

SCHOLAR'S SHOWCASE

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Western



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Letter From the Editor

Rising from the Pandemic

Many of us commenced last year by taking in the horizon while dreaming about and anticipating all that it would bring. We were then unknowingly thrust into a year that not many of us could have envisioned. Consequently, all of the contributors in this issue shared at least one commonality: they were students during a global pandemic. This pandemic and all of the other events that the year entailed prompted many changes in our lives. As the writers and artists of this issue persisted during this period, reflected, and gazed ahead, they were able to translate their experiences into words and artwork that they are sharing with you within these subsequent pages. I am grateful to every contributor for investing their time and talent into this publication, especially during this difficult and unprecedented period. Finally, thank you to every reader who explores the pages of this issue and the student perspectives that they hold. Our hope is that this issue acts as an aid in the process of moving forward and rising from the pandemic.

Sincerely,

Amandi

FOREVER UPWARD



Photograph by Idin Fakhrajahani

excelsior

Poem by Olivia Li

an afterlife, a second life
whatever you call it, things are different now
a distorted caricature of a past reality, scraped together
from the ashes of a world you used to know

and you—you're different too
without the noise and bustle of a life well-lived
standing in the wreckage, you don't feel quite like yourself
do you know who you are when
all that's "normal" is dead?

well. it's a funny thing, normalcy
with time and acceptance, it always comes to be
the end of what once was
is also the beginning of what is
to come

though things might not ever be the same
neither will you.
the fires of crisis,
the matters out of your control: they are
the embers from which you emerge
anew;
a phoenix risen from the carnage

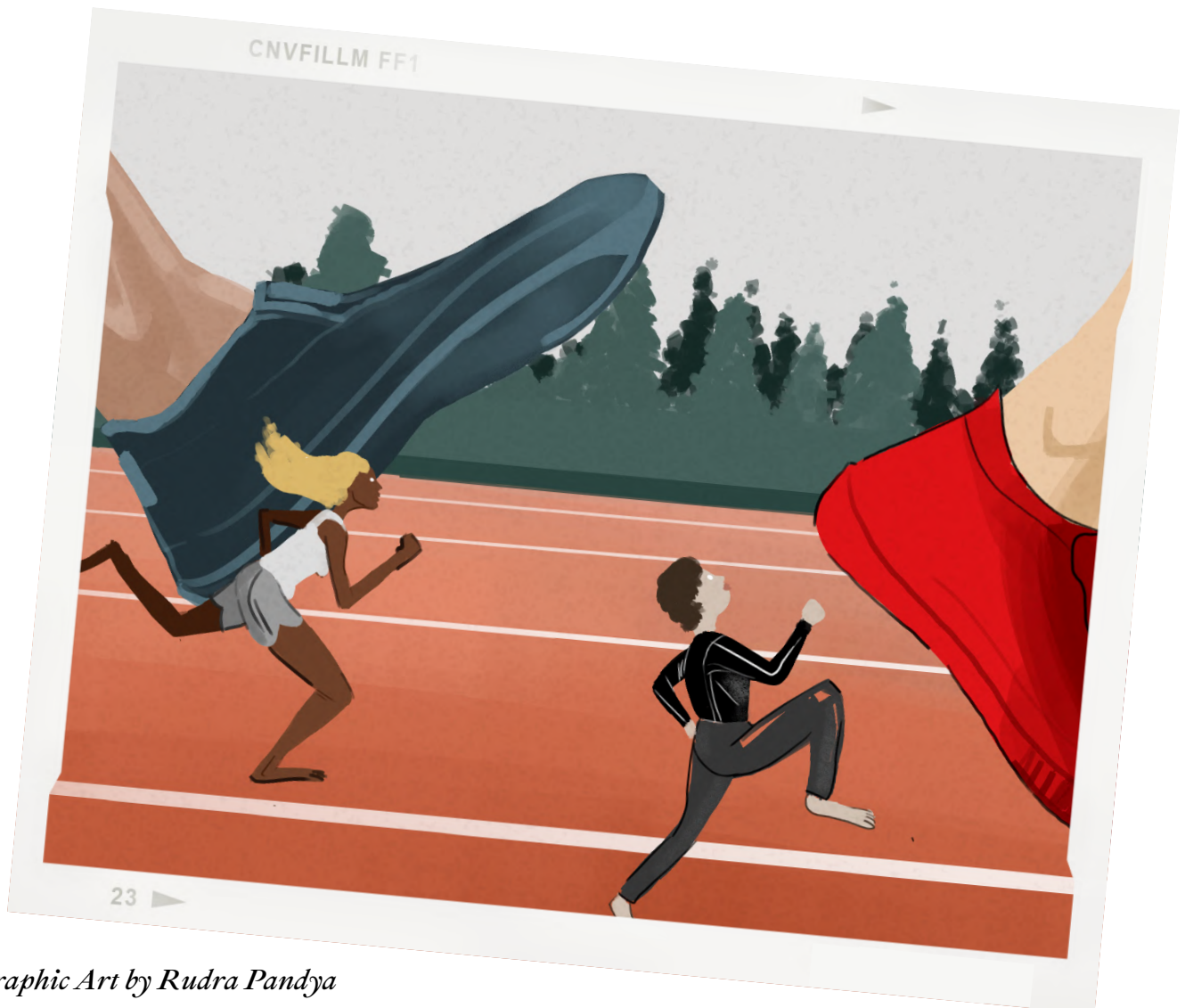
that thing called life: so mercurial, easily flammable
what exists now can melt away in an instant, but
with each transformation, you flourish too
burnished by the heat of growing pains that
leave behind no marks

