

## **If You Don't Vote, You won't matter**

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I saw a great commercial the other night. It had a series of young women who, when faced with some responsibility, (paying bills, cleaning up a mess, whatever) simply said "Oh, I'll let the rest of America take care of it." The announcer explained that indeed many citizens had the same attitude in the last Presidential Election. I laughed, it was a good PSA, it caught my attention and made a good point.

In 2000, there were 183,450,000 adults in the United States. This is the "Voting Age Population." Now, admittedly, for one reason or another some of these adults are not eligible to vote. However only about 2/3 of them are registered to vote. Even if this represents the total eligible, only about 2/3 of the registered voters actually voted. What that means is that less than half of the adult population actually voted in the presidential campaign. What I find interesting (and ironic) is all the "hub-bub" about how President Bush was elected without a majority (actually receiving less of the popular vote than did Al Gore). Indeed, even if a candidate were to receive 100% of the votes cast, it would represent less than half of the Voting Age Population.

I would like to start by castigating all people who are of legal age and eligible to vote but don't. If you don't vote you are selling yourself, our country, and its ideals short. Yes, I know that your vote specifically isn't likely to change anything. However, your vote counts (well, usually, perhaps not in FL). In the aggregate it is important. Keep in mind, that your vote is only 1 in many, just like your job is only 1 of many. Just like the taxes that you pay are small compared to the whole country. Should leaders ignore your job? Your family? If you don't vote, you are giving them carte blanche to do just that. If you examine the voter turn out what you see is that white, older (read wealthier) males tend to be the voters. In 2000, only 18% of 22-25 year olds voted, while 56% of 44-65 year olds voted. Look at the policies that came out of the current administration: they favor people who are older. Indeed with 61% of the over 65 crowd voting (good for you!) it's no surprise that we see Medicare and prescription drug reform. You can easily extend this analysis to any group you want. Voting means power and when you don't vote, you give up power.

It's also easy to complain that "you don't like either candidate." Believe me, I'm sympathetic. But I bet you didn't vote in the primary either (I did, my guy lost, where were all you to help me?). Primary elections are dismal failures. The primary is actually much more important than the main election, given the two party system. (If we had a system like Great Britain, this would work better).

I also want to castigate the leaders of the political parties and the politicians themselves. How lame are you that you can't get 50% of the people to vote? How uninspiring are the current leaders if most people are not even bothering with the whole thing? While one interpretation is that "things are great, I don't feel a need to vote," the opinion polls betray this hope as false. People don't vote because they think the system is bad. People don't vote because they don't like any of the candidates. People don't

vote because the whole thing is such a mess and no matter who wins, it will just get worse. Of course, I refer those who that make argument back to the first few paragraphs, but still, the leaders have failed as well.

Our country, for many years, sat as beacon on a hill. We claimed to be the bastion of freedom and Democracy. We still claim that we want to export Democracy to other countries. But how good an example are we? We want freedom for the Iraqi people. I agree, I would love to see a free Democratic Iraq. That would be a huge success, worthy of praise. But, we are not an example, nor are we any longer good leaders. While certainly I can fault the leaders of our country (and believe me, it's a bi-partisan complaint), ultimately, we are the ones who are responsible. If you want the US to be a strong leader for Democracy and Freedom: Elect people who will do that. Start with the Primaries. Cast your vote there. If you didn't, you may have to pick between two unsatisfactory candidates in November. But pick anyway. Your vote, ultimately will count. The leaders simply want to be re-elected. They look at who votes and design policies that make those people happy. Often on the shoulders of the groups that don't vote: the young, the poor the minorities. It's not fair, but it's not entirely their fault. You didn't vote, you didn't care: Why should they care?