

The future of our democracy: worrisome?

Maureen Fiedler | Jun. 28, 2013 NCR Today

According to Catholic News Service, [U.S. Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco commented](#) [1] on the Supreme Court's decisions on same-sex marriage by saying that the "future of our democracy is very, very worrisome." Cordileone chairs the U.S. bishops' Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage.

I agree that the future of our democracy is indeed very worrisome, but not because the Defense of Marriage Act was struck down. With that decision, the court expanded our understanding of the equality of marriages across the several states. Now, legally married same-sex couples have the same rights to federal benefits that heterosexual couples do. In a democracy that values equality, that decision deserves applause, not condemnation.

What's worrisome is the future of voting rights, not rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

If the future of our democracy is a concern, we should examine the Tuesday decision of the court in *Shelby County v. Holder*, striking down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act, the signal legislation of the civil rights era.

In that sweeping decision, the court eliminated the requirement of preclearance for changes in voting laws in states or jurisdictions with a history of discriminatory practices. That was the key provision that gave teeth to that legislation. Now those teeth have been extracted.

The court said we have made great strides toward racial equality since the enactment of that law in 1965, which is true. But the problem is far from over. Attempts to restrict voting rights continue apace. If anything, they became more prevalent in 2012, with onerous voter ID laws and the elimination of voting days.

What's really worrisome, then, are the real threats to democracy: the thinly disguised forms of racism that linger around in state legislatures, where some lawmakers are all too willing to take us back to the days of Jim Crow.

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