

# Put it to a Vote

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Earlier this month we voted in Donald Trump as our next President. This election was probably the most divisive and polarizing in the last century. Trump disagreed with Hillary on issues; Trump disagreed with his own party on issues; Trump even disagreed with his own running mate on issues.

But one thing everyone can agree on is that, thankfully, the election is over.

According to CNN, sadly, only about 55% of eligible voters actually cast their ballots at this year's election. This is down slightly compared to 60% of voters who visited the polling booths in the 2012 election between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. Tragically, voter participation in America pales in comparison to other industrialized nations. According to the Pew Research Center, countries like Sweden, Turkey and Belgium boast at least 80% of their voters participate in national elections.

After each election, the U.S. Census Bureau questions thousands of Americans whether they voted and if not, why not. According to media company Bloomberg, after the 2012 election, there were three main reasons given. First, both the wealthy and the poor indicated they couldn't get to the polls. Citizens earning \$150,000 or more commonly claimed they were "out of town" on election day, while those earning \$30,000 or less indicated they couldn't get to the polls due to "illness or disability."

Second, over 40% of voters age 65 and older identified "illness or disability" as the most common reason they didn't vote. Because of this, there was a focus put on increasing early voting and absentee ballots. Finally, "registration problems," such as not being on voter rolls or not receiving a mail-in ballot, came in as the third most common reason for skipping out.

One theory for low voter turnout is the inability to sneak away from work. In response, a group of more than 300 companies nationwide pledged to give their employees time to vote this year.

This summer, Hunter Walk, a partner in venture capital firm Homebrew, launched "The Take Election Day Off" movement on Twitter. According to the website Take Election Day Off, some big-name employers joined the movement, including tech companies like the music service Spotify, payments processor Square, and dating app Tinder.

Some companies were even more committed to the cause. Outdoor clothing designer Patagonia closed its corporate headquarters in Ventura, Calif., and its Reno, Nevada-based distribution and customer service office on Nov. 8, so its employees could vote. They even got paid for the day off.

State laws vary regarding an employee's ability to take off from work to vote. Less than half of the states require employers to pay their employees while they leave work to vote. Wisconsin is one of them. While State law requires employers to allow their employees to be absent from work while the polls are open to vote, they cannot be gone for more than three successive hours. But, workers are required to notify their employers of their intention to vote prior to election day.

Workers cannot be penalized for exercising their right to vote other than having their pay reduced for their lost time.

If they held a national vote to decide on whether to declare Election Day as a paid holiday, I bet we'd have about 99% voter turnout.

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