

Whips essay

The proposition states that, "The use of the whipping system has destroyed our democracy." I agree with this proposition because whipping limits personal and constituents' voices which goes against the principles of democracy.

The whipping system has destroyed our democracy as a whip is an official of a political party whose task is to ensure party discipline in a legislature. This means that whips ensure that members of a party vote according to the party platform, rather than according to their own individual ideology or the will of their constituents. If an MP objects and votes against the party platform, then they run the chance of being sanctioned by the party. For example, in 2018 eight Conservative MPs voted against the Heathrow expansion. Each one represented a constituency that would be affected by the development of a third runway. Although they were not expelled from the parliamentary party, they could have been. This shows that the whipping system has destroyed our democracy as the constituents who voted the MP into the Commons may not have their view represented as the whips put pressure on the party's platform to be followed, this goes against the principle of representative democracy which is where the people vote for who they want to represent them and the voted MP represents them in parliament.

Another reason why the whipping system has destroyed democracy is that the whips operate using threats and punishments, along with that they have also gained a reputation for bullying MPs. This operation has created a sort of party dictatorship as the independent-minded are repressed, for example the Conservative Party had a 'dirt book' which contained private information about each MP that was used to blackmail them into voting. An example of a whip bullying an MP is when David Lightbrown, a Conservative whip when John Major was Prime Minister, allegedly pinned a rebel against a wall when he wouldn't vote with the government. The whips also put independent-minded MPs at risk of losing the party whip if they vote against a bill with a three-line whip on it. This is against democracy as the MPs are chosen by the electorate and by removing them from the party's parliament team, they are removing the voice of the majority in a constituency. An example of this is when over 20 Conservative MPs had the Conservative whip removed when they voted against Boris Johnson's government in 2019 on the issue of Brexit. This shows that the whipping system has destroyed democracy as the whips operate in a style that features bullying and punishments. This is totally undemocratic as democracy is all about free speech and freedom and this is exactly what the parties are restricting within themselves.

The third reason why the whipping system has destroyed democracy is the use of governing party whips to draft questions for Prime Minister's Questions. This destroys democracy as Prime Minister's Questions only last 30 minutes, with half of the questions coming from fellow-party MPs and the other half from the opposition. If the questions asked by fellow party MPs are drafted then the Prime Minister is not being scrutinised and is instead just manifesting their party's success, plans and political slogans. This means that the time where effective scrutiny of the PM can occur is very little thus the PM isn't properly taken to account. For example, when Gavin Williamson, David Cameron's parliamentary private secretary sent out an email that was leaked to the press. It suggested what MPs should ask the Prime Minister. This bolstered accusations that Cameron was 'stage managing' Prime

Minister's Questions. Although Williamson isn't a whip, whips are used for this question-fixing task. This shows that the whipping system has destroyed democracy as the drafting of questions for PMQs by whips results in ineffective scrutiny, this means that the PM cannot be taken to account and public interests or interests of others cannot be voiced to the PM. As scrutiny is a key part of a democratic regime, the delusion of scrutiny could be seen as an undemocratic action.

On the other hand, the whipping system has not destroyed our democracy as the use of whips helps communicate party policy to MPs thus whips act as a channel of communication between the government and their backbench MPs. This increases the effectiveness of parliament as every MP knows their party stance and understands the information fully thus time isn't lost through confusion and opinions can be made quickly. For example, some MPs say that they find whips useful in instructing them how to vote. This shows that the whipping system has not destroyed our democracy as it has allowed for a more effective parliament to run as every MP understands the information and thus more time can be spent on scrutiny and amendments and better legislation can be produced. This would mean that they are optimising their delivery of democracy.

Another reason why the whipping system has not destroyed our democracy is that the whips are not always used and sometimes MPs get a free vote. This means that the party can decide on what vote the whips are needed and on what not thus representation of constituents and personal opinions is actually carried out. An example of this is when in 2015, Jeremy Corbyn gave his Labour MPs a free vote on whether or not there should be air-strikes in Syria. He said that it was party policy to oppose the air-strikes, but that Labour MPs could vote with their conscience. In the end, 66 Labour MPs voted for the air-strikes. This shows that the whipping system has not destroyed democracy as MPs can still vote freely at times and thus their representational job is carried out, even if that in a limited amount.

In conclusion although the whipping system has a few democracy backing points such as the improvement of communication and the possibility of free voting at times as a whole the whipping system is destroying our democracy. This is as democracy is the representation of the people and the whipping system limits that through the attempted removal of non-party platform views in times of votes which in-turn removes the representation of constituencies by MPs. To add to that, Whips use undemocratic methods of pressurisation and their use in PMQs squanders levels of scrutiny.

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