

## Trump administration's voter suppression attempts ahead of midterms are not only 'morally wrong,' they're illegal

- Trump's Justice Department recently issued sweeping subpoenas demanding millions of records about individual North Carolina voters.
- After facing a backlash over timing coming so close to November elections, the U.S. Attorney's office postponed the deadline to January.
- But such requests discourage Americans from exercising their constitutional right to vote.
- That's why I'm joining calls from North Carolina lawmakers and others to investigate these actions to determine whether they were politically motivated.

Tom Perez, chairman of the Democratic National Committee

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Imagine going to the polls on Election Day and discovering that your ballot could be collected and reviewed by the sitting president of the United States. That's

essentially what [Donald Trump](#) is trying to do to voters in North Carolina – and we can't let it happen.

At the end of August, just two months before voters head to the polls in the midterm elections, [Trump's Justice Department issued sweeping subpoenas demanding millions of records about individual North Carolina voters.](#)

After facing a fierce backlash over the fact that the request would impede the ability of election officials to do their jobs and conduct free and fair elections this November, the U.S. Attorney's office decided to postpone the deadline for their request to January.

But the fact remains: such a request, whether it happens in the run-up to an election, or shortly after one takes place, only serves to discourage Americans from exercising their constitutional rights, especially people of color. I would know, because as head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division under President Obama, I spent much of my time suing states that tried to block eligible voters from the ballot box.

Now Donald Trump and Republicans are taking things in the other direction. Instead of investigating voter suppression like we did under President Obama, Trump's Justice Department is complicit in it.

This isn't just morally wrong – it's illegal. That's why I'm joining [North Carolina Representatives G.K. Butterfield, David Price, Alma Adams, and other members from across the country](#) in calling on the Inspectors General of the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security to immediately open an investigation into these actions to determine whether or not they were politically motivated.

"For decades, Republicans have used the dubious "voter fraud" excuse as a fig leaf to cover up their true intent: to deny people of color their constitutional rights at the ballot box."

But you don't need a law degree to understand that there's an ulterior motive here. Republicans know full-well that there is no such thing as "widespread voter fraud." In fact, you're more likely to be struck by lightning than witness a case of in-person voter fraud.

For decades, Republicans have used the dubious "voter fraud" excuse as a fig leaf to cover up their true intent: to deny people of color their constitutional rights at the ballot box. And many conservatives have been caught admitting as much.

In 1980, Paul Weyrich, a godfather of the modern conservative movement, [told](#) a conference of conservative evangelical activists, "I don't want everybody to vote. ... Our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down."

In 2012, the Pennsylvania state House Republican leader was caught on tape admitting that implementing a voter ID law was part of their strategy to help Mitt Romney win.

No one is fooled. That's why many of these laws have already been struck down by federal courts, including a North Carolina voter ID law that, in the words of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, "target[ed] African-Americans with almost surgical precision."

And yet, the Republican Party continues to push this "voter fraud" myth and use voter suppression tactics any chance they get. We all remember when President Trump repeatedly made the false claim that three million undocumented immigrants voted in the 2016 election.

Despite no evidence of this, Trump used the claim as the basis for a sham "voter fraud" commission, which has since been disbanded. And just this summer, the five

conservative justices on the Supreme Court gave Ohio the green light to purge millions of voters from its rolls.

Now Trump's Justice Department is picking up where the president's sham commission left off. And it's no surprise that they're setting their sights on North Carolina.



When it comes to voter suppression, North Carolina is the epicenter. Republicans in North Carolina have resorted to every trick in the book to prevent people from voting: racial gerrymandering, partisan gerrymandering, voter purging, reducing early voting days, moving the names of Democrats down the ballot, and now this latest form of voter intimidation.

Of course, this is not a recent phenomenon. Any honest history of the Jim Crow South shows that North Carolina is no stranger to voting laws steeped in racism – from poll taxes to literacy tests.

We've made too much progress as a nation to turn back now. Make no mistake: Republicans will take what they can get away with in North Carolina, and try it again and again in state after state in the hopes that voter fatigue and misinformation will keep people home on Election Day.

The right to vote is sacrosanct. Protecting that right for all Americans should be a prime concern for every lawmaker in the country. Sadly, we live in a political climate where elected leaders in one political party believe that they should be allowed to choose their voters instead of the other way around.

Democrats believe that our democracy works best when more people participate, not fewer. We believe in a federal Department of Justice that fights for the rights of the American people, not against them. And whether it's in North Carolina, Ohio, or Washington, we will hold Republican leaders accountable.

*Commentary by Tom Perez, chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He previously served as secretary of labor and as the head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division under President Obama.*