Chapter 1

The Promise (or Perils) of Compulsory Voting

In his 1996 Presidential Address to the American Political Science Association, Arend Lijphart termed inequality in political participation "democracy's unresolved dilemma." Certain groups — particularly the poor and less educated — are systematically less likely to vote in elections. This inequality in turnout translates into inequality in representation. The most well-off citizens have outsized political influence, diminishing the quality of democracy. To remedy this fundamental problem facing democracies, Lijphart argued forcefully for compulsory voting. As a byproduct of increasing overall turnout, he observed, compulsory voting would decrease turnout inequality and improve representation.

Recently, politicians, journalists, and academics have argued for compulsory voting as a solution to a host of other problems facing democracy. Today's concerns are more existential: democratic backsliding threatens previously stable democracies throughout the world. Experts and citizens alike are rightly concerned about the rise of authoritarian leaders in established democracies, and blatantly anti-democratic actions taken by elected officials. After decades in which the number of liberal democracies steadily increased throughout the world, recent years have seen a reversal: the number of liberal democracies fell from 41 in 2010 to only 32 in 2020 (Alizada et al. 2021). And the 2021 "Freedom in the World" report by Freedom House marked the 15^{th} consecutive annual decline in freedom worldwide, with fewer than 20% of the world's population living in countries designated as "Free" (Repucci and Slipowitz 2021).

From Donald Trump in the United States to Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, populist figures with authoritarian tendencies have been embraced by a wide swath of voters. Voters are increasingly willing to accept the anti-democratic behavior of their leaders as long as it advances their partisan goals (Graham and Svolik 2020). Economic inequality — on the rise

in nearly every advanced economy (Qureshi 2020) — and deep societal divisions along racial and ethnic lines have further contributed to the vulnerable state of democracy (Haggard and Kaufman 2021; López and Luna 2021; Rau and Stokes 2024).

Whereas the problems facing democracy are clear, the solutions to promote more robust and healthy democracies are elusive. Scholars searching for pathways to better quality of democracy have often focused on electoral institutions. This focus is unsurprising. Granted, institutions are not an exogenous structure from which politics "begins" — they are endogenous, created by political actors. Still, once in place, they fundamentally shape the character of a political system. Institutions shape who competes and how; the kinds of candidates who are successful; and how diverse individual preferences are translated into aggregate policy outcomes. Outcomes that, ideally, are good for society, maintain peace and stability, and achieve some measure of fairness and equity.

In recent years, many who are concerned about the quality and stability of democracy have called for major changes to electoral institutions. After the election of Donald Trump, calls for the abolition of the Electoral College intensified, with many voters and experts arguing that a candidate like Trump could never have won without it. After Britons shocked the world by voting to withdraw from the European Union and Colombia failed to ratify a peace deal to end a long-running conflict with the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC), many observers soured on the use of referendums and other mechanisms of direct democracy.

The introduction of compulsory voting has also emerged as a common institutional proposal in response to the myriad threats to democracy — including the rise of authoritarian leaders, deep partisan polarization and societal divisions, and economic inequality.

A recent *New York Times* article suggested that compulsory voting would improve the US economy and create a less divided society (Moyo 2019). Another article, appearing in *The Guardian*, argued that "Australia's compulsory voting saved it from Trumpism" (Alcorn 2019).

These considerations extend beyond opinion articles. In February 2020, a California state legislator introduced a bill to make voting compulsory in the state by 2022 (AB 2070, 2020).[1] And a recent report by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS) Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship recommended the adoption of compulsory voting as bulwark against threats to democracy (American Academy of Arts and Sciences 2020: 38–39).

In February 2019, the Samoan parliament passed a compulsory voting law, which was im-

[1]This bill (which was never likely to pass) proposed a system similar to the one Chile used from 1988–2011: registration was voluntary, but registered voters could be fined if they abstained.

plemented for the first time in the 2021 general elections. And in 2022, the Chilean legislature also passed a bill to mandate voting in all future elections and referendums.[2] Legislators from across the political spectrum endorsed the measure as a means to "strengthen democracy and its institutions" (Andrés Longton, December 2022).

