



On the Fence

Does every vote matter? Will my voice actually make a difference?

Yes: Every election is a valuable opportunity to improve our country

If you don't vote, you can be sure your voice will not be heard. Does your vote actually matter? Absolutely — in more ways than you may imagine and in more elections than you may be considering. At least 10 state elections have been tied or won by one vote in the past 30 years, and it's possible to believe that your ballot could tip an entire election.

If your candidate doesn't win, it doesn't mean your voice hasn't been heard. Winning candidates know exactly how many voters did not support them. The closer the gap in election returns, the more powerful your vote is. For example, recent political analysis shows that our congressman, Greg Walden (R-Ore.), has moderated his voting pattern since his liberal opponent won 40% of the vote in our district.

Your voice will be heard locally, especially if you're active in candidates' campaigns. You've seen people wearing "I Voted" stickers. We also need "I Will Vote" stickers, an excellent way for your voice to be heard. If someone asks, explain why the person you support is the best candidate, why those policies are important. You can amplify your voice by informing and convincing other voters. If we want to be heard, we need to be informed. As one analyst put it, "Ignorance potentially opens the door for both elite manipulation and gross policy errors caused by politicians' need to appeal to an ignorant electorate in order to win office." We've heard how many voters may have been misled by Russian influence in social media. A successful democracy depends on knowledgeable voters.

In the last mid-term election, only 47% of eligible voters cast their ballots. The other 125 million eligible voters were silent. Apparently they didn't care how their tax money is spent, whether the environment is sustainable, whether we have affordable health care, whether we go to war or not. Tragically, it seems many Americans invest more time choosing which sports team to support or phone to purchase. (Did you know that anyone can see whether you



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voted in the last election? The Voter Activation Network app lists all registered voters and whether they voted. Non-voters could be shamed on social media for failing to participate in the future of our nation.)

Voting on every level counts. Many successful conservative candidates have been groomed for public office starting early with their careers as county commissioners, district court judges, even school board members. Over decades, the Republican Party has programmatically encouraged and supported the party's best young conservatives, like the two recently appointed Supreme Court Justices, preparing them to qualify for the most powerful positions in the land. From my perspective, Democrats have failed to appreciate the importance of that long-term planning.

Your vote is exactly equal to every other citizen's. Democracy offers a level playing field, although some argue that the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision has moved the goal posts. Nevertheless, notable candidates like Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, supported by vocal activists, have defeated generously financed opponents. As Thomas Jefferson said, "Should things go wrong at any time, the people will set them to rights by the peaceable exercise of their elective rights."

If our state's voter turnout is low, our collective voice is unlikely to be heard in Washington. The party in power won't worry about our state's positions on vital issues if they assume our state won't be decisive in the next election. In Oregon our ballots are delivered and a stamped envelope is provided. Instead of watching TV or surfing the internet, we need to read about the candidates, think about their policies, mark our ballots. Every election — local, state or national — is a valuable opportunity to make our voices heard, to improve our country and to save the planet. ■

Yes: U.S. Constitution ensures everyone is represented

Everyone wants their voice to be heard. Happily, when our great nation was founded, great care was taken to ensure that everyone and every place was represented. We have representative style of government. Each vote was designed to be important on an individual, city, county, state and country basis. Recognizing that the needs of citizens vary widely by location, the founders wisely chose a system of proportional voting and citizen representatives that would represent each locality. They rejected the concept of a "pure" democracy where a simple majority determines the outcome for everyone. They knew from experience and history that "pure democracy" quickly morphs into tyranny that can allow the majority to enslave the minority. It was recognized explicitly that everyone has rights originating from God — and not coming from the state, or the majority — and that these rights must be protected. It took a civil war to fully implement the concept.

Diffusing governmental power weakens the ability of politicians to scaremonger via emotional appeals. It promotes stability and fairness. It allows decisions to be appealed to a higher authority. In our great governmental system, protecting the minority and preventing government abuse of power is implemented by dispersing that power in a number of well-considered ways:

1. At both the state and local levels, power is decentralized into the separate branches of government: Executive, Judicial, Legislative. Thus, absolute power cannot be centralized. Tyranny is avoided.

2. Most governmental decisions are not decided directly by the people but rather by their elected representatives at the city, county, state and national levels, who are charged with serving the people in the localities they represent and also charged with protecting their "unalienable rights." Proportional voting promotes stability by limiting the vagaries of the electorate.

3. To promote fairness in Congress, proportional voting is implemented in two ways. Two — and only two — senators are elected from each state



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for the Senate. In the House of Representatives, each state has a number of Representatives that match its relative population. This keeps the large states from dominating over the small states — and vice versa. It helps avoid an "us against them" regional attitude and promotes compromise.

4. To ensure everyone and every state is represented fairly in national elections, proportional voting is implemented in the Electoral College. Each state has electors who vote for president in a "winner takes all" fashion, and the number of electors is determined by state population. Thus politicians are obliged to campaign in varied and disparate states and address the needs of all the people rather than just focusing on big media markets.

5. Changes to the Constitution are made as amendments, which must be approved by two-thirds of Congress and then by three-fourths of the states. This allows change but sets a high bar, further promoting stability. So far, only 27 amendments have been added to the original Constitution.

In our country today, as it has been from the beginning, there are power-hungry politicians who desire the power of a more totalitarian system that can be changed on a whim and are perfectly willing to deceive the electorate if they can to get the power they seek. They wish to overthrow inconvenient constitutional protections that pose a barrier to them. Without constitutional protections in place, voting is a sham and is never an agent of change. It can even be personally dangerous. However, under our constitutional republic every person and place is represented at each level and with rights that are protected by multiple layers of governance and representation.

Make sure your voice and your vote continue to matter in multiple ways and at multiple levels by supporting constitutional principles that ensure freedom for all. Let freedom ring! ■

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