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A New Campaign Strategy Informed by Pragmatism: Running on a Platform of Expanding Voting Accessibility

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POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS | RESEARCH ARTICLE

A new campaign strategy informed by pragmatism: Running on a platform of expanding voting accessibility

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Abstract: Voter disillusionment is commonplace in the United States, with many eligible voters either choosing not to or altogether unable to exercise their right to vote. To the former, in 2016 alone, nearly 40 percent of eligible voters did not vote. Although it is an issue that extends to the health of a democracy, voting itself is not one that is central to campaign platforms, with candidates running on more high-profile issues such as healthcare or the economy. A solution to voter disillusionment is for pragmatically minded candidates to organize their campaigns around voter expansion as a means to build winning coalitions. Once locating the rhetorical origins of efforts to disenfranchise the marginalized, we develop a pragmatic strategy for appealing to those previously disengaged constituencies by demonstrating how such a platform turned legislative agenda can improve the lives of more citizens as well as strengthen democratic values.

Subjects: Politics & International Relations; Social Sciences; Humanities

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Aaron Martin has a PhD in Political Science from and is a Senior Lecturer in the Irvin D. Reid Honors College at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He leads an interdisciplinary research program where this essay's co-authors—Zoe B. Pidgeon, Robert Calimente, Alexandra D'Antonio, Albi Taipi, and Dr. Martin—analyze important and timely problems by applying the pragmatic method to interpret the social world and argue for political reform and social progress. Dr. Martin—along with other collaborators from his research program—has multiple interdisciplinary articles formally “Under Review” as well as some in the “Revise and Resubmit” phase at various scholarly publications.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In the U.S., factors such as race, age, and income affect voter turnout rates. This essay describes how political candidates can benefit from running on an electoral platform supporting voter expansion policies. To that end, we analyze the relationship both traditional and progressive values have with respective attitudes about and positions around policies that either suppress or expand voter participation. We find that minorities and young people are disproportionately underrepresented in registering to vote and subsequently casting ballots. As such, understanding how demographics and related trends impact participation levels is of particular interest to pragmatically minded candidates when appealing to such key groups for building a majority coalition. Candidates, whose primary strategy is to make voting easier for historically disenfranchised and other ignored constituencies, can not only help their electoral chances of winning but can institutionalize greater long-term accessibility and thus increased participation levels using the policymaking process.

Keywords: campaign strategy; culture; elections; mobilization; political campaigns; political candidates; political participation; political theory; voting

1. Introduction

The health of a democracy is invariably tied to its electoral system. When voter participation and citizen confidence dip and the integrity of the vote is at stake, it becomes likely that the vote will be unrepresentative of the entire population. In a review conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau on the 2016 presidential election, people who made \$75,000 a year were 19.7 percent more likely to vote than those who made \$20,000, with the percent of the population who voted increasing simultaneously with the rising level of income, thus acting as a stark illustration of the wealth gap in voting accessibility (Voting and Registration, 2019). If the vote is limited to particular groups while excluding others, the makeup of elected leaders is not fully representative of a country's eligible citizens. We hold that if voting were to become more accessible and attractive to a wider array of people, a broader selection of interests would be considered, and in turn, the government would become more responsive to the needs of the general electorate.

To accomplish these ends, candidates should consider putting voting and the expansion of voter rights at the forefront of their platforms. As an issue that transcends political barriers—or at least should—like that of gerrymandering, the act of voting extends from the political and partisan sphere into the actual functioning of a democracy itself. Once improving the process and increasing the likelihood of voting, issues that candidates usually run on, such as social welfare reform or carbon emissions reduction, would be more easily dealt with in the interest of the people because more citizens would have access to the tools used to participate in the vote. As it stands today, certain ideologies on the right use theoretical frames of reference and the politics of fear to disenfranchise minorities and other underrepresented communities from voting. To negate this effect, our proposed solution emphasizes a particular set of commonalities shared among American voters in order to eliminate voter suppression as well as barriers to vote that disproportionately affect those marginalized groups. Using this as a platform would create the conditions for a more accessible system that relies on its own abilities to improve society. Further, such a platform relates to voters of all socio-economic standing rather than just a select few, thus providing the opportunity for the American political system to represent all aspects of the American experience.

Voter disenfranchisement and suppression are common across the U.S. With laws requiring voter IDs and others that prevent freed convicts from voting, significant amounts of targeted populations are unable to exercise their right to vote and, as a result, representation is restricted (Muyumba, 2018). Representing a vicious cycle, when voter suppression is practiced, elected officials make decisions that are contrary to the beliefs of the larger citizenry. For example, the average American's trust in the government has fallen to 19 percent, less than one third of its level in the 1960s because of decisions that exclude various constituencies (Elving, 2015). This is, on our view, a consequence of a non-pragmatically informed conservative orientation, based on ideological principles that are prevalent in American political representation. This orientation puts forth policies intended to suppress voter turnout, targeted at minorities and others like young people, while justifying them by making appeals to the rule of law and the integrity of the voting process. It also states that policies meant to quell voter fraud are the solution, despite the fact that in-person voter fraud is strikingly uncommon: there have been only 31 or so credible incidents of voter fraud out of one billion or so votes cast (Levitt, 2014). As an issue that spans many realms of policy and extends to the health of a democracy, voter disenfranchisement, such as suppressing votes, can alter—and has altered—the way that the American electorate is represented.

