

Texas Republicans set to pass voting restriction bill

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The Texas Senate passed a bill Sunday morning that will further restrict voting rights in the state ranked as the most restrictive in the US in a recent study by Northern Illinois University. As of this writing, the Texas House of Representatives was poised to approve the bill and Republican Governor Greg Abbott was expected to sign it into law before the end of the day.

Both houses of the state legislature are controlled by the Republican Party. Senate passage of the bill came after a week of closed-door discussions. It was then rushed to the floor late Saturday evening for overnight debate and Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick suspended a Senate rule that requires a bill to be public for at least 24 hours before a final vote is held. The bill passed in the Senate by a vote of 18 to 13.

Texas is the latest of several states to pass anti-democratic laws attacking voting rights in the aftermath of the 2020 elections and Trump's attempted coup of January 6, 2021. The fascist mob attack on the US Capitol, incited and supported by Trump and facilitated by the leadership of the Republican Party, was aimed at overturning the election of Joe Biden and maintaining Trump in power. Baseless claims of massive vote fraud and a "stolen election" provided the rallying cry for the mobilization of far-right militia forces that overran the Capitol in an attempt to block the certification of Biden's winning margin of electoral votes.

The same pretext is now being used to limit mail balloting, impose or strengthen voter ID requirements, cut back on early voting, enable partisan state legislatures to override vote counts by election authorities, and give a green light to far-right "poll watchers" to intimidate working class voters and election workers.

To date, Iowa, Florida and Georgia are the most notable states to have passed such laws, but a total of 389 bills have thus far been introduced in 48 states, according to the Brennan Center.

The Texas bill, known as S.B. 7, bars election officials from mailing absentee ballots to voters unless directly requested, making it a felony to do so. It places restrictions

on absentee voters, requiring them to provide a driver's license number or the last four digits of their social security number on the ballot and the envelope. It also makes it more difficult for disabled voters to acquire and submit absentee ballots.

The bill curbs early voting on Sundays, an obvious attempt to disrupt community voter drives organized by Black churches, often referred to as "Souls to the Polls."

S.B. 7 makes it a crime to refuse poll observers access to voting sites or block their ability to fully watch the process, stating that poll watchers must be able to "sit or stand near enough to see and hear the election officers." One provision makes it easier for partisan poll watchers to pursue legal action if they claim they were obstructed from fully observing the voting process.

In the months leading up to the November 2020 election, the Trump election campaign set up a website at armyfortrump.com. The site appealed to Trump loyalists to "enlist" in the "Army for Trump" and receive training to "monitor" the polls in working class and Democratic districts.

Additionally, the bill includes a provision, added at the last minute, that grants judges the authority to void an election if the number of allegedly fraudulent votes cast could alter the result of an election, regardless of whether it is proven that voter fraud actually influenced the outcome. Nor would it matter for whom the invalid votes were cast.

The passage of S.B. 7 has further exposed the feckless nature of the Democratic Party's response to the national assault on voting rights waged by the Republican Party.

In Georgia, the Democratic Party and the national media promoted the illusion that corporate intervention against Republican voting laws would halt the Republican attacks on democratic rights. This has been proven false.

Despite dozens of corporations issuing statements against the Georgia law, nothing has changed. Now in Texas, where companies like American Airlines, Dell and Microsoft have criticized the bill, corporate pressure campaigns have once again accomplished nothing but channel working class

opposition into the dead end of impotent appeals to ruthless corporate exploiters.

In addition, the Democratic Party has used the Republican bills to promote its own congressional voting bill, known as the “For the People Act,” or H.R. 1. President Biden responded to the Texas bill by stating, “I call again on Congress to pass the For the People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.”

H.R.1 is branded as a restoration of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and a solution to the assault on voting rights. In reality, it is nothing of the sort. The main purpose of the “For the People Act” is to protect the Democratic Party’s electoral interests while presenting a false appearance of defending democratic rights.

The bill does include some measures to make it easier to vote, including automatic voter registration, expanded early voting, and the overturning of state laws banning felons, including those who have served their sentences, from voting. However, the bill in its present form has virtually no chance of passage in the Senate, where the Democrats need to obtain the votes of at least 10 Republicans to overcome a filibuster. If anything emerged from the Senate, it would be an even more watered-down bill.

The rest of the bill has little to offer the working class. Nothing in the bill would stop the Texas law from granting courts the authority to annul election results, nor would it stop partisan poll watchers from carrying out voter intimidation. The bill does not even mention poll watchers or observers, let alone legislate against their weaponization against voters and election workers.

Large sections of the bill are devoted to addressing gerrymandering, campaign finance and election security, not with the aim of resolving these issues but of deflecting them.

The bill’s provisions on gerrymandering do nothing to actually prevent political redistricting. Instead, it requires states to form independent redistricting commissions to direct the congressional redistricting process. These supposedly independent commissions are not actually independent, but rather unelected bodies of preselected candidates approved by the two capitalist parties.

The bill purports to address many popular complaints about the influence of corporate money in federal elections. This is done through a public campaign financing option for federal elections. Candidates in federal elections would be eligible to receive grants matching small donations up to six times their value. However, the source of funding is a tax on corporate litigation with no established budget, meaning corporate donations will continue to dominate electoral politics.

Additionally, participating candidates may still receive donations from political action committees.

The bill also advances the Democratic Party’s anti-Russia campaign, through which it seeks to place further restrictions on third party and left-wing political organizations.

H.R.1 would require online platforms with at least 50 million users to create a database of all requests for political advertisements, including a copy of the ad and the purchaser. The bill would also require political committees to notify the FBI of any connections with foreign political parties and require the FBI to submit an annual report to Congress on the connections between political committees and foreign contacts. This section could be used to justify federal surveillance of any political organization with foreign contacts, including socialist or antiwar groups that coordinate with co-thinkers internationally.

Such requirements are justified on the grounds of preventing foreign interference in US elections, but in reality are intended to further suppress any alternative to the two-party capitalist stranglehold on American politics. This is underscored by the mantra of the Biden administration and the Democratic leadership on the paramount need for “bipartisan unity” with the increasingly fascistic and Trump-controlled Republican Party.

The defense of democratic rights, including the critical right to vote, cannot be entrusted to the Democratic Party, which has proven itself neither able nor willing to defend democratic rights, beginning with its acceptance of the theft of the presidential election in 2000 and its support for police state measures in the name of the “war on terror.”

Now it is seeking to cover up the role of the Republican Party and high-level officials in the military, police and intelligence agencies in the plot to overturn the 2020 election and install Trump as a dictator. Its greatest fear by far is that the exposure of this ongoing conspiracy will have massive social and political consequences, breaking the stranglehold of the two-party system over the working class and threatening the entire capitalist system.



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