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# The Dark Money Assault

ON VOTING RIGHTS

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Our findings show that the same special interests that have long rigged our democracy for the wealthy and powerful are now funding efforts to make it harder for people to vote and to block critical anti-corruption and voting rights legislation. The rush to push through restrictive voting bills and oppose access to the ballot box revolves around one motive: special interests, large donors, and dark money groups trying to hold onto the outsized role and power they have had in our politics for far too long. Republicans at the federal and state levels have made suppressing voters a top priority in 2021, following the lead of their donors.

**But passing the For the People Act would end dark money, crack down on corruption, and make Washington more accountable and responsive to voters. It would ensure people — not just the powerful — are at the foundation of our democracy.**

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**TIFFANY MULLER**

PRESIDENT OF END CITIZENS UNITED //  
LET AMERICA VOTE ACTION FUND

# KEY FINDINGS

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**1** **Conservative dark money groups have already announced over \$42 million in spending campaigns** to restrict voting rights at the state level and block the passage of the For the People Act.

**2** Already, state legislators nationwide have introduced **371 bills that included restrictive voting proposals called for by the Heritage Foundation.**

**3** 40 dark money groups and dozens of top conservative super PACs have publicly stated their opposition to the For the People Act. **These groups spent over \$120 million in dark money during just the 2018 election cycle.**

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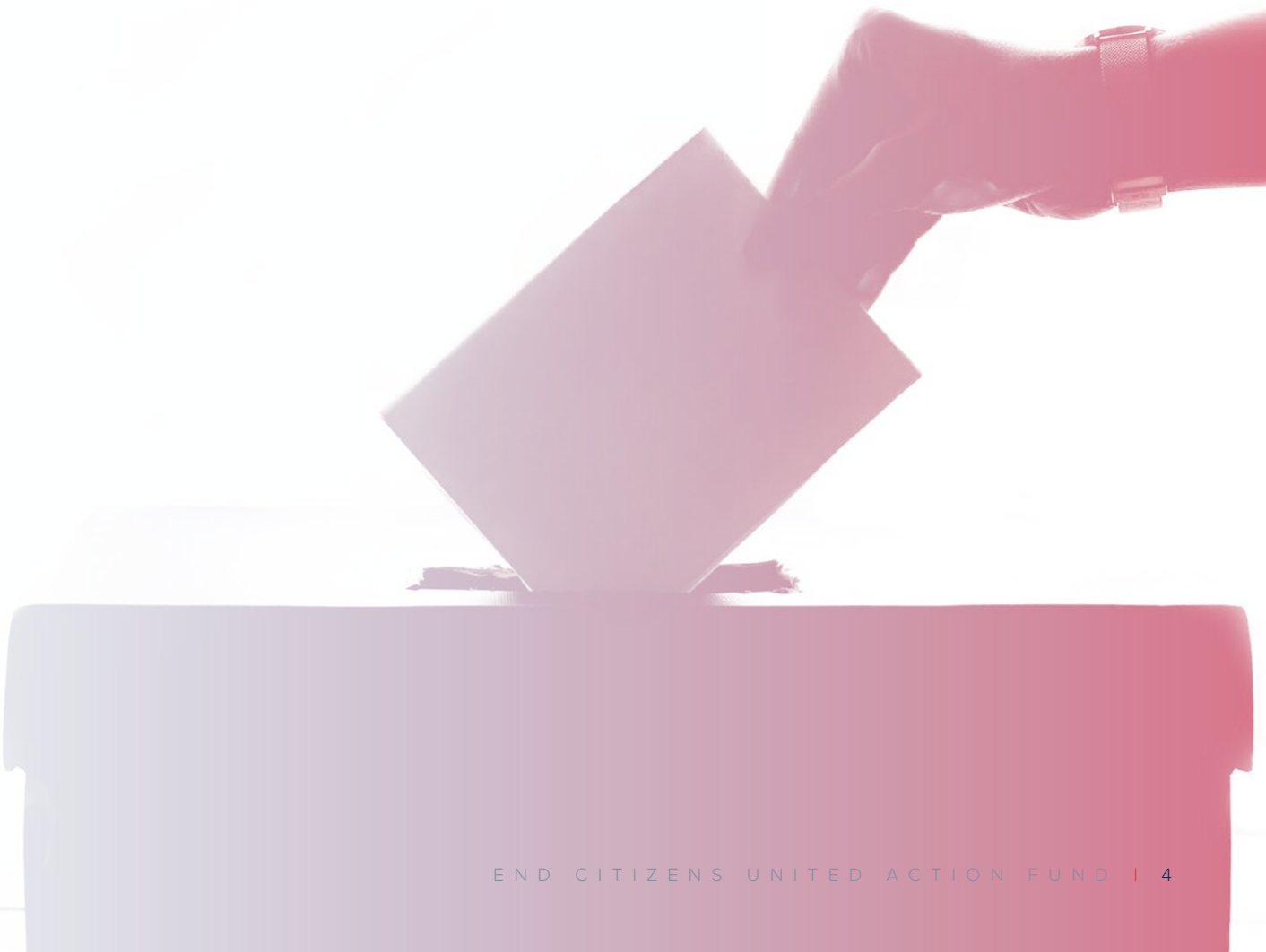
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*Dark Money Is Behind New Voter Suppression Efforts*

