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A Solution to Gerrymandering

Alabama is not exactly a model of democratic values and freedom. Much of the political practices within the state have roots in the racism that was sewn with the seeds on a plantation. After the 2020 census, the state legislature of Alabama redistricted its congressional house seats, but the result employed a gerrymandering tactic known as packing. This strategy pushes all of the voters that represent a specific group into one district to prevent that group from winning multiple districts. Following several appeals and lawsuits, the Supreme Court declared the map in violation of Section Two of the Voters Rights Act of 1965. The federal court drew the map that will be used in 2024 despite multiple protests from the state legislature. (League of Women Voters). While the problem is solved for now, this is definitely not Alabama's first attempt at gerrymandering, and it probably won't be the last. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel for Alabamian voters. After the decennial census, a small committee with equal representation should be tasked with redistricting in a way that protects the voters. This will prevent gerrymandering and thus provide better representation for minority voters and increase voter turnout.

First, this committee would prevent voter discrimination because a single party could not control redistricting. Alabama has a long history rooted in racism, and starting with the

thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments, the government used numerous tactics to keep Alabama's population segregated. A government with racist tendencies instituted well-known policies such as literacy tests and a grandfather clause to prevent black citizens from exercising their right to vote. Unsurprisingly, it was a white majority that both voted for these actions and benefited them, and the opposing party began to cater to black voters as the Supreme Court struck down the discriminatory policies. The scars of this demographic polarization survive today, as the Pew Research Center found, eight out of ten African American voters in Alabama lean democratic or liberal. Alabama Republicans have not received anything resembling a majority from African American voters in recent years. Even excluding the undertone of racism, this gives the party a massive incentive to prevent a majority black district, and it has proven to be true. Six out of seven Alabama Congressional Districts are represented by Republicans, despite a consistent thirty-five percent count in most elections for the Democratic Party (CNN). The blatantly racist electoral map used in 2022 exemplifies the Republican Party's attempts to curb the voice of black voters. A twenty-eight percent population only received one majority African American district despite a significant proportional growth since the preceding census. In a world in which Alabama Republicans do not have the final say, it would be significantly harder for this level of voter suppression to occur. The lack of a Republican supermajority would prevent this type of gerrymandering and provide a more democratic result. In addition to lacking support from minority voters, Republicans in Alabama need to be socially conservative to maintain a majority among rural white voters: "Alabama voted Democratic in every presidential election from 1876 until 1948" (Frederick). The strong lean toward the democratic party stemmed from its support of segregation and a favoritism for increased devolution to the states. The democrats of this era preferred that each state have more power while the Republicans

avored a larger central government, a stark contrast to the modern day. However, it was not the stance on government control that persuaded white Southerners to vote Republican ballots:

“Within the state, Republicans took advantage of the social liberalism of the Democratic Party and made inroads at the local, county, and state levels” (Frederick). It was the social stance of the Republicans that wooed white Alabamians towards the party, reinforcing the importance of racism in political decision making. It was when Democrats such as Harry Truman began supporting social changes such as an integrated military (Frederick) that curbed the majority vote in favor of Republicans. This history has not lost its meaning in today’s world, as the socially conservative policies of the Republicans act as a shield of armor for securing a majority. It is uniquely important that a political party whose majority is based on catering to southern racism does not get the final say on whose vote counts for which candidate. Despite the twisted and awful nature, it is a strategically beneficial move for the republican party to limit the say of black voters as it appeals to its white supporters. If an equal share from members for both parties were forced to make the decision together, it would not only provide relief for a moderate Republican majority but for the entire demographic of African American voters in the state.

In addition, a bipartisan committee to reduce the effects of gerrymandering also shows promise for increased voter turnout. The purpose of gerrymandering as a whole is to gain a political advantage in elections, whether it be by diluting the pool into multiple districts or packing a group into a singular one. This practice is a staple in most states with a large political majority and occurs even in “battleground” states such as Michigan. There are numerous plans for gerrymandering across the country, and there are numerous negative impacts. “The enacted plans across all states create significantly fewer highly competitive seats” (Kenney et al., 4). When elections are manipulated in favor of a party, they become significantly less competitive as

it ensures victory for a certain party. This competitiveness is incredibly important: “Only one major party running in the election was associated with a 4.5% drop in turnout, equivalent to 22,500 fewer people choosing to vote whereas elections with only one candidate had, on average, a 14.6% drop in turnout, or 73,000 voters in the district.” (Jordan 30). Voter turnout is incredibly important to democracy because if people are not actively participating in elections, then the government is representative only of the small portion who do vote. Participation is the lifeblood of democracies, and the United States manages to keep its levels significantly lower than other major democracies, mostly due to the ease at which a singular political party can gerrymander. The aforementioned committee can bring a solution to this issue by pulling gerrymandering from the roots up and forcing warring political parties to agree on districts for the voter, not for the politician. It can draw the government’s attention away from polarized competition, even if only for a moment, to benefit the voter.

Ultimately, Alabama’s gerrymandering problem needs to be solved because it negatively affects the voices of minorities and reduces voter turnout. The solution is to form a bipartisan committee with equal representation from both major political parties. Gerrymandering hurts democracy to its core and damages the credibility of elections. It allowed racism to root its way into governmental procedures that can affect the country on a national scale through congressional elections. The easy wins that parties secure for themselves disenfranchise minority voters who tend to vote toward a certain party, in addition to discouraging voter turnout. It is necessary to prioritize not the vote but the voter in an election, and until governments acknowledge that fact, they cannot function as truly representative. This major flaw in American democratic processes has been present since the first congressional elections, and preceding action, it will continue to rip at the fabric of American democracy.

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