

### Reflection on Discussion from 4/25/12

Our discussion focused on the upcoming presidential elections, and what issues should matter the most in people's choices. While foreign policy and the economy were people's answers during a poll, education was by far the most popular answer. Most students argued that the current framework for the distribution of money to high schools needs to be drastically revamped, as it takes away from equal opportunity for people. I found this conversation very useful, as I learned a lot about the current funding method for the US educational system.

Currently, funding for schools is largely generated at the county and state levels. Richer neighborhoods have relatively higher county taxes, which provide ample support for their schools. In addition, richer schools have more motivated staff and better facilities to help their students score higher on the state tests and secure more state funding. Poorer schools, on the other hand, are caught in a paradoxical, vicious cycle, with poor facilities causing poor student performance, leading to less state funding (for the schools who need it the most), resulting in even poorer facilities. I find it hypocritical that while students argued that poorer neighborhoods, including theirs, be given more opportunities, they demonstrated little empathy for peoples with far less opportunities, simply because those peoples are from a different country.

Foreign policy was also a big sticking point in this conversation, with some students seemingly oblivious to their nation's perceived inconsistency in dealing with 'tyrants', and consistent meddling in the affairs of other nations. This, in

addition to some comments made on the economy made me question how great a role the 'issues' played in people's choices during elections.

The answer arrived soon. One interesting opinion was that Romney could not be trusted because he of his religion- he is a Mormon. Efforts by other students to explain that this notion was based on sentiment and stereotype, rather than logic, fell on deaf ears. This was empirical evidence that personal opinions rather than the considerations issues and proposed policies quite easily swayed votes including those of educated people. I am inclined to say that while a lot of time is spent on which issues matter, a more fundamental task is to teach the electorate that issues should matter in the first place, as shown by our discussion.

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