just as the world has once burned, it will continue
to burn and recover, and burn and recover, and
amidst the smoke and cinders—
so will you.

Neoliberal Doctrine:

The Pervasiveness of Racial Inequality in Contemporary Contexts

The conservative notion of personal effort and hard work by the individual – pulling oneself up by the bootstraps – has been an integral survival strategy for people of colour (POC). Neoliberalist arguments have long maintained racialized economic systems in place, assuming free markets rule all, when in reality our economy is shaped by institutions, norms, and policies (Lipsky, 2016). In eras long pervaded by racial profiling (Johnson, 2009), openly discriminatory hiring practices (Saez and Zucman, 2014), and race relations being implicated in every facet of the law (Gross, 2011), the myths of individualism and meritocracy were juxtaposed as a solution; when subject to real consequences based on the colour of your skin, embracing the idea of ‘working harder than anyone else’ became quintessential for survival, both economic and real. However, bootstrapping fails to understand how objective efforts concerted by two individuals can have drastically different outcomes because of their subjective position in society, and with its coupling to contemporary neoliberal agendas, has readily produced resurgent forms of racism.



Graphic Art by Rudra Pandya

Our measure of economic security has long been centralized on white economic security. For example, the latest aggregate unemployment numbers for Canada indicate that the economy has grown (StatsCan, 2020). However, digging a little deeper, we can see how while overall unemployment fell slightly, it increased for Black communities (StatsCan, 2020). The idea that a rising tide lifts all boats — that if the GDP increases, for example, every Canadian will benefit — is a simple economic idea to grasp. In reality, the economic downturn that has accompanied the coronavirus pandemic has disproven this concept many times over. The stock market has surged even as infection rates have climbed and the wealthiest people in the world have seen their net worth increase even more Canadians struggle to afford housing in urban centers such as Calgary, widening economic disparities as a whole (Meij, Haartsen and Meijering, 2020).