# THE BACKDROP

During the Trump Administration, Republican operatives raised at least **\$250 million** in dark money contributions to help push through **more than 200 conservative judges to the federal bench**, including many who had records of **arguing or voting against voting rights**. Then, leading into the 2020 election, this same **network of GOP dark money groups** pushed **dozens of lawsuits** to try to restrict voting rights and access — and received many favorable rulings from the same judges they had helped get confirmed. Despite **admitting** that their efforts were solely aimed around suppressing the vote to help elect Trump, dark money groups after the election then turned to helping **spread the Big Lie** that the election had been stolen, and even helped **organize** President Trump’s rally that led to the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Now, after all of these efforts to suppress the vote in, and overturn the results of, the 2020 elections failed, Republicans and their dark money groups have found a new motive to engage their donors and their need for power: **an unprecedented attack on voting rights at the state level**. This plan, which has the **full support of the party’s national apparatus**, could **represent** “the most sweeping contraction of ballot access in the United States since the end of Reconstruction.” In just the first six months of 2021, more than **389 restrictive voting bills were introduced across 48 states**, including 30 that have already been signed into law and 61 more that were actively moving through state legislatures.

At the same time these wealthy special interests and dark money groups are supporting efforts to restrict voting rights at the state level, they are also working extensively to block passage of the **For the People Act (H.R. 1/S. 1)**, federal legislation that would overturn many of their state efforts by protecting the freedom and right to vote for all Americans, as well as end dark money by requiring these groups to finally have to disclose their major donors.

In support of these two goals, conservative dark money groups have already announced over \$42 million in spending campaigns, and that is likely just a fraction of all the spending that will take place. This includes at least \$5.1 million on TV ads opposing the For The People Act and voting rights efforts



*Develop a Strategy Based Around Voter Suppression to Lure Donors & Fulfill Their Demands for Power*

# THE DARK MONEY PLAN

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Responding to the demands of megadonors desperate to hold onto the undue influence they have held over our politicians and policies for far too long, the Republican party and its dark money groups have crafted a major plan to roll back access to voting and oppose democracy reforms.

After failing to both help elect Donald Trump to a second term and then convince Americans that nonexistent fraud was to blame for his loss, conservative dark money groups found that many of their donors **were thinking of stopping their donations altogether**. Alarmed at losing the big money that keeps them afloat, these groups quickly found a new strategy to attract their donors: make limiting voting access the “center of gravity in the party” to rig elections and allow Republicans and their donors to regain power in Washington.

As reported by the **New York Times**, conservative activists with no background in election law seized this opportunity to keep their donors and voters engaged by turning the focus of their dark money groups’ efforts to supporting restrictions on voting. Many of the most prominent conservative groups began directing their resources toward campaigns to restrict when and how people can vote, and an array of **party leaders and outside groups began working directly with Republican state legislatures** across the country to reengineer the voting system at the state level.

