

Defend Democracy Project



NEW REPORT

Voter Suppression: — A Key Strategy In — The MAGA Playbook

February 2023

NEW REPORT

Voter Suppression: A Key Strategy In The MAGA Playbook

MAGA Republicans made it harder to vote in the 2022 midterm elections through voter suppression. This report shows how the argument that voter suppression had no impact in 2022 is wrong. Republican policies depressed turnout, especially for Black voters, by deliberately imposing hardship on minorities. The racial turnout gap has increased twice as fast in GOP-led states due to targeted voting restrictions and registration requirements. Their actions created long lines and reduced ballot drop boxes in select areas. They gerrymandered majority-minority areas to minimize Black and Hispanic voting power. Ultimately, they achieved their goals of choosing who votes and who doesn't.

And Republicans are intensifying their efforts in 2023. Voting should be made easier in America, not harder—especially not for historically suppressed communities. Yet Republicans are doubling down on voter suppression. MAGA legislatures are already rolling out their anti-voter agenda in key states like Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin, pushing targeted plans that will force millions (primarily minorities) to go to extraordinary lengths to vote. With hundreds of anti-voter laws still on the books, it is clear that Republican voter suppression efforts will continue to threaten our democracy for the foreseeable future.

Here are some examples:

Nationwide

“It’s hard for people to vote when they literally feel attacked to vote.”

– Rep. [Steve Horsford](#), Congressional Black Caucus chair

MAGA-Led States Widened The Racial Turnout Gap Twice As Quickly By Making It Harder To Vote. MAGA Republicans have taken on the Jim Crow [legacy](#) of voter suppression efforts aimed at reducing the voting power of racial minorities, particularly Black voters. Anti-voter policies deliberately impose just enough hardship and confusion to prevent targeted voters from participating in elections. According to [Research Collaborative](#), “Since 2008, MAGA Republican trifectas in 31 states have passed legislation to make it more difficult for people of color to vote.” Correspondingly, Black turnout has decreased 4% in those 31 states while White turnout has actually *increased* by 4.5%. Republicans’ efforts to make it harder to vote have led to an 8% rise in the [MAGA racial turnout gap](#) in just over 12 years, doubling the pace of inequitable turnout in all other states.

Republicans Openly Praised Targeted Voter Suppression Efforts. Nearly 2 in 3 voters agree that some voters experience barriers to voting and that those barriers are [intentionally created](#). Even prominent Republicans have admitted that voter suppression impacted the 2022 midterm elections. Former Georgia Senator Kelly Loeffler [pointed](#) to “low participation by diverse, younger groups of voters,” as an important part of the 2022 midterm election in Georgia, declaring: “That’s the track record our General Assembly ran on. Because Republicans remain solidly in the majority, we can build on that track record to push the trendlines back to

wider margins of victory as Georgians experience the results of conservative leadership.” In Wisconsin, Republican election commissioner and 2020 fake elector Bob Spindell said he was “[especially proud](#)” of lower turnout in urban areas like Milwaukee during the last election, [attributing](#) depressed turnout to a “well thought out multi-faceted plan” by Republicans in the state to suppress unfavorable votes—[particularly Black voters](#).

Florida

Governor Ron DeSantis Silenced Black Voters Through Disenfranchisement and Gerrymandering. MAGA Republicans conducted a sweeping voter intimidation campaign before and during the midterm elections. First, the Florida GOP [eliminated](#) two majority-Black congressional districts ahead of the midterm elections after Gov. Ron DeSantis did everything in his power to [reduce the voting power of racial and ethnic minorities by gerrymandering Congressional districts](#). Next, the GOP-led legislature pushed through a set of changes to election law disproportionately affecting Black voters and making it [harder to vote](#). Above all, these laws were meant to [intimidate people](#) by raising the costs of voting. In just one year, Florida [became significantly harder to vote in](#), surpassing five other states, according to the [Cost of Voting Index](#). Then, Florida police [arrested 20 people](#) for supposedly casting ballots illegally during the primaries—even though the state had told them they were eligible to vote, which [prompted significant backlash](#) and raised concerns that his response would [intimidate thousands of voters](#) into staying home rather than [risk getting arrested](#) or reincarcerated. On Election Day, DeSantis’ administration [refused to admit](#) Justice Department monitors, [falsely claiming](#) that DOJ monitors intended to enter polling places and disrupt voting, and [repeatedly claiming without evidence](#) that voter fraud and election interference were imminent problems.

