

Republicans introduce 253 bills to restrict voting rights in states across the US

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Republican lawmakers in 43 states have introduced a total of 253 bills aimed at restricting access to the ballot box for tens of millions of people. Republican-controlled states, including Southern states that employed “lynch law” terror to block African Americans from voting during the decades-long period of Jim Crow segregation, are flooding their legislatures with measures to effectively disenfranchise working class, poor and minority voters.

The laws largely focus on tightening voter ID requirements, purging voter rolls and restricting absentee and mail-in ballots.

In the United States, state governments have the authority to oversee elections and determine election procedures and rules, including for national elections. Within each state, individual counties have a great deal of latitude in the conduct of elections.

Republicans control both the lower and upper legislative houses in 36 of the 50 states, and both the legislatures and governorships in 23 states, making it very possible for far-reaching barriers to the ballot box to be imposed across much of the country.

The attack on voting rights, led primarily by the Republican Party, has been facilitated by the 2013 US Supreme Court ruling in *Shelby County vs. Holder*. The court ruled 5-4 to effectively gut Section 5, the main enforcement mechanism, of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Section 5 of the landmark civil rights law required states with a history of discriminatory voting practices to clear any changes in election rules and procedures with the US Justice Department.

The states affected in their entirety at the time of *Shelby* were Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Virginia. States where certain counties fell under the provisions of Section 5 included California, Florida, Michigan, New York, North Carolina and South Dakota. Many of these same states are now seeking to implement far-reaching attacks on voting rights.

Despite opening the door for a return to restrictive and discriminatory voting practices, the 2013 ruling met with little resistance on the part of the Democratic Party. Neither the Obama White House nor the congressional Democrats mounted any serious effort to reverse the evisceration of the Voting Rights Act by enacting new legislation in the years since the reactionary *Shelby* ruling.

This capitulation to an attack on voting rights by a Republican majority on the Supreme Court followed the theft of the 2000 presidential election by means of a 5-4 high court ruling halting a vote recount in Florida. That partisan ruling handed the White House to George W. Bush, who had lost the popular vote nationally and no doubt would have lost the pivotal Florida vote had the recount been allowed to proceed. The Democratic Party and its candidate, Al Gore, immediately accepted the theft of the election and demanded that their voters recognize Bush as the legitimate president.

Now the Democrats are passing two voting rights bills in the House, knowing that they have virtually no chance of obtaining the 10 Republican votes required to overcome a filibuster in the Senate. They have no

intention of appealing to the mass popular opposition that exists to the attack on voting rights, because that would threaten an upsurge of the working class against the capitalist system.

Below is a partial list of states seeking to impose new barriers to voting that target workers and poor people.

Arizona

Arizona, where the GOP (Grand Old Party, the Republican Party) controls both legislative chambers as well as the governorship, is tied with Georgia for the highest number of restrictive bills at 22. One bill would allow for the mailing of absentee ballots to voters but require them to deliver the ballots in person. The same bill would also limit the number of voting stations in each county based on population.

There are also bills to purge voter rolls, eliminate the Permanent Early Voting List, abolish “no excuse” absentee voting and impose stricter voter ID requirements.

The attack on absentee voting is particularly significant since even before the pandemic nearly 80 percent of Arizonans voted by mail.

Another set of bills would allow the state legislature to decide the allocation of electoral votes in the presidential election, regardless the popular vote in the state. Current law stipulates that whichever candidate receives the most votes will receive all 11 of Arizona’s electoral votes. One proposed change would allow the state House of Representatives to revoke the state attorney general’s certification of the electoral vote by a simple majority vote and allocate them to whichever candidate it chooses.

Georgia

In Georgia, where, like Arizona, the Republicans control both the legislature and the governorship, bills being introduced closely follow Arizona’s example. They would end “no-excuse” absentee ballots and also require absentee ballots to have a witness signature on the envelope. Additional restrictions would shorten the time period for voters to request an absentee ballot and require the request to include a copy of the voter’s ID.

Other provisions would shorten the period of early voting, reduce the use of ballot drop boxes, criminalize providing food or water to voters waiting in line, cut mobile voting facilities and end early voting on Sundays. The latter proposal is transparently directed against the widespread practice of black churches encouraging their congregations to go to the polls directly after the Sunday religious service.