Recent polls in Canada suggest that the idea has some traction there as well: a majority of Canadians polled in September 2019 said that they favor compulsory voting for Canada. And nearly two-thirds of citizens in each of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom say that it is important that their government make voting mandatory (Connaughton and Schumacher 2021).

In the year 2000, the Australian Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters estimated that 17% of democracies worldwide (24 countries) were using some form of compulsory voting rules (Jackman 2001; Australia 2000). As of 2020, 27 democracies have compulsory voting laws on the books (IDEA 2020).[3] And many other countries have recently considered compulsory voting legislation — including the United Kingdom, France, and Bulgaria.

The pressing need to better understand compulsory voting comes not only from the number of countries where it is currently in force, but from its growing role in public discourse and its potential to directly address the central problems facing democracies today. Twenty-five years ago, Arend Lijphart identified turnout inequality (and the resulting inequality in representation) as a fundamental flaw weakening democracies; years later, this flaw still has not been rectified and the signs of fragility in established democracies have become unmistakable.

If compulsory voting does indeed live up to advocates' characterizations — with the potential to combat partisan polarization, reduce economic inequality, and foster broader support for democracy — then many countries could benefit from its adoption. Yet we must also proceed with caution. If these optimistic predictions about compulsory voting's impact on the political environment and the strength of democracy are wrong, the hasty implementation of compulsory voting — like other new institutions — could do more harm than good. Amidst these widespread debates over new election law, compulsory voting is an institution that students of democracy cannot afford to ignore.

[2]Chile previously employed an unusual compulsory voting system, where registration was optional and voting was only mandatory for those who chose to register. This system was eliminated in 2012, and replaced by a system of automatic registration and voluntary voting. The new law established a new system of automatic registration and compulsory voting. It does not mandate participation in primaries.

[3]Of these 27 countries, 13 actively enforce sanctions (IDEA 2020). Some scholars have argued that the severity and enforcement of sanctions are essential to increasing turnout under compulsory voting (Panagopoulos 2008; Singh 2011), but Birch (2009) observes that compulsory voting laws are often very effective even in the absence of strong enforcement. The importance of sanctions is discussed in further detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

Can compulsory voting solve the complex problems facing democracy? Or, might this electoral institution actually exacerbate the underlying problems weakening democracy? If, as I argue, compulsory voting *can* strengthen democracy, what are the necessary conditions for it to work? If Australia's compulsory voting "saved it from Trumpism," why did Brazil's compulsory voting fail to "save it" from Bolsonaro, another populist authoritarian figure?

These are the central questions motivating this book.

A Brief History of Compulsory Voting

Before diving into the ways that compulsory voting might alter the political environment, it is worth pausing to define exactly what compulsory voting is, where it is used, and how this institution came into existence. Compulsory voting, in my usage, refers simply to a system that establishes an obligation to vote and includes a legal provision for sanctioning abstention. The sanctions themselves might not be reliably enforced, but some theoretically enforceable sanction must exist.[4] The form of sanction varies widely, from monetary fines to ineligibility for public employment or services.

Voters may cast blank or spoiled ballots without facing sanctions, so long as they show up on Election Day.[5] Hence, some argue that "compulsory turnout" or "compulsory attendance" at the polls are more accurate terms for the systems commonly described as "compulsory voting" (throughout this text, I use the more conventional term "compulsory voting" to describe these systems).[6]

Using this definition, at least 46 countries have enacted compulsory voting laws since 1800 (Bóveda 2013). But understanding the origins of compulsory voting requires looking much further back in history. The idea that voting is not just a right, but an obligation of citizenship, can be traced back to ancient Athens. In fact, when modern-day Greece adopted a compulsory voting law in 1926, they justified the change in part by hearkening back to ancient Athenian practices. During parliamentary debates about compulsory voting, advocates cited the Solonian Laws of the 6th century BCE, arguing that this early constitution contained an idea similar to compulsory voting (Malkopoulou 2007). One Member of the

[4]Scholars differ on whether to classify systems without sanctions as having compulsory voting. In Chapter 7, I discuss these issues in greater detail, explaining the qualitative difference between compulsory voting laws that, in my usage, include some provision for sanctions; and "constitutionalization" — a legally established duty or obligation to vote that is not associated with any form of sanction or punishment for abstention.

