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### **Strengthening the American Vote**

Within America's representative democracy, the ideal citizen would be embedded with protection from this institutional power. Recently there has been an uptake in civil unrest. Individual Americans express feelings of powerlessness in the face of institutional and corporate power systems. This impression of helplessness has led many to believe the American political system beyond saving which creates apathy. Although one could argue the majority population does not control the government anymore, the people still have power; the right to vote. Implementing Ranked-choice voting would allow the individual vote to become stronger and give voter's the freedom to vote outside of party lines.

The current two-party system allows for united parties that have the ability to create large impacts, but this also ostracizes divergent viewpoints. By having a two-party system, Americans often have to "pick the lesser of two evils" or risk their vote being inconsequential. This disillusion of true choice results in legislative stagnation and almost little to no change for the individual who wants to create change. It further ostracizes individual leaders with alternative viewpoints by excluding them from viability for running for public office.

The perilous task of expunging the two-party system from the American government appears to be almost impossible. It is not likely that the very people you put into power would

legislate to move the power from themselves more into the hands of the voter. Ranked-Choice voting could be the answer to strengthening the representational component of our voting system that has marginalized many individuals all throughout history. By implementing Ranked-choice voting into local and state government elections, civilians will have the choice between many candidates and it will begin to destabilize the hold of the stalemated two-party system that actively creates more space for abuse of power.

Without oversight, issues normally tasked to governments like the regulation of corporate institutions go unchecked and grow in power as well as brutality. The bureaucracy that exists within large institutions creates voids of personal responsibility and care for fellow individuals by hiding behind the distance of corporate policy. Entrusting institutions with human well-being allows a space for the dehumanization of each individual allowing people to just become numbers in the system. Legislation passed by the people has the importance of keeping institutions in check. As a capitalistic society, America views institutions as the foundation of harmony, cooperation, and economic function. Although institutions can have underlying positive functions, they become significantly more negative without active legislation keeping human impact balanced against growth and profit. Most corporate institutions have a goal of becoming larger, normally done through fiscal achievements and growth. Pecuniary objectives help institutions reach more people but creates an echelon that rarely uplifts moral ideals. Governmental oversight of corporations and other institutions offer safety to the individual because governments should protect and support the people.

Through a variety of means, government agents, elected to oversee and regulate institutions, sometimes favor corporate and social institutions over the individual citizen. Several examples of governments working in favor of institutions more than the people can be found throughout

history; exemplifying how those in power turn a blind eye on purpose or reside completely unaware of the brutality being done by powerful institutions. As humanity evolves the move from monarchies and dynasties towards democracy illustrates the attempt to balance the power of governmental institutions.

One colonizer of Mexico, Bernal Diaz Del Castillo, exemplifies a far historical example of how this can happen and harm entire civilizations. In the novel *The Conquest of New Spain*, readers learn about the so-called religious saving that the Spanish conquistadors completed in Mexico. This book displays an important lesson on the danger of complete power. What modern readers can infer from the story is the brutality that the Spanish brought in the name of religious salvation to the native people of Mexico. The dreadful acts that were committed were seen as the wishes of the ruler at that time, her majesty the Queen of Spain, Catherine de Medici. As the story goes on it becomes clear that the actions of Bernal Diaz were not directed from the Queen. In fact, she was completely unaware of the actions being taken on her behalf.<sup>1</sup> The colonization of the American continent can not be diminished to a few events that happened at the hands of Bernal Diaz and his men, however one can make assumptions to how royal oversight, or regulations, could have minimized damage done to the Mexican people. It can not be expected that those in power just act in a benevolent way however and the checks and balances of democracy return the power to the people being governed.

Government regulations on corporations function to limit power of in-humane institutions, in America however this seems to be the opposite. A more modern day example can be found in our current American struggle with political campaign funding. Institutions hold the ability to influence government legislation, the same legislation that restricts and oversees any

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<sup>1</sup> Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain* (London: Penguin Classics, 1963).

unethical choices. In the supreme court case of Citizens United V. FEC <sup>2</sup> the supreme court ruled that corporations can donate an indefinite amount of money to political campaigns. Essentially, large companies have the freedom to bribe any public figure allowing corporations to legally create things like tax breaks, shell companies, and LLC's, all of which only allow continued abuse of individuals. In the past year of 2020 over 55 major corporations, such as Nike, Cabot Oil & Gas, and HP, each having a profit ranging from \$8 million to \$3 billion, paid \$0 in federal taxes.<sup>3</sup> The quintessential lack of accountability of corporations tax dollars shows just how much power institutions have in the American courts. Governmental restrictions set up rules that put the individual person before the cooperations, or people over profit. Without these legislations more and more Americans suffer at the hands of corporate institutions.

