens' responsibility for the collective outcomes to which their votes contribute. Versions of this claim are advanced, more or less explicitly, by several proponents of compulsory voting (Abraham 1955, 6; Hill 2014, 170–171; Lijphart 1997, 10).

On the other hand, this line of argument raises a significant difficulty. If the justification for compulsory voting rests on demanding standards of competence, it may impose obligations that many citizens are unable, even if they are willing, to satisfy. In such cases, legal compulsion risks forcing individuals to participate in an activity that they lack the capacity to perform responsibly (Brennan 2014, 89–90; Lardy 2004, 314–315). This remark reveals a problem at the heart of this version of the rights-and-duties argument: the more strongly compulsory voting is justified by appeal to the duty to vote well, the more vulnerable it becomes to objections about excessive informational burdens and unequal capacities among citizens themselves.

[6] Epistemic accounts of voting differ not only over the content of demands placed on citizens but also over whether and to what extent failures to meet such demands generate moral blameworthiness. Some views assign degrees of responsibility to abstainers, and to voters as well, in cases of bad outcomes (Goldman 1999b), while others reject such responsibility (Lever 2010). The present argument does not depend on resolving this dispute.

Epistemic Elements in Legitimacy and Collective Rationality Arguments

Arguments in favor of compulsory voting that appeal to democratic legitimacy and collective rationality can also be formulated in epistemic terms. As we have seen, these arguments emphasize that low turnout undermines the legitimacy of democratic decisions insofar as it allows collective outcomes to depend on an insufficiently large and insufficiently representative subset of the electorate. Once epistemic considerations are added, low turnout ceases to be problematic merely from the standpoint of procedural fairness; instead, it also calls into question the presumed tendency of democratic decision-making to produce correct or reliable outcomes.

The implications of this epistemic reframing become even more pronounced when one takes into account the view sometimes referred to as correctness theories of democracy, which states that democratic decisions are legitimate because they constitute correct answers to political questions (Estlund 2008, 99).[7] Although most proponents of the epistemic approach to democracy do not endorse the radical claim that democratic legitimacy depends *exclusively* on correctness, for most of them, legitimacy is nevertheless closely connected to the quality of collective decision-making (Cohen 1986; Goodin and Spiekermann 2018; Landemore 2013). From this perspective, high turnout matters not only because participation reflects political equality or popular sovereignty, but also because broad participation positively affects the probability of selecting correct options.

The most influential arguments in support of this claim appeal to probabilistic models of collective decision-making, the best known of which is the Condorcet Jury Theorem (Goodin and Spiekermann 2018,

[7] Correctness theories represent the most demanding approach to the study of democracy in terms of the demands placed on citizens' knowledge and judgment (Kelly 2012). For proponents of this approach, democratic decisions are legitimate if and only if they are correct. A classical formulation of this view can be attributed to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's claim that the general will is infallible (Rousseau [1762] 1997, II.3). Although the term "correctness theories" was introduced by David Estlund, he himself rejects this position and defends a more epistemically modest theory according to which democratic procedures are legitimate only insofar as they lead to correct outcomes with a probability greater than random (Estlund 2008, 107).

17–22). Roughly speaking, these models show that if individual voters are more likely to choose the correct rather than the incorrect option, then increasing the number of voters raises the probability that the *majority* will select the correct option. When applied to democratic decision-making, such models point to the conclusion that large electorates can reliably produce correct outcomes. And if democratic legitimacy is closely tied to correctness, then the systematic absence of high turnout is problematic not only for the representativeness of the electorate, but also for its decision-making capacity.

High voter turnout is also regarded as a precondition of democratic legitimacy for an additional reason, namely, because it guarantees the *representation* of the entire population at the polls. Compulsory voting is therefore defended as a mechanism that ensures that the perspectives of all existing demographic groups are taken into account in democratic decision-making (Brennan 2014, 34). This line of argument likewise has a significant epistemic dimension. The value of participation here lies not only in the size of the group involved in decision-making, but also in the diversity of perspectives, information, and approaches to political problems (Landemore 2013, 97–98). Theorists of epistemic democracy commonly appeal to a model that demonstrates that groups with greater internal diversity consistently outperform homogeneous groups composed of individually most competent members (Hong and Page 2004). From this point of view, compulsory voting may be justified in these terms insofar as it prevents the systematic exclusion of various perspectives from the process of public discussion and democratic decision-making.

Lastly, as we have seen, compulsory voting is sometimes defended as an effective means of overcoming the collective action problem (Lijphart 1997, 11). Democratic decision-making produces public goods from which all citizens benefit, yet individual voters have little incentive to contribute, since they enjoy these benefits even when they do not participate. Compulsion is thus defended on the basis of fairness or reciprocity. When combined with epistemic considerations, however, this line of reasoning gains additional force. When citizens abstain, they do not merely benefit from a public good; they also withhold information, judgments, and perspectives that are needed to produce the said public good. This suggests that compulsory voting can be justified not only as a fair distribution of participatory burdens, but also as a means of securing the informational inputs required for reliable collective decisions.

