

Voting Suppression, Democracy Destroyed! Really?

Shôn Ellerton, July 5, 2021

A personal take on the chaos of the United States' recent spate of voting bills and acts.



I love reading about crazy cults, and there's one which I found totally and utterly bizarre, but seemingly harmless. It is a cult by the name of [Raëlism](#). Basically, it's one of those UFO religions, this being one, where an alien comes down to meet a crazy Frenchman in a UFO during the 1970s and tells him lots of weird stuff. But one philosophy they espouse which almost seems logical is that our leadership should be run through a [geniocracy](#), a term proposed by this movement that one must attain a certain level of intelligence before running entire nations!

Here in the Western World, we do not have a geniocracy; I'm fairly certain of that, but those who live in most of Western Europe, Canada, Australia and the United States are, in my opinion, fortunate to live in a *democracy*. Readers of history and current affairs may be aware of nation states working under a theocracy like Iran, or a hardcore 'Confucius' feudal society operating under the philosophy of Juche like North Korea, or a regime where questioning the body politic is punishable as in China or a straight-up tyrannical feudal society like Saudi Arabia. Yet, there are those in the United States who belligerently cry out that their democracy is under threat, most of which, are unable to provide any reasonable explanation as to what it is that is causing the threat. There are those who are firmly positioned within the party of their choice, for example, the unswerving Republican or Democrat, which are quick to point out any action from the opposing party that may be impinging on democracy. Of course, there are many others who understand the tenets of democracy regardless what side of the political fence they are on.

For me, I find the notion of ‘voter suppression’ and its cause as an attack on democracy strangely disconnected from reality. I have exhausted the topic many a time in previous pieces, but too many of us are not really thinking for ourselves and educating ourselves on specific issues but rather, taking the opinions of others as gospel or blindly following the movement of others, the so-called mob mentality mindset.

I started to run across snippets of news which, had they not come from ‘serious’ news sources, might have come from a satirical publication like [The Onion](#) or a [Mad](#) magazine. Take this one for example from the Washington Post on June 29th, 2021.

[*The Justice Department is suing Georgia. Don't expect Garland to end there.*](#)

According to the first paragraph, Attorney General Garland is suing the state of Georgia because legislature, through a bill called [S.B.202](#) (Senate Bill 202), is denying the right of Black people to vote. I understand that the press is usually quite liberal with applying tactics to make their material into clickbait, but this certainly aroused my curiosity.

The Washington Post article does not provide any explanation as to why it hinders Black people to vote so I opened up the S.B.202 pdf bill. Much of it reads in a similar vein to Texas’s similar S.B.7 bill but like S.B.7, I could not find any reference to black people, race, creed or colour. In fact, in the whole of S.B.202, there is one instance of the word, black, and it refers to black ink.

Clearly there are no explicit clauses in these bills, which have riled up the Democrats who claim they are unfair, racist and undemocratic, that prevents black or latino people to vote. Therefore, one can deduce that these allegations of ‘voter suppression’ are directly attributable to the presumption that black and latino people have less capacity to vote than ‘white’ people. It takes an extraordinary mindset to assume that white people have easier access to voting than non-white people. To me, it seems almost nonsensical that the state of Georgia is being sued on the basis that its new piece of legislation *might* have an impact on black communities based on possibly flawed statistics that black people find it more difficult to vote.

Being a curious sort of person, I had a little read of [SB7](#), SB202 and the 800-page monster [For The People Act \(H.R.1\)](#), which the Democrats have been trying to push out. For obvious reasons, I did not read H.R.1 in its entirety and I

assume that most others, including the politicians who are supposed to read them, have not either. Lawyers charge per hour so it's quite likely that they will take the opportunity to read it. I would as well if I was being paid per hour!

I managed to read the relatively short SB7, which is around 30 pages but SB202, at around 90 pages, became considerably bloated perhaps, in competition, to the doorstop tome, HR1. Anyhow, I managed to get the gist from all three, and not unsurprisingly, there were parts in each which I believed to make perfect sense and parts that were simply unworkable. Disappointingly but predictably, HR1 deviates from being neutral with respect to its 'findings' sections in the bill. For example, take this from Subtitle A, section (6)

“(6) Racial discrimination in voting is a clear and persistent problem. The actions of States and localities around the country post-Shelby County, including at least 10 findings by Federal courts of intentional discrimination, underscored the need for Congress to conduct investigatory and evidentiary hearings to determine the legislation necessary to restore the Voting Rights Act and combat continuing efforts in America that suppress the free exercise of the franchise in Black and other communities of color.”

The fact that this bill covers a multitude of different subjects along with subjective rhetoric and historical findings to pad this out to an 800-page 'all-or-nothing' wonder does not make it wholly surprising that it is not faring all very well in getting it engrossed into law.

