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“The Threat of Gerrymandering to Voting Rights”

by

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Voting is a crucial part of the democratic process in the United States and a responsibility reserved to the people. Through voting, one has their say in who the representatives of their country are and what laws are passed, altering the future and state of the country as a whole. With such emphasized importance of this right in the democratic process, why do so many people pass on this responsibility?

In recent decades, only 60% of the eligible population votes during presidential elections, with a lower 40% for midterms. A record low was reached in 1924 at 48% after women's voting rights were obtained. How could this be, that after the eligible voter population increases, voter turnout reaches an all time low? Turnout has never quite recovered since, until 2018 and 2020 marked the highest voter turnout in over a century. This long period of low turnout, and still relatively low, brings into question if any external factors play a role.

The U.S. has a complicated voting system to put it vaguely, which is often criticized for not truly constituting a representative democracy. One of the largest issues that contribute to this is gerrymandering. Gerrymandering is when political districts are redistricted in such a way that it favors one party over another. Each state draws new district boundaries every 10 years.

Not only is gerrymandering problematic due to the fact that it gives parties unfair advantages, but it can also take voice away from the people, specifically minorities who can be gerrymandered against. Although gerrymandering has been around since 1812, this gives explanation as to why voter turnout decreased so sharply after the Nineteenth Amendment was passed and is only beginning to fully recover. Additionally, it has been

concluded that the more gerrymandering there is, the less voter turnout, due to an accumulation of poor voter efficacy.

Our state of being a democracy is often a point of pride for the United States. However, with gerrymandering being an ever present issue, it sends democracy into a downward spiral. There are solutions however. California and Arizona have put reforms in place that prohibit politicians from drawing their own districts. In Michigan, citizen-activists passed a ballot to create their own independent, criteria-specific commission for redistricting. In 2019, the House of Representatives passed the We the People Act, which would require every state to use independent commissions to draw their federal districts. The bill was blocked by the Senate but it lays a strong foundation for future efforts to take down gerrymandering.

In order for us to truly take pride in our democracy, the founding principle of active participation of the people in government and protection of their rights must stay true, for as stated by William Greider, "Americans cannot teach democracy to the world until they restore their own". Voting must remain accessible and voters must truly feel that their vote matters and isn't manipulated in any way. Voting rights must remain protected for an ideal democracy deserving of pride.