

# Review of: "Building a digital republic to reduce health disparities and improve population health in the United States"

Paul Shafer<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Boston University

**Potential competing interests:** The author(s) declared that no potential competing interests exist.

This article explores an important dimension of the social safety net, decreasing administrative burdens by suggesting a universal digital footprint across government to allow programs to work "as they are intended" (from previous version). I appreciate the international perspective that they bring, with the technological tools that could be brought to bear on this problem in the US. However, one could argue that the fragmented social safety net and far from complete enrollment in programs among the eligible is a feature, not a bug (e.g., Governor DeSantis on the Florida unemployment system during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasis on federalism in Medicaid and TANF administration). Whether or not lower income Americans are as "adroit" at navigating administrative burdens, there is also the consideration of whether they have the time and resources to navigate them—the time tax and relative cost of being poor (e.g., regressive fees that prey on the poor, bureaucracy associated with proving lack of resources). There is also the consideration of trust and "freedom", would there be enough public support from Americans and our representatives to even reasonably propose such a centralized system? Given the waves of anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ, and anti-abortion sentiment along with many other targets of discrimination in modern-day America, depending on where you live, could something as simple as reading the "wrong" book or getting the "wrong" health care service make you a target for state violence? Whether or not these scenarios are likely, these are concerns that many would have. The rationale for how a neutral, benevolent, and efficiency-minded policymaker would be for such a transformation are evident, simply following through on delivering the best experience and full benefits provided by existing policies; however, that embodies none of the historical context of how America ended up with the systems and outcomes that it has (and has chosen). This is a great start, I would just encourage the authors to consider how to better contextualize the great promise that a "digital republic" could hold for well-being in the US with consideration of these challenges.