MAGA Voting Changes Reduced Black Turnout In Florida In 2022. As a consequence of MAGA voting changes spearheaded by Ron DeSantis, the Black share of the Florida electorate [decreased](#) by 2% despite no significant population change, suggesting disparate turnout: “In 2018, [CNN exit polls](#) showed Black voters made up 13% of all voters. Four years later, the same [CNN exit polls](#) showed Black voters had decreased to just 11% of all Florida voters.” Turnout [dropped](#) by nearly 10% between 2018 and 2022: “[B]efore the new voting laws were enacted, the state had a 63% turnout among registered voters in the midterms. This year, [turnout dropped to 54%](#), which mirrors the historic average of past decades.” Turnout in predominantly Black precincts was [low](#): “Although Leon County’s active Democratic voters outnumber Republicans roughly 2-to-1, the GOP turnout was 69 percent, while the Democrats managed 58 percent.”

Florida Election Laws Making It Harder To Vote Are Only Beginning To Take Effect. New voting restrictions adopted last year are set to be [rolled out](#) over the next two years. County-level election supervisors have begun urging the state to [throw out](#) the new mail-in voting changes, warning that the restrictive policies “will create significant election reporting delays and a slew of costs for local election offices, and could disenfranchise large numbers of voters.” Just a few weeks ago, hundreds of thousands of voters had their mail-in ballot status [canceled](#) under the new laws forcing all absentee voters to re-apply and follow new stringent ID requirements—with fewer ballot boxes available for absentee voting. Since roughly [one third](#) of all ballots cast in Florida elections are mail-in ballots, these large-scale changes to accessing

absentee ballots will have a massive impact on Florida voters. With most Florida election deniers remaining in office, MAGA efforts to end easily accessible, secure voting systems continue. Furthermore, DeSantis' racial gerrymander, anti-voter laws, and election police are all here to stay [here to stay](#).

Georgia

“We should not assume that because I won that voter suppression is not an issue in Georgia...The fact that people have had to overcome barriers doesn't mean those barriers don't exist. We literally saw college students and seniors in lines that were hours and hours and hours long. Maybe he's happy with that. I'm not. I think we can do better than that...You can have the right to vote and still not have access.”

– Senator [Raphael Warnock](#) (D-GA)

Georgia Republicans Passed A Voter Suppression Law Ahead of the Midterm Elections.

Long before November 2022, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp enacted one of the nation's most restrictive voting laws, SB 202, in an effort to suppress the will of voters after historic turnout saw Trump and his two MAGA allies in the Senate lose their elections in 2020. The law imposed a slate of new regulations governing elections, imposing [hefty](#) voter ID requirements, cumbersome requirements on absentee voters, criminal penalties for provisional ballots cast in the wrong precinct, [lengthy](#) pre-registration processes, and much more. Voting rights experts spent nearly 18 months challenging the law in court and mobilizing grassroots organizations to prepare voters for a blatant attempt to suppress voters. In practice, SB 202 resulted in [fewer](#) ballot drop boxes, [longer](#) lines, [increased voter travel time](#), hundreds of thousands of [voter registration challenges](#), [less](#) early voting, and, crucially, a widened racial [turnout gap](#). Many reporters observed that SB 202's passage led to mail-in ballots [plunging](#) by 81 percent from 2020 and Black voter turnout dropping from the 2018 midterms. Early voting [fell precipitously](#) as well after SB 202 halved the number of days for casting ballots before Election Day. Long lines at early-voting precincts, especially in the Atlanta metro, led to [mass complaints](#) of voter suppression. Even with SB 202 drastically reducing early voting, the Georgia GOP [fought](#) for a confederate-era Saturday [voting ban](#) that state courts ultimately overturned.