What has been proposed in response? A broad sweeping paradigm that posits hard work and effort will be the main determinants of your future socioeconomic status. What if, after working for years, you find yourself losing traction in an economy structured against you? Too bad, you clearly didn't work hard enough. Despite POC holding equivalent education levels, being similar ages and of analogous familial status, they are consistently underpaid relative to Caucasian peers (Conference Board of Canada, 2018). If a capitalist economy were truly rational, and in extension racism be irrational (because why would the free market want to miss out on hyper-productive workers?), racialized statistics that support the status quo of white wealth wouldn't be emergent. The cultural scribes of neoliberalism remove racism and the production of racialized inequalities from the contexts of history and power, finding resolutions to disparity instead in the free market and in the racialized individuals' choices to not experience racism. While neoliberalism's components continually hammer home the myth that citizens are individually responsible for their fates, the state polices those who do not subscribe to this doctrine. In other words, as the state "disinvests in the protection of citizens against the vicissitudes of the labour market as it becomes further deregulated," individuals, especially those with legacies of racial inequality, are subject to redefinition as personally responsible if they are found on the losing end of neoliberal philosophy, or in common parlance, if they fail to 'pull themselves up by the bootstraps' (Robbins, 2004).

As a whole, the pervasive notion of bootstrapping is one that universalizes the experience of all people into an all-encompassing category at the expense of social justice reform. Paying attention to people's individualities, the experiences that result from that identity, and forming action plans centered on addressing discrepancies can be the only remedy to combat conservative notions.

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In the Foreground

Photograph by Idin Fakhrajahani



When the Familiar Falls Away

Essay by Jasmine Kang

As time goes on, life inevitably brings new challenges. Some are expected, like working through new concepts and managing bigger projects as you progress through each year of university. Others, not so much, like discovering that a routine lab experiment you're running has suddenly fallen apart. As with many changes, there's often a brief, but chaotic adjustment period before settling back into equilibrium. But sometimes there are changes that turn the familiar world upside-down. This is precisely the situation in which Margaret Hale, the heroine of Elizabeth Gaskell's 1855 novel, *North and South*, finds herself when she is suddenly uprooted, first from her relatives in London and then from her home in the idyllic village of Helstone, to the faraway manufacturing town of Milton-Northern. Having been accustomed to the wealth and comfort of rural southern England, Margaret is confronted with the smoky, alien streets of the industrial north and has to adjust to her new life.

Milton is a separate world from Margaret's former life. She takes an immediate dislike to the town and its people. The air is heavy with factory smoke and filled with the noisy reverberations of industrial machinery. Margaret is no more impressed by Milton's inhabitants, looking down on the manufacturers that own the factories as unsophisticated tradesmen and bewildered by the rough manners of the factory workers when she encounters them in the streets. While reading the novel, I was disconcerted by Margaret's condescending, patronizing attitude towards the people of Milton, although it wasn't too unexpected given the class divisions of Victorian England. More familiar, however, was Margaret's feeling of loneliness and her experience with the compounding stresses that accompanied her change of circumstances, from financial difficulties to her mother's illness.

I was surprised to find how much I related to Margaret. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrust us into an unfamiliar world. We are isolated, separated from friends and family. We face financial struggles, whether it is finding a job or paying university tuition. We worry about illness, anxious about both contracting the virus and transmitting it to others. Margaret learns the customs of Milton, shaking hands rather than bowing, picking up local slang, and coming to understand the fierce independence of the people. So too do we adjust our habits in response to the pandemic, wearing masks, using technology to connect with others, and shifting course to maintain social distancing on walks. Margaret spends much time brooding over her circumstances but going out lifts her spirits and turns her mind away from melancholy thoughts, highlighting the importance of fresh air and exercise.

Margaret's initial unsavory attitude towards Milton changes as well. She comes to know Milton primarily through two individuals: the wealthy owner of a local cotton mill, John Thornton, and the factory worker and union leader Nicholas Higgins. Her acquaintance with Thornton is rocky from the start; they are constantly arguing about matters of trade, from the value of independence to class antagonism. However, Margaret is able to see past her initial prejudices about manufacturers and learns to recognize Thornton's diligent character and kind heart. Her relationship with Higgins shows her both the struggles and spirit of the working class, which culminates in a strike that rocks the entire town. Despite the conflict, Thornton and Higgins also come to know and respect one another, finding common ground and working together.