“**Dark-money organizations, sustained by undisclosed donors, have RELENTLESSLY PROMOTED THE MYTH THAT AMERICAN ELECTIONS ARE RIFE WITH FRAUD.**”

THE NEW YORKER | 08.09.2021

Simultaneously, many of these same groups started working at the federal level to stop the For the People Act (H.R. 1, S. 1), a once-in-a-generation package of critical anti-corruption reforms and voting rights protections that would prevent most of their state-level suppressive tactics. Just two days after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, leaders of major GOP dark money groups **secretly huddled** on the phone with top Republican congressional staff to discuss the bill. To their dismay, their own polling found that not only was the bill overwhelmingly popular with voters across the political spectrum, but there was no message they could devise effectively to counter the argument that billionaires should be prevented from buying elections. The participants conceded that since the bill was too well-liked to shift public opinion, that they would instead focus their efforts on ensuring Republican lawmakers use all legislative maneuvers available to try to kill the bill in Congress.

These efforts are supported all the way to the top of the national Republican party. The Republican National Committee, which previously set aside **\$20 million on legal efforts** to limit voting access during the COVID-19 pandemic, **created an “election integrity” committee** to develop restrictive voting legislative proposals, as did the **Republican State Leadership Committee**. Both of these committees were **filled with members** who backed false conspiracies about the 2020 election, and who were deeply involved in the effort to overturn Trump’s election loss as well as organize and promote the rally that led to the January 6th insurrection. The Republican Party has also made clear **its unified opposition** to the For the People Act.

## CORPORATE MONEY ALSO SUPPORTING VOTER SUPPRESSION

**Corporate donors have joined their dark money counterparts in backing Republicans at the federal and state levels who have made suppressing voters a top priority in 2021.**

The GOP state legislators trying to suppress voters benefit from our broken campaign finance system. Public Citizen **reported** corporations have donated more than \$50 million to state legislators who have been lying about the election and trying to suppress the vote. They’ve taken another \$36 million from industry trade association groups. Corporate PACs have given \$8.6 million to the 8 secessionist U.S. Senators who voted against certifying the 2022 election results even after the January 6th insurrection.

Popular Information also found that **corporations donated thousands to legislators** now working to suppress the vote. While some companies have urged Congress to ignore the lies about 2020 election fraud, few actually have opposed specific suppressive bills introduced at the state level. And, while many corporations announced they would stop donating to Republican objectors who tried to overturn the presidential election results, **some** have since been caught **blatantly lying**.



**\$50 MILLION**

*Corporate Funding  
of Voter Suppressor  
Legislators*



**\$36 MILLION**

*Industry Trade  
Groups Funding Vote  
Suppressor Legislators*



**\$8.6 MILLION**

*Corporate PACs  
Supporting U.S. Senator  
Election Objectors*



**UNDISCLOSED**

*Corporate Donations  
to Dark Money Voter  
Suppression Efforts*

Leading Conservative Groups Direct Tens of Millions of Dollars Behind Their New Voter Suppression Strategy

# THE DARK MONEY APPARATUS

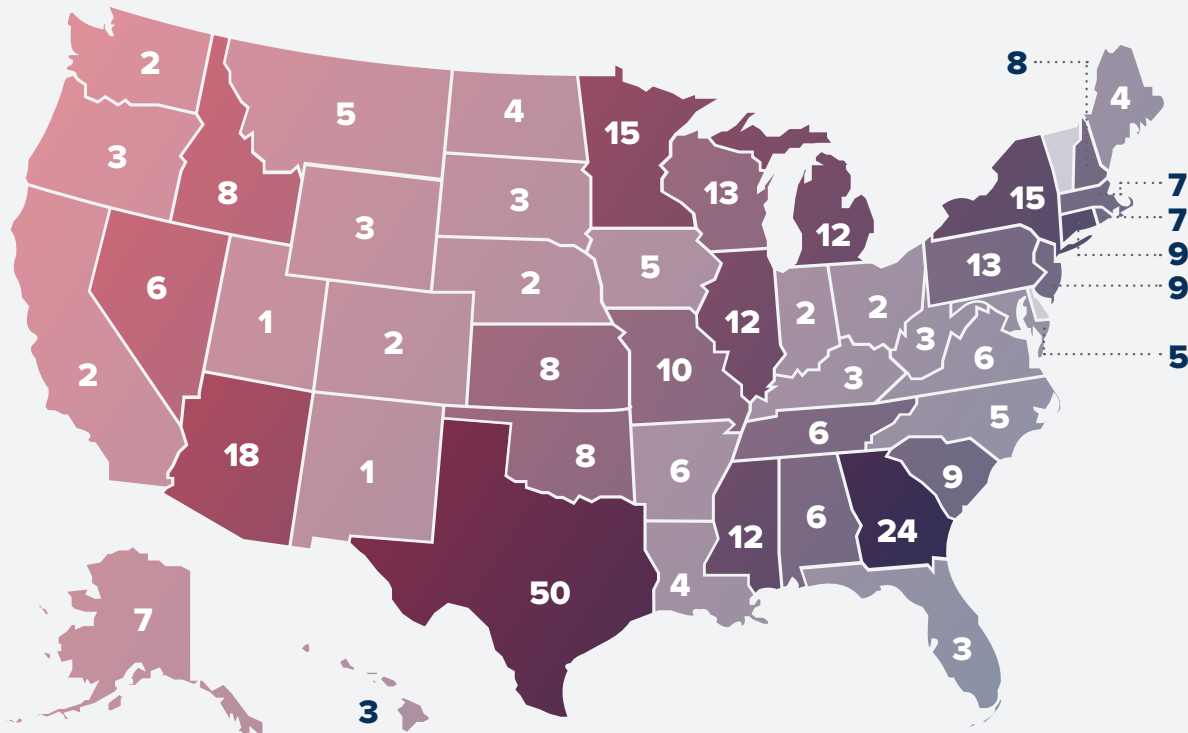
Armed with the new directive from their donors, a wide variety of top conservative dark money groups are now working to suppress the vote and oppose the For the People Act, with spending campaigns of over \$40 million already announced and more sure to follow.

## THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

The group's dark money arm, Heritage Action for America, announced plans to spend **\$24 million** on a "two-year effort" to shape states' voting laws and to work at the federal level to block the For the People Act. As part of this campaign, the Heritage Foundation is working closely with allies like the American Legislative Exchange Council (known as ALEC) and the libertarian State Policy Network to "produce model legislation for state legislatures to adopt" and to hire lobbyists in "crucial states." **Already, legislators nationwide have introduced 371 bills with restrictive voting proposals called for in the Heritage Foundation's agenda.**

## VOTER SUPPRESSION BILLS SUPPORTED BY HERITAGE ACTION

Heritage Action pushed restrictive voting policies that were included in bills introduced in 48 states:



HERITAGE FOUNDATION, 02.01.2021; VOTING RIGHTS LAB, ACCESSED 04.12.2021; BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE, 04.01.2021



## HERITAGE ACTION SHAPING STATE VOTER SUPPRESSION BILLS

### RESTRICTING DROP BOXES AND GEORGIA'S SUPPRESSION BILL

**The use of drop boxes should be severely limited.** If authorized, states should require that drop boxes be located in secure settings where they are under 24-hour security, under video surveillance, and located in government buildings. The video surveillance should be available to designated representatives of the candidates and major political parties.



A board of registrars or absentee ballot clerk may establish additional drop boxes, subject to the **limitations of this Code section, but may only establish additional drop boxes totaling the lesser** of either one drop box for every 100,000 active registered voters in the county or the number of advance voting locations.

HERITAGE

GA SB202, 03.25.2021

GEORGIA SB202

### ABSENTEE BALLOT LIMITATIONS AND IOWA'S SUPPRESSION BILL

There should be no permanent absentee ballot lists and **no automatic mailing to all voters of absentee ballots or absentee ballot request forms.**



Changes the number of days prior to an election that any registered voter can apply for an absentee ballot from 120 days to 70 days.

**Allows county commissioners to send an absentee ballot application to a voter only at the request of the voter.**

Changes the number of days prior to an election that an absentee ballot can be mailed to a voter from 29 days to 20 days and **prohibits an absentee ballot from being mailed to any person who did not apply for an absentee ballot.**

HERITAGE

Iowa Legislative Services Agency, p.2 & 3, SF 413, 02.24.2021

IOWA SF413

### ENDING SAME-DAY REGISTRATION IN MONTANA

No same-day registration. **Registration should be required before Election Day** to give election officials sufficient time to verify the accuracy of the registration information contained on a registration form and to confirm the eligibility of the individual seeking to cast a vote in the upcoming election.



