

How the Right to Vote Sparks Political Interest

 blogs.iadb.org/ideasmatter/2018/04/06/how-the-right-to-vote-sparks-political-interest/

Razvan Vlaicu

April 6, 2018

Little more than half of the respondents captured in the latest regional survey of Chile-based [Latinobarómetro](#) thought democracy was the best form of government – a ten-year low that indicates weakness in Latin America’s democracies. But does this mean citizens are losing their interest in voting, democracy’s most sacred right?

In a recently published [study](#), Carlos Scartascini and I examined data from 2004-2016 to measure the level of voter engagement in the region. We wanted to see if having the right to vote made citizens in the region more politically involved and knowledgeable. We found encouraging signs.

Youth are 9% more interested in politics once they can vote

We employed data on political activities from AmericasBarometer, a survey conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University. Being eligible to vote, we found, has a positive effect on political engagement. In fact, in an examination of countries throughout the Americas, we discovered that youth who became eligible to vote in the most recent election expressed on average a 9.2% greater interest in politics.

Political interest is greater in countries with mandatory voting

Moreover, mandatory voting, common in Latin America, has independent effects. In Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru voting is not only obligatory but enforced through sanctions. In these countries, there is a considerable boost among eligible voters in political interest, as well as among so a