Throughout *North and South*, Margaret has to respond and adapt to the challenges that life throws her way. While at first, she finds her change of circumstances harsh and bitter, as she learns more about Thornton and Higgins and recognizes the merits of Milton, she comes to value her home in the north just as much as she did her home in the south. Life before COVID-19 may seem like a distant dream. There isn't much we can do as individuals to change the reality of the pandemic, but we can control how we respond. We can acknowledge both the good and the bad of our situation, appreciate our common humanity, and continue moving forward together.

BTS Comes to Western

Article by Ajaya Sharma

As we acclimate to the new normal, we realize that the world must go on. For music lovers, appreciating music has become limited to online releases as concerts and meet-ups are not possible. Despite such limitations, one boy group has managed to deliver not only amazing content but also break multiple records all in this year, and they are the Bangtan Boys, or more commonly known as BTS. They are a group of seven ordinary boys from South Korea who have truly taken the world by storm (as we will see later on in this article). There are seven members in this group: their names are Namjoon (RM), Jin, Yoongi (Suga), Hoseok (J-Hope), Jimin, Taehyung (V), and Jungkook.



From left, Jeon Jungkook, Park Jimin, Jung Hoseok, Kim Seokjin, Kim Taehyung, Min Yoonhi, and Kim Namjoon.

Now, the love for BTS has even made it to our very own Western University! This year, a student asked in Western Must Knows whether any fellow students would be interested in forming a Western Army group, and the response was incredible! There is a private Facebook group called Western Army and includes members very interested in ratifying their club. Now, we are going to talk to the individual responsible for bringing the Army spirit to Western, Keenan:

1. What inspired you to make an Army club at Western?

I think it was seeing how much positivity BTS was spreading around the world during the pandemic this year that made me wonder if there was an ARMY community at Western and what could be achieved in London if we all

came together, as international ARMY have done consistently in the past to support the band and their philanthropic efforts with organizations including UNICEF and Black Lives Matter. I was also inspired by my friend and co-worker Shirley, who is a Western alumni that started the London ON ARMY fanbase, which hosts a variety of quality BTS-themed events throughout the year. Immediately after I made a post to gauge whether there was any interest, over 100 Western students reacted and joined the Facebook group within the first 24 hours of its creation!

2. How long have you been a part of the BTS Army?

I am relatively new to the BTS ARMY and only started following them a few years ago. I still remember getting more into R&B and Hip-Hop in first year and then randomly being introduced to K-Pop in second year and gradually becoming a fan of BTS.

3. Who is your bias and the real question is why is it Yoongi?

Like most ARMY, choosing a bias is a constant struggle because we are always getting bias-wrecked by the other members; however, I find that mine is consistently Yoongi because of his musical talent. I find that Suga has a really unique and versatile flow but what sets him apart is his ability to write, compose, arrange, mix and produce material. His solo mixtapes, released under the alias Agust D, really caught my attention and I am always impressed by anything he is featured on including his songs with Halsey, Heize, IU, MAX and SURAN.

4. Were you surprised by the response to making a BTS Army club at Western?

I was definitely surprised by the enthusiasm that ARMY at Western had for becoming an official club; I don't think I ever intended for Western ARMY to pursue official ratification with the USC but there was significant interest and since I have been very involved with various clubs and organizations on campus, I wanted to do my part by helping channel all our ideas and passion into a legitimate club.

5. What do you think the future of this club will look like?

I am hoping that Western ARMY will bring together members of the Western community who are fans of BTS or their music and that we will promote their positive messages through a celebration of song, dance and culture. I am hoping that we will be able to fundraise for important causes that the band has recognized (including this summer with BLM) and honestly just host some extremely engaging and interactive events for Western to enjoy! I think that ARMY is extremely passionate and creative, so I truly think the future possibilities are endless.