As such, our solution to voter disenfranchisement is a pragmatically informed set of candidates and campaigns—and eventual policy makers—where the crux of these campaigns and policy

promises lies in voter expansion and in the cultural implications that follow—that is, more policies passed that keep voters engaged and facilitate a culture not of issue based campaigning but of expanding access to the tools for which citizens make their government more accessible.

2. Methodology

To correctly frame our strategy, it becomes useful to draw on the academic definition of the pragmatic theory, rather than the popular conception of the word. In politics and for common rhetorical purposes today, pragmatism—or pragmatists—is used to describe those who are readily able to cross party lines in negotiation (Herndon, 2018). For the purpose of this essay, we propose our strategy to be based on the pragmatic method put forward by Richard Rorty that holds that a political system based on a “fundamental” theory of man is incorrect in its assumption that there is one theory or philosophy that holds for all people, but rather that it is more effective to move forward without a philosophical foundation and to base policy and strategy on past experiences and hard fact. Within Rorty’s pragmatism, thinking is divided into two schools: that which is pragmatic, or “nonessential,” and that which is essential, or “foundational.” Essential thinking is based in “theories of morality” or “theories of humanity,” and that which is nonhuman in nature, relying on a supernatural power. Foundationalism stems from essential thinking, in believing that there is an ideological foundation on which one can build in order to reach the “truth”; in short, pragmatism rejects this notion.

When applied to democratic theory, both foundationalism and pragmatism can be supportive of democracy as the preferred form of government; that said, foundationalism holds that if government is formed around the essential notion that humans are all created equal, democracy is the ideal and thus best type of government. Pragmatism, in its denial that political theory and governments themselves should any longer be grounded in and founded on ideological principle, accepts as the best option that which maximizes well-being and that which does not need ideological underpinnings to sustain itself. We hold that, in the pragmatic method democracy functions better when more citizens have equal access to the tools needed for maintaining and improving democracy—namely, electoral participation and voting.

A campaign strategy that utilizes the pragmatic method and is centered on expanding voting access would help to ensure ideology is no longer *the* tool in which to garner political support. Currently, ideology—as it is foundational—is used to divide or unite voters for or against certain issues because it is informed not in a context of this-worldly experiences and mutually beneficial outcomes but grounded in some intrinsic, other-worldly devotion to *the* purported human cause. For example, debates in which policy makers use the foundation of religion in an attempt to prove or disprove whether or not gay marriage should be legal are used to mobilize voters for or against bans, and then to divide the electorate. Despite these efforts, studies show that when gay marriage became legal nationwide, invalidating religious arguments against it in the name of the law, public opinion drastically changed on the topic. In 2010, 28 percent of Americans opposed gay marriage, whereas 42 percent favored legalizing it; in 2017, 62 percent of Americans said that they favor allowing gay marriage, while 32 percent oppose it (Rubin, 2017). This difference illustrates that once foundationalism becomes increasingly viewed as an outmoded source for philosophical justification, the American electorate adapts to not only living without it but begins to celebrate the societal implications—resulting in a freer and more tolerant democratic society. Similarly, when initially unattractive policies increase the well-being of the entire population, those policies become more attractive as people learn to accept, appreciate, and ultimately come to depend on those policies. An example of this is the change in public opinion surrounding health-care access. According to a study conducted by Kaiser Health, in the year after the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), as many as 51 percent of the population viewed it as unfavorable, as opposed to 34 percent who viewed it as favorable. In late 2016 and early 2017, public opinion shifted as a result of increased attention brought to the repeal of the act and it became more favorable, at 52 percent, than unfavorable, at 39 percent KFF health tracking poll: The public’s views on the ACA, 2019). Similarly, we maintain that the concept and conclusions can be applied to

voting rights and access. If candidates were to advocate for expansions in voter rights, their policies, which would increase ease and freedom of voting, would experience widespread support like those described above when passed into law.

Policies that expand the public's access to the vote typically fall on the progressive side, despite the act of voting being the mechanism by which both parties are empowered. This divide, however, is almost entirely partisan and political, with younger and non-white voters who typically vote on the left being the target of voter suppression laws and other voting barriers (Cohn, 2018). The aim of such statutes and maneuvers is not the only one used to suppress turnout. Rhetoric around voter fraud and voter discouragement, specifically on the grounds that votes will not make a difference in elections, also have a negative effect on the voting populace (Thrush & Peters, 2018). These tactics of suppression and fear, grounded in foundational ideology, would be reduced by a strategy informed by pragmatism and focused on expanding the vote to all citizens rather than only a few.

3. Conservative rhetoric and the foundational left

Among individuals who consider themselves conservative is an ideology united by a common philosophy. More specifically, conservative ideology is based in a frame of reference that is foundationally informed in philosophical presuppositions that favor limited government and display skepticism toward social dilemmas. It is this foundational frame of reference on which congressional leaders, scholars, and advocates alike seek to base their political arguments, civil discourse, and national identity. Instead of accepting a pragmatic approach to salient issues—an approach that Rorty argues is pivotal to the success of American democratic institutions—conservative ideologues provoke racial anxiety and cultural myths from their fallacious and theoretical frame of reference of national self-image with tactics that intimidate and disenfranchise minorities and underrepresented communities from exercising their civic duties. It is this appeal toward “traditional American values” that stokes intolerance toward the tools that improve democracy and hinder opportunity for equal access to voting.

