
The 3 key drawbacks of the US democratic process: strict laws on voter identification, early voting cuts and gerrymandering

America is a democracy. It claims to be a place where a free exchange of ideas takes place. For the most part, America does provide citizens with both political and individual freedom. However, there are a few minor aspects of the political system that serve to compromise the democratic process in America. Strict voter identification laws, gerrymandering, and cuts to early voting programs are three ways in which the democratic process is weakened in America.

Democracies are about freedom and equality. A true democratic process involves power being divided up amongst the people. A certain group of people should not have greater electoral power than another group of people under a true democracy. If certain votes are being discredited or discounted, then it is likely that the democratic process is not genuine or involves some elements of deception. American politics are generally fair and equal. On paper, anyone can register and cast their vote. However, the American political system has several deceptive ways that politicians can weaken the political power of certain groups of voters. The tactics usually involve an alternative message to the public. It would obviously harm the reputation of politicians if they openly stated that they were manipulating legislation in order to suppress political opposition. Instead, they usually cite alternative goals that are not always legitimate. A thorough examination of policies and data reveal that many of their cited reasons are not always realistic or even a major problem in the first place.

Voter Identification Laws

Voter identification laws are one example of policies that are slightly deceptive. Politicians claim that they are intended to prevent voter fraud. Obviously, most people agree that voter fraud should not occur in a democracy. However, voter fraud is not a prevalent occurrence. According to a study done, there have been only 2068 cases of voter fraud since the year 2000 (Bialik). When broken down on a yearly basis, that number translates to 147 voter fraud cases per year. That data comes from the entire United States (Bialik). Legislation is supposed to address important issues. While it is possible that many other cases of voter fraud do not get discovered, the numbers are still dramatically small. Even elections in small districts feature thousands of voters. If a candidate wanted to cheat an election by paying fraudulent voters, then it would have to be done on a relatively large scale (Parson). The small number of discovered cases of voter fraud is evidence that legislative efforts are probably more interested in something other than stopping a minor problem.

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If voter identification laws are not truly interested in stopping fraud, then what are they for? Strict voter identification laws can sometimes be used to suppress the votes of certain groups of people. For example, some strict voter identification laws require multiple forms of identification. Many lower-class working people do not have multiple forms of identification. It is possible that they recently moved to the state and cannot afford to pay for all of the paperwork required to get another form of identification. In contrast, people from other social classes can usually easily afford to get the required documentation. Thus, the strict voter identification laws are affecting lower-class people more than the rest of the population. From a political standpoint, it makes sense to suppress the voting power of people that are members of the opposing party. The Democratic Party features a high number of minority members. The Republican Party stands to increase their chances of election in swing states by suppressing the votes of minorities that are more likely to vote for the Democratic Party. Swing states are states in which the electoral races are close. No political party holds a definitive majority. Thus, swing states would be the best places for deceptive tactics like voter ID laws to be used.

Although it is true that some voter fraud occasionally happens, the number of minorities affected by strict voter ID requirements outweighs the number of potential fraud cases. The data reveals that voter fraud is not a common practice. There are thousands of minorities in different areas of America that would be unable to vote if voter ID laws were made stricter in their district. When this is compared to the small number of voter fraud cases, it is clear that there is probably a hidden agenda in passing voter identification laws. The real motive is for politicians to gain an advantage in elections by preventing a percentage of minority voters from being able to voice their political opinions. This practice weakens the democratic process in America.

Gerrymandering

Gerrymandering is another way in which the democratic process is weakened in America. Gerrymandering is a term that refers to the process of redrawing district lines (Lublin 3). In America, votes are broken down into winner-takes-all districts. This means that if a politician can selectively redraw the district lines, it is possible to do so in a way that gives their political party a greater chance at winning the next election. For example, if two neighboring districts are equally divided between Democratic and Republican support, a politician could strategically redraw the lines. By establishing a new district that included a larger percent of support, it would be possible to gain a political advantage and increase the chances that the candidate or party would win in the next election (Lublin 48). The practice can also be used to weaken opposition. If the opposing political party holds a majority in several large districts, it is sometimes possible to break those districts down into smaller ones that do not feature majority control.

