

Campaign for America's Future

CONSERVATIVES SAY IT OUT LOUD: THEY HATE DEMOCRACY

By [Dave Johnson](#)
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The roots of today's toxic conservative movement lie in Ayn Rand's teaching that wealthy "producers -- now called "job creators" -- should be left alone by the government, namely the rest of us. The rest of us are "freeloaders," "moochers," "leeches" and "parasites" who feed off these producers and who shouldn't be allowed to make decisions to collect taxes from them or regulate them or interfere in most other ways. The Randians hate democracy, and say so, declaring that "collectivism" sacrifices individual rights to majority wishes. (See [Concern Over Republican Embrace Of The Ayn Rand Poison](#).)

For decades these selfish, childish, "you can't make me" beliefs stayed largely below the radar, because conservatives understood that voicing them in public risked alienating ... well, anyone with any sense at all. But for various reasons sense has departed the country and conservatives are finally saying it out loud, for everyone to hear: they hate democracy. They want to limit the country's decision-making and the rewards of our society and economy to those they feel "deserve" to be on top, namely the "producers" and "job-creators."

Writing in [Registering the Poor to Vote is Un-American](#) conservative columnist Matthew Vadum reflects these views, writing that democracy is "like handing out burglary tools to criminals." He writes,

It is profoundly antisocial and un-American to empower the nonproductive segments of the population to destroy the country -- which is precisely why Barack Obama zealously supports registering welfare recipients to vote.

A decade before the Motor-Voter law that required states to register voters at welfare offices was enacted, NAACP official Joe Madison explained the political economy of voter registration drives. "When people are standing in line to get cheese and butter or unemployment compensation, you don't have to tell them how to vote," said Madison, now a radio talk show host in Washington, D.C. "They know how to vote."

Vadum echoes the Randian ideology that we should be government by the "producer" supermen, and the parasites (the rest of us) should have no say in this, calling it communism:

Encouraging those who burden society to participate in elections isn't about helping the poor. It's about helping the poor to help themselves to others' money. It's about raw so-called social justice. It's about moving America ever farther away from the small-government ideals of the Founding Fathers.

Registering the unproductive to vote is an idea that was heavily promoted by the small-c communists Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, as I write in my new book, [Subversion Inc.: How Obama's ACORN Red Shirts are Still Terrorizing and Ripping Off American Taxpayers](#).

Thom Hartmann talks on his TV show with Vadum about this:

In response, conservative outlets like [FOX News](#) have been giving Vadum a platform to repeat his views to large numbers of people:

Other Conservatives Weigh In

Vadum's perspective are not unique in conservative circles. **Rush Limbaugh** has questioned on the air whether poor people should be allowed to vote. **Judson Phillips, president of Tea Party Nation** thinks voting should be limited to those who "own property."

Other conservatives are also on the record as opposing democracy. **Walter Williams**, in *Democracy Versus Liberty*, writes, "I find democracy and majority rule a contemptible form of government." He echoes the old "taxes are theft" line, writing, "Laws do not represent reason. They represent force."

Pat Buchanan picks up the baton and mocks democracy, calling it a "childlike faith," and laments the downfall of a corrupt tyrant, in *The Democracy Worshipers*,

...Hosni Mubarak, though a ruthless ruler, had been our man in Cairo since the assassination of Anwar Sadat, fighting alongside us in the Gulf War, keeping the peace with Israel, allying with us in the war on terror.

But as soon as the tide turned against him, we ditched him and cheered on the crowd in Tahrir Square, a few of whom celebrated the downfall of despotism with a sexual mauling of Lara Logan.

Some Good Points

Earlier this year, writing at the Cato Institute, Senior Fellow Steve H. Hanke offers a more nuanced view of democracy's failings, in *On Democracy Versus Liberty*. Mr. Hanke makes very good points about the tendencies of the public to be steered toward bad decisions by panic during crisis. "The result is that crises acted as a ratchet, shifting the trend line of government size and scope up to a higher level." Later, he equates the power of organized wealth (Cato's funders, anyone???) to influence lawmakers with the problems of majority rule! He uses examples including farmers continuing to receive subsidies long after the depression ended, and the Bush-era expansion of government in response to 9/11.

But Hanke fails to see that it is not democracy that causes these distortions, but the failure of our system to keep the power of concentrated wealth from shouting down the collected wisdom of the people. It is the suppression of democracy that causes the very problems Henke attributes to democracy.

Republican War On Voting

Today in several states Republicans are making it harder to vote. In *The Next Voting Rights Movement Must Start Now*, CAF's Isaiah J. Poole warns,

In state after state, new hurdles, such as voter ID laws, are being constructed to the right to vote that will especially trip up low-income people, students, rural residents and seniors. They disproportionately affect many of the groups who helped put Barack Obama in the White House in 2008 and who are in the vanguard of opposition to right-wing economic policies today. This disenfranchisement is largely happening below the radar of a populace and a national media preoccupied with the poor state of the economy and with the series of attacks by governors on public employee unions.