The harbinger of intolerance for improving democratic institutions is disenfranchising voters to turn out to the polls on Election Day. This can be accomplished through several avenues yet, with statutes and limitations which limit access to the polls, the effect seems most adverse. The act of limiting voter turnout through bureaucratic efforts is not novel—on the contrary, Republican-controlled state legislatures frequently pass provisions to ensure an outcome favorable to conservative ideology (Michaelson, 2018; Muyumba, 2018; New voting restrictions in America, 2018). The latest example of such influence includes state legislative efforts happening in Georgia for the 2018 midterm elections:

The state legislature passed, and the governor signed a bill that would make voter registration more difficult. It imposes a requirement that voter registration forms match exactly with other state records—a burdensome process known as ‘no match, no vote.’ Only months earlier, the secretary of state agreed in a court settlement to stop a similar procedure that had prevented tens of thousands from registering. (New voting restrictions in America, 2018)

The efforts in Georgia are emblematic of efforts utilized by conservative ideology based in a foundational frame of reference. To utilize legislative procedures to disenfranchise thousands of citizens from performing their civic duty is against the democratic values insisted by Rorty. More specifically, it is antithetical to what John Dewey admired in democracy in that a vision for one citizen should not hinder the ability for others to work out their own salvation (Voparil & Bernstein, 2010). However, only when legislation prioritizes democracy over philosophy, as Rorty argues, will these values be illuminated.

Disenfranchising voters also reflects an alarming rhetoric that seeks to alienate and generalize American values. The momentous intensification of the Tea Party movement is indicative of this

frightening rhetoric circulating today's political sphere. Rising in opposition to the Obama administration's and Democratic congressional leaders' healthcare agenda, Tea Party elites not only hold strong resentment over non-conservatives but especially undertake shrill attacks against black immigrant, and LGBT communities (Grossmann & Hopkins, 2015). Tom Tancredo, a former representative from Colorado who mounted a speech at the Tea Party Convention in 2010, asserted that Barack Obama was elected president because "we do not have civics, literacy tests before people can vote in this country" (as cited in Hechtkopf, 2010). He furthered this tort by claiming that "people who could not spell the word vote or say it in English put a committed socialist ideologue in the White House—name is Barack Hussein Obama" (as cited in Hechtkopf, 2010). To exclude these communities is antithetical to what Rorty refers to as a "civilized society" in which "tolerance for other people's fantasies and choices is instinctive and habitual" (as cited in Voparil & Bernstein, 2010). The unsubstantiated contention presented by Tancredo is a practice of paranoid politics undertaken by Tea Party elites to engender exaggerated, over-suspicious, and apocalyptic rhetoric toward minority communities. The Tea Party's parochial emphasis on these underrepresented communities is an awareness of the increasing populace of African Americans, Hispanics, and LGBT individuals who play an amassed role in national politics including contributing to political discourse and participating in civic duties.

Foundationally based conservative ideologues also utilize a theoretical frame of reference in regard to traditional religious values to suppress the suffrage of minorities. These individuals seek to enshrine Christian fundamentalism to "traditional American values" by utilizing extreme rhetoric to provoke a sense of what it means "to be an American" (Salzer, 2018). Newt Gingrich, an established conservative thought leader who ran for the Republican candidacy for president, encompasses this philosophy:

I am convinced that if we do not decisively win the struggle over the nature of America, by the time they're my age they will be in a secular atheist country, potentially one dominated by radical Islamists and with no understanding of what it once meant to be an American. (as cited in Montopoli, 2011)

Gingrich is insinuating that there exists a fundamental nature of America in which, only through this foundational definition, can citizens understand what it means to be American. Without an explicit statement, Gingrich argues that American values are exclusively bound to a Christian frame of reference and without this adherence to religion, citizens cannot understand the true meaning of being an American (Berney, 2018). Without this understanding that Gingrich adheres to, an American citizen is unable to participate in American democracy because she has no basic understanding of what being an American means. This impulse to marginalize Americans who refuse to adhere to a "nature of America" that incorporates a Christian God is counterfactual to a truly democratic state insisted by Rorty and argued by Dewey and Whitman. Dewey and Whitman

both hoped that America would be the place where a religion of love would finally replace a religion of fear. They dreamed that Americans would break the traditional link between the religious impulse, the impulse to stand in awe of something greater than oneself, and the infantile need for security, the childish hope of escaping from time and chance. (as cited in Voparil & Bernstein, 2010)

This pragmatically informed reasoning unites the many unique viewpoints characterized by a pluralistic America. It resonates with a liberal democracy that prides over equal political and social liberties for all constituents, no matter their cultural or religious background.

Moral beliefs rooted in philosophical presuppositions held by foundationally based conservative theorists vehemently abhor the rise of pluralism and propagate rhetoric that generates moral divisions and political partisanship among Americans. Instead of tolerating the outcomes that the

institution of the American democratic system contends, conservative fundamentalists highlight political issues as moral situations in order to polarize the general population into a dichotomy of extreme political stances. Sarah Palin, a Tea Party advocate and former Republican vice presidential nominee, utilizes this rhetoric to form in-groups and out-groups among Americans:

We don't like this fundamental transformation of America—this road that we're on toward national insolvency; being beholden to foreign countries in so many respects now; being under the thumb of big government with more of a disrespect for life, for the sanctity of life. We don't like that transformation. (as cited in Spiker, 2016)

