

GOP attacks on American voters turn desperate, ugly and dangerous

By [Bob Fittrakis](#) and [Harvey Wasserman](#)

Global Research, October 13, 2008

[The Free Press \(Ohio\)](#) 13 October 2008

Region: [USA](#)

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The GOP assault on American voters has hit full stride as the economy and John McCain tank in synch.

With just over three weeks until election day, the Republicans have mounted an all-out attack against newly registered voters and the organizations working to sign them up. As many as 75% of these new voters are expected to vote Democratic, but the attacks have also spread to long-established voters as well. Recent calculations show more than a million more newly registered Democrats in Ohio than Republicans.

The usual drumbeat claiming massive voter fraud has become ceaseless at Fox "News" and other right wing media mouthpieces.

As expected, the assault centers in Ohio, which once again could decide the presidency, but has manifested throughout the nation:

1) A Republican sheriff in Greene County, Ohio, has demanded social security and other records from 302 local voters whose ballots he apparently wants to negate. Sheriff Gene Fischer has requested registration cards and address forms for all Greene County residents who voted in a special session established in Ohio allowing new voters to register and vote on the same day. The process was challenged in court by the GOP. The Ohio Supreme Court turned down that challenge, and allowed the same-day voting to proceed. But now Fischer claims telephone calls complaining about the potential for voter fraud have prompted him to go after the information.

In Franklin County, home of Ohio State University, Columbus State Community College, Capital University, Ohio Dominican University, and Otterbein College, election protection observers are reporting continuing surveillance by Republicans at Veterans Memorial, the site for early voting. The observers have documented Republican operatives taking photographs and writing down license plate numbers of voters. Election activists expect similar criminal charges as in Greene County to be filed in the state's capital.

Greene County is home to Wright State, Central State, Wilberforce and Cedarville Universities, along with Antioch College, which was recently put out of business by a right-wing putsch on its board of directors.

Llyn McCoy, Greene County's deputy elections director, says names, telephone and Social Security numbers will be blacked out of any records handed over to the Sheriff. According to McCoy, the Sheriff says he has no evidence of voter fraud other than phone calls stating fraud was a possibility. It is widely assumed that the same-day registration/ voting option

was exercised primarily by students who lean heavily Democratic. In 2004, African-American students from Wright State, Central State and Wilberforce were regularly challenged on their registration credentials and forced to endure waiting in lines to vote for hours. Students at Cedarville, a Christian school, made no such reports. Sheriff Fischer's targeting of historically black college students, the core of Obama-mania, is intended to send a chilling effect through the ranks of these Democratic voters.

2) U.S. District Court Judge George C. Smith, a Reagan appointee, has approved a GOP lawsuit demanding that the state give county boards of elections great leeway in attacking new voter registration forms. The decision, framed under the Help America Vote Act, would allow Republican challengers access to data from the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and the Social Security agency to challenge new voters. The Judge noted that Ohio law permits challenges to absentee ballots, thousands of which have been pouring in to elections boards. If allowed to stand, it could give the GOP the right to shred ballots already cast in the Buckeye State, with the precedent possibly being used to further enable a GOP nationwide disenfranchisement campaign. Smith gave Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner a week to respond. Brunner has stated she will appeal.

3) Before the ruling, Brunner announced at the close of registration that the number of registered voters in Ohio had jumped by 665,949, from 7,518,189 active voters on January 1, 2008, to 8,184,138 active voters now. About 5.4 million votes were officially counted in Ohio's 2004 presidential election. Then-Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell certified a Bush victory of less than 119,000 votes. A massive GOP disenfranchisement campaign could easily exceed that margin.

4) The New York Times has reported that boards of elections in at least nine crucial states, including Ohio, have violated federal law in conducting purges and have been illegally using Social Security data bases as part of those purges. The Times' Ian Urbina quotes Colorado Secretary of State Mike Coffman as asking the Colorado Attorney-General to review how some 2,500 citizens were removed from the registration lists there. The Times has cited purges in Colorado, Louisiana and Michigan that have apparently been conducted within 90 days of the upcoming November 4 election, violating federal law that allows states to expunge only those who have been convicted of a felony, moved out of state or died.

