

## Extra Credit

During Reconstruction, former Confederates were bent on preventing the newly freed slaves from participating in government. Once Congressional Reconstruction took hold, these Confederates were removed from power and Federal soldiers enforced the new civil rights laws and Constitutional Amendments. However, once Reconstruction ended, this brief period of time in which African Americans were able to participate in government (voting and holding political office) also ended. Jim Crow Laws took effect, denying African Americans a real voice in government for 100 years (plus?).

Today, we live in an even more diverse nation (mostly due to the immigration law enacted in 1965), with even more minorities than in the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras. Although the Civil Rights Movement removed many of the barriers that had once kept minorities without a voice in government, this notion of voter suppression continues to make the news.

Many minorities (and the Democratic Party, whose politician often rely on minority votes) believe that the Republican Party is engaging in voter suppression tactics around the nation. Republicans deny this charge, stating that they are trying to protect the election process. Here is a list of recent things that have occurred. The facts are presented first. Then each side's argument is presented:

### 1. Voter Purges

**Facts:** In several states, citizens have had their voter registrations removed if they have not voted in the past several elections. In order to vote in the next election, each voter will have to re-register to vote. This is called voter roll purging. Most states have purged voter rolls in the past. Recently, the states that have performed these purges (removing hundreds of thousands of voting registrations) are controlled by the Republican Party.

**Democratic Party View:** This is a tactic to suppress voters, particularly minority voters who have a harder time in getting registered to vote. Why do they have a harder time? Minorities tend to work hourly-paid jobs and are not able to take time off work to go to the DMV or Clerk's Office to wait in line for voter registration. Even if they can take the time off (or their day off is on a day in which the government office is open), poorer people are more concerned with getting through life in the present time, rather than worrying about registering to vote for a future election. Also, many minorities, elderly (minority or not), and disabled (minority or not) have more difficulty in gaining transportation to register to vote. Furthermore, voters are notified by mail that their votes have been purged, usually only once. It is easy for busy working-class people to overlook these mailings.

**Republican Party View:** Purging voter rolls protects the election process by reducing the risk of voter fraud. People move out of state – it would be bad if someone voted in two states in the same election. People are convicted of felonies – which removes their eligibility to vote. It would be bad if a felon whose vote was legitimately removed was actually able to cast a vote. Purging voter rolls also forces people to inform the state that

they have moved addresses within the state. By forcing them to re-register to vote, the state can accurately know where voters are living. This will enable voting precincts to know how many voters to expect on election day. By knowing accurate addresses, the precincts can also know with accuracy that any mail-in (absentee) ballots are being sent to the right person.

## 2. Voter ID Laws

Facts: Some states (mostly controlled by Republicans) require that voters show a photo ID when they vote, otherwise they are not allowed to vote.

Democratic Party View: Similar to the obstacles that poor and minority voters experience in registering to vote (discussed above in the Purging issue), requiring a photo ID puts a heavier burden on minorities, elderly, and the disabled than on white, non-elderly, and non-disabled voters.

Republican Party View: By requiring a photo ID, the precinct poll workers on election day can accurately determine that a voter is who (s)he says (s)he is. This prevents voter fraud.

## 3. Gerrymandering

Facts: The U.S. Constitution guarantees that citizens are allowed to vote. Each voter is equal (“one man [person], one vote”). The U.S. Census officially counts the American population every 10 years, a mandate in the Constitution. For example, the year 2020 is a Census Year. However, the redistribution of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives (and therefore the Electoral College, as well) does not occur until after the Census Year. So, the 2020 Electoral College is based on the 2010 Census. Usually, the redistribution occurs in the year or two after the Census. So the new Electoral College and distribution of U.S. House of Representatives seats are determined by the following election (in the 2020 Census case, by 2022). Once it has been determined how many House of Representatives seats each state will have, it is up to each state legislature to draw the maps of their respective state’s Congressional districts. In 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that gerrymandering for political purposes must be addressed at the state level, not the federal level. See the video explaining gerrymandering. See the chart on which party has held control at the state level in the last 20 years.

Democratic Party View: After the 2010 Census, the Republicans were able to gerrymander many states, locking in an unbalanced amount of power that is not truly representative of the nation. The fact that Republicans have only won the Popular Vote in a Presidential election once in the last 30 years reflects the true sentiments of the majority of Americans. Essentially, by gerrymandering, the Republican Party has cheated voters – even though voters cast their ballots, the elections have been partially “rigged.” Essentially, gerrymandering is a process in which “politicians choose voters” rather than the democratic process of “voters choose politicians.” Since the Republicans control so

many state legislatures, no law will be passed in those states that will make gerrymandering illegal – thus it will perpetually continue.