6. What are your personal goals for the club?

I wanted to help create a safe and welcoming space for fans of BTS and anyone interested in learning more about the band. BTS have inspired, healed and empowered youth to embrace their identity and love one another so I wanted to help organize a community that can connect others from various backgrounds to form meaningful and lasting relationships all while honouring BTS's artistry and legacy. What I love is how BTS is an artist that mainly performs in Korean and produces K-Pop but their lyrics and music have resonated with people from all over the world. They also recently earned three #1 song entries on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and have become the first K-pop group to ever receive a Grammy Award nomination which is simply unheard of for a foreign artist and speaks to their trailblazing success.

7. Any other comments you would like to make about the club or about BTS in general?

No! Thank you for reaching out and learning more about us!

INTROVERT IN QUARANTINE



Graphic art by Michelle Zhang

Introvert In Quarantine

Poem by Christine Taylhardat

i thought i enjoyed my own company,
until it was all that i had.
solitude was easy,
peaceful and quiet.
now i am screaming to get out.
being alone had once been a choice,
one where i was freed of my anxiety.
now, i'm alone, without choice,
and anxious all the time.
silence was a friend,
her warm presence enveloped me,
until she became too much,
and it was suffocating.
i used to try to pretend,
to fit in,
but it's not necessary anymore.
my many masks reduced to one.
i'm trying to learn to live inside this box,
what is a mere fraction of the world before,
where my home is my refuge and prison,
and where i exist only inside my head.
i can remember joyful days,
and interactions mixed with fears:
the pit in my stomach, a flush in my cheeks,
the jitter of nerves.
emptiness and memories are all that are left.
and i am struggling,
i don't know what to do,
how to be myself again,
how to connect with old or new friends.
sometimes,
i just avoid it all.
and i remain in this box because...
it's easier,
i guess.

i have always been an introvert.
always liked solitude,
always preferred silence.
but
even an introvert
needs a semblance of company.
i feel
disconnected
and alone,
with my escape from the world now gone,
it's become hard to endure.
this introvert in Quarantine,
she really needs others,
now even more than before.



Graphic art by Michelle Zhang

fly against
the darkest
storm



COVID-19: An Egoistic Justification of a Non-Egoistic Action

Essay by Akash Jain

COVID-19 has shocked the entire world. Every individual, regardless of gender, race, religion, or creed, has been impacted in some regard. Authorities have been challenged in ways they have never experienced before, forced to creatively devise methods that best incentivize collective action. While the world's newfound predicament seems dire, COVID-19 has elucidated how egoism can spur non-egoistic action, providing new avenues for governments to drive social cooperation and benefit humanity.

Psychological egoism is a descriptive thesis that individuals act purely on the basis of self-interest. According to psychological egoism, and by extension rational egoism (a normative thesis that individuals ought to act on the basis of self-interest), the only way in which an individual participates in a cooperative enterprise (which is a scheme of social cooperation to achieve a particular goal) would be in effort to further their own benefit. Alternatively put, social cooperation is inherently conditioned on the instrumental value said individual reaps as a result.

Mancur Olson, a prominent American economist, captures this point precisely through his “by-product theory”. Olson’s by-product theory states that one might contribute to a cooperative enterprise because their contribution is tied to a wanted provision. It is important to note that a provision does not necessarily have to be a good, it can be anything that is desired. Correspondingly, the discussion of instrumental power in Hobbes’ Leviathan acknowledges that the greatest human power is working together, and by doing so, one can best achieve their desires.

COVID-19 is arguably a scenario whereby one’s self-interest coincides with a commonly desired end: survival. The pandemic is an example of a phenomenon that threatens every individual’s survival to a (relatively) equal degree.

In this case, it seems plausible that individuals would act in concert to achieve the mutual aim of survival, as it is in one’s self-interest. Although short-term interests may be sacrificed, such as not seeing friends/loved ones and having to work/study at home, any future, self-regarding desires presuppose survival (that is, one must be alive to experience any benefits whatsoever). Therefore, on a rational basis, individuals would presumably pursue the attainment of “survival”, even if they must forgo utility attributed to their present desires.