Palin's claim that a "fundamental transformation of America" is taking place insists that a "fundamental America" exists, rhetoric that seeks to disenfranchise non-white, non-western culture from traditional American ideals. Her use of "we" is rhetoric for the in-group that is holding the American foundational fabric together while insinuating that the out-group is transforming what it means to be American—a transformation that is undesirable based on a foundationally informed philosophy of American democracy. This contradicts Rorty's view of a pragmatically informed democracy. Rorty insists that the U.S. should renounce philosophically justified and morally based political arguments for ones that adhere to the preferences of all Americans:

Using these definitions, we can say that Rawls wants views about man's nature and purpose to be detached from politics. As he says, he wants his conception of justice to "avoid ... claims about the essential nature and identity of persons." So presumably, [Rawls] wants questions about the point of human existence, or the meaning of human life, to be reserved for private life. A liberal democracy will not only exempt opinions on such matters from legal coercion, but also aim at disengaging discussions of such questions from discussions of social policy. Yet it will use force against the individual conscience, just insofar as conscience leads individuals to act so as to threaten democratic institutions. (as cited in Voparil & Bernstein, 2010)

By prioritizing democracy over philosophy, Rorty asserts that disengaging philosophical disagreements from conversations regarding politics abets the adherence to democratic values and the advancement of social policy. Therefore, it is pertinent that a pluralistic America is not only capable of, but obliged to engage in civic duties, a circumstance made possible by easing the barriers of voting.

While the existence of a foundationally based right-wing ideology is evident, there exists a lesser known faction molded by leftist theorists who negatively perceive the effectiveness of the American democratic system are marked by their spectatorship and disengagement from political participation. This faction interprets the institution of democracy as inadequately ensuring "the fair values of political liberties for their poorest members" and "the requisite social, political, civic, and economic environment necessary for citizens to learn to articulate their views in ways that others can understand and accept" in order to join "in a collective political project with others, or internalize the norms of reasonableness necessary to engage in productive democratic debates with others" (Parvin, 2017). This perspective inundates the theoretical frame of reference envisaged by the cultural and academic left and thwarts their vision of a politically engaged American society. The faction's themes are largely philosophical rather than strategic and democratic. They fail to offer substantive policies or platforms that could benefit the American people. This political immobilization is perceived by Rorty as retrospective and spectatorial:

Leftists in the academy have permitted cultural politics to supplant real politics and have collaborated with the Right in making cultural issues central to public debate. The academic Left has no projects to propose to America, no vision of a country to be achieved by building a consensus on the need for specific reforms. The American civic religion seems to them narrow-minded and obsolete nationalism. (as cited in Parvin, 2017)

Rorty insists that a politically inactive left that overwhelmingly centralizes interest, thought, and debate on just cultural issues is similarly detrimental as a foundationally based conservative ideology has demonstrated itself to be, at least in terms of the lack of progress on things like wages and mobility. Instead of being accused of inactivity, the left ought to consider a functional platform of policy issues that embraces democratic institutions and eschews philosophical suppositions.

4. A pragmatic new left

A pragmatically informed new left candidate whose campaign strategy emphasizes the importance of eliminating discrimination, while prioritizing growing economic concerns and voter expansion, benefits the meta-issue of voter turnout that previously sitting Democrats have ignored. We compare the term “maturing left,” (Voparil & Bernstein, 2010) as Rorty would describe the Democrats of the 1960s that prioritized the acknowledgement of differences rather than common economic concerns, to the sitting Democratic candidates in Trump’s era that resemble similar shortcomings concerning the economic worries of working-class citizens today. This is demonstrated in the comparison of maturing left Democrats like Joe Crowley and Hillary Clinton to new left progressives like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders and how differently they prioritized the economic issues of working-class people like healthcare. By drawing comparisons between the agendas of policy makers from the left that Rorty found to be ineffective with similarly minded policy makers in 2018, a pragmatically informed new left candidate can engage and reach more voters and thus increase voter turnout. It is important to acknowledge how voter expansion is not only changed through voting laws, but also through the acknowledgement of the economic concerns of previously disengaged voters.

Low voter participation reflects a disengaged voting culture that is encouraged by the foundational right and ignored by the maturing left—again, with the “maturing left” consisting of current sitting Democrats in power that have pushed economic concerns and the meta-issue of voter expansion aside while instead prioritizing the recognition of cultural differences. These policy makers of the maturing left, for Rorty,

had a lot of ideas about cultural change, but few ideas about how to counter Reagan’s soak-the-poor policies, what to do for the unemployed in the Rust Belt, or how to make sure that a global economy did not pauperize American wage-earners. (as cited in Voparil & Bernstein, 2010)

With most independent voters leaning Democratic, it is not surprising to map how more accessible voting policies can be a concern for those in power from the right (Smith, 2016). However, maturing incumbent Democrats are coming to realize that current platforms do not provide broad enough representation within economically and socially evolving districts. This can be seen from the resulting Democratic primary winner for New York’s 14th House district between congressional incumbent Joe Crowley and first-time candidate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. There are many factors to take into account regarding Ocasio-Cortez’s victory against Crowley, which include Ocasio-Cortez’s platform of emphasizing economic concerns of the working class, while also addressing the meta-issue of voter turnout in the country.

