



DISCUSSION GUIDE

ONE PERSON, NO VOTE
HOW VOTER SUPPRESSION IS DESTROYING
OUR DEMOCRACY
CAROL ANDERSON



WHO GETS TO VOTE?

CONVERSATIONS ON VOTING RIGHTS IN AMERICA

Carol Anderson. *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.

1. Prior to reading *One Person, No Vote*, how would you characterize your understanding of contemporary voting rights struggles in the United States? Has your understanding changed? If so, how? If not, why?
2. Anderson describes reactions abroad to violent protests in Little Rock, Arkansas, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, noting that the United States was heavily criticized: “What ruined the United States’ credibility, the Soviets gleefully claimed, was that people who dream of nooses and dynamite . . . who throw rocks at defenseless Negro children—these gentlemen have the audacity to talk about ‘democracy’ and speak as supporters of ‘freedom.’ American racism and its savage practice of cruel persecution and abuse of minorities is . . . the true nature of the American ‘democracy’ which the United States is trying to foist on other countries and peoples” (18–19).

Do you think the United States government is still viewed internationally as hypocritical, as advocating for democracy abroad without ensuring it for American citizens? Is this a fair assessment?

How might international condemnation of American racism affect how we think about issues of racial justice and disenfranchisement as Americans?

3. How does the voter suppression described in *One Person, No Vote* impact your own view of American democracy?
4. The 1965 civil rights march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, is a keystone example of nonviolent resistance met with brutality and force: “As peaceful marchers ran into the hailstorm of Alabama state troopers and Dallas County Sheriff Jim Clark and his deputies, news cameras captured the horror of tear gas, barbed-wire bullwhips, and police on horseback trampling over the fallen. A nation sat in stunned silence, almost traumatized by the spectacle” (21).

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Is it easier to ignore voter suppression today because it is not accompanied by physical violence? Could a nonviolent resistance campaign like those seen during the civil rights movement help address issues of vote suppression?

How should the media cover current voting rights issues? Do media outlets have an obligation to examine voter ID laws or voter roll purges from both sides of the debate, or should efforts to restrict the franchise be identified as such by media reports?

5. Felon disenfranchisement disproportionately impacts African Americans. “In 2016,” Anderson writes, “one in thirteen African Americans had lost their right to vote because of a felony conviction, compared with one in fifty-six of every non-black voter. . . . Indeed, the felony disenfranchisement rate in the United States has grown by 500 percent since 1980” (93).

Is disenfranchisement an appropriate punishment for felony conviction? If so, under what circumstances, if any, should felons or ex-felons have the right to vote restored? What are the effects of felon disenfranchisement on individuals? On communities?

6. The purpose of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993, also known as the Motor Voter Law, was to streamline the voter registration process for American citizens, thereby making it easier to register to vote. The law described the right to vote as a “fundamental right” and added that it is “the duty of federal, state, and local government to promote the exercise of that right,” requiring that states “maintain” or regularly update their voter rolls. However, some states have used that requirement as a justification to wrongly remove voters from the rolls, resulting in over one million people being removed from voter rolls across the United States for not voting or for infrequent voting.

Does the government have a duty to make it easy to vote? Should the government err on the side of widening the franchise and making it easier to vote, even when doing so may conflict with other goals, such as the desire to maintain up-to-date voter rolls? Why or why not? What kinds of changes could make voting more accessible to all?

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7. Today many states' congressional districts are drawn through partisan gerrymandering, wherein districts are formed in a way that heavily advantages a candidate of a certain political party due to the partisan composition of the district, leading to uncompetitive elections. Opponents of gerrymandering have argued that political districts should make geographical sense, that they should be compact and contiguous and cover an easily understood area.

Do you agree? What are the advantages or disadvantages of gerrymandering? Does gerrymandering distort political opinion or voting outcomes? If so, how?

Have you experienced positive or negative effects of gerrymandering in your community?

8. Are voter suppression efforts a more attractive strategy for some politicians than changes to political platforms and strategies? Why or why not? Is making voting more difficult or restricting the franchise ever a correct or acceptable approach?

9. Can you think of examples of voter suppression that you've witnessed in your lifetime here in Louisiana? If you've lived outside of Louisiana, is it easier or harder to vote here than in other places you've lived? Has it become easier or harder to vote in your lifetime?

10. In 2013, the US Supreme Court struck down key sections of the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) in its *Shelby County v. Holder* decision. Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the majority, stated "Our country has changed. While any racial discrimination in voting is too much, Congress must ensure that the legislation it passes to remedy that problem speaks to current conditions."

Do you think racial attitudes in America have changed enough in the last fifty years to warrant the invalidation of portions of the VRA? Have the states, counties, and municipalities under the VRA's preclearance requirement proven they are committed to running free, fair, and open elections for all citizens? Can you think of any examples of voter suppression that have taken place in areas formerly under the preclearance requirement since 2013?