

OPINION

AMERICAN OPINION

The GOP is campaigning against Americans voting

Georgia struck almost 100,000 voters from its rolls. In Wisconsin, a state with only 3.3 million registered voters, perhaps 200,000 are set to be purged. Some of them might have moved out of their respective states or died. But many will unjustifiably fall victim to Republicans' relentless drive to disenfranchise Democratic-leaning voters on the pretext of preventing voter fraud.

A recent Georgia state law calls for people who have not voted or contacted election officials for several years to be removed from the rolls. About 100,000 people are subject to the loss of their registration status after three years of inactivity, before state lawmakers lengthened the period to five years. Voting advocates argue that those 100,000 should get the benefit of the lengthened five-year period. State officials disagree and want to continue with their purge. A federal judge ruled Friday that the state may proceed.

The legal wrangling should not disguise the bigger point: Georgia's underlying law is wrong. The United States does not require people to vote. Americans may exercise their franchise or decline to do so. How often they do one or the other should not affect their access to the ballot box. States can keep their voter rolls clean without disenfranchising people who choose to vote occasionally or who missed a postcard informing them that their registrations were to be purged.

The disenfranchisement in Wisconsin is even worse. A Wisconsin judge ruled this month that 200,000 voters must be struck because they failed to respond within 30 days to notices sent from the Wisconsin Elections Commission, which asked whether the voters had moved. These letters did not mention that voters who failed to respond would be purged, because the commission had not planned to remove them from the rolls, at least not anytime soon.

After the commission sent its letters, a conservative activist group concocted a reading of state law that would require the commission to move to immediate purges, and a state judge ordered quick removal. Though the legal reasoning is a stretch, the conservative Wisconsin Supreme Court seems likely to agree.

The records on which the commission relied to target these 200,000 people were imperfect. Despite the tight turnaround period, 2,300 said they still live at the same address — in a state in which a margin of 23,000 swung its electoral votes to Donald Trump in 2016.

Thousands more no doubt failed to respond because the commission's notice got lost in the shuffle of their daily lives. At least Wisconsin allows Election Day registration — a hassle, but better than Georgia, which offers no such option.

It should not be up to Americans, on penalty of disenfranchisement, to help state governments with their record-keeping. Officials should strive to make voting easier, not harder. States should build automatic voter-registration systems that update voter rolls whenever people interact with motor vehicle departments or other state agencies, and they should impose no arbitrary time limits on those registrations.

If there were any sign of massive in-person voter fraud, the case might look different.

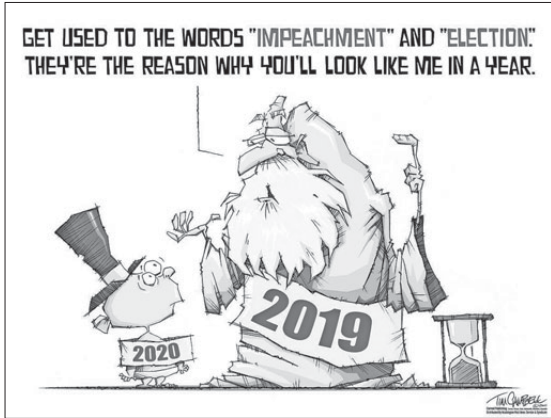
But there is no evidence of such a threat — only of a disturbing push to purge voters who disagree with those in power.

This editorial is the opinion of The Washington Post's editorial board.

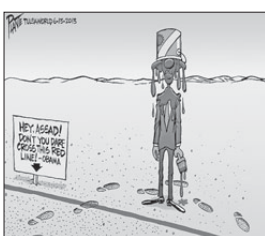
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BRUCE PLANTE'S BEST OF 2010s



The phantom momentum of Bernie Sanders

A late-December flurry of articles on a revival of Bernie Sanders' prospects points to a cardinal rule of political journalism: The story must change. Whether the story has actually changed matters not.



FROMA HARROP
National commentator

Thus, we had a headline in The New York Times reading, "Why Bernie Sanders Is Tough to Beat," and one in Politico that said, "Democratic Insiders: Bernie Could Win the Nomination." The polls, however, have barely budged. In a humorous tweet saying, "The Primary

Has Been A Crazy Unpredictable Roller Coaster Ride," statistical analyst Nate Silver compared recent RealClearPolitics averages for Joe Biden and Sanders to those of a year ago. On Dec. 19, 2018, Biden was at 27.5 percent and Sanders at 19 percent. Exactly a year later, Biden was at 27.8 percent and Sanders at 19.3 percent.

The first poll after the December debate, Silver tweeted, showed "not a heck of a lot going on." Andrew Yang, Amy Klobuchar and Pete Buttigieg each gained a point. Bernie and Michael Bloomberg lost one.

A FiveThirtyEight/IPSOS poll asked likely Democratic primary voters who won the face-off. Biden got the most votes. Sanders came in second.

Nevertheless, Politico quotes Faiz Shakir, Sanders' campaign manager, saying that political insiders and pundits are finding it harder and harder to ignore Bernie because "he's rising in every average you see." That would seem at odds with reality, but one must concede that 19.3 percent is better than 19.0 percent.

It's true that Sanders wasn't getting a lot of attention in recent months but for two plausible reasons. One is the rise of Elizabeth Warren. The other is his heart attack.

Warren's numbers slipped after other candidates went after her. Sanders, if anything, benefited from being left alone.

Sanders loyalists seem to be ignoring that their candidate suffered a heart attack only three months ago. That Bernie is back campaigning is a tribute to his resolve. And we're pleased to see letters from cardiologists reporting that he is recovering well. But it does not cancel out the seriousness of what happened.

About 1 in 5 people who suffer a heart attack are readmitted to a hospital for a second one within five years, according to the American Heart Association. And a heart attack elevates the risk of a stroke. Sanders is 78.

The Vermont senator's people insist that Biden's leaviness pulls will narrow or vanish once backers of Warren come over to their man. It is not clear whether they would in large numbers.

Sanders, not unlike President Donald Trump, has a cultlike following, which means few leave him but also few join up. And while Sanders conceivably could take hard-left support from Warren, Biden could take moderates from Buttigieg, Bloomberg, Klobuchar, Yang and Cory Booker.

Referring to Biden, Sanders recently told The Los Angeles Times that Trump will "eat his lunch." Biden retorted that he will invite Bernie for "dessert" at the White House. Biden does know how to return a punch.

I'd wager that the spate of Bernie-can-win analyses reflects some news sources' sensitivity to complaints that the "corporate media" is slighting Bernie. That and the need for a new political angle every week.

In a replay of 2016, Sanders and his surrogates are portraying the "Democratic establishment" as the great enemy. They need reminding that other Democrats have a right to an opinion. Also, not all Democrats love Bernie's bashing of the leadership or how he slips in and out of the party, retooling when an election approaches.

The latest Economist/YouGov poll, meanwhile, shows Biden ahead of Warren by 11 points and ahead of Sanders by 13. As they say, the more things change ...

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