

One Hand Clapping?

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We have had few times in our history that one party was so dominant that it governed almost unimpeded. The Republicans after the end of the Civil War had an almost unchallenged role until Woodrow Wilson in 1914. And the Democrats during the Depression and throughout World War II dominated, even granting a president four reelections.

However, we have never had a time in which there was refusal of the minority party to engage in bipartisan legislation. The current Republican party, still in the thrall of destructive Trumpism, has become the anti-democracy party, refusing to legislate responsibly. This is forcing the Democrats to serve as its own large tent, housing progressive and conservative wings, which makes common governance difficult.

The 2020 election removed Trump from office, and the two-thirds of Americans are much relieved to have a president with good character and a return to behavioral norms. However, his very popular agenda of big changes is being thwarted by some deliberately undemocratic advantages wielded by the defeated Republicans.

The Senate is itself undemocratic, giving equal power to states of disparate populations. Wyoming has as much power in the Senate as New York or California, which gives small rural populations more power than great urban centers. Racial bias still lives with conservative and less educated voters having undue power over the increasingly multi-racial cities.

The states themselves also have undemocratic advantages when each dominant party can parcel out voting districts every ten years, a process called Gerrymandering. Instead of having the redistricting done by unaffiliated professionals, party hacks draw district boundaries to disadvantage population centers.

The Supreme Court then made this undemocratic system worse when it ruled that corporations and their mega-donations were the same as individuals, constituting free speech. Thus "dark money" fouls the political landscape, unaccountable and destructive. Furthermore, the Republicans with Mitch McConnell deprived a Democratic president (Obama) from his lawful nomination of a new justice and then gave the next president (Trump) an opportunity to ram through three nominations. The second two nominated created a politically unbalanced court.

Unfortunately, President Biden is being hampered by his narrow margin in the Senate, 51 to 49, which would require total unanimity among Democrats and willingness to forever end the filibuster, an undemocratic remnant of the Senate's racist past.

We are doomed to trying to govern with only one hand clapping, until the upcoming election in 2022, which traditionally is a blowback against the party that won the presidency. If our democracy is to be saved, voters will have to pay attention (as they did in Georgia when a runoff election provided the Senate with two new Democrats who gave President Biden a narrow Senate majority).

If voters in 2022 are paying attention, they will punish Republicans who have morphed their party into a Trump Cult and give the Democrats a wider majority in the Senate. If this happens, the following protections of our democracy will pass:

\225 Reproductive rights protected nationwide making congressional support replace the Supreme Court's ability to undo a half century of protection.

\225 Voting procedures made national, protecting and encouraging voting by mail, non-partisan election procedures and vote counting, and protection for all voting.

\225 Gerrymandering procedures made illegal nationwide (districts redrawn by non-partisan commissions).

\225 Limits to presidential power: pardons cannot include felons imprisoned for attacking government, accountability for accepting or soliciting monetary benefits (emoluments), release of financial statements before nomination, restrictions on war making ability (nuclear dangers), annual physical and mental health status published.

\225 Term limits for all federal judges, including the Supreme Court (perhaps 20 years).

\225 Limit presidential appointments to Supreme Court to one Justice per term.

\225 Repeal of the filibuster rules in the Senate.

None of this can get past the Republicans in the Senate. They must be replaced so that the Democrats have a majority in both House and Senate races in 2022.

One party is legislating while the other is engaged in attacks on all democratic institutions and all guard-rails that keep us a viable democracy. The obstructing Republican Party is in an increasing minority and is in meltdown. It will eventually be replaced by a new patriotic conservative party.

687 words

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