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Andrew Long
University of New Hampshire

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Are you voting for Democracy?

ANDREW LONG
JUNIOR – COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

We as contemporary American citizens have grown up to idolize the term democracy as a unifying, concrete, and superior form of government. But honestly, how much do ordinary citizens know about the origins of democracy or more importantly the democracy of the United States? Most students at this University are aware that although the term 'democracy' was coined in ancient Athens and Athenian society operated on broad democratic principles, however, very few Americans know that the overwhelming majority of those living in Athens could not vote. Similarly, when the framers wrote our constitution, they designed the United States as an indirect democracy. The underlying concept was to prevent those who were "unaccustomed" in the works of government from wielding too much power. However, in this day and age, everyone, male or female, black or white wields the right to vote.

In this election year, we as the youth are faced with an endless bombardment of instructions to "get out and vote" from our parents, the media, our professors, or from numerous supporters of presidential candidates. The question that I am moved to ask is this: In this ever increasing bureaucratic and corporate controlled society where the common theme is it's "me against the mountain," *why vote?*

We all know that voting is often a cumbersome procedure full of inconveniences such as long lines, confusing ballots, and those annoying chads. However, if we as responsible citizens are patient

enough to sift through these obstacles, we *can* make a difference. Therefore, as an active and concerned citizen, I propose rationales for why we should vote and take part in the most important aspect of the democratic process.

First, you'll hear it time after time after time; it's your civic duty. Similar to reporting to jury duty, voting is part of your responsibility for living in the United States. By the time the election rolls around, I realize most people are tired of all the political jargon that the candidates have hurled during the campaign. Some even use this as an excuse to not vote because they feel that in not voting, they in some way are spiting the system. However, whether or not *you* vote, there are millions out there who will vote and a candidate *will* win. Furthermore, the same person who does not go to the polls out of spite is usually the same person who does not want someone else making their own decisions about (insert issue here). In not voting, you are allowing not only the candidate to make a decision for you, but you also allowed millions of others to make it without even putting up a fight. Moreover, to be totally honest, not voting undermines the political process. As a nation, we have come along way in voting rights since the democracy of the Athenians who deemed only debt free males over the age of eighteen with military training and had Athenian parental heritage were given the right to be "voting citizens." Therefore, just because it's not illegal not to vote, that does not mean it's right.

Secondly, the question often posed by tentative voters is, will my one vote make a difference? This is often a loaded question because in all actuality 99.9% of the time your one vote will not make a difference. However, what if that .01% chance occurs, and you decided not to vote? For example, in the 2000 Presidential election, Al Gore lost the Florida electorate to the ultimate winner and current President, George W. Bush by a mere 537 votes. In that Florida election, almost six million people voted. Mathematically, Al Gore lost by less than one ten thousandth of a percent.¹ While five hundred votes are many more than one vote, one can imagine that more than five hundred people thought that his or her single vote wouldn't count and decided not to vote. While the odds are great and the number of people voting is seemingly too large to grasp, our one vote does count. One vote of an active citizen repeated many times amounts to many votes.

Finally, we should vote because universal suffrage is endowed to us as citizens of this democracy. Countless lives have been lost in the hope that we, the future of America, could have the fundamental right to elect our representatives. As 21st century citizens, we are in a unique position not only among those who have lived in the United States, but also of those who have lived in the history of the world. For example, a little over a century ago African Americans in this nation received only three-fifths of a vote. In the history of mankind, how many people have been able to claim that they were afforded the right to decide how their government was to be run, and how their needs and wants would be decided? As a democracy, we are revered by those who are oppressed by tyrants and dictators alike. Moreover, as a country, we have come a long way. Our leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Martin Luther King Jr. ensured that all would have the right to vote. We the voting public, owe

it to those who can not vote, activists over the years, and ultimately to ourselves to cast a ballot on Election Day.

If we as a nation are willing to fight wars both intellectually and physically to ensure that democracy reigns, we must first ensure that as the foot soldiers of democracy, we are doing our part. One and all, we with the ability to make a difference, must go and vote. We must have faith in our elected leaders, as our founding fathers envisioned, to make choices on our behalf that serve the best interest. Our opportunity to vote is unparalleled in human history, dwarfing even the experience of the Athenians. Our valued suffrage is universal, ensuring that no citizen is left behind. Therefore, in becoming active members of this democratic process, we are compelled to vote and get involved in other aspects, whether it be serving others in the community, or representing American values in the international community. In doing these things, we help to continue this great democratic experiment into the 21st century.

¹ CBS News, 2000 Florida Election Results
http://www.cbsnews.com/campaign2000results/state/state_fl.html, Accessed 7 February 2008