

Trump pushes voter suppression: how should revolutionaries respond?

written by Greg Butterfield
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Protesters demanding justice for Breonna Taylor faced off with armed fascists at the

Kentucky Derby, Sept. 5.

Oct. 13 — As people in Fairfax, Va., waited in line to cast their ballots on the second day of early voting, [a squad of Trump supporters](#) descended on the polling station, disrupting the process and intimidating voters and poll workers. In Southern California, the Republican Party placed [unofficial dropoff boxes](#) to capture mail-in ballots amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The New York Police Department, which regularly brutalizes and murders Black and Brown people with impunity, brags how it will [guard the polls](#) while mobilizing [all cops in the city](#) to repress protests around the election. New York's police "union" has even endorsed Trump.

The governor of Texas restricted mail ballot dropoff to just one location for every county in that huge state. (A federal court later [ruled against the measure](#), but the state immediately appealed. It's unclear how or if it will be rectified in time.) Florida imposed a poll tax to prevent voting by former prisoners. Elsewhere, Republican governors and state legislatures have taken measures to restrict and inhibit voting. As of this writing, [some have been overruled](#) by the courts, some have not.

The U.S. Supreme Court on Oct. 5 [upheld a South Carolina measure](#) that requires that mail-in ballots include a witness's signature. In 2013, the unelected, appointed-for-life Supreme Court gutted a key provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, opening the door for Southern states to reinstate such Jim Crow-style restrictions.

"The state of Alabama moved almost immediately to implement a voter identification bill that had been held up in the state legislature under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act," the [Washington Post noted](#). "The state then closed more than two dozen driver's license offices, a principal place for obtaining a proper ID. The offices closed were disproportionately in areas with large Black populations.

“Before 2006, no state required voters to produce identification. The first was enacted in Indiana and later upheld by the Supreme Court. Today, 36 states have voter ID laws, some more strict than others.”

A concerted, well-organized and generously funded campaign is underway throughout the U.S. to suppress and invalidate the votes of the most oppressed members of the working class in the Nov. 3 elections — not only for the presidential contest, but also congressional, state and local races.

There is also the threat of violence by white supremacist movements like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers. At an earlier time, these forces went under names like the Ku Klux Klan and the John Birch Society.

Danger of fascist violence

Racist voter suppression is a frequent and ever-growing feature of U.S. elections. But the level of coordination in 2020 is unprecedented and comes right from the top.

For months, President Donald Trump has denounced voting by mail and other measures to protect voters amidst the pandemic, going so far as to try to sabotage the ability of the Postal Service to deliver the mail.

Trump has repeatedly refused to say that he will accept the election results if they don't favor him. During a nationally televised debate, he told the Proud Boys (and by extension all white supremacists) to “stand back and stand by.”

[Attorney General William Barr](#) joined Trump, authorizing investigations of politically motivated fraud claims.

On Oct. 10, the [Los Angeles Times](#) published a report entitled, “What if armed far-right groups go to the polls? Some plan to.” It states: “Experts are especially focused

on dangers raised by armed right-wing factions and self-styled militias with national networks who may intimidate voters, particularly immigrants and people of color.

“The Oath Keepers claim thousands of members, including some who served in the military and law enforcement. Some have signed up as poll watchers, while others plan to monitor the election armed and ‘undercover,’ drawing their weapons if needed, said founder Stewart Rhodes, a former Army paratrooper and Yale Law School graduate.”

The danger of far-right sabotage and violence targeting people of color is especially high in [so-called swing states](#), where the decisive Electoral College votes are up for grabs between Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Wisconsin.

And there are other states where violent, racist gangs have clashed with Black Lives Matter protesters, and where the elections could be another flashpoint — including Colorado, Kentucky, Missouri, Oregon and Texas, among others.

According to the L.A. Times: “Black Lives Matter protesters in swing states also plan to go to the polls to protect voters from being intimidated by right-wing groups: ‘This could be the biggest voter turnout in history, a lot of them people of color,’ said KeJuan Goldsmith, 19, a Black activist college student who led a protest against police brutality in Green Bay, Wis., on Saturday. ‘If we need to be there for them to be protected, so they can cast their vote without fear, that’s what we have to do.’”

Defend democratic rights of the people

How should revolutionaries respond to threats of right-wing violence and state-sponsored intimidation before and on Election Day? We should defend the rights of the oppressed and workers at the polls wherever and however we can.

Many progressive and even liberal groups have made plans to counteract voter

suppression, including court challenges. The Coalition of Labor Union Women and other AFL-CIO affiliates urged union members to sign up as poll workers. Others are organizing community escorts for voters, as reproductive rights activists have long done to overcome the intimidation tactics of anti-women “right to life” groups. These are all worthy efforts.

But what happens if armed, violent movements like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys descend on polling stations? The police and other agencies of the capitalist state can’t be relied upon to protect oppressed voters and poll workers. On the contrary, cops often treat these fascists as their unofficial deputies and even goad them on to violence.

The Democrats won’t call on the masses to fight to defend their rights. That was made crystal clear, yet again, with the Republican rush to confirm Trump nominee Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court before Election Day.

Although it may cost them the White House, Democratic leaders haven’t called on the masses to resist the imposition of this far-right ideologue. They are more afraid of the people and the potential for their struggle to outgrow the limits of capitalism than they are of the devastation that four more years of Trump could wreak.

That’s why revolutionaries can’t stand aside on Election Day. Communists, revolutionary socialists and anti-fascists must be prepared to challenge the right-wing goons and defend the right to vote at polling places where necessary — just as we would protest and defend the community during any fascist manifestation.

Our goal is not to give credibility to Biden or other capitalist politicians who helped pave the way for Trump and the far right. They offer no solutions to the white supremacist danger or the broader crisis of capitalism.

Rather, we must show our class that we will defend their hard-won democratic

rights, especially those of the most oppressed, against the class enemies who would terrorize them into submission, while continuing to explain why a mass movement politically independent of the capitalist parties is needed to win real social change.

The voting rights of Black and Brown people, now under threat, were won in the streets, not the voting booth. What better way for revolutionaries to make their case than to show our willingness to defend the rights of the people?

