

Right-wing campaigns in Georgia and Wisconsin purge half a million registered voters

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Within the last week two significant court rulings have authorized the purge over 500,000 registered voters in the states of Wisconsin and Georgia.

First, in Wisconsin a previous October ruling which purged over 234,000 voters was upheld by Ozaukee County Judge Paul Malloy, an appointee of former Republican Governor Scott Walker. This was followed in a Tuesday ruling by a federal judge which upheld the request of Republican Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to remove over 300,000 voters from the rolls.

Of the over 300,000 registered voters excised from the rolls in Georgia, 120,651 individuals are to be removed for not having voted or made “contact” with election officials within the last seven years or for not having responded to mailers sent out by the state. The “use-it-or-lose-it” rule which first went into effect in Georgia in 2017, despite being blatantly undemocratic, was upheld by a 2018, 5-4 Supreme Court decision.

When a voter is purged from the rolls, a time-consuming and labyrinthine process is required to get re-registered, which is different depending on what state one lives in. Usually it involves submitting various IDs, paperwork or online forms in order to be properly registered. While Wisconsin does allow same-day voter registration, provided one has an up-to-date government-issued identification card and proof of residency on their person the day of the vote, Georgia and 28 other states do not allow same-day registration.

In Wisconsin over 234,000 mailers were sent out during October to voters who were “suspected” to have moved. Of these postcards, 60,000 were returned as undeliverable. However over 2,300 were returned by voters who confirmed that they still lived at the same

residence, and an additional 16,500 were returned stating that they had moved but still lived in Wisconsin and were registered to vote.

The process by which the various election commissions decide if someone should be purged from the rolls is a mishmash of private interests using dubious “data” to reach their false conclusions in solving the “problem” of too much democracy in the United States. Current verification systems use various state agencies’ databases, including Department of Motor Vehicle records, tax records and school information to try to ascertain accurate voting records. Theoretically, if someone’s address appears differently in two databases, the system would flag that person as a “mover” and a mailer would be sent out. With the latest ruling by Judge Malloy, if the mailer is not returned after two attempts the person is automatically deregistered.

While many people do move and do not update their address with state election authorities beforehand, it is entirely possible that many of the mailers are not returned because they resemble so much of the junk mail, corporate advertising, penny flyers and political advertising that overflows from the average mailbox.

The frequency of voter purges has only increased since the 2013 Supreme Court decision *Shelby v. Holder*, which stripped federal oversight over many Southern states, allowing right-wing interests to begin culling the voter base to fit their agenda. While the Democrats controlled Congress throughout the first two years of Obama’s presidency, they did nothing to strengthen the Voting Rights Act or enact any enhanced voting protections.

Legal groups affiliated with and, in the case of 2018

Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, created by the Democrat Party, have filed lawsuits seeking an injunction against the rulings. These include the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin and Abram's outfit, Fair Fight Action Inc. This and a few perfunctory tweets from accounts associated with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senator Bernie Sanders and former Attorney General Eric Holder were all the time and effort the Democratic Party could spare to defend the basic democratic rights of thousands of voters.

In-person voting fraud, or voter impersonation, is as rare as "getting struck by lightning," according to the Brennan Center report titled "The Truth About Voter Fraud." A 2014 Harvard University study also concluded that "the likely percent of non-citizen voters in recent US elections is 0." Finally, an article in the *Washington Post*, which used the news-aggregation system Nexis to comb through every reported instance of voter fraud in the 2016 election, found four instances in which someone was actually charged with voter fraud. In one case an elderly woman was charged after she filled out her recently deceased husband's absentee ballot.

There have never been any conclusive studies that have proven an election was swung in one direction due to voter fraud, but this hasn't stopped bipartisan state election commissions from purging registered voters, under the guise of "performing maintenance," for decades.

The latest impetus for the most recent Wisconsin purge was a lawsuit filed by the right-wing Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty. A majority of its funding comes from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, worth an estimated \$800 million. On its website the foundation boasts proudly of its support for "organizations that strengthen families; encourage self-reliance; promote civil discourse ... and rely on voluntary institutions outside of government to address community and individual needs."

The foundation was not only a heavy backer of the Walker campaign but actually helped run it as well. A 2012 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* article confirmed that Bradley Foundation CEO Michael Grebe was personally conducting interviews at the cabinet level of the Walker administration. Grebe also served as chair of Walker's reelection campaign, the "Friends of Scott

Walker."

In previous roles Grebe was also the chair of the Republican Party of Wisconsin and the general counsel for the Republican National Committee. Former Republican Speaker Paul Ryan has credited Grebe as being his "political godfather."

In addition to bankrolling and hiring Republican politicians, the Bradley Foundation proudly contributes to the Koch brother-affiliated Americans for Prosperity. This corporate front spearheaded the push in many states in the early part of this decade to enact "voter ID" laws which would require voters to have a valid government-issued photo identification card in order to vote. As with the purges of the electoral rolls, the real purpose of these laws is to disenfranchise poor, working-class and elderly voters who are unable to afford or access a new ID, as opposed to catching the mythical multiple voter.

The real threat to democracy is not multiple voters, Russian bots or Facebook ads, but the ruling class and the rotten social and economic system they represent. There is plenty of fraud in US elections, the most important being the canard that voters are presented with a real choice between the two parties of big business.



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