With America's history with categorizing different demographics it comes to no surprise that social institutions also influence America's legal system. The remnants of a society where only white men who owned land could vote, still reside without the courts of the justice system. Represented not only by the overly privileged people in power, but in smaller systems as well there remains injustice. Corporate regulations originate from the same place as the American justice system, and with a lack of oversight on corporations we also see a lack of scrutiny for old prejudiced government systems.

Walter McMillian, an accused murderer, suffers at the hands of unrecognized social institutions, or in his specific case, white public opinion. In the book *Just Mercy*, Walter McMillan was accused of killing a girl, but when his lawyer challenges the ruling and asks for another trial the Judge says "he couldn't authorize a trial in a community where so many people

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<sup>2</sup> "Citizens United v." FEC, <https://www.fec.gov/legal-resources/court-cases/citizens-united-v-fec/>. Accessed 19 May 2022.

<sup>3</sup> 55 Corporations Paid \$0 in Federal Taxes on 2020 Profits, 2 April 2021 <https://itep.org/55-profitable-corporations-zero-corporate-tax/>

had formed opinions about the accused.” This judge almost outright says that the evidence was weak and ultimately the ruling could have been wrong, but because the public had made a judgment he could not challenge that. This goes without saying, but the ‘public’ he speaks about resides in the white public of the city. This quote also implies the judge could ultimately make the decision to re-ensate a new trial, but in doing so risks his re-election. The white community had more power over the re-election of this judge and so in order to appease them refused to even hear the arguments in a new trial. This power imbalance between the white community and the black community reflects in how Walter McMillian's trial is handled. Due to specific parties or demographics having more political influence than others, the legislation favors these groups leading to abuse of marginalized groups.

Representative democracy supposedly allows the general population to restrict large dehumanizing institutions, as well as create a space for all voices to be heard equally and not place certain demographics over others. However, different and underrepresented communities know that the opposite tends to be the reality in America. These communities feel burdened with watching government policies being influenced by groups who these said policies do not affect. Sometimes even large groups of demographics don’t have enough power to create change due to unfair representation and systems that specifically limit representation within government.

In the US 61% of voters believe that Roe v. Wade should not be overturned and that a woman’s right to safe abortion should be legal.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the Supreme Court will be allowing states to limit a woman’s right to a safe abortion, which will result in over thirty states solidifying the terrifying regulation into law. A citizen's right to vote presumably allows the

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<sup>4</sup> “U.S. Public Continues to Favor Legal Abortion, Oppose Overturning Roe v. Wade.” *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy*, Pew Research Center, 30 May 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/08/29/u-s-public-continues-to-favor-legal-abortion-oppose-overturning-roe-v-wade/>.

general public to create legislation to limit institutions, but now the other seems to be true, institutions regulating the general public.

An example of a societal institution having an unbalanced power can be found in Mary Wolfstonecraft memoir *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She says, “I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves.” An overwhelming majority of law makers in America identify as male, yet they create legislation that only affects women. Essentially, telling women they have power over themselves, but due to a lack of female representation, male demographics have more power and can create inhumane legislation. The fight for control of the American representatives was never just about restricting institutions and the inhumane conditions they wrought in America, but about gaining control over one’s own self and community.

Understanding America’s complex interweaving of governmental structure and societal systems, or institutions, is a privilege only the educated can usually navigate. Although most Americans vote, many do not have the time or deep understanding of these systems to make choices that would truly represent them as individuals or what they value. Both a lack of time to learn about the political system and the education to do such learning derive from the harsh reality within societal systems of poverty. Any American who lives in poverty must focus on other more immediate issues, such as rent, food, and providing for any dependents. They do not have the privilege of time or money to go to a university to gain understanding of the nuanced inner workings of the system they live within and vote to create change for themselves.

Charles Dickens uses satire to exemplify how systems do not give the poor the same opportunities. In his book *Hard Times* the antagonist Mr. Gradgrind says “Any capitalist ... who had made sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence, always professed to wonder why the sixty

thousand nearest Hands didn't each make sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence, and more or less reproached them every one for not accomplishing the little feat. What I did you can do. Why don't you go and do it?"<sup>5</sup> Poverty does not allow the American people to take time to scrutinize the system they live within, forcing a lack of action upon those who would change the system if given the change.

The narrowness of those who actively vote and the extreme polarization of the two-party government institution have left political figures unable to compromise and work for the average citizen in productive ways. Sitting members of government pressure each other to vote through party lines, instead of the reason they should have been elected, to represent the needs of their constituents. Congress even has a specific title and position for keeping figures within the bounds of their party, the Majority Whip. This figure, tasked with organizing their party members for cohesive votes, demonstrates the value of party lines over individual issues. Essentially Majority Whips threaten to remove party support from candidates if they do not vote in accordance with the rest of the party. Due to the two-party system, public figures can not afford to disagree with their said party, or they risk their next election. Politicians also can not leave to the other party due to the almost celebrity status and background the public holds on them. Current public figures must choose to vote along party lines, or face almost certain failure come the next election cycle. Through this, even if an individual falls outside of the normal category of a political figure (white, old, rich, and male) they quickly force a closed rank and vote in accordance with the majority of the party or risk being ostracized from their elected position.

