

EN100

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Joseph J. Wunderlich

Should New Voters Take A Test Before They Vote?

In the United States the right to vote is one of the most basic rights given to a person. After years of fighting a civil war and countless political demonstrations later, every man and woman of any race was finally able to vote after August 18th, 1920 when the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, allowing women to vote. Why then do so many people choose not to vote considering how great a privilege? Most importantly of all, and the question this paper will be the focus of, should there be a test to filter out uneducated Americans before they vote.

All of the states possess the right to establish their own qualifications for voting. The very first article of the Constitution provides that, in choosing members of the House of Representatives, the electors shall have the same qualifications required for electors of the most numerous branch of the state legislature. The same proposition is enunciated by the seventeenth amendment with respect to elections of United States Senators. Under the only reasonable interpretation of article one, section two, and the seventeenth amendment, anyone qualified to vote for members of the most numerous branch of the state legislature also is entitled to vote for members of Congress and for senators. Conversely, those who do not have the right to vote for state legislators are ineligible to vote for members of the House and Senate (Hart, Bert).

It is not unreasonable to place greater emphasis on intellectual ability to perform the duties of citizenship. This is not to say that we should turn government over to "philosopher-kings," as advocated by Plato in his work Republic. However, in our society, which presents a voter with difficult and complicated issues to determine in federal, state, or local elections, the damage done by ignorant exercise of the manipulative franchises is almost immeasurable. This has been found equally true in performance of jury duty. New York was one of the states that pioneered in the use of a "blue ribbon jury"-- a device intended to increase the likelihood of

intelligent determinations of guilt and innocence in complicated and serious cases. The Supreme Court of the United States upheld the constitutionality of the "blue ribbon jury," and ruled that a state was free to consider intellectual qualifications for jury service while the performance of jury duty is of special importance in our society, the exercise is not so far down the scale of civic duties in importance that a state could not reasonably consider the citizen's intellectual ability to vote (Ketler).

Considering how the power to vote is one of the greatest, if not the most powerful decisions a citizen can make, what then could go wrong by simply asking for basic knowledge of the candidates and one's own country? It is arguable whether or not this is infringing on people's rights, though how? It is difficult to protest filtered voting without coming off as anti-intellectual. At least that is how I view the situation as it stands. The primary purpose of such a test would simply be to separate uneducated opinions, to well educated, fact-based ones. Unfortunately as a result, this may alienate voters based on income disparity, as poorer, less educated citizens are statistically less likely to vote. (File)

What such a test would look like to begin with is highly controversial. I've come up with two types of tests I think would be suitable. One test would be taken at the polls and require 5 or more questions per candidate. Assuming that there are 2 candidates, that is 10 questions total. Let's say that missing 3 or more will render that vote invalid. This test is ideal because it requires that voters have knowledge of ALL candidates, not just those who the voter is voting for. The second version of this test would be one that you take in order to vote to begin with. Passing the test would grant the new voter a license to vote, similar to a driver's test, and it would have to be renewed every election at the booths. This of course is a much more complicated process than test number 1 and is also the version less likely too be put into action.

Since 1972, every state has required that voters be at least 18 years of age in order to vote, therefore the voting-age population has historically been a common population base used for calculating voting statistics. Some Census Bureau products, such as the voting detailed and historical table packages, present voting estimates using this population as the base in order to allow historical comparisons all the way back to 1964. The voting-age population does not account for citizenship status. (File)

Since 1978, voting rates have been consistently higher in presidential election years than in congressional election years. In 2014, the overall voting rate was the lowest for a congressional election since 1978. At 41.9 percent, the 2014 turnout rate was 3.6 percentage points lower than in 2010 and 5.9 percentage points lower than in 2006. (File)

Overall, across the last three election cycles, the voting population has grown more racially and ethnically diverse, while the share of the voting population that is 65 and older has also increased, both for congressional and presidential elections. At least part of these observed increases are attributable to population trends, as the American population at large has grown older and more diverse in recent years. However, the question of whether these changes in the electorate are being driven by simple population change, or by increased or decreased engagement from certain groups, remains an open question, one that this report turns to in the following section. (File)

