

Democracy at Risk

[Article 2 of the Nehemiah Articles]

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Democracy is America's chosen form of governance, not monarchy, dictatorship or anarchy. And Democracy is based on the recurring process of voting. Therefore, ALL laws and many aspects of American society can be changed by simply voting for changes.

We can even vote for changes about voting. Originally, only adult male, property-owning, free persons could vote, but eventually the electorate expanded to include non-property owners (by 1856), all free males (1860s), women (1920), and individuals aged 18 to 21 (1971). Poll taxes were eliminated in 1964.

But there still remain some aspects of voter disenfranchisement. For instance, ten states permanently ban felons from voting, even after serving their sentences. And gerrymandering is still legal to give geographical advantage or disadvantage to some candidates or constituents.

Also, because the only votes counted are from eligible voters who are actually present (or who have submitted absentee ballots), a long-standing "trick" to win elections is to prevent opposing people from voting. This can be done by using physical intimidation, legalistic complications, corruption, or inconvenience (location and number of polling places, as in the 2016 Arizona primary elections). Whenever democracy is denied to persons, Democracy of the nation is at risk.

With a few exceptions for very small groups (such as clubs and business partners), democratic governance is usually by elected representatives (ranging from members of a board of directors to members of Congress) and elected executives (governors and Presidents). The representatives are empowered to vote (and executives can take direct action) on behalf of their constituents.

Essentially, the people can have their say, and then the elected ones can have their way. Since elected representatives can pass laws that increasingly favor certain positions, those who influence elected officials with money, lobbying and endorsements can alter the direction of the nation. The money of our Capitalist Economic System is overpowering our Democratic Governance System.

Note that this discussion is not about the election **process**; it is about efforts devised to ensure elected **politicians** favor a specific point of view when laws and rules are being decided.

In 2010 the traditional and legal restrictions limiting anonymous political donations by corporations were removed by the U.S. Supreme Court split-decision (5 to 4) on a campaign finance case by "Citizens United" (a non-profit **organization** that promotes **corporate** interests). Now Super PACs (Political Action Committees) roam freely to establish their influence over elected persons by donations and campaign announcements, presented as freedom of speech under First Amendment protection.

For example, Big Oil (large oil companies) can support candidates from either political party who would favor fossil fuel usage, and vigorously oppose those who are anti-Big Oil or favor environmental

protection and renewable energy. Impersonal, non-living, profit-motivated corporate entities use business muscle to alter the opinions of voters, placing Democracy at risk.

The American tradition of having only two major political parties is becoming detrimental because the elected legislators are increasingly controlled by party leadership that influences the longevity and success of their political careers. Voting along “party lines” is infamous when key issues are being discussed, and anyone who steps out of line faces drastic consequences from their party elders/leaders. Term limits would end the abuses of “serial incumbents.”

Having “control” (a simple majority) in the House of Representatives and/or the Senate has become a blunt weapon for holding hostage the legislative interests and proposals of a President (or state governor) who is of the opposing party. National examples abound. At state level, Illinois has gone ten months without a budget (as of April 2016), with no sign of compromise.

America does not need a third political party. What it needs is a modest number of truly independent elected legislators. Ten percent (10%) would be sufficient. Ten U.S. Senators and forty-three Representatives could take control of Congress by voting with constructive reasoning. This would strengthen Democracy in America.

Nothing is perfect. Politics tend to be dirty with many “under the table” (but not illegal) dealings. Rules are made. Rules can be changed. Two examples from the current 2016 Presidential Primary Elections in America are:

1. Republicans: Donald Trump missed the boat on the selection of the delegates to the Republican Convention. Winning in a state’s primary does not mean that the delegates selected to attend the convention will be loyal to Trump after the first ballot. Regardless of Trump’s complaints, the rules were there all along. It is as if a businessman did not fully read a business contract before he signed it. It is not unfair.
2. Democrats: Concerning Black voters and southern Democrats, Hillary Clinton has a massive popularity advantage over Bernie Sanders. This translated into her winning of 701 vs. Sanders’ 331 pledged delegates in the eleven southern-state primary elections, an advantage of 370 delegates to help her win the party’s nomination.

However, based on decades of solid southern voting for Republicans, neither Clinton nor Sanders is likely to win more than two or three of those eleven southern states in the November general elections. Without those pledged southern-states delegates, Sanders would be approximately 130 pledged delegates ahead of Clinton at this time (post New York primary). The convention rules will not be changed, but perhaps the Super Delegates will see and act upon this reality of Sanders’ superior numbers in northern and western states.

The good news is that American democracy allows for voting on changes to improve the system. While Democracy is always better than the alternatives, it is placed at risk whenever the population fails to defend and improve its implementation, including controls on the influence of money.

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Factual information in this article was obtained from Wikipedia articles on the topics.