



# WHY DO ELECTIONS MATTER?

Professor Michael Bruter and Dr Sarah Harrison founded the Electoral Psychology Observatory (EPO) to put citizens at the heart of how we study elections, arguing that, when it comes to democracy, the experience of the people voting matters as much as the outcomes of elections. A better functioning democracy must have the experience of citizens at its heart.

Part of their research has involved observing elections all over the world, and these photographs and quotes from voters help to tell a story about people's experience of Election Day.



## There's no such thing as a polling station

No piece of architecture is ever designed to be a polling station. Instead, buildings used for a whole variety of purposes (schools, churches, supermarkets, garages, even laundromats) temporarily become hosts to polling stations once every few years. Yet they are often the primary location where citizens interact with their democracies and their design matters. What should an ideal polling station look like?



SCAN TO HEAR MORE FROM  
MICHAEL AND SARAH  
ABOUT THEIR RESEARCH



"I WAS WONDERING WHO OTHERS WERE VOTING FOR."



"I HAVE GREAT PLEASURE SLIDING THE BALLOT INSIDE THE ENVELOPE."



20-30%

OF VOTERS TYPICALLY EITHER MAKE UP OR CHANGE THEIR MINDS DURING THE WEEK OF AN ELECTION, HALF OF THEM ON ELECTION DAY ITSELF.



"POLITICS ARE SO MUCH A PART OF HOW I INTERACT WITH PEOPLE. THESE ISSUES ARE PERSONAL. I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE SEPARATE POLITICS FROM RELATIONSHIPS."



## The impact of queues

Election Management Bodies worldwide worry about queues, fearing they will put voters off and generate dissatisfaction. But the evidence gathered by the EPO suggests that whilst excessively long queues generate complaints, moderate queues inspire excitement and the feeling of being part of an important collective event. They are subconsciously seen as a sign of democratic momentum and shared experience.

"WHY AM I WASTING MY TIME WITH THIS, WHEN I COULD BE SPENDING IT WITH MY FAMILY OR PLAYING GAMES OR EVEN COUNTING MY TOES?"



1.5x longer

VOTERS SPEND ROUGHLY ONE AND A HALF TIMES LONGER THINKING ABOUT THEIR ELECTORAL CHOICE WITH A PAPER AS COMPARED TO AN ELECTRONIC BALLOT.

"A SENSE OF HISTORY LINKING ME WITH GENERATIONS OF WOMEN VOTERS AND THE HARD WON RIGHT TO VOTE."



"GREAT TO SEE OTHER PEOPLE THAT WERE REALLY ENTHUSIASTIC AND EAGER TO VOTE."



"I FELT A GREAT MOMENT OF EMOTION."



## How we vote

Going to vote alone has a very different symbolic meaning from going as a family, bringing children along, or making it a collective social outing with friends or neighbours.