GOP Voter Suppression Efforts Made It Significantly Harder to Vote In 2022. Black participation rates dropped from 47.8% to 43.2% compared to 2018, while Hispanic participation fell from 27.6% to 25.1%. Comparatively, white voter turnout actually grew 0.4 percent. In the words of state Rep. Jasmine Clark, “[T]here is a [clear and present threat](#) that must be addressed by lawmakers who want to protect all voters' freedom to vote in safe, accessible elections.” These effects are the direct results of a deliberate, premeditated strategy by MAGA Republicans to undermine the will of Georgia voters. Yet the suppressive effects of SB 202 would have been much worse without deep and comprehensive voter engagement by state and local voting rights organizations [refusing to normalize voter suppression](#).

Georgia Anti-Voter Laws Based on 2020 Election Lies Aren't Going Anywhere. As voting rights advocates note, policies that restricted voting [remain in place](#). SB 202 still stands as a cornerstone of the MAGA plan to undermine the will of voters. Though Raphael Warnock prevailed in the U.S. Senate race, Republicans have maintained an iron grip on the levers of

state government and SB 202 will remain in force. With anti-voter laws still in-force, ballot access will remain limited for years to come: "It's [death by a thousand cuts](#). They are not trying to hit the jugular, so you bleed out at once. It's these little nicks, so you slowly become anemic before you pass out."

Ohio

"There is no justification for the burdens that the [voting restrictions] impose on Ohioans. It will diminish confidence in an electoral system that those in office have co-opted to entrench their positions of power at the expense of voters' rights."

– [Lawsuit](#) challenging Ohio's latest voter suppression law

Ohio Just Made It Harder To Vote After Historic Voter Suppression Efforts In 2022. Ohio is one of the [10 hardest states to vote in](#), and last year [turnout fell](#) by more than the national turnout compared to the 2018 midterm elections. Just weeks into the 2023 legislative session, MAGA Ohio state legislature [passed](#) one of the most [restrictive election laws](#) in the country. The law imposes harsh voter ID requirements and sets [tight deadlines](#) for voters to return mail-in ballots and provide missing information on them. Right-wing lawmakers passed the law as a [last-minute bill](#) crammed into a 16-hour session without any public input, undermining the voices of their constituents. Several voting rights organizations strongly denounced the legislation and have already filed a [federal lawsuit](#) challenging the new changes which could "[disenfranchise](#) Black people, younger and older voters, as well as those serving in the military and living abroad."

MAGA Judges Will Determine The Future of Voter Suppression In Ohio. Anti-voter laws aren't the only thing impeding the democratic process. State judges play a crucial role in safeguarding our voting rights. After the 2022 midterm elections, however, Ohio's highest court [expanded](#) their right-wing majority, which will almost certainly [uphold](#) voter suppression laws like those enacted in HB 458 and could enable MAGA legislators to [gerrymander](#) the state's House seats as early as 2024.

Texas

Texas MAGA Republicans Made It Harder to Vote in 2022. Ahead of the midterm elections, the MAGA Texas legislature adopted a slate of anti-voter laws making it more difficult to vote, particularly in majority-minority counties. State Democrats even [fled the state](#) in an unsuccessful attempt to halt a special session called to cement new restrictive elections laws. The sweeping voting restrictions were [widely condemned](#) by civil rights groups and the Justice Department in several lawsuits. The Texas Civil Rights Project found that the [restrictive voting laws](#) hindering ballot access [made it harder to vote](#) in the state, particularly for Black and Hispanic Texans, during the midterm elections. In particular, new absentee ballot restrictions led to some counties [rejecting huge swaths](#) of their absentee ballots. About 12% of mail-in ballots statewide were [rejected](#) during the primary election and thousands of mail-in ballots were similarly rejected during the general election. An NPR analysis found that Texas rejected the [highest proportion of mail-in ballots](#) of any state in the 2022 midterm elections.