An act revising late voter registration; **Closing late voter registration at noon the day before the election.**

HERITAGE

HB 176, Ch. 244, 04.23.2021

MONTANA HB176

### GIVING POWER TO PARTISAN OBSERVERS IN FLORIDA

Election officials should be prohibited from stationing observers so far away that they cannot **observe the process, including such procedures as the opening of absentee ballots and the verification process.**

Observers (except for purposes of recording the actual votes cast by individuals) should be allowed to have cameras and recording devices wherever they are stationed.



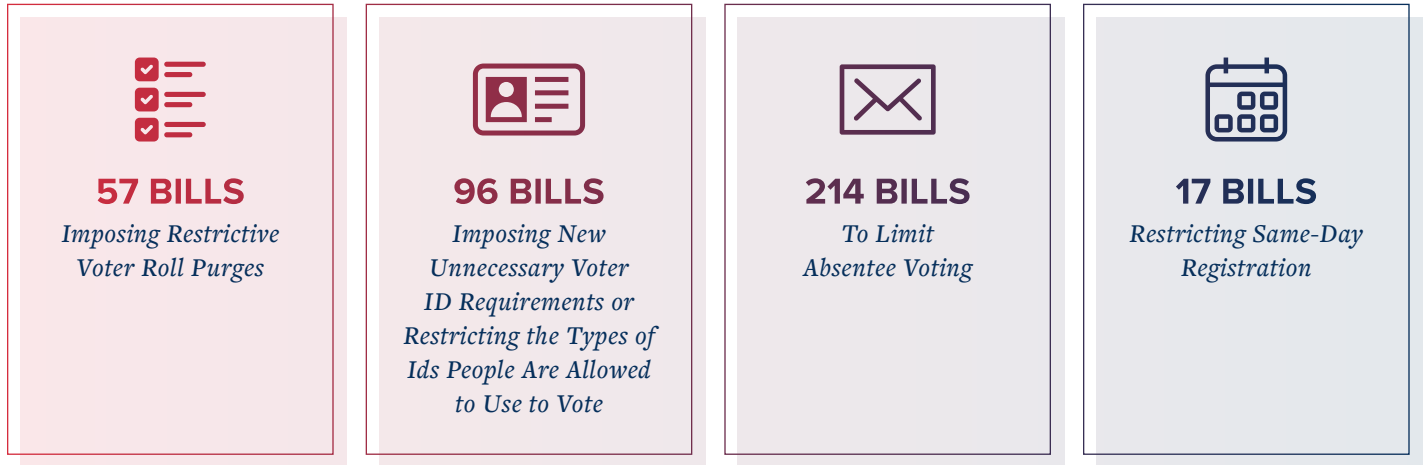
Specifies that during each meeting of a county canvassing board, each political party and candidate may have **one watcher within a distance that allows him or her to directly observe ballots being examined for signature matching and other processes.**

