

Thousands Of UK Voters Become Invisible!

5th December 2019

Hundreds of thousands of British **expats** are **barred** from voting in the UK's upcoming general election on 12th December because of a controversial law that states Britons lose their right to vote in UK elections after 15 years **overseas**.

In the 2017 general election, the Conservative party promised to scrap the rule and give every British expat the same voting rights. However, despite attempts, nothing came to fruition in the following two years of parliamentary chaos.

Currently, the rules allow expats to vote if they are registered in the **constituency** where they last lived - but only if they have spent less than 15 years living abroad. Anyone who has spent longer away is barred from voting although exceptions exist for the military, civil servants and British Council employees.

This rule became particularly relevant during the 2016 Brexit referendum. It was especially frustrating for expats resident in EU countries, as they will be disproportionately affected if the UK eventually leaves the EU.

The 15-year rule effectively means that hundreds of thousands of British citizens are **disenfranchised** from the UK political system. And to add insult to injury, the great majority are unable to vote in elections in their country of residence - as they aren't citizens - creating a large group of 'invisibles'.

As one financial expert pointed out: "It's especially frustrating for those who are still **liable** for UK taxes, such as inheritance and property taxes, but are not

allowed to vote in the UK. Whatever happened to 'no taxation without representation'?"

The time-restriction rule was introduced in 1985 and was, in fact, an improvement on the previous situation which hadn't allowed any expats the vote. At first it was a 5 year limit, later extended to 20, and finally reduced to 15 years in 2002.

In Spain, expat rights are protected by article 68 of the constitution. In Portugal, the Assembly of the Republic is "the representative assembly of all Portuguese citizens", thus giving expats the same right to vote in elections as citizens living in Portugal.

Some expats have challenged the rule but the European Court of Human Rights has ruled that it **is up to** national governments to legislate on this matter and that "15 years is not an insubstantial period of

time" that allows plenty of time to change nationality and vote in your country of residence.

An increasingly divided UK will go to the polls for the third time in four years in December, in what is the first winter election since 1923. Since 1935, elections in the UK have always been held on Thursdays, in contrast to most other countries that organise their elections on non-work days such as Sundays.

Supposedly, this was to stop workers getting drunk before voting on Fridays, the day they received their pay packets, and to reduce the influence of religious leaders over voters who went to church on Sundays.

Written by ECP coach Rob. Read source articles [here](#) and [here](#).

Before you read the article, find this vocabulary in the text:

expat: a person who lives outside their native country

to bar: to prohibit someone from doing something

overseas: referring to a foreign country

constituency (UK): a voting district

disenfranchised: deprived of the vote

to add insult to injury: to make a bad situation worse

liable: responsible by law to comply

to be up to: to have the responsibility



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Let's chat about that!

Write your opinions in an email and send them to your ECP coach!

Have you ever voted by post or from abroad? If so, why??

Would you consider introducing the 15-year rule to where you live?

How do you think the time of year (or the weather) affects voting?

What is your opinion about voting on a work day?

Do you think your country should hold more referendums (like Switzerland)?

Social Events In English

Real-Life English in Vitoria-Gasteiz



Practical English Stuff

Real Language to Express Yourself Better

LIVE!English presents:

COFFEE SATURDAYS!

Come and socialise in English!



chitchat

1. verb To talk in an idle or casual manner.

We're just chitchatting, come on in!

First Saturday of every month

Next date:

Saturday, 7th December

Time: 11:00 to 12:30

Place: Panadería Bertiz, C/Francia 23

Add these dates to your diary!

Coffee

Saturdays:

5th Oct ✓

2nd Nov ✓

7th Dec

11th Jan

1st Feb

7th Mar

4th Apr

2nd May

6th Jun

Cinema

Nights:

25th Oct ✓

29th Nov ✓

20th Dec

31st Jan

28th Feb

27th Mar

24th Apr

29th May

26th Jun

CINEMA NIGHTS!

Come and socialise in English!

Date: Friday, 20th December

Time: 19:30 to 21:30

Place: ECP Hub, C/San Ignacio de Loyola 15

Talking about elections

Constituency

The electoral area in which voters elect a candidate to parliament. There are 650 constituencies in the UK.

Member of Parliament (MP)

The person who represents their constituency in the House of Commons (UK).

Canvassing

This is when supporters of a party promote their party's policies and their candidate by visiting homes and speaking to people in the street.

Polling station (Polling place in US)

Where voters go to cast their vote.

Exit poll

A survey in which voters leaving a polling station are asked how they voted.

Opinion poll

Opinion polls ask people which party they will vote for in the election. Polls are also used to find out opinions on a range of issues

Tactical voting

An effort to get voters to back a party they don't really support in order to defeat another party.

Hung parliament

An election where no one party wins a majority.

Usually the largest party then tries to form a coalition government with another party.