

Political apathy essay sample



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Throughout the course of our history, Americans have followed a strong belief that, through hard work and initiative, hope can be brought to the political and economic spectrum. The American Dream has been a symbol meant to inspire and encourage citizens to seek their passion, enabling them to work with diligence to increase economic stability. However, many people in America today are losing faith in with this dream. It has become very evident that the political apathy from Americans significantly depends on their level of belief and faith in the American Dream.

The main goal of the American Dream is for workers to follow their path of interest and have rights to economic incentives that ultimately contribute to our support for capitalism. This system characterized by “ private property, competitive markets, and limited government involvement in production and pricing of goods (Magleby 87)” is one of the main things that fuels and drives the American Dream. Most Americans of all incomes believe that the “ free market system gives almost everyone a fair chance, that capitalism is necessary and freedom depends on it (Magleby 89).” This means that, in America, the competitive go-getter can make a fortune, build a dream home, and retire early. People who have more ability or work extremely hard will get ahead and earn more economic rewards in this land of opportunity. It is clear that the more freedom citizens have, the less apathy they feel toward politics. As we are in more economic turmoil, faith in the American Dream and our capitalist system is being slowly diminished. This is causing apathy as people give up and start to care less and less about politics.

Capitalism is becoming more dominant, and not in the way that drives and causes the American Dream to thrive. Ed Hess from Forbes was very

adamant in saying," Over the last 25 years American Capitalism has become financialism, which is primarily transactional, unrestrained greed (Hess)."

This shows how much capitalism today is changing dynamically stemming from many negative factors. As capitalism grows weaker, jobs are being lost. Unemployment rates and national debt are currently results from political apathy in America due to people losing trust in our government. Keeping the American Dream alive and capitalism from losing strength has proved to be challenging: " That great enemy of democratic capitalism, economic inequality, is real and growing (Meacham)." A majority of people want to see a change from the government to feel satisfied again. Most American do not know what the American Dream means anymore. It has been mostly related with economic freedom. Americans work so hard to get these materialistic things and end up tired and complaining about how we have to keep working to pay for them.

In America, there are many institutions whose main priorities are to influence your average person to take a side on certain issues while presenting awareness about the political system. Our Nation's founders considered these groups, such as political parties, to be factions because they can become too fierce for a centralized democracy. A linkage institution is " a structure within a society that connects the people to the government or centralized authority (Linkage)." Within our nation today: interest groups, political parties, and mass media are considered linkage institutions because of their influence in connecting individuals to the government. The sense of apathy is increasing in people because they are unsure who or what they can trust in order to improve America as we see it today.

Interest groups, or lobby groups, are formed today to influence members of Congress to try to persuade legislation, and pass or defeat bills they have an interest or stake in. Every person has lobby groups working for them. Some are there to promote or oppose social issues, like abortion, gay rights, guns and other issues. There are groups that represent handicapped, elderly, health insurance, business, unions, children, you name it, there is a lobby group pushing it an agenda for or against it. Generally they work the various committees and provide information, statistics, fact sheets, sometimes even petitions. Similar to political parties, interest groups use some of the same techniques, such as mass media, to seek influence from Congress and individuals. A good example of an interest group that is seeking a positive change in America is PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals).

They have one goal, to stop at nothing to promote the ethical treatment of animals. This can be seen when when Kentucky Fried Chicken founder Colonel Harland Sanders died. Steps from his grave site, the group produced a new headstone in 2008 with a seemingly innocent poem about how KFC is a " Kind Friend of Chickens." In reality, the poem was acrostic: the first letter of each line spelled out, in bright-red letters: " KFC Tortures Birds." The cemetery had the headstone removed. This example just shows a way that interest groups can influence people through mass media. When that story got out into the public, it made KFC look like the bad guys. The head of PETA quoted when referencing Colonel Sanders: " Certainly the nearly 1 billion chickens that are tortured and killed for KFC restaurants each year are more deserving than him (PETA)."

Another issue that arises within special organizations is how these groups used the money received from supporters. Political action committees tend to bundle their contributions from individuals to present to a political party or a candidate. During the 2000 and 2004 elections, individuals were allowed to give unlimited contributions to candidates or political groups. The main problem that lies here is that “ the party committees used this money for specific candidate attack or promotion (Magleby 149).” The media would portray the opposing candidate in a negative manner all paid for by these special organizations.