However, there is an important objection to be raised. It can be argued that free riding on the participation of others in a cooperative enterprise actually maximizes an individual’s self-interest and would thereby be suggested by psychological egoism and required by rational egoism. Formally, a free rider is someone who reaps the benefit of some form of collective action (and thus social cooperation) without expending a degree of effort commensurate to other contributing agents.

As a psychological or rational egoist, there is a strong incentive to free ride. Individuals who are a part of a cooperative enterprise, but do not contribute, still reap the primary benefit (i.e. survival) for which the enterprise was established initially. In addition to this primary benefit, free riders have the opportunity to exclusively reap incidental benefit(s) that subsequently accrue by virtue of free riding.

While this seems like a legitimate objection, the act of free riding may actually incentivize others to free ride as well. Because individuals have legitimate reasons to defect from the cooperative enterprise, it can be argued that people will only contribute if they have the assurance that others will too. Alternatively put, Person A will be a contributing member of a cooperative enterprise insofar as Person B contributes; if Person B does not contribute, Person A will not either. This notion was first ideated by Tyler Cowen, another prominent American economist.

Therefore, if enough individuals free ride on the contributions of other participants, there is a possibility that the entire cooperative enterprise will falter. Subsequently, the pursuit of survival would be inevitably compromised. It appears that this situation is not in the self-interest of any individual, including those that free ride (as everyone wants to survive). Without the existence of a cooperative enterprise, free riders would have nothing to free ride on. Hence, as a psychological or rational egoist, free riding would not be an action to engage in. As such, individuals would participate in the cooperative enterprise by socially distancing and respecting government regulation.

The framework ascribed above makes the strong assumption that individuals are rational and forward-looking. However, in reality, individuals have unique preferences that makes it difficult to accurately predict and ascertain their behaviours in particular situations. In other words, the determinants of decisions are innately idiosyncratic.

Nevertheless, this framework provides an interesting and unique way to understand how self-interest can be used as a motivating factor for social cooperation and overall public welfare. COVID-19 is a particularly relevant example because individuals can clearly appreciate the magnitude of their contribution, and subsequent benefit, in a cooperative enterprise. There is, arguably, a direct impact of social distancing.

Consider the converse, when an individual does not engage in social distancing. By not contributing to the cooperative enterprise, the probability of contracting the virus, and, in turn potentially dying or causing loved ones to die, increases substantially. In other words, with COVID-19, there is an immediate consequence, one that directly impedes the chance of survival of an individual or their loved ones.

Because COVID-19 is a unique instance whereby (1) an individual's survival is at risk and (2) their ability to engage in a cooperative enterprise has a direct impact in augmenting their chance of survival, this framework has practical applications. Governments can use this framework to respond to innate idiosyncrasies that exist, channeling them into positive forces. Using a model based on self-interest aligns with natural human tendencies, namely the instinctual desire to pursue survival. Leveraging self-interest with social cooperation allows governments to implement evergreen policies, not only regarding COVID-19, but for any type of collective action problem. Using this framework as a policy tool can motivate people to cooperate, in turn engendering positive and long-lasting change.

Masked

Photograph by Idin Fakhrjahani





Pause

Graphic art by Natalie Li





Distance Makes the Heart Grow

Poem by Amandi Perera

This year,

We notice when
The world becomes colder
As the breath of another being disappears.
We grieve from afar in
two dimensions.

We notice when
A room expands with warmth
As the breath of another being enters.
Eyes meet eyes from afar in
three dimensions.

We notice emptiness
Within the six feet, six blocks, six towns, and
Screens between us.
Invisible waves cannot free us from
Two dimensions.

So one day,

We will grasp frail, weathered hands.
We will embrace unfiltered, human lines and blemishes.
We will observe outlines of lips as they change shape.
We will closely watch a glint of light dance in a pair of eyes.
We will notice

thelackofdistance.