Republican Party View: Gerrymandering is legal, as long as each state allows it. The voters (should) know how this process all works. Therefore, if the Republican Party is voted into office after the U.S. Census, the voters are apparently choosing the Republican Party to draw the district maps.

#### 4. Mail-In Ballots (Absentee Ballots)

Facts: All states allow some voters to mail-in their vote (also called Absentee Voting), depending on the reason (such as military servicemembers stationed outside their home state). In roughly one third of states, voters must offer an excuse to receive an Absentee Ballot. The other two thirds of states do not require an excuse. See the Map of Mail-In Voting. In a few states, all voters are mailed an Absentee Ballot – these states are called “All Mail Voting” States. This does not mean that voters can only vote by mail, it means that all voters have the option to vote by mail. Mail-in voting has been shown to increase voter turnout, especially for local elections (which tend to have less voter turnout than Presidential Elections). Some Republicans have publically stated that mail-in voting is not good for their party. The highest ranking Republican to state this is President Donald Trump. In an interview on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 by the Fox and Friends television program, he was asked about proposals that Democrats had wanted included in a COVID-19 Pandemic law to make things easier for people to vote, including mail-in ballots. Trump responded, "The things they had in there were crazy. They had things - levels of voting that, if you ever agreed to it, you'd never have a Republican elected in this country again." This has led to a partisan debate over mail-in ballots during the COVID-19 Pandemic with over 40 states under state government directions to stay at home.

Democratic Party View: Using mail-in ballots, especially during a pandemic, is a logical thing to do, as it allows voters to continue to perform their civic duty while remaining safe.

Republican Party View: Mail-in ballots increase the potential for voter fraud.

#### 5. Individual State Suppression Case Study of Wisconsin

Facts: The State of Wisconsin has seen a turbulent political environment recently. In 2010, Republican Scott Walker was elected Governor. However, he was forced into a Recall Election in 2012, which resulted in his re-election. In 2018, Scott Walker was defeated by his Democratic Party rival, Tony Evers. Three weeks before Evers took office as Wisconsin Governor, the Republican controlled state legislature enacted laws that limited the powers of the Governor and the State Attorney General (also about to be filled by a Democrat) so that these officials could not roll back previous changes made by the Republicans during Governor Walker’s tenure. The outgoing Governor, Scott Walker, signed those power limiting legislative bills into law. In advance of the Wisconsin

election of April 2020 (in which several elections were on the ballot, including Presidential Primaries, local issues, and a key State Supreme Court Justice seat), Democratic Governor Evers requested that the election be postponed, as several other states had already done, in light of the dangers of people in close proximity at the voting polls during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Republican State Legislature denied this request. The governor then requested that mail-in ballots be accepted after the election day, as many Wisconsin voters had yet to even receive their ballots due to less staffing in precincts and increased demand due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The U.S. Supreme Court, along partisan lines, ruled that the mail-in ballots had to be postmarked by the Post Office on the day of the election – no extension allowed.

Democratic Party View: The Republicans in Wisconsin have gerrymandered and cheated the voters of Wisconsin repeatedly. To make matters worse, the voter suppression during the COVID-19 Pandemic is blatantly obvious. Many of the state's Democratic voters live in urban areas, which could not support the normal numbers of precincts to allow voting. Thus, in Milwaukee, only 5 voting precincts were available on election day (out of the normal 180). This forced voters, much of whom were minority, to stand in line for hours in order to vote. Yet, in rural areas of Wisconsin, dominated by Republican voters, voters were not subject to long lines. Worse, by refusing to extend the mail-in voting deadline, voters were forced to choose between their health and safety and voting.

Republican Party View: The fact that Governor Walker was re-elected in the Recall Election of 2012 is proof of the will of the Wisconsin people. Democrats have to realize they do not hold the "right answer" on everything – other people have their own views on how the state should be run. Which is why they vote the way they do. In terms of the COVID-19 Pandemic, it has been in the news since January 2020. Thus, voters had plenty of time to request mail-in ballots. Furthermore, historically it has been shown that changing electoral processes just before an election is a tactic used by those bent on one-party rule and totalitarianism. Playing around with elections is a dangerous thing to democracy. This is why the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the way it did. To protect democracy. Furthermore, mail-in ballots increase the risk of voter fraud.

Assignment:

1. Write your opinion on each of the five issues summarized above. Feel free to do your own research too (just be sure to look at the source!). Are the Republicans suppressing votes, as the Democrats claim, or are they protecting democracy, as they claim? Cite evidence to support your opinion/argument. All five issues must be addressed in order to receive credit.
2. From what you have learned (from this extra credit and from this course), how important is it for every American to vote?