[5]The secret ballot precludes the government from ascertaining whether any particular citizen voted for a candidate or cast a blank ballot, thus ensuring that "the right not to vote remains intact" (Lijphart 1998: 10). Moreover, legal challenges to compulsory voting — which argued that it was a violation of personal liberty to require a citizen to vote when he or she might not support any of the candidates — have been struck down on the basis that voters can always choose to cast a blank ballot (see Hill 2015).

[6]See, e.g., Keaney and Rogers (2006: 26).

Greek Parliament arguing in favor of compulsory voting claimed in 1911 that voting was "a duty recognized ever since antiquity."[7]

In ancient times, Athenian election officials would use a red-dyed rope to round up citizens loitering in the marketplace and steer them toward the Assembly. This tactic encouraged people to head to the Pnyx to vote, lest they be stained by the red dye (Staveley 1972: 80). In the fourth century BCE, citizens were paid for their attendance (Aristotle 1935: 41(3); Staveley 1972: 78–79), and during the Peloponnesian War, fines were levied against those who remained in the marketplace rather than attend the Assembly (Hansen 1983: 10).[8] Some of these practices were mocked by Plato, who said that payment for voting made people "idle and cowardly, and encouraged them in the love of talk and money" (Plato 2005: 515(e); see also Hasen 1996: 2135, fn. 3).

Many centuries later, compulsory voting was implemented in various forms throughout the world. Among the earliest examples was an edict issued in 1340 by Robert of Anjou. It required that all men over age 14 participate in the election of councillors for the city of Toulon, or pay a fine for their absence (Malkopoulou 2011; Teissier 1868).

Medieval Switzerland, too, employed a form of compulsory participation. Beginning in the 13$^{\text{th}}$ century, Swiss cantons held annual meetings — called Landsgemeinde — at which eligible citizens would elect judges, representatives, and other officials, as well as vote directly on laws.[9] All adult men who were eligible for military service were required to attend the Landsgemeinde (Kobach 1993: 17). Any eligible participant who did not attend, or who did not wear his ceremonial sword, was prohibited from attending a free dinner provided by his canton (Robson 1923: 570). In the canton of Appenzell-Ausserrhoden, fines were also levied against those who failed to attend the Landsgemeinde (Hansen 1983: 209).[10]

Compulsory voting also has remote origins in colonial America. In the 17$^{\text{th}}$ century, the colonies of Plymouth and Virginia fined citizens who did not vote; in the 18$^{\text{th}}$ century, Maryland, Delaware, and Georgia adopted compulsory voting laws as well (Abraham 1952). After independence, the United States never implemented compulsory voting at the state

[7]This statement was made by MP Athanasakis and recorded in the Journal of Parliamentary Discussions, 2.4.1911, p.1548–1553. It was quoted and translated from Greek by Malkopoulou (2007: 3).

[8]While Hansen (1983) argues that these fines were intended to increase the low participation rates, this interpretation is not undisputed. Hasen (1996: 2135, fn. 2) notes that Stockton (1990) suggests that the primary purpose of these fines may have been to reduce noise and distraction in the marketplace.

[9]In many respects, the Landsgemeinde bears resemblance to the Athenian Ecclesia (Hansen 1983: 207–222), though there is no evidence that the creation of the Landsgemeinde was influenced by knowledge of the Ecclesia (Hansen 1992: 22).

[10]It is unclear when the fines in Appenzell-Ausserrhoden were first introduced, and the Landsgemeinde has a long history in Switzerland. The Landsgemeinde still exists in two cantons today. As of 1983, Appenzell-Ausserrhoden was actively levying fines for non-attendance (Hansen 1983: 209), but the Landsgemeinde was later abolished in Appenzell-Ausserrhoden in 1997.

level, though it was briefly implemented in Kansas City in 1889 before Missouri courts ruled it unconstitutional (Abraham 1952). Between 1888 and 1951, attempts were made in each of the then-48 states to introduce compulsory voting; none prevailed (Abraham 1952).

