

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE
CHAIR OF THE PRIVILEGES AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE
BY DEPUTY R.J. WARD OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 25th FEBRUARY 2020**

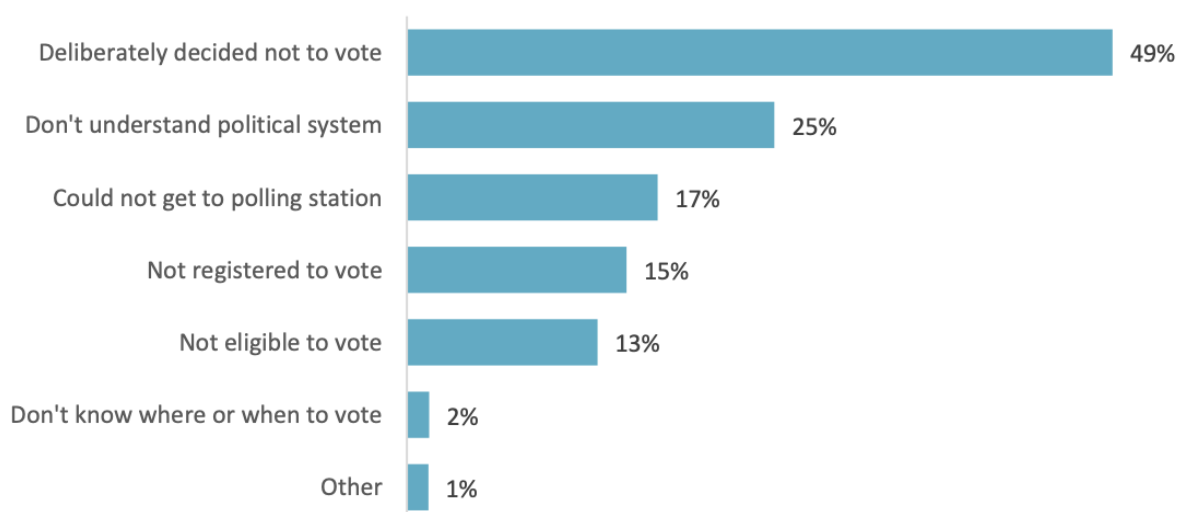
Question

In light of the findings of the Jersey Better Life Index 2019 that Jersey placed 41st out of 41 jurisdictions for civic engagement (as measured by voter turnout), will the Chair advise whether compulsory voter registration will be considered or researched as a response to this reported lack of voter engagement?

Answer

Jersey has the worst voter engagement of almost any democracy in the world. As the question rightly highlights, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2019 *Better Life Index* ranks Jersey lowest in civic engagement; 379th out of 403 regions; 41st out of 41 nations.

The *Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey* Report of 2018 which was run by Statistics Jersey very shortly after the last States Assembly elections suggests that around half (49%) of people who did not vote in May 2018 said that they “Deliberately decided not to vote” – this was the most cited reason for not voting, followed by “Don’t understand political system” (25%) and “Could not get to polling station” (17%).



The most commonly cited reasons for deliberately not voting were ‘my vote won’t change things in Jersey’ and ‘I don’t trust the political system in Jersey’ (both 39%)

Any and all initiatives to improve on this situation must be considered and action taken, however, one has to ask how compulsory or punitive measures would be viewed by a population so thoroughly disenchanting?

- In survey after survey the electorate has complained about a confusing and overly complex electoral system - in return the States has failed to simplify the modus operandi.
- It is hardly surprising that people feel their vote won’t make a difference when at the last election over a quarter of seats were decided before a single vote was cast; over one third at the election before that but the States has done nothing to eliminate the uncontested election.

- Worst of all, voters in rural areas are massively over represented in the States a fact not lost on those who are underrepresented - a classic disincentive - and yet nothing has been done to ensure each elector in the Island has a vote of equal weight and power regardless of their postcode. A basic Human Right and one to which they are entitled.

The answer surely is for us to put our own Assembly in order before bringing in legislation to mandate participation by an understandably uncooperative electorate who are unlikely to suddenly cooperate as a result.

PPC currently favours automatic registration over compulsory registration. If one is in possession of a Social Security number and have done the requisite residential time, one is on the electoral register.

This would have the added bonus of allowing the elector to cast a vote at the polling station of their choosing, any polling station, the one most convenient for them.

We need more polling stations in more accessible locations and we need to extend the reach of pre-poll voting opportunities. The electorate are not coming to us; we have to make the effort to go to them.

PPC has a list of other new initiatives which we will reveal at the appropriate time but all our efforts will be in vain if we can't first deliver meaningful, manageable elections and fair votes for all.