HERITAGE

Florida Senate Professional Staff of the Committee on Rules, 04.20.2021

FLORIDA SB90

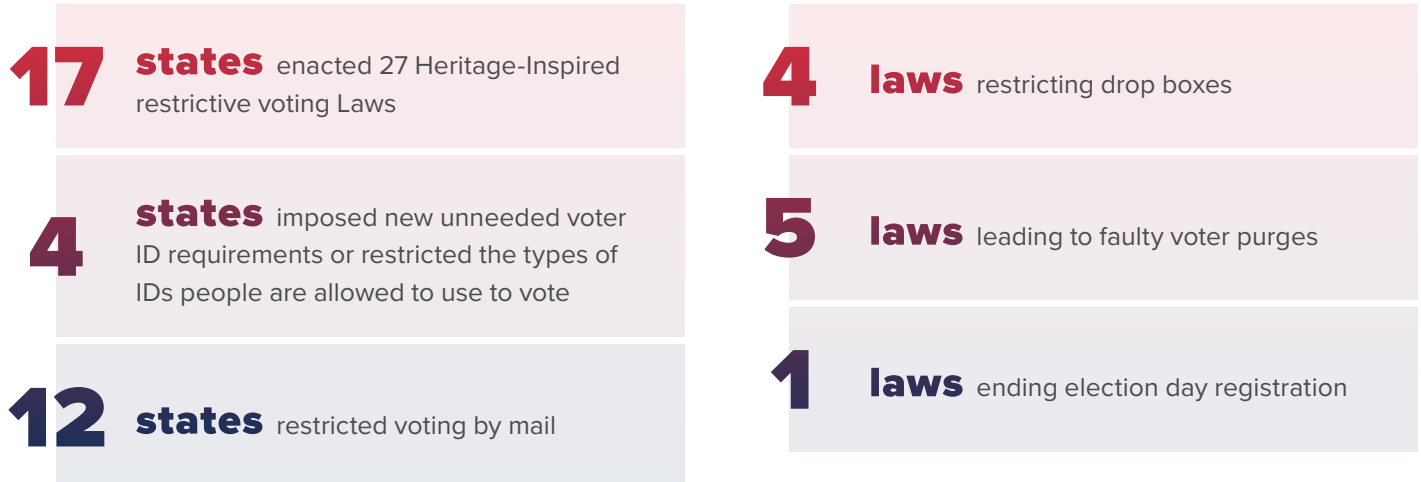
**LEGISLATORS INTRODUCED:**

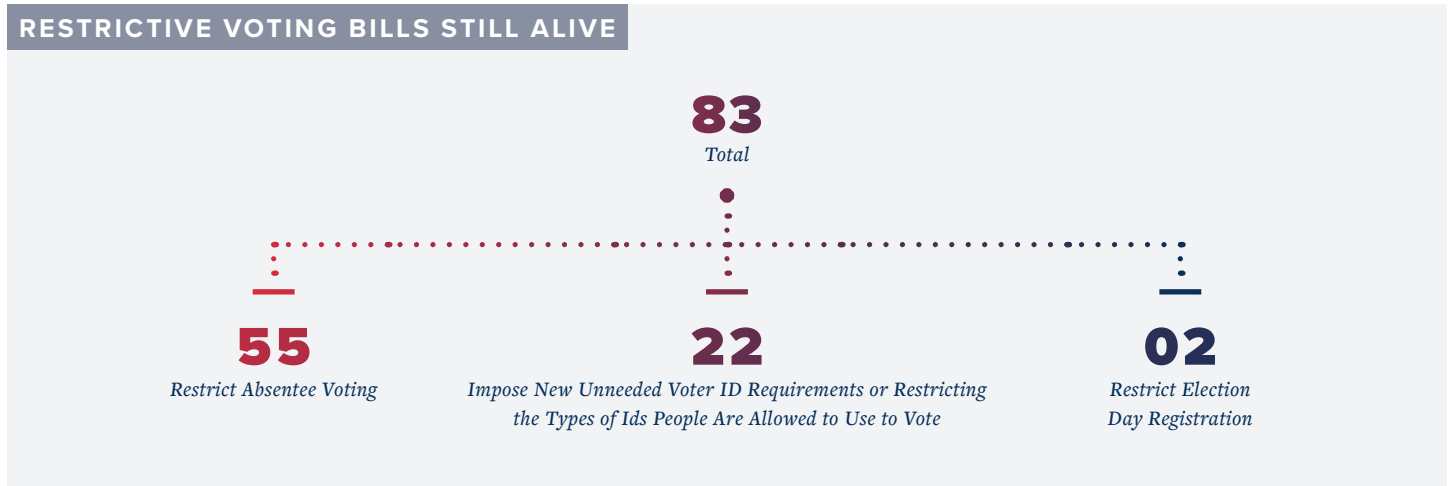


The states which saw the most bills introduced are Texas, Georgia, and Arizona; all three have unified Republican governments and Georgia and Arizona were the states President Biden won by the slimmest margins. For example:

- + *Within days after volunteers from Heritage Action for America met with Republican legislators in Georgia, **68 bills to restrict voting access in Georgia began flooding the state legislature**, at least a third of which had similar language or were firmly rooted in the principles that the Heritage group had shared with state lawmakers.*
- + *Similarly, Heritage claimed credit for a new Arizona law that adds unnecessary and potentially improper voter purge practices that could remove voters by mistake, with the sponsor of the bill even thanking a Heritage volunteer in a Facebook post after it passed.*
- + *Heritage also claimed credit for Florida's bill which imposes new limits on drop boxes, reduces voter assistance, limits absentee balloting, and bars private funding to support elections.*

**AS OF MID-JULY:**





In addition, Heritage has partnered with other far-right groups to **organize in-state rallies** to pressure U.S. Senators to oppose the For the People Act.