The Epistemic Elements in Consequentialist Arguments

Rather than assessing compulsory voting only in terms of aggregate effects, such as higher turnout or improved representativeness, the epistemic approach places emphasis on the impact it has on the quality of democratic decisions and on the epistemic capacities of citizens themselves. For this reason, consequentialist arguments in favor of compulsory voting can, more naturally than other forms of argumentation, be connected to considerations about knowledge and decision quality. This approach can complement consequentialist arguments for compulsory voting, but it can also reinforce them by providing additional reasons.

We have seen that one argument in favor of compulsory voting is that this practice may improve the quality of democratically made decisions. This line of reasoning builds on epistemic approaches to democracy, both those that view democratic institutions as instruments for producing correct political decisions and those that emphasize the quality of public discussion. From this perspective, higher turnout and improved representativeness possess not only procedural but also an instrumental value. Nevertheless, as previously noted, different categories of arguments in favor of compulsory voting cannot always be clearly distinguished, and there is therefore a certain overlap here between the epistemic approach to consequentialist arguments and arguments from democratic legitimacy. For this reason, we will not further pursue the claim that compulsory voting positively affects the quality of democratic decision-making and will threat the point of intersection between consequentialist and epistemic arguments as already addressed.

Instead, we will focus on a second consequentialist argument, namely that compulsory voting can generate epistemic benefits for *citizens themselves*. Compulsory voting may encourage citizens to acquire basic political knowledge, to participate in public discussions, and to develop the habits required for informed political reasoning (Hill 2014, 182; Lardy 2004, 315–316; Lijphart 1997, 10). The significance of these effects lies in the fact that they enhance citizens' capacities to understand political decision-making, that is, to assess reasons, evidence, and competing claims concerning political decisions. The epistemic value of participation, therefore, does not lie solely in the act

of voting itself, but also in the preparatory and accompanying processes that voting requires (Birch 2008, 47; Wertheimer 1975, 292).

The idea that participation can yield epistemic benefits finds support in John Stuart Mill's view, which in this context can be characterized as a form of epistemic liberalism (Landemore 2013, 76). According to this view, excluding citizens from the process of democratic decision-making would amount to depriving them of their intellectual and moral capacities (Mill [1861] 2001, 51–52). Although Mill advanced this argument in support of universal suffrage, and he likely would not have endorsed coercion, contemporary proponents of compulsory voting appeal precisely to the educative character of voting and regard compulsory voting as a natural extension of arguments in favor of universal suffrage (Lijphart 1997, 11).

In addition to quantitatively improving political knowledge, compulsory voting may yield further benefits insofar as it exposes citizens to perspectives that would typically be unavailable to them. When participation is sufficiently broad and not concentrated among politically motivated or socially privileged groups, citizens may encounter arguments or viewpoints to which they would otherwise remain unexposed. The benefits of compulsory voting thus lie not merely in increasing the number of voters, but also in ensuring the heterogeneity of participants in democratic decision-making. Diversity of perspectives plays a role in eliminating biases, as well as in creating favorable conditions for deliberation and for the confrontation of opposing viewpoints (Landemore 2013, 92–94).

Nevertheless, just as consequentialist arguments in favor of compulsory voting, understood broadly, may be met with the general objection that this practice can produce negative consequences, such arguments, insofar as they concern knowledge and decision quality, may be criticized on the grounds that compulsory voting could have *epistemically* detrimental effects (Brennan 2014, 92; Katz 1997, 245). These and similar objections against compulsory voting will be the subject of the following section.

EPISTEMIC LIMITS

The preceding sections have shown that the main normative arguments for compulsory voting – whether they appeal to duties, democratic legitimacy, or positive consequences – are not free of epistemic considerations. In each of these arguments, claims that participation ought to be made mandatory implicitly rely on assumptions about citizens' beliefs, their competencies, and the quality of democratic decisions. In this section, we turn to the limits of epistemic defenses of compulsory voting by examining a set of objections that can be raised against this practice, as well as by considering whether compulsory voting can be justified on purely epistemic grounds. The objections discussed here are not typically aimed at compulsory voting as such; rather, they originate in the broader literature on epistemic democracy and voting. They are presented in reconstructed form in order to assess their implications for compulsory voting.