Whereas mandatory voting laws did not survive past independence in the United States, they were spreading across Europe in the 19$^{\text{th}}$ and 20$^{\text{th}}$ centuries. In 1835, the Swiss canton of St. Gallen introduced compulsory voting; over the next few decades, approximately half of all Swiss cantons adopted the law (Malkopoulou 2011). In 1878, Liechtenstein became the first country to adopt compulsory voting at the national level (Malkopoulou 2011). In 1881, the German principalities of Baden and Bavaria introduced mandatory voting. Bavaria instituted a two-thirds quorum rule for elections; in the event that the quorum was not met, all those who abstained were charged for the costs of holding a new election (Robson 1923).

Among modern democracies that currently require universal participation in elections, the earliest adopter was Belgium in 1893 (Malkopoulou 2011). Before the introduction of compulsory voting, Belgian participation rates were notoriously low. In 1861, abstention in Brussels was over 90%, and in provincial elections from 1880–1892, annual abstention rates ranged from 46% to 52%. Belgium introduced compulsory voting to increase participation, as well as to combat abstention-buying.[11] Abstention-buying was a common practice at the time, in which "unsympathetic electors" received bribes to stay home on election day (Robson 1923). Upon introducing compulsory voting, turnout rates immediately skyrocketed in Belgium. Today, Belgium maintains one of the highest turnout rates in the world (Desilver 2017).

The Netherlands followed suit and adopted compulsory voting in 1917, as did Luxembourg in 1919.[12] Around the same time, countries in Latin America and Australasia began to implement compulsory voting laws. Argentina was the first Latin American country to mandate voting, in 1912. Over the next 20 years, it was joined by Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru. Australia introduced compulsory voting in 1924, and maintains one of the most effective compulsory voting regimes to this day.

In the latter half of the 20$^{\text{th}}$ century, compulsory voting spread further throughout Latin America, Europe, and Australasia. As of 2020, 27 countries have laws mandating that their citizens vote in elections (IDEA 2020).

[11] See Gans-Morse, Mazzuca and Nichter (2014) for a theoretical discussion and review of the literature on modern-day abstention-buying.

[12] Compulsory voting remains in present-day Luxembourg but it was abolished in the Netherlands by 1970.

What Does It Mean to Strengthen Democracy?

The first step in assessing whether compulsory voting can strengthen democracy is to clarify what it means to strengthen democracy. What are the criteria for answering this question?

An institution might strengthen democracy in the sense that it improves the *quality of democracy*, or in the sense that it makes democracy more *resilient* to threats. I consider both of these in turn.

Quality of Democracy

How do we assess whether an institution improves the quality of democracy? Scholars have offered many different definitions of democracy, ranging from a minimalist conception (competitive elections) to lengthy descriptions of a system in which nearly "all normatively desirable aspects of political, and sometimes even of social and economic, life are credited as intrinsic to democracy: representation, accountability, equality, participation, justice, dignity, rationality, security, freedom, ..., the list goes on" (Przeworski 1999: 24). Indeed, democracy is often associated with a long list of lofty goals, some of which lie outside the scope of what I will consider in this book (Does a democracy make its citizens happy? Does it deliver strong economic performance?).

By *quality of democracy*, I mean the extent to which democracy approaches its foundational ideals, such as political equality and governmental accountability. In their book *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*, Diamond and Morlino (2005: xi) define a quality democracy in terms of "the three main goals of an ideal democracy—*political and civil freedom*, *popular sovereignty* (control over public policies and the officials who make them), and *political equality* (in these rights and powers)—as well as broader standards of good governance, such as transparency, legality, and responsible rule" (emph. added).

We might assess the quality of democracy by looking to certain normatively desirable outcomes that relate to these democratic ideals, such as whether the government is responsive to the will of the people (whether that is some form of common good in areas where consensus on the "right" answer might be achieved; or a majority preference in areas of greater conflict). Responsive government implies vertical accountability: leaders can be removed from office if they fail to deliver on the electorate's preferred policies and outcomes.