It makes sense to say that people have different philosophies on politics and issues, and because of this there are various organizations that are based on those beliefs. Political parties have a serious impact on the government because each major party has different opinions on main issues. We can all agree that the major political parties can gain too much power for the government; “ Americans typically take political parties for granted. If anything, most people are critical or even fearful of the major parties. Parties are, in a word, distrusted (Magleby 174).” This “ fear” and “ distrust” can cause many voters to be uninformed or confused when casting their ballot. They may choke and pick a third party, which is almost like throwing away a vote. This apathy is directly stemmed from the voters not knowing what to believe from their candidates.

Before the presidential election, a candidate is selected from the Democratic Party or the Republican Party through a direct primary. Most people, however, believe that the candidates avoid the issues and are mostly concerned about the amount of votes and supporters. This could lead to

many voters being apathetic. Not knowing who to trust on certain issues can make a voter unsure of who they are voting for. The potential for a third party to be established is something that could certainly happen in the near future, Republican John McCain believes this could happen because “ Americans are frustrated by sluggish economic growth that has depleted their incomes while corporate executives take in massive salary bonuses (Holland). The rise and fall of parties makes a huge difference in the political world and how voters are informed on an issue.

Mass Media makes a huge impact on American politics and culture through the use of technology and communication. Since media is very influential in American society, they are considered the fourth branch of government. Everything from Newspapers, to television broadcasts, to the Internet are significant because they keep us up to date with political and international events. The invention of television has made presidential elections able to be seen up close and personal. Americans sometimes react negatively towards the media: “ Americans blame the media for everything from increased tension between the races, biased attacks on public officials, sleaze and sensationalism, increased violence in our society, and for being more interested in making money rather than in conveying information (Magleby 255).” Despite the influence the media brings, many individuals today believe it’s biased. News stations either have a liberal or a conservative point of view, but a majority of stations are dominantly liberal, such as FOX News and CNN. According to charts on Gallup. com, individuals still seem to distrust the media and believe that it’s too liberal. Currently, 55% of Americans have little to no trust with the media due to the lack of accurate

and fair news. The percentage of distrusted Americans has decreased from 46% in 1998 to over a majority as recently as 2011. Most Democrats feel that the media is just about right while Republicans tend to believe that the media should be more conservative.

To feel like a part of the United States of America, it's important for citizens to feel responsible and be fully aware of all aspects of American society. The United States has often been called "the land of opportunity" which stems from American beliefs. The opportunity to vote in elections gives citizens a choice to select a candidate dependable enough to serve their country. Just because people can vote for their respective parties, does not necessarily mean our primary system is completely reliable or effective, but America still keeps a balanced pace. Some people believe that the candidates run to gain votes rather than setting up solutions on the most significant issues. Voters need to have a better understanding on the electoral perspective and learn how to express political opinions to make a difference in the United States.

The government has to be aware of opinions of the individuals in order to keep society impartial. Without the opinions expressed from the people, Americans would not follow the rules of democracy and would become corrupt. The public has opinions that serve as constructive criticism to the government and a response to take action on issues. Schools and the mass media are main influences and advocates on students' political attitudes and awareness. Childhood and adolescent years are the best time for people to be socialized about politics because children easily adopt the essential values in America and this can lead to better opinions throughout their adult lives.

The gruesome events of 9/11 made a dramatic change to the peoples' trust with the government. According to Robert Putnam's survey on public views toward the government," Interest in public affairs grew by 27% among younger people and 8% among older respondents (Magleby 198)." You can see the clear impact on trust that was made within the American population. For example we are more inclined to trust a neighbor, co-worker, or complete stranger since the attacks. This change in trust may be more consequential in people's private lives than in their public activities like voting, volunteering, or becoming more involved in politics.