**FREEDOMWORKS**

The dark money group formed to push for smaller government **initiated a \$10 million campaign to oppose H.R. 1/S. 1 and push for tighter voting laws in states.** The initiative is being run by Clela Mitchell, a prominent Republican attorney who represented Trump after the 2020 election in his false claims of voter fraud and who was **present on the call** where Trump demanded that Georgia’s Republican Secretary of State “find” enough votes to reverse the state’s 2020 presidential election results. As part of FreedomWorks’ new campaign, Mitchell was among the **leaders of several outside groups who testified** at a West Virginia House Judiciary Committee hearing in support of a state bill to create new obstacles to voting.

**ELECTION TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE**

Dark money groups Susan B. Anthony List and the American Principles Project joined forces for an “election transparency” campaign aimed at drumming up opposition to H.R. 1/S. 1 and helping push through restrictive voting laws at the state level. The campaign has a **\$5 million** fundraising goal, and is being led by Ken Cuccinelli, a top conservative activist and former Trump Administration official. The campaign has begun **organizing conference calls with activists of other social conservative groups across the country.**

## RESTORATION ACTION

A dark money group **tied to top conservative megadonor Richard Uihlein** that has previously **called for “completely restructuring Social Security and Medicare”** and eliminating the Department of Education, **launched \$2 million of TV ad spending in at least 3 states falsely attacking the For the People Act.**

## CLUB FOR GROWTH

The long running dark money group that **spent over \$7 million in dark money alone in the 2018 cycle**, launched a campaign **opposing** the For the People Act that included at least \$50,000 in digital ads calling the left “unhinged” and “rabid dogs.”

## HONEST ELECTIONS PROJECT

The newest member of conservative operative **Leonard Leo’s vast dark money** network is pushing for a range of voting regulations aimed at making it harder to vote, and has **pledged tens of millions of dollars into conservative election efforts across the country.** In 2020, the group **launched a \$250,000 digital and television ad campaign against voting reforms**, and this year it released **a polling memo** attacking the For the People Act. In addition, the group’s executive director recently testified at a Pennsylvania House committee hearing in favor of state **election proposals** to make voting harder.

## PEOPLE UNITED FOR PRIVACY

The dark money group has **actively worked to oppose H.R. 1/S. 1**, including organizing a coalition letter to Congressional leaders to “reject” the bill. The letter was signed by a large number of State Policy Network members, as well as Charles Koch’s outside groups, Americans for Prosperity and the Libre Initiative. There were **also several groups that** signed onto the letter that **actively pushed false claims of voter fraud leading up to the January 6 insurrection** or pushed other conspiracy theories about what took place at the Capitol.

## AMERICAN ACTION NETWORK

House Republicans’ top dark money group **launched a recent misinformation ad campaign targeting H.R. 1/S. 1, as well as conducted polling trying to attack the reforms in the bill.**

## AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY

The Koch-backed dark money group, which has **a long history** of opposing campaign finance transparency, **urged Members of Congress to oppose the For the People Act**, and also wrote **op-eds** criticizing the bill.

### THE INSTITUTE FOR FREE SPEECH

The dark money group, which was **created to attack and oppose common sense campaign finance regulations**, put together a **“resource guide”** attacking the For the People Act, while its founder was a **Republican witness** in the Senate’s March S. 1 hearing.

### THE FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL

The dark money group recently **dedicated one of its online organizing sessions to a “Pray Vote Stand Townhall” to encourage people to lobby their state legislators on voting issues**. The President of the deep-pocketed and powerful Christian legal group Alliance Defending Freedom joined the town hall as well.

### ACT FOR AMERICA

The dark money organization, which has been **designated a hate group by both the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League**, flooded congressional offices with emails attacking the For The People Act with outright **false attacks on the bill that were quickly debunked**.

## Overall, 40 dark money groups and dozens of top conservative super PACs publicly stated their opposition to the For the People Act.

While the total money actively being spent by these groups on this effort cannot yet be determined given the dark money arrangements of so many of these organizations, these very same groups spent over \$120 million in dark money during just the 2018 election cycle.

