

Early voting begins in US mid-term elections amid threats of disruption, suppression and violence

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Millions of ballots have already been cast in the United States in mid-term elections that culminate on November 8, this year's Election Day. All 435 seats in the House of Representatives are at issue, along with 34 seats, one-third of the US Senate, and 36 state governorships.

Heavy voting has been reported in those states that provide for early voting at the polls, and a heavy volume of mail-in voting as well.

In Georgia, with contests for both US Senate and the state's governor, election officials reported a record-breaking week of early voting, with 729,029 ballots cast over five days, compared to 488,177 in 2018, the previous mid-term election.

In Michigan, with contests for governor, attorney general and secretary of state, election officials said they responded to nearly 1.8 million requests for absentee ballots and more than 641,000 ballots have already been returned, compared to only 346,000 mail votes in the entire 2018 election.

A *New York Times* account cited huge increases in both early voter turnout (up 70 percent in Georgia and 50 percent in Florida) and requests for absentee ballots (up 114 percent in North Carolina). It cited one estimate that 5.5 million people had cast ballots through October 21, of whom 51 percent were Democrats, 30 percent Republicans and 19 percent independents.

This margin, as in 2020, reverses the traditional Republican lead in absentee balloting, when it was previously restricted to the elderly. Mail voting was made widely available 2020 due to the COVID pandemic, and was disproportionately used by Democrats since Republican candidates and the Trump administration downplayed the pandemic and disparaged legitimate fears of voting in person.

The surge in mail ballots means that in many states, as

in 2020, the outcome of numerous contests will not be known immediately because of delays in vote-counting. This is particularly the case in states where the election machinery is controlled by the Republicans, who have blocked efforts to count mail-in ballots before Election Day in order to create the impression—as Trump sought to do in 2020—that they have a wide lead in the vote.

As in 2020, but with greater preparation, many Republican candidates are expected to declare victory as soon as initial vote totals are tabulated, and then raise cries of “vote-rigging” and “stolen election” when the later counting of mail ballots begins to cut into their leads.

One of the most flagrant election denialists, Kari Lake, the Republican candidate for governor of Arizona, summarized this method in an interview during the week on CNN. “We want to know that our legal vote counted,” she said. “We want to know the winner on election night. We don't want to be counting for 10 days.”

In the context of the procedures adopted in many states, “knowing the winner” on election night would amount to declaring the Republican candidate a winner based only on the in-person vote totals and discarding all uncounted mail-in ballots.

This is not an individual tactic, but a method spearheaded by the fascist wing of the Republican Party headed by Donald Trump. According to a report published this weekend in *Rolling Stone*, “In recent months, Trump has convened a series of in-person meetings and conference calls to discuss laying the groundwork to challenge the 2022 midterm election results... In these conversations, pro-Trump groups, attorneys, Republican Party activists, and MAGA diehards often discuss the type of scorched-earth legal tactics they could deploy.”

The magazine's report says Trump has focused

particularly on the city of Philadelphia—where the population is largely African American and Jewish—the traditional bastion of the Democratic Party in statewide contests. Trump was said to blame the city for his defeat in Pennsylvania in 2020, although his numbers there were no different than in 2016. He actually lost the state because of a shift in the heavily populated suburban areas outside the city.

Given the number of closely contested races for the Senate, the House and state governorships, the prospect for the post-election period is one of mounting political crisis, involving not only control of the House and Senate, where the Democrats now have tiny margins, but also control of major states such as Florida, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and Arizona.

Any of these contests could well erupt into politically motivated violence, since the Republican Party is now dominated by election denialists who claim the 2020 election was stolen, and the Democratic Party has done little or nothing to alert the American people about the grave danger of such attacks.

The congressional investigation into the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol has not led to the prosecution, let alone imprisonment, of Trump or any of his top aides who organized and inspired the fascist-led assault in an effort to keep Trump in the White House.

Ample evidence has been collected and presented by the committee, but it brought itself to seeking Trump's own testimony only last week, sending him a notice to respond *after* the November 8 election, when many members of the committee may have been voted out of office and the committee itself may be a lame duck, with an incoming Republican majority determined to abolish it.

There are few sights as pathetic as Biden & Co. pleading for bipartisan agreement with their "Republican friends and colleagues" while the majority of Republican candidates for top offices in the election—the House of Representatives, US Senate, state governors, attorneys general and secretaries of state—deny that Biden was legitimately elected president.

Even before they contest the outcome of the election, Republican state governments are seeking to disrupt and suppress voter turnout in urban areas they presume will vote Democratic. In Houston, Texas on Thursday, local officials sought election monitors from the federal Department of Justice in response to the announcement by the state government, headed by Republican Governor Greg Abbott, that it would send election inspectors to the Houston area.

A letter from the secretary of state's office said the inspectors would oversee ballot counting and tabulating at county and city offices, not precinct-level voting: "These inspectors will perform randomized checks on election records, including tapes and chain of custody, and will observe the handling and counting of ballots and electronic media."

The inspectors will be accompanied by a task force from the state attorney general's office. This is particularly inflammatory, since Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton was the organizer of a series of legal challenges to Biden's 2020 election victory, at one point even claiming the right of the Texas state government to dictate election practices in other states.

Beyond such interference with the administration of vote-counting, there have already been threats of violence against voters casting mail ballots. In Arizona, armed and masked individuals "dressed in tactical gear, fully disguised," were seen by a local television reporter near a mail ballot drop box in Mesa, Arizona.

In the same town, one voter told the *Washington Post* he had encountered people filming people using a drop box and photographing license plates. They had accused him and his wife of being a "mule," i.e., transporting a mail ballot to drop off for someone else.

Other forms of harassment and threats of violence have been directed against election officials. In Nevada, of the state's 17 county election supervisors, 10 have quit or announced they are leaving office. Eight of 12 people in the state's election staff have left. The registrar of voters in Washoe County (Reno), the state's second-largest, quit after threats of violence.

Several states have sought to legitimize claims of "vote fraud" and intimidate voters by prosecuting individuals who mistakenly cast ballots in 2020 when they were not eligible to vote under reactionary and anti-democratic state laws, particularly when the voters were former felons. Two such cases were dismissed last week in Texas and Florida on procedural grounds because Republican officials had acted outside their jurisdiction.



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