We might also look to specific institutions that facilitate those ideals — for example, the existence of a free and independent media. Citizens would be hard-pressed to hold their government accountable without access to information that political leaders might wish to suppress (e.g., a corruption scandal or poor economic performance).

Throughout this book, I will consider a broad set of government characteristics that

compulsory voting might influence. But I devote particular attention to its effects on *political equality*. Perhaps the most fundamental idea behind democracy is that every individual is politically equal (see, e.g., Dahl 1989, 2000; Verba 2001; Dalton 2017). Political equality does not imply equal economic status or material resources. Rather, it refers specifically to "the extent to which citizens have an equal voice over governmental decisions [...] expressed in such principles as one-person/one-vote, equality before the law, and equal rights of free speech" (Verba 2001: 2).

No democracy has ever fully realized this ideal. In perhaps the most obvious violations of political equality, wide swaths of countries' populations have been formally disenfranchised across history (e.g., women, various racial and ethnic groups, non-landowners, citizens with felony convictions). Even amid universal adult suffrage, the wealthiest individuals often wield undue influence over political outcomes. And even if everyone has the formal *right* to vote, that does not mean that everyone has an equal *opportunity* to vote in practice. Some citizens face higher costs to get to the polls or face harassment and intimidation when attempting to cast a vote.

But the idea that people should, on principle, have an equal voice is fundamental to democracy. As Dahl argues, "the ideal of democracy presupposes that *political equality is desirable*. Consequently, if we believe in democracy as a goal or ideal, then implicitly we must view political equality as a *goal or ideal*" (Dahl 2006: 2, emph. in original). Hence, if compulsory voting can move us closer to political equality, it makes a substantial contribution to strengthening democracy, bringing it closer to achieving its fundamental ideals.

Democratic Resilience

Another measure of the strength of democracy is its resilience to threats. In the late 20$^{\text{th}}$ century, those threats most often came in the form of coups. Today, a growing wave of democracies face the threat of *erosion*: a gradual process by which elected leaders chip away at fundamental democratic norms and institutions.

In military coups, authoritarian leaders wrest control over the government from elected leaders; but democratic erosion backsliding is characterized by the *election* of aspiring autocrats. Elected leaders who go on to erode their democracies might be ambiguous about their intentions when first seeking office; but many are explicit about their intentions to dismantle democratic institutions and norms. And yet, they still win elections.

Why do voters support candidates who go on to erode democracy? Scholars have identified a long list of factors that lead voters to elect aspiring autocrats, from national security crises (De Bruin and Jones 2024) to economic inequality (Rau and Stokes 2024). Perhaps

the most common framework for understanding when and why voters elect eroders points to a tradeoff between *partisan goals* and *safeguarding democracy* (Graham and Svolik 2020). Voters might value democracy, but if politics are sufficiently polarized, other issues take precedence.

Aspiring autocrats frequently appeal to partisan divisions. When partisanship becomes a salient cultural identity, politicians can place an existential frame on winning elections: if the dreaded other side comes to power, "we won't have a democracy anymore."[13]

To further amass support for their anti-democratic behavior, eroders often aim to devalue (or "trash-talk") the democratic institutions they seek to erode (Stokes 2025). If the courts are full of partisan hacks, why should we respect their rulings? They might even argue that violating a democratic norm is in fact *democratic*, because it "evens the playing field" after the other side behaved badly (Lupu, Rau and Zechmeister 2024).

With these dynamics in mind, I consider three key ways in which compulsory voting might make democracies more resilient to erosion — or more vulnerable to it. Does compulsory voting create a more or less partisan electorate? Does it reduce or exacerbate polarization? And does it enhance or weaken voters' commitment to democratic norms?

Plan of the Book

The book proceeds in three parts.