The first counterargument targets the claim that democratic legitimacy requires mass participation. As we have seen, epistemic conceptions of democracy often appeal to probabilistic models that show that large groups of voters are highly likely to arrive at correct decisions (Goodin and Spiekermann 2018). Nevertheless, while from this perspective every additional voter may be welcome, it does not follow that full participation is necessary in order to achieve good outcomes. Formally speaking, each additional voter contributes to the probability of selecting the correct option, but not to an equal degree. In fact, as the number of voters increases, the marginal contribution of each additional voter begins to decline rapidly. Beyond a certain point, what may be called the *optimal number of voters*, the probability of selecting the correct option is so close to certainty that including additional voters contributes virtually nothing, while still imposing certain costs (Brennan 2011a, 56–57). From this point of view, compulsory voting may appear epistemically unnecessary since the correctness of a decision can be reliably achieved even at relatively modest levels of turnout. If this objection is sound, then epistemic arguments for compulsory voting that rest on the claim that correctness is necessary for legitimacy are significantly weakened, because one of their premises – that democratic decisions require mass participation in order to be on the right track – is simply false.

The second counterargument goes a step further by showing that all the epistemic benefits typically attributed to compulsory voting could be achieved through the introduction of a cheaper and non-coercive alternative, not only to compulsory voting, but to voting in general. Instead of requiring all citizens to participate, democratic decision-making could be replaced by *voting lotteries*: a system in which a certain number of voters are randomly selected from the electorate and granted the right to vote in a given electoral cycle – potentially with some form of financial compensation (Brennan 2014, 36). Such a mechanism would not, in principle, violate the values of democratic equality, since all citizens would have an equal probability of being selected, and the number of "lottery winners" could correspond to the optimal number of voters required to surpass the epistemic threshold that guarantees correctness. From an epistemic perspective, this proposal may appear attractive: if the group is sufficiently large, it satisfies the conditions posited by probabilistic models, and since it is randomly selected, it constitutes a representative sample of citizens that reflects their internal diversity. Moreover, the collective action problem is also neutralized, since participation is rewarded and no one is forced to vote against their will. If these advantages of voting lotteries are realized, compulsory voting may, on this view, appear epistemically redundant, as all of its purported benefits could be achieved without coercion.

The third counterargument challenges an assumption shared by many attempts to provide an epistemic grounding for democracy, namely that citizens are sufficiently competent to participate in political decision-making. What if, on the contrary, many citizens lack political knowledge, rely on misinformation and prejudice, and vote in systematically misguided ways (Brennan 2016, 4–6)? In that case, large electorates constitute an *epistemic obstacle* rather than an advantage. Furthermore, abstention is not thought to be random, but is often practiced precisely by those citizens who recognize their own lack of competence (Birch 2008, 48–49). If this is correct, compulsory voting carries the risk of allowing political decisions to be driven by those citizens who are least informed about their consequences.[8] From this perspective, compulsory

[8] Brennan illustrates this point by citing a series of studies that indicate the degree of political unawareness of the average American voter, and by drawing an analogy between compulsory voting and "forcing drunk people to drive." Nevertheless, he treats this widespread ignorance as an expected consequence of the nature of

voting is taken to be not only epistemically unnecessary, but potentially harmful (Abraham 1955, 21).

Taken together, these objections pose a significant challenge to epistemic arguments in favor of compulsory voting. In what follows, we respond to these challenges from within the same general framework. We argue that these objections share a common assumption: that compulsory voting affects only the number of voters at the polls, while leaving the voters themselves unchanged. Yet, as we have seen, many arguments in favor of compulsory voting hold that this practice has dynamic effects on citizens' motivation and political knowledge, by actively improving them (Hill 2014, 182; Lijphart 1997, 10). If proponents of compulsory voting are correct in this respect, then its epistemic value cannot be measured solely in terms of a simple increase in turnout.

In this way, the counterargument concerning the optimal number of voters partially loses its force. Even if relatively small groups of voters (at least when compared to the size of the overall electorate in many contemporary democracies) are sufficient to guarantee the selection of correct options, compulsory voting may still be epistemically desirable if it has an educational character that positively affects the entire electorate over time. Similarly, the argument for voting lotteries assumes that the randomly selected group of citizens either already possesses, or will acquire during the electoral process, the knowledge necessary for responsible participation. If compulsory voting produces such an effect across the population as a whole, then from an epistemic perspective, it becomes preferable to lotteries, which would educate only a relatively small number of voters. Finally, the objection that many voters lack sufficient competence can also be turned in the opposite direction: if many citizens do not possess the capacities required to vote well, compulsory voting may prove to be a mechanism that encourages the development of precisely those capacities, rather than one that foregrounds incompetence.