Before reading these, I positioned myself as a 'third party' without any political leanings but rather, to view the practicalities of these bills. Or at least, to try my best to be as objective as possible as if I was locked away in a room without knowledge of today's politics and review the bills with unerring and impartial justice--the allusion of Lady Liberty being blindfolded is that justice is supposed to be blind. I also reviewed these bills with my 'data hat' on. As a data architect, I am astutely aware of the difficulties of obtaining accurate results especially when there are opportunities for error both intentional and non-intentional.

Let us start with the easily manageable SB7, a bill of around 30 pages or so. Being drafted by the Republicans, and from the state of Texas, this bill very quickly brought the ire of die-hard Democrats on the presumption that this bill is not going to be good, denouncing it as racist. Interestingly, there are no occurrences of the words, *black*, *white*, *color*, *minority* or *ethnic* in the bill at all. But that aside, what does the bill purport? Why do some class it as being racist?

The truth is, is that it is not, much like playing the game of chess isn't being racist—because white goes first.

SB7 aims to make voting more secure and accurate by enforcing practical measures to avoid instances of duplication, preventing the coercion of voting through ballot harvesting and ensuring that those who may vote are eligible to do so. Duplication is one of the biggest headaches for those involved in the industry of data. Another issue is the legacy of the data, in other words, where did the data come from. In data parlance terms, this is known as lineage of data, an important topic for any data integration expert. Hence the need to control the number of balloting points without undue proliferation but not limit them extensively as to make it too inconvenient for the majority of voters to attend. As for eligibility of those who can vote, a system of checks and balances are in place by enforcing the requirement to present official ID beforehand.

SB7 takes a reasonable stab at preventing these issues to proliferate. For example, let us take the issue of ballot harvesting, the act of going door-to-door to canvass for votes and casting them on their behalf. In ballot harvesting, often competing parties go door-to-door asking if their votes have been cast, and if not, make a valiant attempt at selling their party in exchange for making it convenient to the resident that they will cast the vote for them. In my opinion, this is not ethically or morally right. I do not have any issues with competing parties going from door to door to explain their manifestos and advertise for their party, but to be given the power to cast votes on their behalf does not seem right to me. However, if a resident requires assistance for someone else to cast on their behalf, this is a different situation and one that I find quite reasonable, such as in the case of the state of Colorado.

Eligibility is another issue which SB7 seems to address well. If one cannot produce official ID, should that person be able to vote? Those against the notion that one should have to present official ID often cite that there are many who are not able to get official ID or are too poor to get one. Is this really the case? I did not research all fifty states, but I did get the overall impression that the DMV (the government body that issues driving licences) in the states that I researched including Washington D.C., [provide free ID](#) if you cannot afford it. If there are states that still charge for ID for those who genuinely cannot afford it, then I believe they should assist in doing so. In any case, one does not need a driver's licence but simply an ID card, which is very affordable; certainly, less than the cost of a beer in a bar. I simply do not buy into the rhetoric that one

cannot get a simple ID card. If they cannot, perhaps they are not eligible to do so. After all, one must be a citizen to vote. Moreover, if one cannot bother to make a reasonable effort in procuring one, especially due to laziness or nonchalance, should that person be voting at all?

This leads me nicely into the discussion of the value of voting. This is my subjective view, but I do not agree with compulsory voting, nor do I agree with coercing others to vote, especially if those others have no knowledge of our political landscape. Perhaps it may not be for the best to force others to vote if they cannot vote without any knowledge or passion. If someone votes simply because he or she was told that they should vote for that party, how is this good representation of what is a good fit for society? In a nutshell, those who *want* to vote *will* vote and in no way will they be hindered to vote, because hindering any eligible person to vote is illegal.

SB7 addresses its issues of data lineage, or the origin of the data, by streamlining its data sources, or in other words, points of ballot collecting. This does make sense insofar that one can trace where the ballot was dropped which may assist in verifying the authenticity of the source of the vote. It does present problems; however, because reducing the number of ballot collection points *will* make it harder for some, particularly those in the remote communities, to vote. And I stress remote communities rather than urban areas where voting collection points are abundant enough.

Disappointingly, there is little of no effort in either SB7 or SB202 to increase flexibility as to opening hours. Weekend and off-peak times should be far more in abundance. Those particularly affected by this are nine-to-five workers, whether they be blue-collar or white-collar workers. Not necessarily ethnic and black communities which many Democrats crave to make a reference to. It is, as if, by asinine suggestion, only black and ethnic minorities have nine-to-five jobs with rigid hours.