Part I investigates compulsory voting's implications for the quality of democracy, with a focus on political equality. Chapter 2 draws on democratic theory to argue that broad participation is an essential ideal of democracy. Turning to the implications for equal representation, some critics contend that compulsory voting makes elections *less* representative of the electorate's preferences, because would-be abstainers who are compelled to vote are uninformed about politics (Brennan 2014; Selb and Lachat 2009). These uninformed voters might select candidates at random (Freire and Turgeon 2020), a practice that increases the likelihood that elections select candidates who are not the most preferred by the electorate (Jakee and Sun 2006). I show that the dominant arguments against high turnout — which hinge on an opposition to mobilizing uninformed voters — are, at their core, anti-democratic. And recent studies cast doubt on the most pessimistic accounts of voter information under compulsory voting, arguing that compelled voters to seek out more information about politics (Shineman 2021), although they likely still remain less informed than those who would vote when not compulsory (Dassonneville et al. 2019).

[13]See, e.g., a recent quote from Donald Trump in reference to the 2024 presidential election: "If we don't win this election, I don't think you're going to have another election in this country" (Reid 2024).

In Chapter 3, I examine turnout inequality — an empirical pattern where wealthy voters turn out at higher rates than poor voters — and how boosting turnout can reduce socioeconomic inequality in representation. Proponents of compulsory voting frequently point to widespread turnout inequality as a key justification for its introduction. Yet empirical studies have shown that this pattern of turnout inequality, where the rich turn out more than the poor, is not a universal phenomenon (Fornos, Power and Garand 2004; Kasara and Suryanarayan 2015). If countries with voluntary voting can achieve relatively equal turnout, this indicates that there are other paths to ameliorating turnout inequality without mandating participation. What are these paths and might they be preferable to compulsory voting? Studying turnout patterns around the world, I show that the primary factor promoting equal participation in voluntary systems is clientelism, a system in which economic inequalities translate to inequalities in representation (Szwarcberg 2015). Targeted classes (the poor) lose influence over public policy, and the polity loses the ability to hold officeholders accountable (Stokes et al. 2013).

Compulsory voting is a far better path to unbiased turnout. But how well does it work to reduce turnout inequality in practice? After all, some studies even question whether compulsory voting might *increase* turnout inequality, depending on the types of sanctions it imposes (Cepaluni and Hidalgo 2016). I show that compulsory voting consistently reduces turnout inequality. Even in cases where governments sanction abstainers by cutting off access to services that the wealthy rely on more than the poor, compulsory voting still achieves very equal turnout across classes.

Part II turns to the question of democratic resilience. Can compulsory voting hinder the political aspirations of would-be autocrats? Or might it enable their election? Considering the factors that lead voters to support aspiring autocrats, this part addresses three key questions. Does compulsory voting create a more or less partisan electorate? Does it reduce or exacerbate polarization? Does it enhance or weaken voters' commitment to democratic norms?

Conventional wisdom holds that compulsory voting creates a more partisan electorate — a concerning outcome for many democracies that are currently grappling with negative effects of intense partisan divisions. Chapter 4 combines cross-national data with a close analysis of Chile to reassess this claim and show that previous accounts of compulsory voting mischaracterized its implications for partisanship. Chile provides a unique opportunity for causal identification, demonstrating that voting does not foster partisanship. And turning to cross-national analysis, I show that prior tests were plagued by systematic measurement error. Upon correcting for this bias, I find that compelled electorates are no more partisan than voluntary ones.

In Chapter 5, I examine how mandatory participation influences party platforms and political polarization. Some have argued that compulsory voting shifts policy to the left; others that it pushes parties to converge on more moderate positions. Neither of these broad statements find strong support in theoretical analysis or in empirical data. Under certain conditions, compulsory voting can reduce polarization. And compulsory voting does provide parties with incentives to represent a broader swath of the population. But the overall implications for polarization are highly dependent on the party system and the particular distribution of preferences within a society.

Chapter 6 considers how mandatory voting shapes voters' attitudes about democracy. Theoretical work has posited that compulsory voting will increase citizens' commitment to democratic norms. The idea is straightforward. Participation facilitates social learning. And as people interact with the democratic system (through voting), they are likely to internalize more democratic norms and develop a stronger attachment to the system. But some empirical studies have found that compulsory voting can reduce satisfaction with democracy, eliciting concern that it might also reduce support for democracy (e.g., Berggren et al. 2004). My analysis indicates that compulsory voting has limited effects on citizens' commitment to democratic norms. It does strengthen citizens' sense of civic duty. But I find no evidence that it increases or decreases citizens' commitment to democratic systems of government more broadly — except under certain types of enforcement regimes, a matter I address in greater detail in Chapter 8.

