

# To vote, or not to vote?

*Every vote counts!*

<b>Themes</b>	Democracy, Citizenship, General human rights
<b>Complexity</b>	Level 4
<b>Group size</b>	Any
<b>Time</b>	270 minutes (in 3 parts)
<b>Overview</b>	This activity involves a survey of people in the community to explore issues about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Voting in elections</li> <li>▪ Civic participation</li> </ul>
<b>Related rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The right to take part in the government of the country</li> <li>▪ The right to participate in democratic elections</li> <li>▪ Freedom of expression</li> </ul>
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To appreciate the reasons for using your vote in elections</li> <li>▪ To develop skills to find out and analyse information critically</li> <li>▪ To value the personal contribution of every citizen in a democracy</li> </ul>
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Survey sheets 1 and 2, one set per pair</li> <li>▪ Copies of box 1, notes on how to conduct the survey, one per pair</li> <li>▪ Pens or pencils for everyone</li> <li>▪ Large sheets of paper (A3) or flipchart paper and markers</li> <li>▪ Sticky tape</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Copy box 2, the sample survey sheet, onto a large sheet of paper as an aid for giving the instructions.</li> <li>▪ On flipchart paper, make copies of survey sheets 1 and 2 for compiling the results.</li> <li>▪ Plan a timetable for the activity. You will need to allow 60 minutes for part 1 (introducing the survey), a minimum of 120 minutes for part 2 – (the survey) and 90 minutes for part 3 –(analysing the results and the debriefing and evaluation).</li> </ul>

## Instructions

### Part I: Introducing the survey

1. Explain that the main purpose of this first session is to prepare the group to go out into the community to survey people's reasons for voting or not voting.
2. Ask participants whether or not they are intending to vote in national or local elections, the next (first?) time they have the opportunity to do so. Take a show of hands, and then divide the group according to those who are intending to vote (A), and those who are not (B). "Don't knows" can be allocated randomly to either group, in order to balance the numbers as far as possible.

#### THEMES



DEMOCRACY



CITIZENSHIP



GEN. HUMAN RIGHTS

#### COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 4

#### GROUP SIZE



ANY

#### TIME



270 MINUTES

3. Ask each group to draw up a list of reasons why they do, or do not, intend to vote and to write them up on a large sheet of paper. Give them about 15 minutes to prepare their lists.
4. Bring the groups back together, and ask a representative from A and B to go through their lists. Allow time for a short discussion at the end, and add any further suggestions to the lists.
5. Hand out copies of the survey sheet. Refer to the large copy you made. Make sure people see that part 1 is for recording the non-voters' responses and part 2 for recording the voters' responses. Point out that the questions are similar except for question 2, which is different in the two parts. Go through the questions, making sure that they are clear.
6. Now explain the method of recording responses. Show the group the example (see handouts) and explain how to use the "5-bar gate" method of keeping a tally.
7. Hand out copies of the notes on how to conduct an interview, one copy to each pair. Go through it and talk about:
  - How they can ensure that interviewees are selected at random
  - How many people will each pair question? (The more the better!)
  - When and where the survey will be carried out
  - When the survey will be done
  - The time to come back and discuss the results
8. If everyone is clear about their tasks, go ahead with part 2 - the survey!

### Part 2. Analysing the results

The survey is now complete. The groups meet to collate, analyse and discuss the results. You should allow 60 minutes for this.

1. Ask the pairs to add up their totals in each box and to incorporate these onto the two large charts. In this way, the information from each group is collated and the totals for the whole group can be calculated. They should also record the "reasons" that interviewees gave. If the same reason was given several times, record how often, again using the "five-bar gate" method.
2. When all the information is compiled, ask people to calculate the following statistics:
  - The total number of people questioned
  - The proportion of voters in the total sample and the proportion of non-voters in the total sample
  - The proportion of male and female respondents
  - The proportion of the people questioned in each age group
  - The age group with the smallest number of voters
  - The age group with the greatest number of voters
  - The most commonly given reasons for not-voting
  - The most commonly given reasons for voting
  - Whether more people gave reasons (of either sort) connected with people, or parties.
3. Now move on to discuss how people enjoyed doing the survey, their experiences and what they learnt.

## Debriefing and evaluation

In the general discussion of results you may want to touch on a number of different issues, for example:

- What were the groups' feelings when carrying out the survey? Were people generally prepared to answer the survey questions?
- Was it difficult to do the survey? Did they enjoy it?
- Did the group manage to get a "representative" sample of the population as a whole? What were the difficulties in doing this?
- What are the problems in drawing conclusions from the groups' results? How could these be avoided?
- Were there any statistics that particularly surprised the group?
- Were the results of the survey in any way unexpected?
- Did the answers given by people tend to correspond with the feelings within your group? Do you think your group is "representative" of the population as a whole?
- Would they do anything differently if they were to do the survey again?
- Do the results of your survey give a realistic picture of voting patterns in your community? Why? Why not?
- Statistics are often presented as facts to support an argument. How wary should people be of statistics?
- What is the perception now in the group about the need, or otherwise, to use your vote? Has anyone's opinion changed (in either direction!)? If so, which were the most compelling arguments?

