

US - Will a Shocking New GOP Court Victory and Karl Rove's Attack on Ohio in 2006 Doom the Democrats Nationwide?

Bob Fittrakis, Harvey Wasserman, Bev Harris, Wendy Weiser & Amy Goodman, Democracy Now!

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Tuesday, October 31st, 2006 - [Democracy Now! News Program](#) - On Sunday in Ohio, a judge put on hold a decision that suspended the state's new voter identification law. Our next two guests write that this law imposes a series of draconian requirements for voter ID, including the demand for certain documents. These documents are more difficult to obtain by the poor, homeless and elderly - all constituents who tend to vote Democratic.

Bob Fittrakis and Harvey Wasserman are with us now from Columbus, Ohio - Bob Fittrakis is a Political Science Professor at Columbus State Community College and an independent candidate for Governor endorsed by the Green Party.

Harvey Wasserman is an independent journalist based in Columbus. He is a senior editor for [Freepress.org](#). Along with Bob Fittrakis and Steve Rosenfeld, Harvey is co-author of the book, [What Happened in Ohio: A Documentary Record of Theft and Fraud in the 2004 Election](#).

You can find their latest article on the Free Press website — it is titled "Will a shocking new GOP court victory and Karl Rove's attack on Ohio in 2006 doom the Democrats nationwide?"

AMY GOODMAN: Well, let me put that question to Harvey Wasserman: Will it?

HARVEY WASSERMAN: It very well could. There's this whole anticipation that the Democrats are about to retake at least the House, possibly the Senate, as well. We think that there is tremendous manipulation going on — we know there's tremendous manipulation going on here in Ohio. We have Jay Kenneth Blackwell, who's the Secretary of State, running an election in which he is also running for governor.

And the state Republican apparatus has done everything in its power to limit the franchise in the state, make it more difficult for alleged Democrats — we'll put it that way — to vote. They have imposed tremendous problems for people wishing to vote. They have disseminated the voter registration campaign. And we think the polls are probably not reflecting the fact that many, many people who are expecting to vote on Election Day are not going to be able to vote, because of the — terrible restrictions have been put in place by the Republican Party here with very clear goals as to limiting the Democratic vote.

AMY GOODMAN: Explain, though, exactly why you see this as Karl Rove's attack on Ohio.

HARVEY WASSERMAN: Well, we don't think that this could be coming strictly from the state house here. Karl Rove and George W. Bush were in Columbus on Election Day 2004. We are dead certain that that election in 2004 was stolen. We watched it here on the ground in Ohio from the start. We have put out a book with a hundred different ways that the election was stolen here, and we now have a book of documents with the New Press, What Happened in Ohio in 2004, and we're watching it unfold again in 2006.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, wait. How do you know that for sure it was stolen? Give us some examples that back up your argument.

HARVEY WASSERMAN: Well, we actually have successfully sued now to preserve the ballots from 2004. The initial inspection of the ballots at some of the 88 counties in Ohio indicates very clear irregularities, theft, and just general manipulation, and we have gone through the — we've looked at the electronic voting machines. We've looked at the long lines that occurred. And —

BOB FITRAKIS: Well, we can be very specific. We found 22,000 over-votes in a non-random pattern.

AMY GOODMAN: Bob Fittrakis.

BOB FITRAKIS: Yeah. They're all in heavily Democratic districts, and they're not on the paper form with absentees. And we also had pre-punched paper ballot reports sworn under oath. So what we're finding in areas like Cleveland, Akron, Toledo, areas that went 12-to-1 for Kerry, 7-to-1 for Kerry, 5-to-1 for Kerry, a statistically improbable ratio of over-votes for the President, which probably cost the President — or John Kerry 22,000 votes. We're also finding that they purged, between 2000 and 2004, they purged 24.93% of all the voters in Cleveland, which voted 83% for Kerry in that city. But if you contrast that —

AMY GOODMAN: What do you mean, they purged them?

BOB FITRAKIS: They purged them. It's a may cause. They didn't have to purge. The Board of Election purged nearly a quarter of the voters in the city of Cleveland. 8,000 to 10,000 were purged accidentally by Diebold in what they call an electronic glitch, but all of these are in heavily Democratic areas. 28,000 people were purged in Toledo in 2004. In Ohio, boards of elections only purge in odd-number years — 2001, 2003.

AMY GOODMAN: Bob Fittrakis, just to follow up on this point, you said Diebold accidentally purged them. Explain exactly what you're talking about, because you're doing this research for a number of years now. Most people in this country, this is all new information for.

BOB FITRAKIS: Well, what we're moving to across the country, which is really quite scary, is electronic poll books. And when they converted the old system, the old computer system, to the new electronic poll books, 8,000 to 10,000 names were, quote, "accidentally glitched." That is, people eligible to vote, their names were simply left off, and they were turned away.

HARVEY WASSERMAN: Right. We have in Ohio now, since 2000, we have clear testimony that 500,000, roughly 500,000 voters have been dropped from the voter list in heavily Democratic areas in Cincinnati, Columbus, Cleveland, and Toledo. 500,000 voters is nearly 10% of the entire electorate in the state of Ohio. 5.6 million people voted in Ohio or had their votes counted in Ohio — let's put it that way — in 2004. And going into the 2006 election, 500,000 people have been purged from the registration rolls, that we know of. They are all in Democratic areas. We have no evidence of purges in Republican areas.