The maturing left of the 1960s compared to the 1930s, as described by Rorty, have prioritized the recognition of cultural differences over the recognition of a common humanity through the elimination of prejudice altogether. Similarities regarding the recognition of economic concerns by the working class can be drawn between the maturing left of the 1960s and the maturing left still in power into the 21st century. Economic issues have received less intellectual and political consideration as cultural differences are at the forefront of the maturing left’s political agendas. With shifting economic trends in the U.S. and the diminishment of the working class, political candidates and eventual policy makers will benefit from unifying among common economic worries (Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018). This prioritization of economic issues in respect to the

meta-issue of voter turnout should be done so, not by throwing away the efforts already made in the recognition of cultural differences, but in acknowledgement that a stronger left can be encouraged through the unification of what people in the U.S. have in common. By encouraging this alliance between groups facing economic distress and groups that are disenfranchised for reasons outside of poverty, a commonality is shared that Rorty says “makes us fit to be citizens of the same nations” (as cited in Voparil & Bernstein, 2010). This commonality is encouraged through the elimination of prejudice, which facilitates the increase in voters for new left candidates.

A political candidate who seeks to bring economic equality through the elimination of prejudice will attract more voters because racial inequality and economic inequality are tied together (Kochhar, 2018). During Ocasio-Cortez’s debate with Crowley, she said, “This isn’t just about gender and race, but class” (as cited in Gray, 2018). Ocasio-Cortez positions herself as the better fit for the district by focusing on the economic issues that are prevalent within it. She further states, “In a district that is 85 percent Democrat, overwhelmingly working class, and 70 percent people of color, we deserve a working-class champion” (as cited in Gray, 2018). Ocasio-Cortez had recognized and acknowledged the overlap between cultural and economic concerns prevailing within her district. This emphasizes a commonality between the people of her community that unifies them based on the economic concerns of the working class, without disregarding the recognition of cultural change that takes shape within her district. President of the Institute for New Economic Thinking, Robert Johnson, writes that “it was always a mistake to separate out issues of race and class, because they go hand in hand. In economically insecure times, fear of the ‘other’ increases” (as cited in Foroohar, 2017). This is a fear taken advantage of by the foundational right. Republicans have been able to play these two groups against one another, such as in the form of voter suppression laws. But if the focus were to change toward unifying a stronger left that encompasses a larger swath of potential voters, then the expansion of voters supporting pragmatically informed candidates will expand as well.

The economic trends of the U.S. over the past few decades have had working class families shifting away from a maturing left. Analyzing voters’ priority issues during the 2016 presidential election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, David Winston, from The Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, found that voters prioritized issues relating to the economy rather than issues such as gender, racial injustice, and climate change (Winston, 2018). In the survey done on 8,000 voters polled in November and December of 2016, Clinton won a majority of the 23 issues listed (Winston, 2018). However, Trump won voters within the top 10 prioritized issues, including those concerning the economy of which was highest priority by voters, with 98 percent finding it to be important (Winston, 2018). In the analysis, the Rust Belt was stated as a high influencer to the election outcome, referring to the regions experiencing deindustrialization of a previously economic inclining manufacturing sector of the U.S. The report noted how Trump won important Rust Belt states, saying that

we can see that the issues priorities largely matched the electorate as a whole ... [t]he key here is the economy. Trump voters had this as their top issue and a higher priority, while Clinton voters had it as their fifth issue and as an average priority. (Winston, 2018)

With shifting Republican votes for Donald Trump occurring in areas undergoing the most significant economic change, a new left candidate, who creates alliances based on American citizens’ common concern for the economy, helps to create a stronger voting left (Winston, 2018). A candidate who not only focuses on issues relating to cultural differences and social issues, but intertwines them with concerns relating to the economy and the working class, will find herself to be better positioned for engaging voters and expanding voter turnout.

An issue that is more valued by the left than the right is healthcare, which can be used to represent how the maturing left in the 21st century has fallen short in meeting the demands of an economically and culturally changing left. The Voter Study Group report concluded that although

the economy was an important issue across both parties, there were some key differences: “Democrats and Independents chose healthcare as one of their more important issues, while Republicans and independents said jobs was one of their more important issues” (Winston, 2018). The adoption of the ACA in 2010 was the beginning of a landmark change of healthcare norms to broaden the access to basic healthcare even though it was not—and still is not—acknowledged as a constitutional right. During Clinton and Sanders’ 2016 debate in Wisconsin, Sanders emphasized his astonishment that the U.S., an advanced democratic country, does not guarantee healthcare for all of its people, while Clinton spoke of Medicare-for-all as not being economically feasible: “If it’s Medicare for all, then you no longer have the Affordable Care Act” (peoplefor, 2007). However, with studies showing that there is a rising interest by Americans in a Medicare-for-all healthcare plan (Stein, Cornwell, & Tanfani, 2018), the maturing left’s foundational preference toward the ACA falls short from the changing priorities of a shifting new left population. Nancy Pelosi, at a press release in April of 2016, spoke of the progress in health insurance plans, in relation to how women were treated, saying “those many [who previously didn’t have health insurance] have it in a better way—no pre-existing conditions, no lifetime limits. And being a woman is no longer a pre-existing medical condition” Transcript of Pelosi Press Conference Today, 2017). By purporting how being a woman has been seen as a natural inferior within the ACA, Pelosi, here, can be interpreted as perpetuating a foundational rhetoric that the maturing left uses in acknowledgment of cultural differences rather than aiming to unify a larger coalition under the ACA over a priority of common economic concerns.

