

Analysing federalist 10 and the violence of factions politics essay



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James Madison, in Federalist No. X states, “ But the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property.” (Madison, pg. 64) Please write an essay exploring the reasons Madison gives for the unequal distribution of property and how the new government will be structured to control factions (be sure to give specific examples in our governmental structure or procedures that control factions). Your answer should also include a discussion of Madison’s view of both democracy and majorities.

One of the most influential essays of the Federalist Papers is that of No. 10, which was written by James Madison in 1787. Federalist No. 10 talks about the role of faction, liberty, and how and to what extent the government should control the concerns brought on by factions. Madison defines factions as being, “ a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.” Although these factions are often at odds with each other, they also work against public interests, thus violating the rights of others. Madison is concerned with the social and political insecurity formed by enemy factions. Madison feels that the state governments alone cannot succeed in solving this problem of factions; the answer lies in how a government is structured as a whole. Any type of popular government that can solve this problem effectively must then be presented; Federalist 10 is Madison’s attempt to present that solution.

Central to Federalist 10 is the discussion of its factions. Madison makes the case that liberty and factions are one in the same. Instead of trying to figure out a way to eliminate factions all together, Madison wishes to control only the effects of factions. Madison shows this when he says, " Liberty is to faction what air is to fire, an aliment without which it instantly expires. But it could not be a less folly to abolish liberty, which is essential to political life, because it nourishes faction than it would be to wish the annihilation of air, which is essential to animal life, because it imparts to fire its destructive agency." To remove factions all together would then mean the government would have to oppress the people; which the government should never do. Madison sees liberty and faction as essential in any government system and, " As long as the reason of man continues to be fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed." Having a healthy government means allowing citizens to express their opinions and concerns, but what isn't healthy is the violence that factions may cause.

Madison argues that controlling the effects of violent factions can be achieved through the Republican model of government. A republic is supposed to be capable of controlling the effects of faction, according to Madison, and even more so than a democracy. The republican model of government is one made up of representatives. These representatives carry the beliefs and passions of the majority of the ones they represent. A republic is inherently going to be made of different groups of people with different views (i. e. Democrats, Republicans), these groups are factions. According to Madison, a structure of representation within the government is better at defending the rights of those of the minority and of the individual,

as well as being superior in the ability to stabilize the necessities of the community. Also, Madison feels representatives are better at distancing themselves from the influence of factions and thus better at creating the right kind of legislation that is friendly to the public. When Madison wrote about democracy, he warned against a 'direct democracy' where the common people have a large say in the government. He thought that was a bad idea because he didn't think the people were informed enough to make good decisions. Madison saw democracy as allowing individuals to be their own decision maker in their own interests within a community. They would obviously have a biased motive when deciding on important legislation that will affect more than just them. Madison writes, "No man is allowed to be a judge in his own case, because his interest would certainly bias his judgment, and not improbably, corrupt his integrity. With equal, nay with greater reason, a body of men are unfit to be both judges and parties at the same time." This supports the Aristotelian view that an understanding of common good is exclusive to elites. Elites are supposed to represent the public with less of a bias than a regular citizen because the elite is better educated and therefore more virtuous. Furthermore, since the common majority is incapable of making sure that they are not suppressing a truthful opinion; they would most likely oppress the minorities and then become unable to serve the common good and to make legislation for that purpose. Thus, democracies can never control the violence of factions because the strongest and largest factions will always win out, and it will never be able to protect the weak factions against the will of a strong majority. However, Madison does admit that a risk of such a representative system is having too few representatives, and thus a lack of distribution of power can corrupt

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individual representatives and distort the system. From this Madison says that the republican system works better the larger the republic is; this is beneficial to the United States because of its large size and population. The key is to find the perfect number of representatives, but Madison does not give us that number.

In Federalist No. 10, Madison tells us that property and its imbalanced allocation is the most consistent supply of faction there is. Given the nature of man, the selfishness of property factions is predictable. As long as men hold different opinions, have different amounts of wealth, and own different amount of property, they will continue to associate with people who are most similar to them. It is when people start to associate with those most similar to them that a problem starts for Madison; this association breeds factions. It is property that is divided unequally among people, and also there are many different kinds of property; people have different interests depending upon the kind of property they own. These divisions of property cause the division of the society into different interests and parties. For example, the interests of business owners are going to differ from those of a farmer. Also, those who have better abilities usually have more property than those that do not, and given that the first responsibility of a government is to support and defend ability, it follows that the security of rights of property owners must be a priority. Though, government cannot just forget about those who do not own property, the government must also be able to successfully control the disagreements that come about from non-property owners. The problem is that both those who own and those who are without property have formed distinct interests in our society. Those who are creditors, and those who are

debtors, fall under a like conflict. The regulation of these various interests forms the principal task for Madison. It is through the benefits of a republican style of government (as discussed in the previous paragraph) that the correct regulation and legislation can come about.

The reason that Madison wrote Federalist 10 was to show how the new establishment of a republican form of government would be of greater stability and effectiveness than that of the British rule. Madison also wanted to explain how this republican system would help defend against any tyranny by competing factions against the people, since this issue had caused problems during and after the revolution of 1776. Madison tells us that different factions are necessary when trying to obtain maximum liberty for the public, so in response he seeks to minimize the violence brought on by factions through a republican style of government. This republican government was set up to include a range of financial, social, religious, and physical interests. It is through these varieties of interests, making sure each interest checked the other, that Madison thought would save the American people from a major class struggle of the rich and poor. Madison's answer for the prospect of a clash between the rich and poor was not to set up a ungodly powerful or irresponsible government to rule over the people; for he was never willing to give up freedoms to gain a sense of safety. He only wanted to spread and increase the amount of social and political power within the state itself to adequately defuse the tension building up between the rich and poor, thus assuring both safety and freedom to everyone. This, as stated by Madison, could give a "republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government."