The voting turnout represents how active citizens are toward elections. Older citizens have more expressed opinions on how they view voting because they have either voted many times or believed that each vote would not make a difference. During the 2008 elections, younger people were very supportive of the Democratic Party and over half the percentage of younger voters ended up voting for Barrack Obama. Only about 20.9% of the young Obama supporters voted in 2010:" And the down-ballot losses were even more significant, as close contests for legislative and local races tipped to the Republicans after young people failed to show (Nichols)." Until voters fully understand that their opinions and vote has value, this will continue to happen in every election. Getting people to show up and vote is more than half of the battle when it comes to running a political campaign. As issues tend to stay unresolved, voters may be less likely to vote for any candidate because they want to see more action take place.

Presidential candidates compete in elections to make a difference in American society and rely on support from the people to fulfill public

opinions. A candidate's chances of winning the election depend on the number of popular votes and Electoral College values from each state. Popular votes and the Electoral College are seen differently from each other, especially in presidential elections, because both methods display different representations of votes. Popular votes are based on plurality voting and when a president gains more votes, then his respective party will gain representation from a state. Unlike the popular vote, the Electoral system is based on the total population and representation for each state. The framers of the United States Constitution devised the Electoral College system because " they did not trust the choice of president to a direct vote of the people (Magleby 219)." This shows that the framers believed it was crucial for states with more population to have a greater say in determining the president. It also contributes to apathy with citizens thinking their opinions and vote only matters in the popular vote and not in the grand scheme of things. Many Americans feel like the Electoral College system does not create a fair judgment for the candidates.

People do not believe that their vote would make an impact because of the varied representation of votes and percent of error on peoples' votes. In the 2000 election between George Bush and Al Gore, Gore won the popular vote by over 500, 000 votes. However, most of the presidential votes from Florida were in favor of George Bush. The results of George Bush's Electoral College majority (271-266) declared him the winner of the election. One of the main reasons of this controversial issue was that the voting methods used during the election caused many errors in Florida's Democratic representation. " Other factors received even less attention: the overconfidence of the Bush

campaign in Florida; the failure of parties, election boards and local governments to test ballot designs, maintain voting machines and teach people how to cast a legal vote; the scant attention paid by the legislature to writing robust election laws (Von Drehle)." It all starts with students.

Educating them the fully understand the political system can lead to less apathy and a growth in the number of voters. This debacle that happened in the 2000 election could have been completely avoided with simple understanding.

The quintessential solution to boost the American spirit is for us to make a major dent our massive sixteen trillion dollar national debt. Obviously not all of it, but even the slightest improvements could be enough to restore and prove to citizens that the American Dream still exists today and is fully attainable. Weather that is through raising retirement age, or opening our borders for business we need to see some good change. The percentage of those who are apathetic will decrease significantly if we can make good, consistent progress. The longer Americans can keep their faith in the American Dream, the more the quality of life will improve in the future. We need to strengthen capitalism again to fuel the American Dream, and that starts within our own economy. Another ideal solution to encourage individuals to vote and to decrease political apathy is to provide political knowledge to students as soon as possible. Students would become more politically active as they gain more knowledge and would contribute to politics.

The media can be extremely helpful during the elections because people can watch, listen, or read the news regarding the primaries and elections.

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Another useful, yet difficult solution is to develop a more accurate voting system so that representation counts for all voters and states. Any kind of error within the ballots has a major impact on the candidates. The presidential elections would be more legitimate for both candidates and voters and more voters would rise to support candidates for their country. Understanding the political system fully can be a driving force behind decreasing apathy and creating new opinions on our government. There are also many ideal solutions that can help decrease political apathy within individuals. First of all, news broadcasts and articles should avoid as much political and personal bias as possible to allow individuals to acquire the legitimate knowledge they need and deserve. The media should also balance their information in a way to please both sides of the political spectrum and undecided individuals.

Though those things would be great, our freedom of speech makes these solutions very unlikely, so a more realistic solution would be for voters to, at times, tune out mass media and delve into their own core values. This way, when they go back, they will know exactly what they need to be listening for. Another solution would be for candidates running primaries and presidential elections to maintain focus on the issues that are going on in America. In order to gain trust from voters, a candidate has to make a solid promise to the people, something that is realistic and will make them excited. Last but not least, groups need to maintain a limited and fair amount to lobby for political candidates so voters can trust candidates on the main issues. More awareness from technology can keep individuals focused and participate

throughout the whole election, and there will be a stronger chance of people contributing to politics locally and nationally.

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