Looking at how the maturing left have addressed healthcare and how new left policy makers are seeking to move forward on healthcare reform can help provide insight for candidates to position themselves on the topic while still prioritizing the meta-issue of voter expansion. Ocasio-Cortez ran on a platform that advocates for Medicare-for-all, along with which she endorsed the Improved and Expanded Medicare for All Act (H.R. 676) (Ocasio-Cortez, n.d.). “The Affordable Care Act was a great step forward to insure the previously ‘uninsurable,’ but for many Americans, costs are still far too high,” states her website (Ocasio-Cortez, n.d.). This is an example of a new left candidate who recognizes the need to break away from the maturing left’s foundational presupposition that healthcare is just a human right. With more Americans supporting Medicare-for-all, it is not surprising to see an increase in political candidates prioritizing single-payer healthcare as part of their platforms (Owens, 1970). There is an increasing shift away from the maturing left’s principles on healthcare as a human right and toward a new left that seeks common ground on the agreement that healthcare is an economic issue. This reflects how major issues concerning citizens, such as healthcare, can encourage policy makers to adjust their agendas. However, while the meta-issue of voting is an issue that needs more work from new left policy makers in order to attract potential voters, a new left candidate, who adjusts to the shifting economic concerns of the left, would come to understand that this meta-issue should be a high priority, as it is an issue that benefits a stronger left with more accessible voting laws.

With low voter turnout rates in the U.S. (Gay, 2018) and a common acknowledgement by a majority Americans of the importance of voting (Oliphant, 2018), a candidate platform that prioritizes the expansion of voting laws should be well received in attracting and then retaining the votes of previously disengaged voters. Since more affluent voters go to the polls at higher rates than less affluent voters (Kasara & Suryanarayan, 2015), combined with the presence of a wide disparity in racial and economic equality in the U.S. (Kochhar, 2018), engaging minority and working-class groups previously disenfranchised from voting would help bring about a more inclusive representation of American interests. In doing so, eventual policy makers can represent the interest of more voters who will then sustain the voter turnout rates of a pragmatically oriented political candidate.

Expanding voter participation can look like a variety of proactive voter policies enacted at all levels of government. One way to encourage increased voter turnout at the national level is to make voting a national holiday, which is seen in countries with high voter turnout rates such as in

Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and India (Besant, 2016). An electoral holiday is also increasingly being advocated by new left policy makers, such as Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders (Kelleher, 2018). Having Election Day on the weekend rather than on a weekday can also improve turnout rates, as seen in Finland, Iceland, Luxembourg, and New Zealand (Weller, 2016b). New left policies that prioritize the expansion and increased accessibility of voter turnout would help to represent the priorities of the American people and produce a stronger, left-leaning majority. Thus, there will be more people to support a new left candidate with a pragmatically informed platform that tackles citizens' most concerning issues, such as the economy.

With House Democrats coming to power in January 2019, the ensuing political changes that follow may be affected by a shift in agendas brought by new left political candidates and members of congress from the 2018 midterm elections. Members from the changing new left are already stirring conversations from the foundational right on a rhetoric of religious presuppositions, where Fox News host, Laura Ingraham, described newly elected Congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib, and Ilhan Omar, as “the four horsewomen of the apocalypse” (as cited in Moran, 2018). On the other end, new left candidates are addressing the need for change on how the maturing left have addressed congressional issues in the past. One example is Conor Lamb of Pennsylvania's 18th congressional district who, when asked about his views on House leadership, answered, “My take is, if these people have been around for several years and they haven't solved these problems that have been hanging around, it's time for someone new to step up and get it done” (as cited in Weigel, 2018). More progressive new left policy makers running for office in the midterms of 2018 reflects a desire for more representative political candidates of a shifting left moving forward. The promotion of a more inclusive and engaging voting culture that is supported by a campaign that strives for economic equality and eliminating prejudice will be of great benefit in creating a stronger—and even a more unified—America.

5. Pragmatism and young people

One group greatly affected by the expansion of voting access and promotion of voting as a strategy for political participation would be young people—who, for our purposes, make up the millennial and Z generations. We have chosen to develop and analyze these young people because they comprise of a group not as politically engaged as older groups as well as because an increase in their participation would, on our reading, be of benefit to U.S. democracy. Currently, young people are underrepresented in voter registration (Root & Kennedy, 2018). In 2016, only 64 percent of individuals age 18 to 34 were registered to vote, while the number was 72 percent for individuals 35 years old or older (Root & Kennedy, 2018). A disparity in participation in a democratic system weakens the power of democracy and its ability to represent each member. As such, a political platform based on a pragmatic orientation of democratic participation targets those who do not currently have an actual or perceived stake in democracy. According to Sara Yerkes (2016),

[W]hen a significant percentage of the population sits out an election, it challenges the basic premise of our democracy—a government by, for, and of *all* of the people. Studies on voting rates in the United States have shown that the gap between young and old voters is consistently larger than any other voting gap—between races, education levels, or socio-economic groups. (n.p.)

Young people in the U.S. have an opportunity to participate in America's electoral system. A system which lacks the voices of some is incapable of representing everyone, and the opposite holds true as well: a system which provides a voice for everyone is closer to democracy. Unlike older generations, which largely view the country they live in through foundational ideologies as mentioned previously, young people more so tackle social issues from a pragmatic viewpoint. As David Burstein elaborates, “Millennials are being forced to accept—for better or for worse—the reality of the world we live in, and we are operating from that acceptance as a basis for understanding and

seeking progress” (as cited in Anikst, 2018). In this case, young people are both responsible for and capable of participating in society through their own means. We support this sort of pragmatic civic duty with Rorty as a means to increase proprietorship in politics. Pragmatism, according to Rorty, “represents a desirable replacement of [foundational] questions like ... ‘What is really real?’ ... with the sensible question ‘Does anybody have any new ideas about what we human beings might manage to make of ourselves?’” (as cited in Voparil & Bernstein, 2010)? A question such as this is asked only when foundational rhetoric about the way American society is structured gets dropped in favor of a pragmatically informed desire to find what works.

