Low Voter Turnout Essay, Research Paper

There are many reasons that account for low voter turnout. First of all, it is evident that there is a decline in public interest for elections. Most American citizens feel that their vote does not matter, and seeing as they lead very busy lives they are not inclined to make time to vote when they feel as if their vote does not count. There also is a decline in the competition between the parties. In the 19th century, when voting rates were higher, the parties fought hard, got voters to the polls, made politics a participatory activity, kept registration simple and looked forward to close and exciting elections. Now a day, this no longer happens. American citizens have no motivation to vote as they once did. They are not made to feel that their vote matters. The many reforms made by the Progressives have also reduced voter turnout (Wilson 145).

The adoption of the Australian ballot reduced the high amount of fraudulent voting. The Australian ballot is a ballot printed by the government instead of by the parties and voters are allowed to cast their ballot in secret rather than in public as they were once made to do. This presented a more accurate voter turnout percentage. Voter registration regulations also became stricter, eliminating the large number of aliens from voting and cutting back on the number of blacks and transients who voted. The changes reduced not only fraudulent voting, but also voting in general. This is due to the fact that it became more difficult for voters with little education or who had recently moved to register and vote. Single-member districts also discouraged voters (Wilson 145).

In other countries, voting is more important because the governments there play a larger role in the lives of its citizens. Political parties in foreign countries mobilize voters and are able to get them to the polls very efficiently. The voter turnout in other countries, such as Europe and Australia, is higher because in Europe citizens are automatically registered and in Australia they are required to vote. If one does not vote in Australia they are fined. In some countries, voting day is even a holiday (Wilson 145).

Some people argue that lower voter turnout is not necessarily bad. It could mean the people are satisfied with the present state of the government. It may also be better because the number of educated votes being cast is higher due to the fact that highly educated people tend to vote more frequently.

There are many steps that could be taken to increase voter turnout in the United States. One method is to change single-member districts to proportional representation. This way, seats would be given according to the number of votes the person receives from the voters. Hopefully this would make voters feel as if their vote mattered and they would be more inclined to vote.

A second suggestion is to make voting compulsory, as it is in Australia. If people knew that they would be required to pay a fine if they did not vote, perhaps they would be more inclined to do so. Thus, the voter turnout would rise (Wilson 147).

The third suggestion is to place more significance on the voting process by making voting day a holiday. This would eliminate the hassle of American citizens having to make time to vote and hurrying back from work to their district to do so. If there were nothing to do on voting day but vote, more citizens would tend to do so.

A fourth suggestion is to copy the European system and have registration become automatic. In Europe, the government registers its citizens so that they do not have to and every adult citizen is automatically registered. To many American citizens, registration is a hassle. Americans have to learn how to register and when they must do so, they also have to acquire a registration form and when they finish filling it out, hand deliver it to the registrar. When an American citizen moves to a new state they must go through this process all over again. By adopting the European system, the hope is that more citizens will go to the booths on voting day if that is all they are required to do (Wilson 146-147).

The fifth and last suggestion is to increase the role that the federal government plays in the lives of its citizens. If government becomes more important to its citizens, the citizens will want to vote to ensure that the person they want is voted into office and the issues that are important to them are being dealt with. The parties and candidates themselves could increase voter turnout if they interacted with the voters more and tried to motivate them. Citizens are more likely to vote if they feel they know the candidate they are voting for and that that person cares what they think and about how they feel (Wilson 147).

Congress has already set programs into effect in order to improve voter turnout. One such example is the motor-voter bill. The motor-voter bill requires states to allow people to register to vote when they apply for their driver s license, to register at various state offices, and also by mail. Programs like these make it easier for Americans to register and in turn vote. Congress is confident that by putting programs similar to this into effect, the voter turnout will rise (Wilson 147-148).

In my opinion, the fact that voter turnout is so low does not necessarily have to be viewed as a bad thing. It could mean that citizens are satisfied with their government in its present state and also that more educated votes are being cast. If voting was made mandatory then there would be a lot of uneducated citizens voting, citizens who had no idea who they were voting for or what they stood for and were only voting because they were being forced to. It puts the government at risk for unfit candidates being elected to office and having unwise policies placed into effect.

There is also the argument that the decline in voter turnout is more apparent than it is real. The present day voter turnout is not that much lower than it would have been without fraudulent voting. Until the early twentieth century, voter fraud, such as ballot-box stuffing and intimidating voters, was very common. The Australian ballot reduced this. With the elimination of fraudulent voting and alien voting, we now have a true estimate of the voter turnout, most likely what it would have been before the Progressive movement if the votes had been legally cast and honestly counted. Also, if you compare democratic nations in terms of what percentage of their registered voters cast ballots then the United States voter turnout is not that low, it is actually about 87% in a presidential election (Wilson 145).

In the end, we can do things to make the voting process easier, but that does not necessarily mean the voter turnout will increase. Each American citizen makes his or her own choice whether or not to vote. It would be impossible for the government or any other institution to influence everyone or make voting easier for everyone. If American citizens were forced to vote, it would be infringing on their rights of freedom of speech granted in the bill of rights.

I believe that the decline in voter turnout is not a true crisis. It does not harm the government in any way or cause any problems. Nor does low voter turnouts offend any basic principles or manifest any social sicknesses

(Diclerico and Hammock 66-67). The only thing low voter turnout does do, is make Americans appear lazy and unappreciative in the eyes of other democratic nations that have high voter turnout. However, since when has the United States ever been truly concerned with the opinions of other countries? Never is the answer, so why should we start now? My conclusion is that we shouldn t. We can make changes in the system and incorporate new programs, but nothing will change until American citizens themselves decide that low voter turnout is a problem and that it needs to be remedied.

Works Cited

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