This naturally leads us to the following question: Can compulsory voting be defended on purely epistemic grounds? Such a defense would, on this reconstruction, combine all the epistemic elements of

democratic decision-making. For most voters, acquiring political knowledge is simply not a rational course of action, since the probability that such knowledge will yield concrete benefits – namely, that their individual vote will be the one that decides an election – is negligibly small (Brennan 2014, 89–90).

the argument presented in this paper: (1) citizens have a duty to vote well; (2) a sufficiently large and representative electorate is necessary for democratic decisions to count as legitimate; and (3) compulsory participation has a positive effect on citizens' political knowledge and the epistemic environment of democratic institutions. Taken together, these claims amount to a comprehensive epistemic defense of compulsory voting.

Nevertheless, we suggest that this approach faces a serious difficulty, as it appears to rely on an implicit circularity. Namely, compulsory voting is justified on the assumption that citizens are sufficiently competent to vote well, while at the same time it is defended as a means of enabling citizens to become competent to vote well. If the epistemic justification of compulsory voting succeeds only on grounds that presuppose the existence of compulsory voting itself, such an argument cannot stand on its own. At best, it shows that epistemic considerations can support a broader range of normative arguments in favor of compulsory voting, but not that they can serve as an independent starting point.[9]

Epistemic elements thus play an important role within normative arguments for compulsory voting, insofar as they highlight the connection between participation, democratic legitimacy, voter competence, and the quality of collective decision-making. However, taken on their own, they cannot fully justify the introduction of compulsory voting. The epistemic arguments of this kind depend on assumptions about citizens' political knowledge and motivation to vote that require additional justification. For this reason, an adequate defense of compulsory voting should treat epistemic reasons as complementary to additional, non-epistemic reasons for adopting this practice.

[9] A related skepticism is expressed by Annabelle Lever and Alexandru Volacu, who ask whether compulsory voting might be justified on epistemic grounds where moral or political justifications fail. They argue that this strategy is unlikely to succeed, not because epistemic democracy is incoherent, but because voting is neither the only nor the most reliable mechanism for aggregating politically relevant information, especially when compared to polls, surveys, protest, and other forms of political communication that function without coercion (Lever and Volacu 2019).

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ОБАВЕЗНО ГЛАСАЊЕ: ЕПИСТЕМИЧКА ПЕРСПЕКТИВА[**]

Резиме

Овај рад истражује обавезно гласање са становишта епистемичког приступа демократској теорији. Основни циљ рада је да се испита улога коју питања знања, компетенције и квалитета демократског одлучивања имају унутар нормативних расправа о обавезном гласању. Обавезно гласање се обично оправдава као најефикаснији институционални механизам за решавање проблема ниске излазности. У раду се показује да различити видови оправдања обавезног гласања у себи садрже епистемичке претпоставке, које до сада нису испитиване на систематски начин. Главни допринос рада лежи у експлицирању ових претпоставки и процени њиховог значаја за аргументе у прилог обавезног гласања. Рад започиње разликовањем три главне категорије аргумената у прилог обавезног гласања: аргумената заснованих на индивидуалним правима и дужностима, аргумената који се тичу демократског легитимитета и колективне рационалности, као и консеквенцијалистичких аргумената. Централни део рада састоји се у приказивању тога на који се начин епистемичка разматрања јављају унутар сваке од ових категорија аргумената. Аргументи о правима и дужностима попримају епистемичку димензију оног тренутка када се гласање разуме као активност која се може спроводити на добар или лош начин, што отвара додатна питања која се тичу компетенције

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гласача. Аргументи који се тичу демократске легитимности могу се сместити у епистемичке оквире када се висока излазност постави као предуслов демократског легитимитета. Ови аргументи се тада доводе у везу са епистемичким приступима демократији који одлуке донете од стране великих група гласача, или довољно разноликих група гласача, виде као епистемички супериорне у односу на одлуке које доносе мале или хомогене групе. Консеквенцијалистички аргументи у прилог обавезног гласања имају најјаснију епистемичку компоненту, будући да се њима брани становиште да обавезно гласање доводи до квалитетнијих демократских одлука или повећања политичког знања међу гласачима. У закључном делу рада разматрају се неке од епистемичких примедби које се могу упутити идеји обавезног гласања. Показује се да, иако ове примедбе представљају изазов за епистемичко оправдање обавезног гласања, потенцијална склоност обавезног гласања да током времена континуирано побољшава епистемичке способности гласача може бити одговор на те примедбе. Потом се поставља питање да ли се обавезно гласање може правдати на чисто епистемичким основама и закључује се да се таква одбрана суочава са тешкоћама будући да почива на циркуларном аргументу. На крају, закључује се да епистемичка разматрања могу да пруже додатне разлоге за увођење обавезног гласања, уколико су праћена неепистемичким разлозима, али да сама не могу да послуже као основа за оправдање такве праксе.

Кључне речи: гласање, обавезно гласање, демократија, епистемичка демократија, партиципација, демократски легитимитет

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