

COMPULSORY VOTING IN BRAZIL

EXPLORING MANDATORY VOTING AND ITS
CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS

A CASE STUDY FROM BRAZIL



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Introduction

Compulsory voting, currently practiced in 27 countries, has received little direct attention regarding its ability to bolster the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). This paper investigates its impact, focusing on the case of Brazil while referencing a few other cases, and aims to understand its implications for democratic governance and development. While Brazil's system mandates literate individuals aged 18 to 70 to vote as per its 1988 Constitution, challenges like random or invalid voting persist (Nepomuceno & Costa, 2019, Freire & Turgeon, 2020). Despite seeking to boost political engagement and representation, mandatory voting encounters complexities, and this paper critically analyzes such challenges in the context of Brazil and a few other countries, suggesting avenues for further research on how electoral systems influence societal outcomes and global development goals.

Political Participation

Implementing mandatory voting in Brazil is theorized to significantly democratize the landscape of political participation, bridging gaps across diverse socioeconomic strata. Mandatory voting has been linked to promoting inclusivity and equity in the political domain, as evidenced by studies such as those by Power (2009) and Schneider et al. (2019). It not only fosters a more inclusive political landscape, contributing to the realization of SDGs focused on reducing inequalities (SDG 10) and promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16) but also facilitates equitable fiscal policies aligned with sustainable economic growth (SDG 8), highlighted in the previous section. These policies, influenced by broadened political participation, aim to address income and social disparities, thereby supporting the overarching goals of poverty reduction (SDG 1) and quality education (SDG 4). This viewpoint suggests that such inclusive engagement is paramount for attaining SDGs like reduced inequality (SDG 10)

and strong institutions (SDG 16), fostering an environment where equitable representation and active participation become the norm.

Upon analyzing the effects, it becomes evident that mandatory voting can catalyze diminishing socioeconomic impediments to political engagement. This could lead to establishing more egalitarian fiscal policies and public investments, aligning closely with the aspirations of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Nevertheless, a deeper exploration is warranted to ascertain the direct correlation between compulsory electoral participation and its tangible impacts on policy, especially given Brazil's intricate and multifaceted social composition. Overall, this detailed examination reveals the indispensable role that mandatory voting plays in promoting widespread political participation. It underscores the direct influence of this on realizing the SDGs aimed at mitigating inequalities and nurturing inclusive societies.

Taxation & Fiscal Policy

Taxation is a critical lever for governments to influence a country's social and economic landscape, especially in the context of mandatory voting and its implications for achieving SDGs. While limited evidence exists on the direct relationship between compulsory voting and government spending, studies from diverse contexts provide insights into the impacts of electoral participation on fiscal policy and sustainable development. For instance, mandatory voting has been associated with increased political participation but has not necessarily led to significant changes in government spending (Chong & Olivera, 2005). In Austria, where compulsory voting is enforced, no significant change in government spending was observed despite the surge in political engagement (Hoffman et al., 2017). Similarly, no significant relationship was found between compulsory voting and electoral or policy consequences in Australia, suggesting that the dynamics of mandatory voting may vary across different countries (Fowler, 2013). However,

a study by Schneider, Athias, and Bugarin (2019) in Brazil highlights how increased political participation through mandatory voting can lead to changes in fiscal policy, including taxation, which can significantly impact public goods and services critical to achieving SDGs. This suggests that mandatory voting and taxation dynamics vary by context, and other factors might be at play. However, mandatory voting boosts electoral participation, which aims to ensure that the government is accountable to a broader population representation. As government spending is crucial in addressing income and social inequalities (SDG 10), the impact of mandatory voting on tax and fiscal policy is worth examining.

Progressive taxation systems, where the tax rate increases as the taxable amount increases, can be more effectively advocated for and implemented in environments with high political engagement. This can lead to a more equitable distribution of resources, which is essential for tackling poverty (SDG 1) and promoting equality. The correlation between a 1% increase found in the valid vote-to-turnout ratio and corresponding increases in investments in health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), and public employment underlines the potential of mandatory voting to shape fiscal policies conducive to sustainable development (Schneider et al., 2019). If Brazil is to be used as an example, mandatory voting can lead to taxation policies that allocate more resources to other areas like sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). For example, taxes on pollution or the depletion of natural resources can discourage environmentally harmful practices and generate revenue that can be invested in renewable energy (SDG 7) and other sustainable initiatives.

Linking taxation policies with mandatory voting to achieve SDGs presents benefits and hurdles. Electoral transparency and policymakers' accountability are critical for its effectiveness. Corruption or manipulation can undermine trust in the political system. Allocation of tax

revenues must prioritize societal benefits over short-term gains for vulnerable populations. Implementing progressive taxation requires robust infrastructure and enforcement to prevent evasion. Public trust in tax usage is crucial, demanding transparency and accountability. Addressing these challenges can harness mandatory voting to shape taxation policies for sustainable development, fostering equitable and inclusive societies and advancing SDGs.

