

Georgia Republicans seek control over Atlanta-area elections as Democrats abandon defense of democratic rights

Alex Findijs
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The Georgia state legislature is moving to take control of the electoral system in Fulton County. This is part of the Republican Party's national efforts to advance the lie of mass election fraud during the 2020 election and to create legal systems that will effectively disenfranchise millions of people.

Fulton County is the largest in the state, encompassing much of Atlanta. During the 2020 election Joe Biden carried the county easily, winning more than 380,000 votes, about 73 percent of the total. As a stronghold for the Democratic Party in a state in which Donald Trump lost by just 12,000 votes, Fulton County is a prime target for the Republicans in their efforts to undermine voting rights.

As part of Georgia's new election law, SB 202, the state legislature has appointed a state election board with a Republican majority. The board has the authority to replace local superintendents if it finds that they have "demonstrated nonfeasance, malfeasance, or gross negligence in the administration of the elections."

Last Wednesday the election board took a step forward in this process by appointing its own committee to conduct a performance review of Fulton County's election system. The members include Republican Ricky Kittle, chairman of the Catoosa County elections board; Democrat Stephen Day, a member of the Gwinnett County elections board; and Ryan Germany, general counsel for Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger.

The review and suspension process could take up to a year, but this will be plenty of time to replace local officials with partisan superintendents ahead of the 2022 mid-term elections. If this occurs, the imposed superintendent will have the authority to disqualify

voters, move polling locations, and challenge the results of the election, possibly even refusing to certify the election results.

Georgia is among several other states which have either passed or may soon pass laws with similar provisions. In 2021 so far, 389 restrictive voting bills have been introduced to state legislatures in 48 states according to the Brennan Center, a voting rights advocacy group based at New York University. Of these, 22 have been signed into law and a further 61 are moving through legislatures in 18 states. The ability of Georgia's voting law to enable one-party control over the electoral process will undoubtedly set the tone for future legislation across the country.

Faced with this crisis over voting rights, the Democratic Party has all but completely fled the field of battle. It was in Georgia itself that Democrats refused to mount any serious resistance to SB 202, deflecting popular opposition behind phony boycott campaigns and appeals to corporations to pressure Republican lawmakers.

For months, Democrats lauded their federal election bills: the For the People Act (SB1) and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (HR4). SB1 was filibustered by Senate Republicans earlier this year and HR4 is expected to meet the same fate this fall. Using the resistance of Senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema to altering the filibuster as political shields, the Democratic Party is spending its efforts on gutting these bills of any actual democratic content, capitulating to the demands of the fascistic Republican Party.

The reactionary Manchin, through his shameless appeals for collaboration with the same Republican

Party working to destroy voting rights, has earned himself the right to decide what goes into these bills and what comes out. Providing the public a glimpse of what to expect from future iterations of the bills, Manchin published his own proposed version of SB1 in which he removed most of the provisions that would expand voting access, replacing them with a national voter ID mandate.

The surrender at the core of the Democratic Party's position on voting rights is best exemplified by Georgia Senator Raphael Warnock's proposed Preventing Election Subversion Act. This bill would do nothing to stop the Georgia election board from removing local officials, but would instead create a legal framework whereby deposed local officials may sue the state government for reinstatement.

This is a patently pathetic proposal. Warnock would have election officials engage in a protracted court battle while Republican politicians have their way with the electoral process. Not only this, but he appears to have neglected the fact that SB 202 already allows for local officials to challenge their removal in court, and that the US Supreme Court has a 6-3 conservative majority, presiding over federal circuit courts packed with Trump-era appointees.

What does this bill do to stop Republicans from removing unfavorable election officials? Absolutely nothing! In fact, it enshrines in federal law the authority of state governments to do so. Warnock's bill would grant state legislatures and federal judges the authority to remove local election officials on the grounds of "inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office."

Democratic politicians have spoken extensively against the Republican bills, with President Biden declaring them the "new Jim Crow" and "the most dangerous threat to voting in the integrity of free and fair elections in our history." Yet the Democratic Party has done nothing to oppose it, refusing to make any popular appeal to the millions whose right to vote is now under threat.

Instead, the Democratic Party has consistently turned to CEOs, judges, and Republican politicians, begging them to halt the assault on voting rights, to no avail.

This is because the Democratic Party, as a capitalist party, fears the working class more than it fears the erosion of democratic rights. If the working class were

to take action against the Republican bills, it would quickly expand to broader social issues. Democratic rights are invariably connected to inequality, police brutality, the destruction of social services, crushing poverty wages, and the murderous handling of the pandemic by both political parties.

Under the control of the Democratic Party—the party of Wall Street, big business and the upper-middle class—the fight to defend democratic rights cannot advance. As long as the working class is trapped within the straitjacket of the two capitalist parties it cannot defend its own rights and interests. The working class must break free of their political control and wage an independent political struggle for the defense of democratic rights as part of the fight for socialism.



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