## 2018 TOTAL SPENDING

GROUP	SOURCE FOR EXPECTED 2021 SPENDING	2018 TOTAL SPENDING
<b>American Action Network</b>	<b>American Action Network:</b> AAN Releases New Ad Campaign in 51 House Districts on H.R. 1	\$50,863,110
<b>Heritage Action</b>	<b>New York Times:</b> G.O.P. and Allies Draft 'Best Practices' for Restricting Voting	\$10,995,704
<b>Susan B Anthony List</b> (Election Transparency Initiative)	<b>Fox News:</b> Cuccinelli to Lead Initiative to Take On Democrats' Sweeping HR 1 Election Bill	\$12,378,646
<b>American Principles Project</b> (Election Transparency Initiative)	<b>Fox News:</b> Cuccinelli to Lead Initiative to Take On Democrats' Sweeping HR 1 Election Bill	\$1,128,966
<b>Family Research Council</b>	<b>New York Times:</b> In Restricting Early Voting, the Right Sees a New 'Center of Gravity'	\$1,759,382
<b>Stand Together Foundation</b> (Through TSN Institute)	<b>The New Yorker:</b> Inside the Koch-Backed Effort to Block the Largest Election-Reform Bill in Half a Century	\$1,934,175
<b>People United For Privacy</b>	<b>The New Yorker:</b> Inside the Koch-Backed Effort to Block the Largest Election-Reform Bill in Half a Century	\$269,025
<b>Americans for Tax Reform</b>	<b>The New Yorker:</b> Inside the Koch-Backed Effort to Block the Largest Election-Reform Bill in Half a Century	\$4,231,786
<b>Conservative Action Project</b>	<b>Documented:</b> H.R. 1 Has Passed the House, but It's Facing a Coordinated Right Wing Backlash	\$127,305
<b>Citizens United</b>	<b>Documented:</b> H.R. 1 Has Passed the House, but It's Facing a Coordinated Right Wing Backlash	\$9,791,045
<b>ALEC</b> (through Jeffersonian Project)	<b>Documented:</b> H.R. 1 Has Passed the House, but It's Facing a Coordinated Right Wing Backlash	\$246,588
<b>The Concord Fund</b> (formerly Judicial Crisis Network)	<b>Documented:</b> H.R. 1 Has Passed the House, but It's Facing a Coordinated Right Wing Backlash	\$16,802,593
<b>FreedomWorks</b>	<b>Associated Press:</b> Former Trump Adviser Takes Prominent Role in Voting Battle	\$3,702,741
<b>Club For Growth</b>	<b>Breitbart:</b> Club for Growth Launches Ads Lobbying Kyrsten Sinema, Joe Manchin Against 'Pelosi's Election Fraud Bill'	\$7,277,249
<b>Restoration Action</b>	<b>WMUR:</b> In new ad campaign, dark-money group calls for Hassan, Shaheen to oppose federal voting bill	\$56,022
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$121,564,337</b>

*Stop Voter Suppression & End Dark Money by Passing the For the People Act*

# THE SOLUTION

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The For the People Act (H.R. 1/S. 1) will prevent the assault on voting rights and our democracy, and give power back to regular voters, by reducing the influence of dark money and wealthy special interests, and stopping extreme voter suppression.

The rush to push through restrictive voting bills and block passage of federal democracy reforms revolves around one motive: special interests, large donors, and dark money groups trying to hold onto the outsized role and power they have had in our politics for far too long.

There is a solution in the For the People Act (H.R. 1/S. 1). **This historic package of reforms** will crackdown on corruption and restore ethics and accountability to our government, including by requiring **dark money groups to finally have to disclose their large donors** and by **empowering small donors** to have more of a voice. And, it will counteract the unparalleled recent state-level attacks on the freedom to vote by **protecting the sacred right to vote** — for all Americans. H.R. 1/S. 1 will:



**End Dark Money.** Bring dark money into the light by requiring political groups to disclose their largest donors and adding transparency rules for online political ad spending.



**Empower Small Donors.** Create a small-donor matching program to open up our political system to more diverse voices and reduce the power of big money donors in our elections and the policymaking process. It is funded entirely by a small fee on corporate lawbreakers and wealthy tax cheats and wouldn't cost taxpayers a dime.



**Protect the Freedom to Vote.** Ensure Americans in all 50 states have equal access to early voting, vote-by-mail, and voter registration options.



**Prevent Voter Suppression.** Prohibit voter suppression tactics such as voter purging and caging that are often wrongly used to take eligible voters off the rolls.