Mandatory Voting in Canada

Essay by Abbey Horner

Municipal elections rarely get more than a 30% turnout. Canada should bring in a law requiring everyone to vote in elections on pain of a fine. Canada should adopt legislation mandating voting, allowing for this to be possible so that all citizens' voices are represented, a key foundation of democracy. Many low-income individuals and students cannot make it to polling stations due to working multiple jobs and living outside of their municipal election region but having legislation for mandatory voting that comes with time off for work would allow for their voices to be heard. This occurs in Australia where voting is compulsory and always takes place on a Saturday.

Mandatory voting must be enforced, as “studies show repeatedly that mandatory voting systems without a penalty simply are not as effective as those with an even minor fee for non-voting” (Harb 2020). The Australian system has demonstrated that small fines are sufficient to influence a change in voting patterns, and thus, that a large fine, of say \$500 fine is not necessary. “In that country, if you fail to show up on voting day, you will receive a form letter in the mail requesting that you pay a fine of approximately AUS. \$20.” Canada should ensure that voting takes place on a Saturday and ensure that voting becomes a national paid holiday. This would allow lower-income individuals (those who typically work on weekends) to take the day off work, as for many, a full day's wage is more than \$20. It would also be beneficial for polling stations to include some form of childcare, as familial obligations can inhibit one's ability to vote. If New Year's Day is a paid national holiday and voting isn't, that illustrates our society values the New Year that only some Canadians celebrate more than democracy. A cultural shift must occur, and it starts with a conscientious approach to compulsory voting.

However, even with this conscientious approach, not all individuals are able to vote. In Australia, if one provides “a reason such as travel, illness, religious objections, et cetera,” they do not pay the fine. “This takes care of about 95 percent of the no-show cases. Only about 5 percent of those who do not show up to vote in Australia pay a fine.” Thus, Canada should enforce a mandatory voting system is adopted, but not to the extent that it is financially debilitating for people, especially considering that most of the people that do not vote are of lower incomes. It should also allow for people to provide a valid reason, but the documentation of this should be culturally and economically sensitive if it is to exist at all. There should be no documentation required, as few systems of documentation are culturally or economically sensitive. One could argue that then, people will just submit an untrue reason and not vote, but as we can see in Australia, this is not the case. “Now, Australia has a turnout of over 90 percent. Citizens are also not upset with this, as 70 to 80 percent of Australians support the mandatory system.” Thus, it is evident that the mandatory voting system works.



Graphic Art by Randa Mudathir

One could argue that these votes may be uninformed and are thus “throw away votes” without considering that for some, such exposure to the voting system may actually help them to become more informed. Also, those same “uninformed citizens” are compelled to serve on juries with potentially more serious consequences. Many also consider it undemocratic to force individuals to vote, but in a democratic society, all citizens have a right and a duty to participate in political decisions. Duties such as jury duty are reasonable limits, under section 1 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that we put on our individual freedom to ensure the success of our democratic society.

Another criticism of mandatory voting is that if someone is checking the box ‘none of the above,’ then how is that different from not going at all? This choice, however, would only account for some of the individuals who do not vote and does illustrate that these individuals explicitly do not support either party. If one was to simply not go to the polls, this could be for a number of reasons, other than a disdain for the system. Abstention is a political decision when it is explicit.

It is also important to consider that within the current framework, voting can be extremely difficult for some people. This is especially the case for young people, who are targeted by issues like this, as 1 in 4 people under the age of 25 vote. Many young people attend university and need to vote in their municipal election from alternate locations and may have to mail in their vote. I believe that voting is a highly complicated process that needs to be simplified alongside legislation for mandatory voting, especially for low-income persons, students, and other individuals who are targeted by this legislation. Mandatory voting is a valuable step in striving towards democracy, but as a society, there must be a shift through an increase in education, feasibility, and cultural discourse surrounding voting as both a right and a duty.

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"Looking Up"

Cover art by: Michelle Zhang

Read the Scholars' Life blog:
uwo.ca/se/thrive/blog/scholars.html

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