Mississippi

Mississippi Republicans also control both legislative chambers and the governorship. They have introduced bills that would restrict the types of voter ID that can be used and require voters to provide proof of citizenship when registering to vote. Three Mississippi bills would also require comparison of voter rolls to other databases of citizens, ostensibly to identify noncitizens. Any person unable to provide proof of citizenship within 30 days would be removed from the voter rolls.

South Carolina

South Carolina Republicans, who control the state government, have introduced several bills to strengthen voter ID requirements and attack absentee voting. One bill would require all mail-in ballots to include a witness signature and a driver's license or state voter registration number. Another would impose stricter signature matching requirements for mail-in ballots. A further bill would ban anyone but family members from delivering absentee ballots, ban ballot drop boxes and require mail ballots to be delivered to voting centers. Other bills would drastically reduce the number of polling stations.

Florida

Florida's Senate Bill 90 includes sweeping restrictions on voting rights. Upwards of six million Florida voters who received a mail-in ballot last year would not receive one for the 2022 election cycle. The bill would also effectively require previous absentee voters to request a new ballot every general election. Ballot drop boxes would be banned.

Texas

Texas, which already has some of the most restrictive voting laws, is preparing to enact even further restrictions. Bills introduced in the GOP-controlled state legislature would prohibit drive-through voting, restrict the number of voting machines at voting sites, ban local election officials from sending mail-in ballot applications to all voters and limit early voting.

One proposal would require those with disabilities to provide documentation in order to apply for an absentee ballot. To acquire this documentation, many voters would have to pay for a doctor's visit, subjecting them to a form of poll tax.

The restrictions being imposed in these and other states amount to the greatest assault on voting rights since the Jim Crow era. The expansion of voter ID requirements, in particular, has been shown to target minority populations with precision. Nearly 11 percent of voters, 21 million people, do not have access to a valid government ID. The percentage among black voters is 25 percent.

This concentrated attack on mail-in voting is bound up with Trump's

bogus claim of election fraud and a "stolen election," which was central to his attempt to overthrow the results of the 2020 election. Throughout the 2020 election cycle, Trump attacked mail-in voting as the centerpiece of a supposed Democratic plot to hijack the election.

He used this fabrication to deny the legitimacy of Biden's victory and mobilize his fascistic supporters around the demand to "Stop the Steal," culminating in the January 6 attack on Congress.

The Republican Party overwhelmingly supported the "stolen election" lie and continues to do so. In the name of "election security," the GOP is spearheading the drive toward authoritarian rule.

Arizona Republican State Representative John Kavanaugh recently told CNN he was concerned that "Not everybody wants to vote, and if somebody is uninterested in voting, that probably means that they're totally uninformed on the issues. Quantity is important, but we have to look at the quality of votes, as well."

In other words, not everyone should be allowed to vote.

The Democratic Party, for its part, as demonstrated by its failure to defend democratic rights in 2000 and 2013, has no real solution to this assault on democracy.

To the extent that the Democratic Party is opposed to Republican restrictions on voting it is out of purely electoral concerns. The Democrats are aware that the Republicans are targeting Democratic voters, and they are concerned that the Republicans may legislate Democratic candidates out of contention for office.

Yet the Democrats refuse to mount any significant defense of democratic rights. This is because they are afraid that any mass mobilization of the working class would quickly grow outside of its control and begin to challenge the capitalist system, which the Democrats defend.

Additionally, when it comes to third party and socialist candidates, the Democrats are just as vicious than their Republican counterparts. When the presidential candidates for the Socialist Equality Party attempted to earn a place on the ballot for the 2020 election cycle, multiple Democratic-run states refused to allow the candidates on the ballot, informing them that campaigners must risk their lives to collect hundreds of thousands of signatures in the middle of a deadly pandemic.

The Attorney General of California argued that allowing the SEP on the ballot would cause "an unmanageable and overcrowded ballot" that would create "voter confusion" and "frustration of the democratic process." The Democratic Party's concern is that a socialist candidate may pose a significant challenge to the major parties. Such an occurrence would certainly be a frustration to the Democratic Party but not to the democratic process both parties continue to erode.

The fight to defend and expand democratic rights must be taken up by the working class independently of these two parties as a mass movement in the fight for socialism. Only such a movement can halt the capitalist assault on voting rights and ensure the protection of democratic rights for all people.



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