Other forms of voting would also be effected by new testing. Early voting for instance; In 33 states and the District of Columbia, any qualified voter may cast a ballot in person during a designated period prior to Election Day. No excuse or justification is required. Also, absentee voting; All states will mail an absentee ballot to certain voters who request one. The voter may return the ballot by mail or in person. In 20 states, an excuse is required, while the other 27 states

and the District of Columbia permit any qualified voter to vote absentee without offering an excuse. Some states offer a permanent absentee ballot list. (File)

One of the notable forms of voting that would see a change is mail voting. A ballot is automatically mailed to every eligible voter, no request or application is necessary, and the state does not use traditional precinct poll sites that offer in person voting on Election Day. How someone would be tested before this type of voting method would prove difficult. (File)

Considering these facts above, even the smallest change to the voting process would prove to be a burden to almost everyone. Looking at this situation from the perspective of a new time voter, as I have recently turned 18 this year of 2015, I still believe that it was too easy to me to cast my vote. I could have simply picked at random if I wanted to. This bothered me because an idiot with no political knowledge could cast a vote just as valuable as mine. In my opinion this is a somewhat socialist voting system we have in place. I may sound like an elitist by saying this, but I would like to think that a professional scholar such as a doctor would have a vote that is more valuable than a 18 year old who just entered the political arena.

Democratic voting systems are excellent when the majority of citizens are well informed, but become increasingly dangerous when the uneducated are the majority. People tend vote for a candidate they can relate to the most. (Gleitman) With each new president of the U.S. It is becoming clearer that our presidents are representing the collective majority view opinions of the bottom percentile of voters, rather than the upper echelon of our brightest. In the early days of American history, the Founding Fathers were elite thinkers and philosophers. James Madison attended what is now Princeton. John Hancock went to Harvard. Thomas Jefferson enrolled at the College of William and Mary when he was 16. Today it seems the more education a

candidate has, the harder he or she has to work to distance him or herself from it to avoid risk of threatening the intelligence of lesser voters they are trying to desperately woo. (Deutsch, et al.)

Consider this as well, the front man for the Republican party in the U.S. for 2016 according to Real Clear Politics' 2016 Republican presidential nomination statistics is a multi-billionaire businessman with no tact and strange Nazi-esque racial tendencies. E.x. tagging all Muslim individuals in a database, building a wall to keep Mexicans from crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, and as I will now quote from a Fox News interview on Dec. 3rd on the topic of how to fight ISIS,

"The other thing with the terrorists is you have to take out their families, when you get these terrorists, you have to take out their families. They care about their lives, don't kid yourself. When they say they don't care about their lives, you have to take out their families,"

How easy it sounds the way he unmercifully explains yet another "simple solution" to a vastly complicated problem. It is not so much the idea that Trump suggests, which I myself am not entirely apposed to, rather than the way he can tell people that murdering families is a viable solution without showing a hint of regret. How exactly he plans on locating the families of even one terrorist is beyond me. This is a recipe for collateral damage on a great scale. (LoBianco)

Donald Trump is not a disgrace to this country, he is the manifestation of what so many people believe in their hearts but have never said at risk of coming off as politically incorrect. These are the people that must be filtered out. These individuals are at the borderline of "not mentally unstable enough to go to prison" but "not educated enough to vote rationally". These people could be in the top 1% or the bottom 1%. It is irrelevant. I think Trump poses an excellent example of why not everyone should be able to vote.

Anything more restrictive than a test would begin to infringe on constitutional rights, so this is as far as I will go for now.

It is important to understand the context which I am writing this. At the moment, the U.S. is at a crossroads. The next upcoming candidates have to wrestle with a growing division between the middle eastern countries as well as China. I personally do not want to be forced into a world war three draft brought about by some foolish decisions by the highest office in the land. I hold it close to my heart the sad yet true comment Isaac Asimov once said about Americans:

“There is a cult of ignorance in the United States, and there has always been. The strain of anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that 'my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.'”

If the current voters and their candidates are not spreading peace and intellectualism throughout the world then I'll take my influence elsewhere. I haven't the time to spend on a single educated vote lost in a sea of quick answers.

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