

CHARLES M. BLOW

# Seven Steps to Destroy a Democracy

March 13, 2022



**By Charles M. Blow**  
Opinion Columnist

We are now living through a fully fledged attack on nonwhite power in this country, as conservative white people assert their authority. Until now, the effects of this crusade were somewhat unclear. Data needed to be collected after new conservative laws and policies had gone into effect.

Well, we now have some of the first data, and it is devastating.

According to The Texas Tribune, during the primary elections in Texas this month, 18,742 mail-in ballots were rejected in 16 of the 20 counties with the most registered voters. It was there, too, that the ruinous effects of Texas' new voter ID requirements were particularly obvious.

The paper pointed out that these counties rejected 6 percent to nearly 22 percent of the mail-in ballots cast in the primaries, rates that could easily set a record, since fewer than 2 percent were rejected statewide in the 2018 midterm elections.

It might be tempting to view each election outrage as discrete or to focus on the specific rather than zoom out and see the bigger picture. But when you do, you see that Republicans are following a step-by-step plan to transform elections and the electorate.

**1. First, undercount the number of Black and brown people who are in the country, in order to skew congressional districts and the Electoral College.**

Any attempt to prevent the Census Bureau from fulfilling its duty can contribute to these efforts.

Last week, The New York Times reported that the bureau had grossly undercounted people of color in this country in 2020:

Although the bureau did not say how many people it missed entirely, they were mostly people of color, disproportionately young ones. The census missed counting 4.99 of every 100 Hispanics, 5.64 of every 100 Native Americans and 3.3 of every 100 African Americans. In contrast, for every 100 residents counted, the census wrongly added 1.64 non-Hispanic whites and 2.62 ethnic Asians.

**2. Use census data to racially gerrymander states.**

Pack as many Black and brown voters into the fewest districts so that no matter how high the voter turnout is, the number of seats they can win in Congress or state legislatures is capped.

Take Texas again. The state experienced strong population growth over the past 10 years, earning it two new congressional seats. Ninety-five percent of that growth was among people of color. Even so, as The Texas Tribune reported in December, Texas Republicans placed the two new districts under white voters' control, reduced the Hispanic-majority districts from eight to seven and dropped the Black-majority

districts from one to none.

**3. The next step is to erect barriers to when, how and if people can cast a ballot.**

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, 19 states passed at least 34 laws restricting access to voting in 2021 — the most since the center started tracking these laws in 2011. And as of January, at least 13 bills restricting access to voting had already been filed for 2022.

**4. Then allow big money to operate virtually unchecked to influence the electorate.**

The Supreme Court's Citizens United decision allowed unlimited corporate and anonymous dark money donations in our elections. Money buys influence, and influence can translate into power. Now the wealthy can press their thumbs more heavily on the scale, anonymously in some cases.

**5. Reject as many ballots as possible.**

This is where the mail-in ballot data from Texas comes in.

**6. Change “the referees” of elections, as States United Action put it.**

By the nonpartisan group States United Action's accounting, as of March 1, over 80 people who denied the results of the 2020 presidential election are now running for governor, attorney general or secretary of state — the state officials who run, oversee and protect our elections.

One of Georgia's new election laws would even let the state temporarily take over some election boards. (As you may recall, Donald Trump said to Georgia state officials after the election, “I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have.”)

## **7. Finally, have a Supreme Court stacked in such a way that it is hesitant to step in and beat back these restrictions.**

In January three federal judges blocked an Alabama redistricting map because they said it most likely discriminated against Black people. But in February the conservative majority on the Supreme Court stepped in and allowed Alabama to use the map anyway.

Chipping away at voter protections has become a theme of the court. Ever since its 2013 decision gutting a key part of the Voting Rights Act, which forced states with a history of racial discrimination to seek federal approval before changing their voting laws, the court has made it increasingly difficult for liberals to prove that state officials are violating the law. Just last year, the conservative majority endorsed Arizona's highly restrictive voting laws, passed by the Republican-controlled State Legislature after the 2020 elections.

And just like that, in seven easy steps, a democracy can be destroyed. In fact, it *is* being destroyed.

*The Times is committed to publishing a diversity of letters to the editor. We'd like to hear what you think about this or any of our articles. Here are some tips. And here's our email: [letters@nytimes.com](mailto:letters@nytimes.com).*

*Follow The New York Times Opinion section on Facebook and Twitter (@NYTopinion), and Instagram.*