

General Suffrage and Its Downsides

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In western society, democracy has been viewed as an integral part of an equal and inclusive society for quite some time now. In particular, the majority of developed countries adopted the policy of general suffrage in order to make sure every citizen gets to express his or her thoughts and influences the political course of his or her state's growth. In general, it is safe to say that this kind of approach is intuitively appealing, as it promises a political system that is free of any discrimination and is difficult to corrupt since any effort to do so will inevitably fail because of the diversity of voters. However, recently, many experts have started questioning this approach, emphasizing the fact that a great percentage of regular citizens are not politically aware enough to make the best choices, and that this policy does not take into account the contribution to the country's development of each voter.

The Definition of General Suffrage

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, the term "common suffrage" is used to describe the "right of all adult citizens to vote in an election" ("Universal Suffrage," n.d.). Historically, the policy of general suffrage was not extremely popular due to a wide spectrum of social prejudice, inequality issues, and the dictatorial nature of the governmental systems prevalent before the rise of democracy. However, as the countries of the western world developed socially and economically, the paradigm began to shift. As a result, more and more states abandoned authoritarian, dictatorial, and monarchical regimes and replaced them with democratic political systems. Needless to say, as such a shift began to happen, it seemed natural to go from one extreme to the other and to grant the opportunity to participate in the political processes to all citizens with rare exceptions. This decision has its benefits that are impossible to

deny, as this approach ensures the total equality of voters, prevents small circles of people with high social influence from abusing their power, and bypasses corruption.

The First Problem

There is a school of thought that as the world society continues to advance, the need to design more sophisticated policies becomes more and more evident. Those who argue against general suffrage usually mention its two main drawbacks. First of all, it is essential to understand that in the modern world, the masses are not politically aware enough to have the ability to carefully evaluate the options they are being presented with and to make the best possible choices. Philosopher and political scientist Jason Brennan examines this problem in detail. He highlights the fact that “political decisions are high stakes, and democracies entrust some of these high-stakes decisions to the ignorant and incompetent” (Brennan, 2016). According to this perspective, the policy of general suffrage subjects people to ineptly made political decisions because democratic states are forced to implement such laws and regulations that appeal to the masses, while the majority of voters lack even basic knowledge about the way the world around them functions (Brennan, 2016). Thus, a better idea would be to design a mechanism that would give the opportunity to learn needed information and to potentially participate in the election to everyone, but that would also test their knowledge and grant access only to those who are knowledgeable enough.

The Second Problem

Besides the issue of uneducated masses, the inability of democracies and the policy of general suffrage to take into account the difference in contribution each voter makes to the development of their country is a debacle. This idea is greatly emphasized by the columnist Oliver Hudson. In one of his pieces, he talks about the fact that in the United States, twenty

percent of voters pay ninety-four percent of taxes (Hudson, 2012). Yet, every citizen gets the right to vote, and every vote is being treated equally. Hudson argues that this approach is illogical and inefficient. To his mind, due to the fact that the majority of voters do not contribute financially to the growth of their state, they do not fully understand the extent of their responsibility and are more likely to support the laws and initiatives that imply high spendings (Hudson, 2012). As a result, it seems more appropriate to grant voting permission based on a person's social and economic contribution rather than to give it out to every citizen.

Conclusion

To sum up everything that has been mentioned and discussed, one could say that while the concept of democracy in general and the policy of common suffrage in particular has worked for an extended period of time, they do have serious disadvantages. The first problem is that general suffrage leads to the implementation of laws and legislative initiatives that appeal to the masses, while the median voters are not educated enough to support the best political choices. The second issue is that democracies do not take into account the contribution of each voter, which seems unfair. Considering this, it is a wise idea to rethink the approach of general suffrage and to correct some of its faults.

References

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