

Elections – Mobilization versus Suppression

In his book, *Stealing Democracy: The new Politics of Voter Suppression*, Spencer Overton writes:

“But voter suppression and voter mobilization are fundamentally opposing objectives. First of all, mobilization of voters stimulates voter autonomy and choice. Voters can either choose to stay home or go to the polls and vote Democratic or Republican. Just as voting empowers individual voters, so does mobilization. Those who have not been mobilized are not harmed by targeted mobilization. Whites who are not mobilized by Democrats, for example, are not being denied access. Suppression, on the other hand, reduces voter autonomy by denying the voter a choice. Even when we disagree with the views of the mobilized—progressives, for example often disdain the use of wedge issues such as the Confederate flag or gay marriage to mobilize Republican voters—mobilization furthers democracy and suppression is antidemocratic.¹

Explore this issue:

Give an example of a wedge issue used for voter mobilization in a recent election in your area.

What were the positive outcomes of the issue? Did it increase voter participation? (Voter turnout data is available from your state election bureau and/or your local elections office.)

What were the negative consequences of using the wedge issue to mobilize the vote?

You want to encourage young people to vote. What issues could be raised to get them involved in the next election?

Should politicians use wedge issues to encourage people to vote?

¹ Spencer Overton, *Stealing Democracy: The Politics of Voter Suppression*. W.W. Norton and Company, N.Y. 2006 P89.