Rorty promotes the conclusion that “humans have nothing to rely on save one another” (as cited in Voparil & Bernstein, 2010). Young people increasingly hold this position. Again, Burstein says, “These young people are looking around and asking themselves, ‘Where can I focus my efforts and make a positive change?’” (as cited in Anikst, 2018)? He also argues that millennials are the most technologically centered generation, and that this makes them the “most global generation” (as cited in Anikst, 2018). Young people, by way of the internet and specifically social media, take greater advantage of accessing perspectives and opinions than older people. We hold that, with Rorty, pragmatism allows for democratic societies to more widely consider many ways of being human so that a citizen can rely on the solutions she determines are the best to replace those solutions that are given through foundational philosophy (Voparil & Bernstein, 2010). Technology in the hands of young people has the power to humanize those on another continent, in another state, or around the corner. The increase in understanding of perspectives on human life, Rorty argues, makes individuals more human (Voparil & Bernstein, 2010). According to a report published by Brookings, “Millennials’ desire for pragmatic action that drives results will overtake today’s emphasis on ideology and polarization as Boomers finally fade from the scene” (Winograd & Hais, 2016). It is a time of increased technology and information and decreased foundationalism and religiosity; young people are in fact becoming more aware that they only have each other to rely on, for which Rorty advocates. Pragmatically oriented electoral participation in America is reliant upon such a pragmatically oriented generation, as they are increasingly realizing that it is up to them to solve social problems.

The expansion of voting access has both theoretical and real-world effects on the civic process. Ensuring and expanding access to voting benefits the United State because it allows the country to move toward a more accessible democracy. Theoretically, a democracy functions well when all citizens are able to participate and have an equal say in their system. College student Lauryl Hebenstreit (2018) writes, “The future of democracy can be secured by large numbers of voters because it shows an increase in people engaged in what is happening on a local and national level.” It is clear that an engagement in one’s society is important because it gives the members of a society the opportunity to have equal representation. A disparity in engagement reflects inequalities. Alongside advancing a more theoretically justified civic process, expanding voting access leads to changes in the election of political leaders and the introduction of public policy. A consequence of disengagement and low voter turnout among young people, minorities, and poorer Americans is “class bias,” which holds that policy will favor the interests of older and wealthier individuals, the ones who vote at higher levels (Weller, 2016a). Class bias shows that low voter turnout continues to negatively affect the already underrepresented groups in the U.S. If voting were accessible to all eligible Americans, then political outcomes would begin to reflect those interests rather than the often-conflicting interests of overrepresented groups for whom voting has been made easier. This would facilitate the conditions under which a better society could be created; by the term “better”—and here after, as it is used—we mean a version of society in which people are more fully using democratic mechanisms, like voting, and not to provide some abstract answers about what is “true” or “real” in the ideological sense, but to solve the real-world impediments, like inaccessibility and disenfranchisement, that currently obstruct possibilities about what, as previously stated, “to make of ourselves,” which could, for instance, look like increased accountability by and responsiveness from political representatives.

Voting is indicative of a democracy's level of engagement and equality of political participation; the question of expanding access to voting should not be partisan or generational because voting is the most basic method of civic engagement. Politicians should welcome efforts to increase engagement with voters who have traditionally been marginalized. Root and Kennedy (2018) argue:

One way to improve voter participation for young people is to welcome them into the democratic process early, pre-registering them to vote at a time when they are more likely to begin interacting with government agencies where voter registration services are offered. One benefit of this is that, once a person registers to vote, that individual becomes part of a state's voter file and is more likely to be contacted by campaign and grassroots efforts, which increase voter participation. (n.p.)

Voting should not be antithetical to the goals of any political party. In fact, as Root and Kennedy (2018) say, increased voter registration can even allow political parties to contact a larger number of eligible citizens signed up to formally participate in the voting system than before. A pragmatic view of democracy also supports prioritizing democratic engagement over philosophical arguments. Rorty says, "When choosing between alternative pieces of legislation, we want people to base their decisions on arguments—arguments that start from premises that can be made plausible to anyone who care to look into the matter" (as cited in Voparil & Bernstein, 2010). We argue that, for politics to be accessible, it needs to be understood by anyone that strives to understand it, as Rorty outlines. This sentiment is pragmatically informed because it advocates for political arguments based on their practicality rather than political arguments justified through foundational beliefs which are not shared by all.