Ari Berman, in *The GOP War on Voting* at Rolling Stone,

As the nation gears up for the 2012 presidential election, Republican officials have launched an unprecedented, centrally coordinated campaign to suppress the elements of the Democratic vote that elected Barack Obama in 2008. Just as Dixiecrats once used poll taxes and literacy tests to bar black Southerners from voting, a new crop of GOP governors and state legislators has passed a series of seemingly disconnected measures that could prevent millions of students, minorities, immigrants, ex-convicts and the elderly from casting ballots.

. . . In a systematic campaign orchestrated by the American Legislative Exchange Council – and funded in part by David and Charles Koch, the billionaire brothers who bankrolled the Tea Party – 38 states introduced legislation this year designed to impede voters at every step of the electoral process.

All told, a dozen states have approved new obstacles to voting. Kansas and Alabama now require would-be voters to provide proof of citizenship before registering. Florida and Texas made it harder for groups like the League of Women Voters to register new voters. Maine repealed Election Day voter registration, which had been on the books since 1973. Five states – Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Tennessee and West Virginia – cut short their early voting periods. Florida and Iowa barred all ex-felons from the polls, disenfranchising thousands of previously eligible voters. And six states controlled by Republican governors and

legislatures – Alabama, Kansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin – will require voters to produce a government-issued ID before casting ballots. More than 10 percent of U.S. citizens lack such identification, and the numbers are even higher among constituencies that traditionally lean Democratic – including 18 percent of young voters and 25 percent of African-Americans.

Taken together, such measures could significantly dampen the Democratic turnout next year – perhaps enough to shift the outcome in favor of the GOP.

In [Taking Back The Vote](#), CAF's Terrance Heath writes about the Republican war on voting,

If tea party conservatives have their way, the right to vote will revert back to a privilege — and one enjoyed by far fewer people. It's easy to dismiss media motormouths like [Ann Coulter](#), when she says that women should not have the right to vote, because too many of them vote Democratic (single women, anyway). But it's a mistake to shrug off someone like Tea Party Nation President Judson Phillips, who thinks it would be a good idea to put "certain restrictions on the right to vote," like [restricting voting to property owners](#).

*Phillips' claim is reminiscent of Republican attempts to [use a list of foreclosed homes to block people from voting in the 2008 election in states like Michigan and Ohio](#). When right-wing pundits like [Matthew Vadum](#) (author of the ACORN "exposé" *Subversion, Inc.*) and [Rush Limbaugh](#) say that the poor shouldn't have the right to vote, they're expressing the same sentiment. It's a manifestation of the conservative concern that too many of the "wrong people" have too much of a voice in politics, and too few of the "right people" have any. That's what Paul Weyrich meant when he said to a group of evangelical activists in 1980: "I don't want everybody to vote. As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down."*

Undermining Democracy On Purpose

We are not dealing with the Republican Party we used to know. This is not even George W. Bush's Republican party anymore. In [Goodbye to All That: Reflections of a GOP Operative Who Left the Cult](#), retiring Republican Congressional staffer Mike Lofgren writes,

*Far from being a rarity, virtually every bill, every nominee for Senate confirmation and every routine procedural motion is now subject to a Republican filibuster. Under the circumstances, it is no wonder that Washington is gridlocked: legislating has now become war minus the shooting, something one could have observed 80 years ago in the Reichstag of the Weimar Republic. As Hannah Arendt observed, a disciplined minority of totalitarians can **use the instruments of democratic government to undermine democracy itself**.*

[. . .] A couple of years ago, a Republican committee staff director told me candidly (and proudly) what the method was to all this obstruction and disruption. Should Republicans succeed in obstructing the Senate from doing its job, it would further lower Congress's generic favorability rating among the American people. By sabotaging the reputation of an institution of government, the party that is programmatically against government would come out the relative winner.

A deeply cynical tactic, to be sure, but a psychologically insightful one that plays on the weaknesses both of the voting public and the news media. There are tens of millions of low-information voters who hardly know which party controls which branch of government, let alone which party is pursuing a particular legislative tactic. These voters' confusion over who did what allows them to form the conclusion that "they are all crooks," and that "government is no good," further leading them to think, "a plague on both your houses" and "the parties are like two kids in a school yard." This ill-informed public cynicism, in its turn, further intensifies the long-term decline in public trust in government that has been taking place since the early 1960s - a distrust that has been stoked by Republican rhetoric at every turn ("Government is the problem," declared Ronald Reagan in 1980).

Please read that again, and then [read the whole piece](#). This is a Republican writing, from the inside. They are doing it *on purpose*. They are making the government dysfunctional *on purpose*. They are making people hate government *on purpose*. They are working to turn people against democracy and put themselves in power in its place.