On democratic resilience, democracies have little to lose by introducing compulsory voting: I find no evidence that a well-implemented mandatory voting law makes democracies *less* resilient. But nor is this institution likely to make most democracies substantially *more* resilient. The compelling case for compulsory voting comes from its ability to improve the quality of democracy, by advancing the ideal of political equality.

For democracies that stand to benefit from compulsory voting, practical questions remain about the implementation of these laws. As Part III illustrates, the administrative burdens of enforcing sanctions can be immense; and the manner in which the state ensures compliance shapes its implications for democracy.

Chapter 7 presents a wealth of new data on how strictly sanctions are enforced around the world. To estimate enforcement rates across systems, I corresponded with electoral officials, filed freedom of information requests, scoured newspaper archives and parliamentary transcripts, and analyzed court records. The data I collected illustrate that countries wishing to enforce the law face a heavy administrative burden. The expenditures necessary to enforce fines often far exceed the total value of the fines collected. Moreover, I show that there is wide variation across cases in how governments enforce sanctions (e.g., some establish a

national-level agency specifically tasked with enforcement; others decentralize the effort and place the burden on local police departments) and in how strictly they are enforced (if at all). Notably, the level of enforcement in many countries differs dramatically from assumptions made in prior literature, which tended to impute enforcement levels from some combination of turnout rates and overall state capacity. Countries with high state capacity, such as Belgium and Luxembourg, often do not enforce the law. Whereas countries with lower state capacity like Peru and Ecuador are much more likely to enforce fines against abstainers.

Building on the new enforcement data, Chapter 8 addresses the common assumption that enforcement is a necessary condition for compulsory voting to work. To the contrary, I show that the burdensome enforcement efforts described in the previous chapter are *not* always necessary to ensure compliance with the law. In fact, some of the most well-functioning mandatory voting systems are completely unenforced. When citizens view their country's broader legal system as legitimate, social norms yield widespread compliance even among citizens who know that abstainers are never punished. This increased participation is not simply a reflection of positive attitudes toward a well-functioning democracy; it is a direct effect of the compulsory voting laws. Many of those citizens who turn out even when the threat of punishment is absent openly state that they would abstain if the unenforced law were abolished.

When widespread corruption inhibits the development of these norms, countries can turn to enforcement to increase compliance. But given the expense and logistical challenges of widespread enforcement, norms-based systems tend to be more effective and yield higher overall turnout. And the manner in which a government yields compliance conditions compulsory voting's implications for citizens' attitudes toward democracy. Norms-based systems are more likely to yield positive attitudes towards democracy; a regime relying heavily on sanctions can harden some citizens' negative attitudes towards democracy.

Chapter 9 considers the political barriers to compulsory voting. I discuss the historical patterns of where and when governments have successfully established mandatory voting laws, and I address levels of public support for the institution. Public support is necessary to advance legislation making voting mandatory; and this public support also helps compulsory voting to work well. Levels of popular support for compulsory voting shape its effects on attitudes towards democracy, with the most positive effects emerging in contexts where the law enjoys broad support. I present original survey-experimental data from the United States, testing which arguments for compulsory voting are most effective in winning support. Scholars have often assumed that compulsory voting would be coldly received in the U.S., given its libertarian traditions and "zealous defense of individual freedoms" (Bóveda 2013: 126). But even among respondents that did not see any arguments in favor of compulsory

voting, a (slim) majority favored the institution. Of the arguments presented to respondents, two were effective in increasing support. The first noted that countries with compulsory voting often invest in making it easier to vote. The second highlighted compulsory voting's capacity to improve the quality of democracy by "making sure that everyone's voice is heard at election time."

Finally, Chapter 10 synthesizes the lessons from the preceding chapters to provide recommendations on when and where countries should consider compulsory voting as tool to strengthen their democracies.