The voter suppression of minority groups—including young people, people of color, and poorer people—is a situation where foundational thinking has undermined democratic values. Again, although the issue of democratic participation should not be partisan or generational, it is both because of changing demographics which are leading to a smaller base for the Republican Party from which to attract their traditional constituencies. The Republican Party has made efforts of voter suppression recently by removing voters from registration rolls or putting voter ID laws in place, the latter of which has been done in 24 states since the election of 2010 (Gross, 2018). The Republican Party's base, predominantly older and white, will shrink due to demographic changes, and this has threatened the Party's political control (Griffin, Teixeira, & Frey, 2018). As Griffin et al. (2018) write, "Many analysts suggest that if current voting patterns remain the same as in recent elections, the projected rise of communities of color—Hispanics, blacks, Asians, and others—will favor Democrats as the Republican-leaning white share of the electorate shrinks." Voter suppression efforts happen because Republicans cannot rely on their predominantly white, older voter base as the number of Democratic-leaning young people and people of color in the country grows (Griffin et al., 2018). Although claimed in 1980, what Republican strategist named Paul Weyrich said still applies today: "I don't want everybody to vote ... [O]ur leverage ... goes up as the voting populace goes down" (peoplefor, 2007). When the extent of democratic participation is seen as an ideological benefit or barrier instead of a pragmatic assurance, the democratic beliefs of the U.S. are damaged in order to further partisan success. Therefore, adherence to a foundational view of voting and the political process facilitates and encourages anti-democratic voter suppression.

Georgia represents one example of the Republican Party putting philosophy over democracy by prioritizing its maintenance of the state's political offices more than the guarantee of an equal democracy. In Georgia, 214 polling places have been closed across multiple counties since 2012 (Niesse, Prabhu, & Elias, 2018). Out of the state's 159 total counties, 53 of them have fewer precincts than in 2012 (Niesse et al., 2018). Poll closings in Georgia disenfranchise black voters who have to travel longer distances in order to vote (Vasilogambros, 2018). This represents a use of political power to further inequality. By doing so, the Republican Party fails to allow for increased

political participation. As attorney John Powers states, “Many of the counties in which consolidations are being considered have substantial numbers of minority voters ... These precinct consolidations have a disparate impact on Georgia’s most vulnerable citizens” (as cited in Niesse et al., 2018). The example of Georgia is one of many which shows that the desire for political power has led to a disregard for equal rights of voters.

For our purposes, the reason why it is beneficial to expand voting rights and access to young people and minorities is because the expansion will become self-reinforcing due to demographic trends. Millennials are to grow larger in population than Baby Boomers in 2019 (Fry, 2018). As these pragmatically focused groups grow, a political platform proposing a more accessible voting structure will then allow them to benefit from access to politics, and they will also maintain a larger role in the political process. While they may currently be underrepresented and have lower levels of voting, a campaign’s platform that aims to enfranchise and energize young people and people of color benefits from their increasing numbers. It also benefits from the fact that the meta-issue of voting is self-reinforcing; as young people gain political power, they would likely want to keep it when they obtain a level of agency they did not have in the past.

If a political platform is created which fulfills the marketing and expansion of voting as a topic on which to campaign, the U.S. will look different and, for us, for the better. There will be greater voter expansion and efforts to suppress voters, specifically minorities, will see less prominence. A higher level of political participation can occur, and individuals can see success in their own participation and be motivated to continue participating in the electoral system in order to maintain their interests and create that better society. Campaigns to increase voting in other countries have allowed for the increased education of the voting population; in fact, mandatory voting laws in Australia resulted in the increased political education of working-class voters, causing the working class to go from a politically disengaged group to a politically informed group (Weller, 2016a). As Weller (2016a) claims, “People tend to take an interest in things when there’s something specific in it for them.” The expansion of voting to politically disenfranchised, underrepresented, and disadvantaged groups is advantageous to the U.S. The way that pragmatism encourages collaboration with others as a means to create a better version of oneself and society is beneficial to the discourse surrounding voting rights because it allows for underrepresented groups to have the space to participate in this self-creation. Through this platform, the conditions for making a better society are established. A country that does not empower those without political power cannot benefit from their participation in politics. Therefore, the inclusion of all citizens in voting can allow the United States to make something new of political participation.

6. Conclusion

Voter disillusionment and disenfranchisement are issues that are of the utmost importance to the U.S. As it currently stands, only certain members of society have easy access to voting. Our solution proposes to negate voter disenfranchisement and disillusionment by employing a campaign strategy to showcase voting and voter rights as a main electoral platform plank. A successful result would combat disenfranchisement, increase participation, and allow the populace to participate more fully in the political process.

To that end, we have drawn on Richard Rorty’s “democracy over philosophy” model as well as cross-analyzed his pragmatism with various conservative ideologues to show the latter’s arguments to be increasingly outmoded. For such purposes, we have identified efforts performed by those from the foundational right seeking to disengage minorities and other underrepresented communities from participating in elections. Further, we have also shown how the foundational left actively participates in a political environment that perpetuates spectatorship rather than involvement. By drawing comparisons between the agendas of policy makers from the left that Rorty understood to be ineffective, and showing how such similarities have lingered with certain Democratic incumbents in 2018, we have sought to show how pragmatically informed new left

candidates can reach and mobilize more potential voters, and ultimately increase turnout by emphasizing the meta-issue of voting, specifically in a context of economic impact and prosperity.

Our pragmatic argument asserts that there is significant merit—electorally and beyond—in politically engaging specific segments of society, namely minorities, young people, and the poorer. Moreover, we maintain that efforts to suppress voting, largely based in foundational rhetoric by the right, are antithetical to the maintenance and health of a democracy. Our overall proposal identifies and develops how certain examples—like the younger generations, among others—would become beneficiaries of increased electoral participation and greater political inclusion, the consequence of which would feed off of itself—that is, platforms of more accessibility and expansion would lead to public policies that reflect such, and where campaign promises then become official party planks, a pragmatic politics that fosters efficacy, responsiveness, and flourishing would continually help to sustain a more representative, vibrant, and active democracy.

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