Want to have your say? Register to Vote!

By Bethan Tolley, Communications Officer at the Centre for Brexit Studies

It was November 2012 when I used to my right to vote for the very first time. I had been 18 for 3 months, and I was so excited to finally be able to vote in something.

I had been interested in politics for years, often informing family members of various political parties policies and who I personally think they should vote for in their constituency, long before I was even legal to head along to the polling booth myself.

I lived in Liverpool at the time, where I went to University, and it was the first Police and Crime Commissioner Elections – not something I knew a huge amount about at all. However, it was something to vote in, and I couldn't miss the opportunity. So I did a bit of research into those standing for the role, decided who I thought was best fit, and went along to cast my vote. The person I voted for won, and I was delighted and so pleased for them.

Since then, I have voted 10 more times, in Liverpool and in the West Midlands. These include the likes of Local Elections, General Elections (this year will be my third time voting in a GE), EU Elections, West Midlands Mayoral Elections and of course, the EU Referendum.

Out of those times, three of my votes have been a success, meaning eight times I have been along to the polling booth, the person/party that I voted for, didn't win.

Back in August, I spent five wonderful days in Rome. One day I spent dreamily strolling the backstreets of Rome, where every single corner tells a story, flicking through rails of vintage leather jackets and bags and sipping Aperol Spritz. It was on this dreamy day of people watching and forgetting about the stresses of back home that I found myself sat a table away from an Italian man, who was discussing Brexit with a Scottish friend. I simply had to listen!

The two discussed everything from why the vote happened in the first place, what they think will eventually happen, and if a General Election could take place. They discussed if there was an election, who would they vote for. The Scottish man said that he would spoil his ballot, and the Italian said that he wouldn't even bother leaving the house. I couldn't believe it because A) I came to Rome to get away from it all and Brexit had followed me there and B) Why did they feel like their vote would mean nothing?

Recently, I spent an evening at a Bonfire with family, friends, and their family friends. Someone asked me what I do for work, I told them and we were instantly discussing politics. I'm happy to do so, it is clearly an interest of mine, and I do find it interesting how often people want to know my opinion, what I think and what I think THEY should do because I work for the Centre. They told me how disheartened they are with current politics, why they want change and what they think should happen. However, they were unsure if they were going to vote in the upcoming General Election.

I tell you these little stories, because it made me question one thing: why don't people vote?

Of course, there's a massive chunk of us who have always voted, always will and won't let an Election being less than two weeks before Christmas put us off. At 2017's General Election, the turnout in the UK was 69.3%. We wait in anticipation if the festive period puts people off voting, or if they believe their vote is invalid, pointless and a total waste of time.

I'll be honest, the thought of people not voting because they don't see the point actually breaks my heart. It manages to upset me that much. There's been times that I've been slightly cheesed off with friends and family members because they just didn't bother. I get it, we're not all interested in politics. But the idea that someone doesn't want to have their say in what happens to the country that they live in, the community they are surrounded by, their job, health and future, baffles me.

If you can't see the point, think about this:

– Is your job safe and secure?
– If you could own your own property, would you?
– Do you have access to the NHS?
– Do your children, nieces, nephews, godchildren, have a good education?
– What do you think about climate change?
– Are there enough emergency services available in your area?
– How do you feel about Brexit?
– What are you unhappy with and could Government change this?
– What changes do you want to see in your area – and in the country?

You see, so many of us can't see the point in voting. Yet, there's also so many things that we're unhappy with. Is it still pointless if changes could be made because of your vote? Taking the time to do your research around political parties can be hard work and it will of course require a few minutes of your time. But isn't it worth doing?

Many people are saying this is the Brexit Election, which it may very well be. The election in December is the perfect opportunity to get behind the political party we agree with in terms of Brexit. However, remember that there are always other reasons to vote for a party.

So many of times I have voted, in a relatively short amount of time, have been unsuccessful. I've had to watch the results come through on Twitter in the middle of the night, and see that it didn't quite work out this time.

Does that put me off voting in the Election next month? No. Will it ever put me off? No. I am a strong believer in using your democratic right to vote. So many people around the world would do anything to vote in their country, but unfortunately, not everyone can.

We are incredibly privileged in the UK to be able to vote, and I'll never not use my privilege.

Register by 11:59pm on 26 November to vote in the General Election on 12 December 2019.

If you want to apply to vote by post, register before:

- 5pm on 26 November if you live in England, Scotland or Wales

- 5pm on 21 November if you live in Northern Ireland

Register to vote here.

This blog post is written in a personal capacity and does not reflect the views of Centre for Brexit Studies or Birmingham City University.