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<sup>5</sup> Dickens, Charles. *Hard times*. Edited by George Harry Ford, et al., Norton, 1990. Accessed 20 May 2022.

Ranked Voting sounds complex in comparison to contemporary voting, but it simply allows the most favored candidate to win. Voters must pick a party, once registered to either the Republicans or Democrats in a pre-major election voting session voters can decide which candidates they want their party to put forth. Then during the major election everyone votes for either the Republican candidate or the Democratic candidate. Then, each public office has a unique system to decide who wins the election.

In the case of the Presidency candidates must win through the electoral college, a system that gives each state a set amount of votes, and to win they must gain two hundred seventy votes. This system works perfectly for a two-party system, it allows voters to decide who they wish their party to put forth, but what if citizens wanted more than just two options? Ranked voting, allows voters to put value in more than just a single candidate.

Ranked-choice voting requires citizens not simply to pick their favorite among their parties' candidates, but to rank all of the given candidates, regardless of party, from favorite to least favorite. This allows voters to place candidates they really do not like at the very bottom and candidates they like, but not their favorite, in a second-place category. This new system would allow for a more accurate depiction of who voters truly value and don't value, instead of simply a yes or no to candidates put forth by a party.

The 2020 presidential election was a momentous election for many people, voters felt that this election held a lot of value and that many important topics were at stake. The importance Americans felt regarding this election was reflected by the voter turnout, the largest number of voters ever seen before in the history of the United States. The democratic primary voted to put forth Joe Biden as a Candidate and The Republican party put forth Donald Trump, with the democratic party winning the executive branch seat. On both sides of the race, countless



numbers of individuals spoke out about how although a candidate was not their favorite, a vote for them was a vote against the other candidate. Again placing voters in the position of picking the lesser of two evils. If ranked-choice voting had been implemented for the 2020 presidential election, a completely different candidate could have won.

In the primaries for each party, the democrat Bernie Sanders was eliminated and the Republican candidate Ted Cruz was eliminated as well. Both these candidates were lost before the majority of the population could vote on them. Ranked-choice voting would eliminate the need for only two candidates and would allow for multiple candidates. Say for example, that during the 2020 presidential election voters had these four options; Joe Biden, Ted Cruz, Donald Trump, and Bernie Sanders. Each voter would rank from first place to fourth on how they viewed each candidate. Then once voting had completed the votes tallied only based on everyone's first choice, if a candidate had more than 50% of voter support they won, a true majority over all other candidates. If not, the person who came in with the least, let's say, Ted Cruz, gets removed from the race completely. After the removal of Ted Cruz, anyone who put him as their first option now gets their second choice counted as their first. If after his removal one of the remaining candidates had an overwhelming majority they win, if not the process of removing the last candidate repeats.

In this example, say that Donald Trump was the third-place winner after counting everyone's 1st choices and people who ranked Cruz as their initial pick, the second option. After his elimination everyone whose vote went to him, now moves the remaining candidates. Many people's first choices might still be the only one counted, but a select few now on their 3rd choice. The difference with using ranked choice voting, even after the elimination of a favorite candidate, voters still get a choice on who they wish to win the public office. Now with only two

candidates left one must have a majority over the other, and everyone's vote is counted towards one of the two. Ranked choice voting gives the opportunity to favorite candidates, without the worry of a vote becoming useless because it was used for an unlikely candidate.

The stalemate in Washington between two different major parties has created a weakness that allows for grievous, misaction, or lack-of-action on the behalf of the government. These historical examples illustrate the need for our representative democracy to evolve into a more comprehensive voting system. With the implementation of ranked voting, citizens would be allotted the space to empower candidates that reach outside the modern scope of political figures. With public office holders less motivated to create legislation along party lines, Americans could hope to see legislation around voter focused importance, thus encouraging change within Washington. This upsets the control the two parties have within the American government, forcing candidates to either make change or risk losing spots to candidates who will make much needed change.

Americans can sense the shift of attitude towards legislation builders, and the change that will ensue. In times of powerlessness individuals almost always find the will to overcome systems that harm the individual person. Human nature drives this fight within us to create change, when change is necessary. This can be seen throughout history, but exemplified perfectly by Fredrik Douglas who says “I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master as to the kindly 8 of my mistress acknowledged the benefit of both.”<sup>6</sup> If the abuse of the American legal system continues, voters will force change upon representatives. When this happens, the best tool average citizens will have at their disposal will be ranked-choice voting. Forcefully

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<sup>6</sup> Gates, Henry Louis, editor. *The Classic Slave Narratives*. Signet Classics, 2012. Accessed 20 May 2022.

dismantling the two-party system to be replaced with a more inclusive and plentiful system that better represents American citizens' wants and needs.