

“A federal republic form of government: What is it? Why does it work? Do we still have one?

Why are town governments critical to its success?”

Smaller Towns, Bigger Impact

A federal republic is a republican central government comprised of a collection of independent, but connected states. The states themselves handle a majority of the tasks and duties of a government, with the federal government handling specific individual tasks necessary to preserve the unity of the union. This form of federalism allows for the states to serve as laboratories of democracy, and for the voice of its people to be heard with much more vigor and clarity. Imagine a mountain community republic in which the representatives reside at the top, while the people live dutifully at the bottom. The people would theoretically have to climb the mountain in order to express their political views (as we all know the average politician would likely not make the reverse effort), and most would likely concede the battle and abandon their lobbying efforts. This is where a town-based republic becomes more efficient. Now imagine there being officials stationed further down the mountain, more accessible to their people. The farther down the officials descend, the greater the effect the people will have on the policies enacted. As the federal government branches down to state governments all the way down to municipalities, the level of true democracy present increases. This is why towns are vital for our federal republic form of government to truly be that.

At the turn of the last century, eighty percent of Americans lived in urban areas. This statistic leads many to assume that the “small town” life that was mainstream for so long has

become irrelevant compared to the American-dream inspired city life. However, under the illusion that this presents, one finds that even in these large metropolitan areas, people still reside in a smaller, locally governed community -- essentially a town. At the turn of the last century, a majority of Americans still lived in a (mostly) self-governed community of under 25,000 people. This demonstrates that "towns," although present in a different nature as before, are still the heartbeat of this country. Some states, such as Pennsylvania and New York have been consolidating governments in the hope that economies of scale will work in their favor. However, the data shows that areas in these states spend as much as double the capita per person as other, more grassroots-style governments (Cox, 2008). This could be caused by a number of things, including an increased poverty rate in densely-populated cities leading to higher stress on governmental aid systems, however double the spending still means double the need for revenue for the government in order to support its constituents, possibly leading to higher taxes. Even though some urban areas may be able to finance this spending due to other factors (i.e for-profit government services), the smaller jurisdictions are clearly more frugal and practical. Again, this illustrates the advantages and efficiencies of a town-based republic.

Furthermore, small towns are crucial for the American public to feel the close-knit attitude that runs in the American DNA. When larger cities are broken into numerous smaller districts, people begin to feel less like a grain of sand in the ocean, and they become closer to the democratic republican modes and methods in their area. As aforementioned, democracy works better among smaller groups. These smaller groups have the opportunity to evade the plagues and problems of a bigger, more consolidated government, and increase accessibility to the government. Those that feel more connected with their government are less likely to have pessimistic and blind attitudes toward government, and more likely to participate and vote. In

addition to being more interested in government on a smaller scale, more people are able to actively participate and serve in leadership positions in their community when there are less people to compete with. Although this may lead to some under-qualified officials being given the power of making unqualified decisions due to a lack of proper competition, it is an undoubtedly prosperous system. Local leaders possess a better view of the needs of the communities than distant politicians. When people participate in government, they learn of its intricacies and in turn will be a more well-educated group of voters. Also, the skills that these individuals may learn while serving in their local government can be taken to all future endeavors, leading to a class of better workers contributing to a better society.

All in all, American towns are the silent, prosperous, and underrated building blocks in the tower of our federal republic. Without a foundation, a building crumbles. Without towns, the United States of America would be a facade of the democracy it was made to embody, and its effectiveness would be crippled. Lower branches of American government allow our leaders to reach down that mountain, to the people, and return with their thoughts and ideas, leaving behind a higher faith in government as well as a more competent public. Small towns may not be in the spotlight in this country, but they are crucial to its success.

Sources:

Cox, W. (2008, September 10). America is More Small Town than We Think. Retrieved May 25, 2017, from <http://www.newgeography.com/content/00242-america-more-small-town-we-think>