

LRT #24 Who Gets to Vote?

Good evening—and welcome to Living Room Talk, some thoughts on issues and events that you might be thinking about, too.

My name's John Graham— adventurer, activist, former diplomat. More at johngraham.org and in a memoir, *Sit Down Young Stranger*, on Amazon.

Tonight's topic: Who Gets to Vote?

This should be a strange topic in a democracy with universal suffrage, but it has, sadly, become a very real question that could define our identity as a nation. Hear me out.

If you've been following the news, you know that the State of Georgia has just enacted the most extensive voting restrictions in generations and other Red States are not far behind.

The Georgia legislation introduces a raft of new oppressive laws aimed at disenfranchising voters, including curbs on mail-in and early voting, stiffer requirements for voter ID, absentee balloting and provisional ballots, and fewer drop boxes. It even makes it a crime to offer food or water to voters waiting in long lines caused by fewer polling places, voting machines and drop boxes.

The new law also expands the Georgia Legislature's power over elections, which means that it can now more easily interfere with the voting in predominantly Democratic, heavily Black counties.

The Republicans who control Georgia's government describe their new law as "long-overdue common-sense measures to prevent electoral fraud." Never mind that there is nothing to prevent. Multiple audits affirmed the results of Georgia's elections last year, and there were no credible reports of any fraud or irregularities that would have affected the results.

What the fraud allegations do track—rather exactly—is the intense campaign by Donald Trump alleging that he was the victim of massive voter fraud engineered by his opponents.

But every single one of the more than 57 lawsuits filed by Trump's lawyers has been quickly and resoundingly rejected by the courts.

Nationwide, the 2020 election was declared by even Republican election officials as one of the fairest on record.

You have to have really drunk the Trump Kool-Aid not to see the fraud allegations made in Georgia and other states to restrict voting for what they are—cynical efforts to diminish the turnout of minority citizens who consistently and heavily vote Democratic.

In Georgia's case the Kool-Aid is laced with the triple embarrassment to the right-wing radicals of seeing their state go for Biden last fall and then losing both of their Senate seats to Democrats in January.

The issue might not be so vital if what was happening in Georgia was an isolated power play. It's not. Radical Republicans have already passed similar laws in Iowa, and are moving forward in Arizona, Florida and Texas. In all, there are in play some 250 measures in 43 state legislatures designed to keep Republicans in power.

You can see why they're doing this—they're fighting for the survival of their party, putting that over and above the idea of preserving democracy.

But they're doubling down on a losing strategy.

A Republican party, until it breaks free from Donald Trump, is simply stuck on the wrong side of most Americans' views on healthcare, gun control, voting rights, economic fairness and immigration.

Worse, it's now pouring its energy into the red-meat social issues favored by a Trump world laced with homophobic, misogynist, white supremacist ideologies rejected by a decisive majority of Americans.

It doesn't take a master political operative to understand that, if elections remain free and fair, Republican commitment to a platform rejected by most Americans is going to mean fewer of them in office.

So their answer is a blatant return to Jim Crow with proposals that disproportionately affect, and often target, voters of color. If

enacted, they would result in large-scale disenfranchisement of eligible voters.

The battle lines are quickly forming. Are we a representative democracy or are we not?

Democrats see Federal action as the only possible brake on widespread voting restrictions. The Federal For the People Act, which passed in the House this month with *no* Republican support, is a sweeping bill that would *override* the rash of new state laws, establish core national voting rights standards, and create independent, nonpartisan commissions to handle the congressional redistricting process.

That redistricting thing is key. Republicans will control the redistricting process next year in many key swing states, so Democrats are looking at this Act as an increasingly urgent bulwark, not just against voting restrictions but also as a counter to Republican gerrymandering.

But with the Senate split 50-50, it's clear that the House bill is doomed in the Senate because Republicans will implement a filibuster—meaning passage requires a **60**-vote majority.

Knowing that getting 10 Republicans to join Democrats on *anything* is impossible, Senator Chuck Schumer, the majority leader, is putting Democrats on a collision course with the filibuster itself.

To eliminate or weaken the filibuster—and thus permit passage of the For the People Act in the Senate—Democrats will have to convince a handful of moderates in their own party—a single defection would doom their effort.

President Biden has so far put himself at least somewhat above the fray, preferring to leave the partisan fighting over the filibuster to Senate Democrats. He made it plain in his press conference last Thursday that he intends to impose strict discipline on his agenda and that the next item up is a massive effort to upgrade the country's dilapidated infrastructure.

He wants the focus to stay on infrastructure and all the jobs that come with it, not on a bitter partisan battle over the filibuster.

It's a tough choice and a tight time-frame. Both voting rights and infrastructure are important and both have to be handled in the next two years. There's no assurance Democrats will have control of Congress after the 2022 elections.

With passions building over those Republican drives to stifle the vote, however, can Biden stick to infrastructure-first or will he have to change course in this gale wind?

I think this surprising president has some tricks up his sleeve.

We'll soon find out what they are.

OK, as promised—here are a couple comments from last week's post how about the murders in Atlanta.

Bob wants to know why I focused my talk on male rage. Too him, the answer is simple: GET RID OF THE GUNS.

Bob, I agree with you about guns, but dozens of others have made that point and I wanted to make a different one that I think is just as important, but getting far too little attention.

In addition, I think male rage is implicated in a lot more than just shootings. As far as I can see, it's responsible for a huge amount of other suffering, especially by women and children.

Jerry says that bringing up children should be left to parents and why should anyone want older white men outside the family to help raise their male children?

Jerry, in a perfect world you're right, but this is no perfect world. There are millions of households with no resident fathers at all, or parents who, for whatever reasons, are not taking enough responsibility for how their kids grow up.

And finally, to quote a phrase, it takes a village to raise a child. I had wonderful loving parents but some of the most important lessons I learned about life I learned from Jack Gallagher, my scoutmaster.

That's it for now.

Thanks for watching.

Please share this message widely.

Who Gets to Vote?

The phony fraud allegations used in Georgia and other states to restrict voting are cynical efforts to diminish the turnout of minority citizens who consistently and heavily vote Democratic. Democrats see Federal action as the only possible brake on these measures. The battle is on. Are we a representative democracy or are we not?

<https://www.johngraham.org/blog/who-gets-to-vote>