

Don't complain if you don't vote

By Bethan Tolley, Communications Officer, Centre for Brexit Studies

On Thursday 2nd May, my alarm will go off at 6.10am. I'll check the notifications on my phone, close my eyes for just a 'few more minutes' and then I will get up, get dressed and head out the door. I'll leave about 5 minutes earlier, pop round the corner to the closest primary school in my area and vote in the Local Election. It won't require more than a few minutes of my time, it won't have a particular impact on my day and as I'm registered to vote, I won't be expecting any surprises when I state my name and address before being given my voting slip.

So what is the issue?

Over the weekend, four people told me that they won't be voting in the Local Elections. Now, don't get me wrong, I understand that it is a personal preference and there's no law to state that you absolutely have to vote. However, with it being such a simple and easy process, why you wouldn't use your democratic right to vote – regardless if it is a 'big vote' or not. So, why aren't they voting? Two forgot to register to vote. The other two couldn't see the point. 'Nothing will change, so why bother?' the one said.

I was fortunate to have had one of the best people to have ever lived, in my eyes, in my life until she sadly passed away at the amazing age of 95 two years ago. My Great Nan. This was a woman who never missed her opportunity to vote. She was working class, worked for the NHS and lived, mostly, a very normal life. This didn't stop her voting. Even if something didn't impact her personally, she knew that local council cuts would impact others, so she'd get down the voting booth without a seconds thought. Being a member of her local Women's Institute, she was strong, passionate and wasn't the type to hide her opinion. Her daughter, my Nan, is the exact same. It's a trait I'm incredibly glad that I have picked up too.

As a woman, and a feminist, I have done extensive reading over the years on the Suffragette movement. In fact, it's something that I feel incredibly passionate about. If anything, it's what gave me the interest

in politics that I have now. Just over 100 years ago, I wouldn't have been able to vote, because I'm a woman.

If it wasn't for those women, who knows if we'd even have the right to vote now. They were total game changers in my opinion. To thank them for the sacrifices they made, I vote. To have a say in what happens in my local area, I vote. Regardless of what those around me vote for, and even if they have a completely different opinion to me, I still respect them for taking the time to vote.

I've always picked up on this aspect that the local elections just aren't important. They fail to receive the attention that they deserve. Almost like the only time that votes actually count are for a general election, or a referendum. Local Elections actually have a huge impact on the Westminster bubble that so many of us feel so far away from.

So why are they important? Well, the Local Elections are your opportunity to vote on what happens in YOUR area. Care about bin collections? Your local library? Leisure centres? Local schools? This is the vote that gives you the opportunity to have your say on your area and the services that you love, hate and use on a daily basis.

Local councils also account for a huge amount of public spending. Care about where your hard earned money goes and what it is spent on? The local elections are the time to have your say on this.

Voting is also completely free. Doesn't cost you a penny, and also, chances are, your local polling booth will only be a short walk away. In fact, the furthest I've ever had to go to vote was a 15 minute walk. FYI – you can find out where your polling station is [here](#). Polling stations are open 7am-10pm, giving you plenty of time to get there.

The last few years have felt like we have spent a lot of time trotting down to the local polling booth, but voting doesn't actually happen a huge amount in the UK. In some countries, people get a vote on every issue. Can you imagine! Likewise, in many countries, normal working people like you and me don't get the chance to vote. Imagine having that right taken away from you?

Many people I know who have no interest in voting are, like me, young people. Unfortunately, I think many of us were impacted by the

“Nick Clegg effect”, and in a post-Brexit voting Britain, where 75% of 18-24 year-olds voted to remain in the EU, I know so many who can’t see the point in voting. They think things won’t go their way, even if they take the time to vote. Believe me, I’ve questioned it many times myself.

However, if we continue to be sceptical about voting, what will we end up with? A whole generation not having a say would be utter tragedy. Now isn’t the time to give up on voting, it’s time to have your say.

But, most importantly, if you don’t take the time to vote, especially in the local election, you can’t really complain when things don’t quite go your way. My grandparents have always said, don’t complain if you don’t vote, and I couldn’t agree more.

Local Elections may not get all the air time on TV. The press may not go wild for them. It may not be the topic of conversation of everybody’s lips. But if you think they don’t have an impact on Parliament, and your life, you’re mistaken. Regardless of which box you tick on Thursday, Local Elections are as important as any other opportunity to vote, and one that should not be wasted.