5) The Times has also reported that boards of elections in Nevada, North Carolina, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio have illegally used federal Social Security databases to flag and possibly eliminate voters whose registration applications were suspected of irregularities. The Times reported some 37,000 Colorado voters removed in the three weeks after July 21; Secretary Coffman said the number was 14,000.

6) Michigan elections director Christopher Thomas said his state had removed about 11,000 voters in August, while the Times estimated the real number to be closer to 33,000. Thomas refused to make the purged files public. Michigan Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land is a long-standing Republican partisan whose political activism traces back to the mid-70s when she worked for Gerald Ford's campaign in high school. Critics charge that she functions in the tradition of Florida's Katherine Harris and Ohio's J. Kenneth Blackwell.

7) North Carolina's BOE director Gary Bartlett dismissed concerns raised by the Social Security Administration about possible mis-used of SS files to purge registrations there in conjunction with drivers licenses. The SSI contends Social Security numbers can only be

accessed when there is no drivers license or other form of state ID available.

8) A CBS News report has revealed organized caging attempts by the GOP to eliminate registered voters from the rolls in 19 states. The report marks one of the first initiated by a corporate news organization isolating Republican anti-vote campaigning.

9) An electronic voting machine in New Mexico was found to be operating on faulty software which could have eliminated hundreds of votes. The glitch was apparently corrected, but was of a type that could result in thousands of votes being lost on Election Day 2008, as they were in 2000 and 2004.

10) The grassroots organizing group ACORN has come under serious attack in Nevada, Missouri, Ohio and elsewhere from Republicans attempting to negate the thousands of generally low-income citizens ACORN has registered to vote. As a matter of law, ACORN is required to report irregular registrations that come through its process. But GOP operatives have equated these with “fraudulent” filings, and have ramped up a smear and fear campaign aimed at negating thousands of legitimate ACORN registrants throughout the US.

11) The GOP continues to resist attempts to subpoena Michael Connell, a shady Republican computer operative who programmed the 2000 Bush-Cheney web site. Connell was also hired by former Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell in 2004 to tabulate the Ohio vote count. Under Connell, Ohio’s vote totals were shunted to a computer bank in the same basement in Chattanooga, Tennessee, that housed the servers of the Republican National Committee. In the early hours of the morning after election day, vote totals mysteriously began shifting from Kerry to Bush, swinging the 2004 election. Connell’s cyber-security industry colleague Stephen Spoonamore, a Republican and former McCain supporter, has said that Connell may be able to shed light on vote count rigging in the 2008 vote count as well. Attorneys in the King-Lincoln- Bronzeville civil rights lawsuit have thus far been unable to secure Connell’s sworn testimony.

12) CNN has reported that Obama’s surging poll numbers may leave him “in position to steal Virginia from the GOP.” Virginia hasn’t backed a Democratic presidential candidate since Lyndon Johnson in 1964, but CNN’s use of the word “steal” has raised hackles among election protection activists who argue the flow of theft is in the other direction.

As the moment of truth arrives, McCain-Palin attacks based on race, alleged “terrorist” ties and more are sure to increasingly dominate the GOP campaign. But far more insidious will be an all-out assault on voter registration in the name of “voter fraud,” and on finding new ways to undermine the national vote, most importantly on electronic voting machines of the kind programmed by Michael Connell.

If those supporting the democratic process are not exceedingly vigilant, the GOP could use these tactics to once again take the White House. —

Bob Fittrakis and Harvey Wasserman are co-authors of four books on election protection including HOW THE GOP STOLE AMERICA'S 2004 ELECTION & IS RIGGING 2008, and AS GOES OHIO, just published by www.freepress.org, where this article originally appeared. They are attorney and plaintiff in the King-Lincoln- Bronzeville lawsuit.

The original source of this article is [The Free Press \(Ohio\)](http://www.freepress.org)

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Articles by: [Bob Fitrakis](#) and
[Harvey Wasserman](#)

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