Another problem that SB7 and SB202 addresses is the issue of mass-mailing address boxes with partially completed ballots, on the assumption that it will make it easier to cast a vote, particularly so in the United States, where one can send mail *from* your own personal mailbox (by lifting the little red flag). It is the only country (maybe also Canada) I am aware of that one can do this. From a data analyst's perspective, this poses as a bit of a nightmare as, from personal experience, dealing with Court data in South Australia, I have come across

tricky situations in identifying unique addresses and people in the state. The data is only as good as the data entered into the system—in other words, shit in, shit out. There is far less scope for error when *requests* are made to receive an absentee mail application rather than scatter-gunning ballots from a database of addresses, many of which will probably be incorrect. No surprise that mail ballots via mass mailing have been sent out to dud addresses or dead people. In fact, it would be almost statistically impossible not to do so.

To reiterate on SB7 and SB202, there is no language or dictate in either act which excludes people of colour. They do make voting more secure, accountable and verifiable. That much is clear.

Now with HR1, I confess that I was not able to read it in its entirety. It is simply too lengthy a tome to read. There are a few interesting points about HR1 which deserve attention with respect to voting.

For example, it raises the issue whether convicts should be given the right to vote. Without getting into the complications of whether violent felons or those committing relatively minor crimes, or whether past felons are allowed or not, I do favour the opinion that all citizens, regardless of conviction status, should be allowed to vote. Again, from a data perspective, it is far easier to state all citizens have the right to vote than to lay down a complicated series of caveats open to legal interpretation, which HR1 would contribute to. If HR1 purports to restore voting rights to people convicted of felonies who have completed their sentences, then this is certainly just. In other words, other voting bills who restrict ex-felons from voting, I believe, is unjust.

If I understand HR1 correctly, it seeks to allow 16-year-olds to pre-register to vote. This does not appear to be unsound because one still must be 18 or over to cast the vote. The Republicans often mistakenly make it sound that HR1 will allow minors to vote. However, I do express concern that HR1 makes it easier to vote without stringent user identification. Although I once lived in the United States, I now live in Australia and every vote I had undertaken required a valid ID and a name crossed off the registrar in person. I do not agree with HR1's proposal to make voting registration automatic when applying for another government service. As I alluded to previously, those who express an interest to vote should explicitly register to do so. Automatic registration would bring the number of voter registrations to a far higher number than those votes actually

cast. And of course, the biggest problem with HR1 which SB7 and SB202 strive to prohibit is the mass mailing of ballots and ballot harvesting.

HR1 does make a credible case in making voting online a possibility although there are technical challenges that need to be addressed beforehand. HR1 would also prohibit states from making absentee mail voting requiring an 'excuse'. As long as the voter requests the ballot, all states should be able to service this request without any excuse. Moreover, the state should provide reply-paid envelopes for the ballot.

The best feature of HR1 in my opinion is to establish independent commissions to draw voting districts. Gerrymandering is a significant problem in which geographical boundaries are carefully chosen to maximise the potential of curing votes in each congressional district. Hence the reason why some of the boundaries are in highly peculiar shapes. Paradoxically, this is one of the features of HR1 which made it unpopular for many Democrats for fear of losing seats after boundaries are drawn by independent agencies.

In all honesty, HR1 packed too much material in one act. Leaving voting aside, there are two other divisions in the act, Political Campaigning and Ethics, which take up hundreds of additional pages. Its sheer size and complexity is its own death knell and maybe, perhaps, it was simply designed to fail.

Wrapping up towards the end of this piece, it is worth mentioning that federal elections seem to be in a perpetual state of confusion. There are those who want change for a push for federal elections to be administered nationally while others prefer that each state handles their own administration. The United States, as a federation of States, generally upholds that each State generates legislation that applies to the day-to-day living of all citizens, with federal law legislating on matters which require interstate agreement, national matters or foreign affairs. I think there are pros and cons of whether federal elections should be administered centrally or through each respective state. However, referring back to the importance of stringent ID measures, it is vitally important that whoever casts a vote in a federal election, it is counted *once* and by an eligible person. Moreover, the continuing confusion as to certain provisions states are making in voiding ballots which are cast from a different jurisdiction, can be simply stopped by the development of nationwide system in which a voter could cast a ballot in New Jersey even though that person is registered in Alaska. It would require interstate cooperation to run nationally, which the

majority of Republicans would probably be inclined to disagree, but would absolutely require more stringent ID measures, which, in general, the Democrats are probably inclined to disagree!

In sum, taking a little time to read some of these voting acts and bills makes it easier to disentangle the threads of misinformation, biased rhetoric and implied social justice issues which may ensue after they are or if they are enacted. Each of the acts and bills above have their set of good and bad points, especially when viewed from various perspectives. However, to state that any of these bills or acts is discriminatory, racist or has the aim of suppressing the voter just does not hold any water. The overwhelming majority of us want a system of voting which is secure, safe, fair, non-partisan and, of course, accurate.