## Tips for facilitators

Part 1, planning the survey, is intended to lay the ground for the actual survey, part 2. At the very start, you may want to say explicitly that the purpose of the activity is to give young people a sense of their own value in contributing to the democratic process. It is advisable to emphasise this aspect of it, rather than speaking about "persuading" them to use their vote. Explain that you want each member of the group to reach their own decision at the end of the sessions, but that in order to do so it will be important for them to appreciate the many different reasons for voting that exist.

Try to make the discussion about whether or not people voted (point 4) as "objective" as possible, rather than encouraging the "voters" to try to sway the "non-voters". Do not spend too long on this discussion; it is intended to set the scene for the survey.

When discussing how to conduct an interview (point 7), you will need to take into account the difficulties that the group may face in conducting such a survey. In some communities, people may be uneasy about being questioned on the street by people they do not know. In this case, it may then be better to get group members to question their friends and acquaintances.

It is extremely important that you estimate how much information the group can handle in the analysis. Don't collect so much that people get bogged down in the calculations. If it is a large group, then each pair should interview fewer people than if you have a small group.

### Suggestions for follow-up

Look at the information in the background material on democracy on page 326 and find out which day it was in your country that women first got the vote. You could also find out which groups in your society do not have the vote today (for example - children, immigrants, prisoners, etc.). Discuss the reasons behind this, and whether you think it is fair.

In a democratic society, there are many opportunities for people to take action about issues that concern them. The activity “Power Station”, on page 198, gives participants a chance to think about ways to promote social change.

### Ideas for action

Organise a celebration of the day on which women were granted the right to vote in your country.

If you found groups in your society without the right to vote and you felt that this was unjust, write a letter to your members of parliament expressing the concern of your group. Try to get other signatures as well.

### Key date

The day on which universal Suffrage became law in your country

## Notes on how to conduct the survey

### Finding interviewees

1. Approach prospective interviewees at *random*: in other words, you should not “select” people to be included or excluded from the survey because they are *young, old, nice-looking, female, etc.* Try to avoid bias.
2. Ask the person you want to interview whether they would mind answering a couple of questions for a survey, explain who you are and say that answers will be anonymous and that the results of the survey will not be made public; they are only for the use of this particular group.

### Recording the interview

1. If the person being approached agrees to take part in the survey, then ask them whether they used their vote in the last elections. If the answer is “no”, then fill out sheet 1, the “non-voter” sheet. If the answer is “yes” then fill out sheet 2, the “voter” sheet.
2. Question 1: People should only give their age if they are happy about doing so. Otherwise, a tick should be put in the last column.
3. Question 2: Show the interviewees the options and ask them to choose one. If they have a different reason, write it down in column E. Note: the difference between B and C is that B is a reason involving a *particular person* and C is a reason involving a *party*.
4. The marks should be clear, so that they can be counted later on. As many people as possible should be registered on one sheet. Only one mark should be made against each question for each person.

**HANDOUTS**

**Survey sheet**

**I: non-voters**

**Question 1.** In which age group are you? (Optional)

	Under 25	25 – 40	40 – 60	Over 60	Would rather not say
MALE					
FEMALE					

**Question 2.** What was your main reason for not voting the last time there were elections?

- A. I thought it wouldn't make any difference to the result
- B. There wasn't anyone I wanted to vote for
- C. I didn't agree with any of the policies being proposed
- D. I couldn't be bothered
- E. Other reason (give details):

A	B	C	D	E

**2: voters**

**Question 1.** In which age group are you? (Optional)

	Under 25	25 – 40	40 – 60	Over 60	Would rather not say
MALE					
FEMALE					

**Question 2.** What was your main reason for voting the last time you did so?

- A. I felt it was my democratic responsibility
- B. I wanted to vote for [a person]
- C. I wanted to vote for [a party]
- D. I didn't want [a different person / party] to win
- E. Other reason (give details):

A	B	C	D	E

**Example of how to fill in the survey sheet**

**Survey sheet 1: Non-voters**

**Question 1.** In which age group are you? (Optional)

	Under 25	25 – 40	40 – 60	Over 60	Would rather not say
MALE					
FEMALE					

**Question 2.** What was your main reason for not voting the last time there were elections?

- A. I thought it wouldn't make any difference to the result
- B. There wasn't anyone I wanted to vote for
- C. I didn't agree with any of the policies being proposed
- D. I couldn't be bothered
- E. Other reason (give details):

A	B	C	D	E
 	 	 	 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I wasn't in the area at the time</li> <li>▪ I don't trust politicians</li> <li>▪ Someone asked me not to</li> </ul>