Social & Income Equality

The impact of compulsory voting on social and income inequality is a complex issue, as evidenced by research conducted by Cepaluni and Hidalgo (2016). While compulsory voting has been shown to increase overall voter turnout, its effects are disproportionately seen among more educated populations. This section delves into the implications of mandatory voting for social and income equality, particularly in Brazil's progress towards meeting its SDGs. Compulsory voting can have twice the causal effect on voter turnout for educated populations as opposed to lower-education voters (Cepaluni & Hidalgo, 2016). There are a few possible causal pathways. Educated voters, having better access to information and higher socioeconomic status, are more likely to vote voluntarily. When voting is mandatory, they're more inclined to comply, understanding their civic duties and the impact of their participation on politics. This differentiation in political participation can inadvertently contribute to or exacerbate existing social and income inequalities, potentially impacting Brazil's progress towards SDG targets aimed at reducing inequalities (SDG 10). Mandatory voting could, therefore, have a complex relationship with social equality, simultaneously promoting political engagement while highlighting existing disparities.

Expanding on the analysis, it is essential to note that the relationship between compulsory voting and socioeconomic status in Brazil is nuanced. Research by Aguiar (2017) underscores

that socioeconomic status often serves as an external factor influencing political participation in mandatory voting rather than the other way around. This suggests that individuals with higher socioeconomic status may be more likely to engage in the political process, regardless of the compulsory voting requirement. Furthermore, Aguiar (2017) highlights the substantial impact of education levels and socioeconomic status on interest in political participation. The findings suggest that these structural factors are pivotal in shaping electoral behavior and voter turnout. Individuals with higher education levels and socioeconomic status are often more politically engaged and active in the electoral process. This disparity in political participation based on education and socioeconomic status can contribute to existing social and income inequalities, as specific population segments may have more significant influence and representation in the political sphere. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for crafting policies that promote greater inclusivity and equity in the political process, ultimately contributing to peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).

Gender Equality

In examining the impact of compulsory voting on gender equality in Brazil, it's essential to consider the larger context of political participation and how it intersects with efforts to achieve SDG 5, which focuses on gender equality. Córdova and Rangel's (2017) study suggests that compulsory voting significantly narrows the gender gap in electoral participation, marking a substantial step toward enhancing women's involvement in political decision-making and governance. This increased participation is pivotal for the advancement of gender equality. However, while reducing the gender participation gap is evident, translating this achievement into sustained gender equality and impacting related SDGs presents complexities. The transition from increased electoral engagement to substantive changes in gender policy highlights the

multifaceted nature of addressing gender equality challenges in Brazil. This analysis suggests the critical role of mandatory voting in promoting gender equality in political participation, emphasizing the need for further research to understand how enhanced electoral participation can be leveraged to achieve concrete improvements in gender equality policies and practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper highlights the potential of mandatory voting, particularly in Brazil, to advance Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while acknowledging the need for further research. Understanding the nuanced relationship between mandatory voting and SDG outcomes is crucial. Investigating how increased political participation influences policy decisions and societal attitudes toward governance can provide deeper insights into leveraging electoral engagement for sustainable development. Moreover, comprehending the role of enhanced electoral participation among women in driving policy and societal changes is essential for advancing gender equality. Thus, future research endeavors should explore these intricate relationships to inform effective policy interventions and foster more inclusive and equitable societies. To briefly address the impact of mandatory voting on SDGs in Brazil, mainly focusing on political participation and gender equality, some recommendations include:

1. **Increase Electoral Transparency:** Implement measures to increase transparency and verifiability in the voting process, leveraging the mandatory voting system to ensure broad participation and accountability in election outcomes. This includes enhancing the infrastructure and personnel needed for managing elections effectively.
2. **Develop Focused Gender Policies:** Develop and enforce focused initiatives to promote women's political engagement and leadership within the framework of mandatory voting. By integrating gender-sensitive approaches into mandatory voting processes, such as

affirmative action measures and gender-specific outreach campaigns, barriers to women's participation can be addressed effectively.

3. **Synergize SDG Efforts:** Foster coordination and collaboration among stakeholders to synchronize SDG actions within mandatory voting. By leveraging mandatory voting as a platform for inclusive decision-making, efforts across various SDGs can be aligned to achieve holistic progress towards sustainable development objectives.
4. **Research and Evaluate:** Continuously assess the implications of mandatory voting on societal and policy outcomes, including its effects on political participation, governance effectiveness, and gender equality. Utilize findings to inform evidence-based policy decisions and optimize mandatory voting mechanisms for greater inclusivity and effectiveness in advancing SDGs in Brazil and other contexts where mandatory voting is present or being explored.
5. **Enhance Transparency Through Deliberative Democratic Processes:** Complement mandatory voting with other deliberative democratic processes to increase transparency and public participation in tax and fiscal policy decisions. Establish citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting initiatives, and public consultations to engage citizens in discussions about taxation policies and government spending priorities. By involving citizens directly in decision-making processes, mandatory voting can be augmented with additional avenues for democratic participation, promoting accountability, and ensuring that tax and fiscal policies align with the public interest and contribute to sustainable development goals.

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