There are not many strong arguments that are in support of gerrymandering and the process of redistricting. It is obviously necessary to redraw district lines in certain instances when

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population numbers drastically change. However, it is widely recognized that the practice has been abused by politicians in the past. Democracy is about having equal voting power for all citizens. If someone lives in an area that was gerrymandered, then it is possible that their vote will not count as much as someone else who lives in a different district. Thus, gerrymandering weakens the democratic process in America.

Early Voting Programs

Early voting programs are designed to encourage new voters to take place in the democratic process. They typically offer incentives to new voters, such as shorter amounts of time in line at the polls, the ability to vote before other people, and an overall expedited voting process. One program is called “Souls to the Polls”, and is about encouraging voter participation from churches and many African-American communities (Gillispie). Such programs are sometimes cut from areas, and it is likely due to an attempt to suppress the political power of minorities. A true democracy is about getting everyone to voice their opinion on what they want from the government. Early voting programs are beneficial to democracy because they encourage political involvement. The programs are cut in some areas out of a claim that they are unfair. They give newer voters a preference in the process and allow them to have certain benefits that longstanding voters are not entitled to. Democracy is also about fairness. In some ways, people are correct when they argue that the early voting programs give an unfair advantage to new voters. However, it is a short-term benefit that usually only applies for their first voting experience. If people complain that it is not positive because democracies are about fairness, then those same people should also realize that political participation is another important element of democracies. Although the programs do give an advantage to new voters, they also strengthen the overall democratic process by having more voters involved.

The practice of removing early voter programs can be used to gain a political advantage. Since the programs are mainly targeted at minorities and people that are not educated in the political process, cutting them decreases the chances that members of those groups will vote. From a political party's standpoint, a political advantage can be gained by cutting early voter programs that would have otherwise resulted in more votes for the opposing party.

The evidence that exists in support of the idea that certain tactics are used for political advantage comes from several sources. In the instance of strict voter ID requirements, there are two sources of evidence. One is the low amount of voter fraud that actually takes place. If the laws were in fact about stopping fraud, then it is likely that they would have targeted other forms of fraud that are much more prevalent. In addition, there are also a high amount of swing states that feature voter ID restrictions. If the real purpose was to decrease instances of voter fraud, then it is likely that all states, or at least a substantial amount, would implement the practices. However, the data reveals that there are high concentrations of strict voter ID laws in

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competitive states. This serves as an indicator that there may be a hidden political strategy behind the voter ID laws. The publicly stated purpose of decreasing fraud may not be the only aim of such policies. The same concept applies to gerrymandering. If certain competitive districts redraw lines more frequently than the rest of the country, then it is possible that different motives exist for the redistricting. If the real purpose of redistricting was merely to divide up areas that are highly populated, then it is reasonable to assume that it would occur in many different areas. Redistricting has also occurred more frequently during electoral periods than during other periods, which is another indication that it is sometimes used to gain a political advantage. Similar to both of those issues, early voting programs also occur in many swing states and during electoral periods. An interesting point about early voting programs is that it is possible that they are used by the Democratic Party in order to gain increased support during competitive elections. However, this is arguably not such a bad thing. The purpose of Democracy is to get people involved in politics. Unless one party is specifically telling people to not participate unless it is for their party, then it is likely that they will also be getting opposing members to vote. Contrary to voter ID laws and gerrymandering, this practice actually increases voter turnout. It is possible that one party is using it strategically to gain additional votes and that the opposing party is getting it cut to prevent such tactics. However, it is not as bad for the democratic process as the other tactics because it increases voter turnout.

Conclusion

Tactics are used by both political parties to increase their chances of success and electoral victories. Most of the tactics state ulterior purposes in order to avoid gaining a negative public image. A careful look at the underlying data reveals that the real problematic issues are not necessarily the ones that are given the most attention from political officials. Instead, issues that can be used to increase party support and future electoral success are given increased attention. A real democracy is about ensuring that everyone's political voice is heard. It does not matter which social class or ethnic background a person comes from. If they are interesting in working in America and contributing to the political process, then their political voice should be heard. The democratic process in America is weakened by deceptive political tactics that suppress the political power of some people.

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