

Date: September 30, 2022
TO: Dr. Curley
FROM: Anna Steingruber
RE: Georgia SB 202 and Voting Legislation

The goal of this memo is to analyze the different frames surrounding voting legislation in Georgia with SB 202. In 2021 this lengthy bill reformed the way that voting works in the state after claims of fraud led by President Donald Trump in the 2020 election. The frames fall on party lines with liberal sources declaring this an attack on democracy and the civil rights of minority groups while conservative sources say the bill will protect against voter fraud and increase trust in the electoral system.

Context:

Georgia was the battleground for questions on the legitimacy of the 2020 election after the narrow victory of President Biden. Led by President Trump, Republican sources questioned the number of absentee ballots and attempted to discredit the legitimacy of the election and voting process in Georgia specifically. In response to these claims, Governor Kemp and a Republican led Senate passed SB 202 or “The Elections Integrity Act.”

- *The Bill:* The Elections Integrity Act of 2021 is “designed to address the lack of elector confidence in the election system on all sides of the political spectrum, to reduce the burden on election officials, and to streamline the process of conducting elections in Georgia by promoting uniformity in voting,” (GA SB 202).
 - Goals include: changing weekend voting hours; creating more uniform funding to counties across Georgia; changing process and time frame of absentee voting.
- *Historical Context:* This bill sits on a history of voting legislation from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to debates on Voter ID policy to the work of Stacey Abrams to increase voter turnout in 2016.
 - *Voter ID laws:* These laws followed similar frames and worked to address a similar policy issue- the legitimacy of voters and their identity to create a fair election process. Researchers have identified frames around such laws to be anti voter fraud vs that these laws are discriminatory (Conover and Miller 2018).
- *Partisan Context:* Coming as a result of the 2020 elections, media and political frames match closely with each other. This increases the potency of these media frames.
 - “If a frame is sponsored by a party people feel attached to, motivated reasoning should lead them to pay closer attention to frame content and assess it more favorably. In contrast, if people have negative feelings towards the party sponsor, they would discount, simply ignore, or even engage in counterarguing the interpretations in the frame,” (Slothuus and de Vreese 2009).

Liberal Frame: Discriminatory Legislation

- *Who is Discriminated against?*

- Articles use personal stories to further the idea of harm to specific groups of people. By using a story, the media can create a narrative for people to empathize with and understand the direct difficulties people will have to vote.
- NPR quotes Monica Poole who says, "To find out I did all that and still didn't get my vote in, I feel discouraged," Poole said. "I'm an African American female, and we weren't able to vote for many years, so I feel like it's my civic duty," (Gringlass 2022).
 - By identifying her identity as African American, this further pushes the idea that the bill makes it more difficult for minorities to vote, thus continuing the idea that the bill is discriminatory.
- Directly identifying marginalized groups furthers this frame's potency as there is, "relative malleability of public support and the potential for attitudes to be moved by crafting negatively valenced political communication, including frames highlighting negative consequences for specific groups of voters," (Wilson and Brewer 2014)
- *Partisan Overreach:*
 - A New York Times article looks closely at the bill itself, emphasizing that the bill works to feed Republican ideas by making it harder to vote in urban areas.
 - The article outlines parts of the bill under the idea that, "The Republican legislature and governor have made a breathtaking assertion of partisan power in elections, making absentee voting harder and creating restrictions and complications in the wake of narrow losses to Democrats," (Corasantiti and Epstein 2021).
 - By delegitimizing the Republican party, this frame increases its own potency. The frame depends on placing the other party at fault as they created the bill.
- *Actors Involved:*
 - The Democratic Party: If this is perceived as an attack on minority votes, Democrats stand to lose votes they often count on. They have an incentive to want the law repealed.
 - Voters: Changes in voting law impact how people access the polls.
 - Civil Rights Groups: Advocacy coalitions surrounding civil rights and anti-racism advocacy work can continue their work within this frame.
 - This may include groups such as the ACLU and the Southern Center for Human Rights, politicians like Stacey Abrams and Rafeal Warnock, and individuals supporting similar groups, politicians, or ideals.

Conservative Frame: Increased Trust In Electoral Systems

- *Increasing Trust in the electoral system*
 - In an opinion piece, former Senator Kelly Loeffler says, "As a result, voters' trust in our elections is at a record low. Thankfully, our state legislature did not bend to the media's narrative and has taken prudent steps to strengthen our state's elections," (Loeffler 2021)

- This identifies the idea that there needs to be ways to increase faith in the electoral system and also identifies the “lies” presented by the other frame.
 - This frame works particularly as it appeals to “common sense” logic and emphasizes moral concerns such as “obedience to the law,” (Conover and Miller 2018).
 - Words like “fraud” and “election integrity” demonstrate a moral problem that needs to be fixed, which decreases the space for a disagreement that the law is bad.
- *Voter Turnout is on the Rise*
 - Multiple articles work to increase the validity of this frame over the other, by emphasizing the rise in voter turnout. By doing so, they invalidate the other side and also demonstrate that their bill is not harmful as the liberal frame claims, but helpful in promoting fair elections as voting numbers increase.
 - “Even as voter registration and participation surge in Georgia, Democrats miss no opportunity to label any inconvenient reality an example of ‘voter suppression’” (Buettner 2020).
 - Fox News further demonstrates that the bill is not a discriminatory attack, but simply helpful in ensuring fair elections quoting Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger's office. “Early voting was up 168% this year compared to the 2018 primaries, and 212% up from 2020. Over 100,000 more Black voters cast early ballots as well, compared to 2018,” (Chasmar 2022).
 - By proving increased voter turnout in minority groups as well, this frame is able to gain legitimacy as one which is protecting free and fair elections.
- *Actors Involved:*
 - The Republican Party: Led by Donald Trump especially, the party strands to gain from a frame such as this because it validates party rhetoric of an unfair election.
 - Voters: Changes in voting law impact how people access the polls.

Discussion:

The two frames surrounding this issue depend heavily on delegitimizing the other party by explaining the merits or disadvantages of new voting policies. While the liberal frame ostensibly paints the law as discriminatory, it depends on the idea that it is purposefully this way to increase Republican power. The conservative frame similarly demonstrates the need to protect election legitimacy by furthering distrust in a left-wing government and fraudulent 2020 election. Thus, while the policy is at heart, how to create equal and safe voting practices, it gets twisted into a fully partisan issue through media frames.

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Senate Bill 202 By: Senators Burns of the 23rd, Miller of the 49th, Dugan of the 30th, Ginn of the 47th, Anderson of the 24th and others

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