Texas Lawmakers Have Already Filed Dozens of Anti-Voter Bills In 2023. Just weeks into the 2023 legislative session, Texas lawmakers have [filed over 100 election-related bills](#), many of which are expressly aimed at suppressing the will of the voters by making it more difficult to vote. Though some Democratic proposals are seeking to ease barriers to voting, GOP control over both the Texas Legislature and the governor's office makes these proposals unlikely to pass. Several of the new bills look to [usurp the power of local prosecutors](#) who refuse to follow the Trump playbook on investigating so-called voter fraud by giving state prosecutors and Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton [more power](#) to penalize them. Paxton spearheaded the infamous lawsuit aimed at overturning the 2020 election results in the Supreme Court, and he now [stands to gain even more power](#) to prosecute voters with these bills. One proposal would [establish](#) an enforcement unit for so-called voter fraud, despite the failures of such divisions elsewhere. Further, an [expansive audit](#) of the 2020 election completed in December 2022 found that Texas elections are, and were, secure. Other proposals [authorize](#) the Texas Secretary of State to “designate an election marshal responsible for investigating potential election violations,” or would allow the Secretary of State to review and reject local election orders and language on ballot initiatives.

The Texas GOP Is Targeting Majority-Minority Communities. Just under two months into their legislative session, Texas Republicans have already introduced a range of anti-voter bills [targeting](#) Houston-based, majority-minority Harris County. Several of these proposals take aim at county election administrators, raising the charges for some voting-related misdemeanors, despite having no evidence of widespread voter fraud. Election denier Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has even [called for a new election](#) in Harris County this year, baselessly accusing local election administrators of so-called voter fraud and MAGA disenfranchisement.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin Became One of the Hardest States to Vote In Ahead of the Midterm Elections. Leading up to the midterm elections, scholars and voting rights experts warned that Wisconsin was quickly becoming one of the most difficult states to vote in. Republicans in Wisconsin banned [voter registration drives](#), pre-registration, and [ballot drop boxes](#) while imposing strict [voter ID laws](#)—making Wisconsin the [fourth-hardest state to vote in](#), according to the [Cost Of Voting Index](#). Many of these measures were designed to reduce voter turnout, and their impact on the 2022 midterm elections is clear.

Anti-Voter Election Laws Resulted In Lower Turnout Among Black and Hispanic Voters In 2022. Election data shows that predominantly Black and Hispanic areas saw [significantly lower turnout](#) than other parts of the state despite overall turnout in the state remaining [relatively unchanged](#) compared to 2018, decreasing by less than a percentage point. 46,000 [fewer votes](#) were cast in Milwaukee County compared to the 2018 midterm elections, even with 9,000 newly registered voters. MAGA lawmakers have openly lauded this decrease as the result of successful anti-voter policies.

MAGA Republicans In Wisconsin Are Pushing For Greater Voting Restrictions. The Wisconsin GOP has made it clear they intend to continue their [attacks on ballot access](#) over the

next two years. After expanding their MAGA majority in the state legislature, Wisconsin Republicans are [within reach](#) of a veto-proof supermajority with just a small number of Democratic defectors or absences. Prominent state GOP lawmakers have [attacked](#) the state's election administration system, and the legislature are already considering another slate of voting changes and ballot initiatives—including a DeSantis-style proposal to [disenfranchise](#) thousands of unincarcerated voters with past felony convictions by forcing them to pay off fines and court fees [prior to voting](#). With control of the ultra-MAGA state Supreme Court [up for grabs](#) in 2023, many of the candidates are election deniers [pushing](#) for further election investigations and lawsuits that have already [dominated](#) the Wisconsin GOP agenda since the 2020 election.