

The Effectiveness of Democracy on Legislative Administrations

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DESCRIPTION

Good policy decisions need rational and spirited debate based on the most up-to-date facts. Nonetheless, it is no secret that political discourse throughout the world, with the United States serving as a classic example, has become increasingly, if not fiercely, polarized. Many legislative administrations are established by unstable coalitions, and political debate is fierce. Spending on lobbying and campaigns in the United States is at an all-time high, providing special interests unprecedented access to politicians. The public approval rating of the United States Congress is at an all-time low, but dissatisfaction with government is not limited to the American voters.

Too often, research and scientific advice have been sidelined in global public policy discussions ranging from natural resource usage (e.g., fisheries, forestry) to environmental consequences to public health and safety.

Misinformation on scientific issues abounds in the United States, where the Union of Concerned Scientists' new Center for Science and Democracy will focus our efforts, from local city councils to the halls of the United States Congress, fueled by a never-ending news cycle in which anyone with an internet connection can pose as an expert. Instead of looking for the best available evidence, elected officials look for studies that support the policies they want to implement. To make matters worse, scientific and technological truths that are acknowledged as established knowledge in practically every other industrialized country are frequently ignored in American discourse, on themes ranging from climate change to vaccine safety. When policymakers can't agree on even the most fundamental facts behind an issue, and science itself becomes politicized, good policy solutions become considerably less likely.

Regrettably, these developments occur at a time when the public and policymakers are confronted with some of the most complex and daunting problems in history: mitigating and adapting to the

the effects of global warming, finding sustainable ways to feed, power, and transport ourselves, and reducing the threat of catastrophic war. In light of this, the United States government's incapacity to enact solid policies on even the most basic science-based topics, such as climate change, is particularly disturbing. When policymakers consider scientific advice based on a well-developed and transparent scientific method as simply another special-interest position, we endanger not just our ability to make smart policy decisions.

We have the intellectual talent and infrastructure to reestablish science's proper position in democratic decision-making. So, what measures must we take to achieve this goal?

CONCLUSION

It is critical to remember that even the most stringent laws, such as the United States Clean Water Act, face ongoing political pressure from special interests that regard government rules as a danger to their bottom line. In the United States, Congress often responds to such pressure by limiting agency funds and limiting agency activity. While the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act appear to apply to activities such as hydraulic fracturing (fracking) of shale for oil and gas due to the chemicals used and the wastewater generated, Congress exempted fracking operations from regulation when it passed the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

This basically devolved regulation of fracking procedures and chemical disclosure to individual states in the United States. In reality, fracking activities are free from other federal legislation, such as Clean Air Act requirements, removing much of the foundation for government monitoring. Common Cause, a public interest group in the United States, has disclosed that a part of the natural gas industry spent more than \$747 million dollars over the previous decade to persuade federal authorities that fracking posed minimal danger and should be left to states to regulate as they see right.

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