BOB FITRAKIS: Well, not only that, in Republican areas, Miami County, which is only 2% African American, they're on the record — the director, Steve Quillen — they're a, quote, "no-purge county." And as a result of that, they had a 98.55% voter turnout in one precinct. Although when we showed up to audit that precinct, instead of finding 679 out of 689 voters having voted, we only found 547 signatures in the book, which was about 82%. So we're finding massive irregularities.

And this occurred on election eve, as well. In Clyde, Ohio, they said 131% voter turnout on election eve. What we found is that in many of the rural counties in Ohio, they ran the absentees through twice, which gave President Bush a tremendous boost in these counties.

HARVEY WASSERMAN: Right, and even with preliminary investigation, we found one precinct where allegedly more than 350 consecutive voters cast a ballot for George W. Bush. We've also found a precinct where there were more than 50 consecutive replacement ballots, you know, allegedly spoiled ballots replaced by poll workers. It is very, very clear what happened in 2004. And we fear it's going to happen again in 2006.

AMY GOODMAN: Do you think Ohio is unusual? I mean, it was clearly key. And remind us, how important was Ohio in the national election, Harvey Wasserman?

HARVEY WASSERMAN: Ohio decided the 2004 election. We believe that there — we are pretty certain that there was a clear campaign to guarantee that, under any circumstances, George W. Bush would win Ohio. The president, the CEO of Diebold, Wally O'Dell, in the year prior to the election, sent out a fundraising notice saying he was going to guarantee that Ohio's electoral votes would go to George W. Bush. This was a little fishy, coming from the guy who's in charge of the Diebold Corporation, on which were cast and counted a substantial percentage of the votes here in Ohio.

BOB FITRAKIS: And he was also a member of the President's Pioneer and Ranger team, was at the Crawford ranch, raised \$200,000 for the President. But even more interesting, a group called the Mighty Texas Strike Force showed up two weeks in advance, stayed at the Holiday Inn — we have affidavit on this from a Republican night clerk there, who actually turned them in. They were data mining. They seemed to know — and they were using payphones only — who owned parking tickets, who was behind on their child support, who had traffic tickets, and they were caught making phone calls telling people if they showed up at the polls, they would be arrested. They were also calling people on probation and making the same threats.

When we contacted the Mighty Texas Strike Force through the Free Press and inquired about who they were, they proudly said that they were linked to the White House and Karl Rove and proudly bragged about their role. Also, fliers went up everywhere, telling people they were illegally registered and that Democrats had to vote on Wednesday and Republicans on Tuesday. All of this is in the book.

HARVEY WASSERMAN: You have to remember that the 2004 election was run by Jay Kenneth Blackwell, the Secretary of State of Ohio, who simultaneously served as the co-chair of the Bush-Cheney campaign, and the 2006 election is being run by the same man who is now a GOP candidate for governor here. This gives new dimension to the term "conflict of interest." There is no way that the Republican Party would have carried Ohio in 2004 with a fair election. It did not happen, and we're very much afraid that many of the key — the key U.S. Senate race and many of the key House races in Ohio in 2006 are going to be subject to fraud and that the Democrats, the people who think that the Democrats are going to do well in this election, may well be sorely disappointed.

BOB FITRAKIS: There's already 5,000 voters in Franklin County here in Columbus, that their absentee ballots won't be counted, because we've gone to the photo ID with the driver's license. There's two different numbers on there. There's an administrative identifier over the picture, which is actually bigger than the driver's license, and at least 5,000 people used that number, and now we're being told by the Secretary of State's office that their votes won't be counted, which is part of what's going on in the current lawsuit that you were speaking of earlier.

HARVEY WASSERMAN: Right. What the Republicans have done here is injected tremendous confusion. We had a four-day period recently, within the last week or two, where the rules for voting in Ohio changed three times in four days, and we have intrusion into the federal court system and tremendous confusion being created at the ADA County Boards of Elections, where nobody really has a firm take on what's required to cast a ballot in Ohio.

We think this is deliberate. It's classic Rove strategy. And the stakes here couldn't be higher. And we are very concerned about what's going to happen. We are urging people to videotape. We will hold hearings after the election, where people can be sworn in, as we did in 2004. This has all got to be documented, or we're going to be in dire straits in terms of preserving our democracy in this country.

AMY GOODMAN: Harvey Wasserman, I'm curious about what you think of this latest story of the Committee on Foreign Investment investigating that Smartmatic, whose chief principals are Venezuelan entrepreneurs, last year purchased Sequoia Voting Systems, which makes the equipment used in Florida, counties like Pinellas and Hillsborough, elections. This is the same government committee that investigated the ownership of the U.S. ports by Dubai. How significant is this?

HARVEY WASSERMAN: Very significant. The voting machines on which 80%, as you've said, of the ballots in this country are cast or counted are all controlled by Republicans. Diebold is a Republican corporation. ES&S, of course, has Chuck Hagel as a principal, a senator from Nebraska, where he's been elected twice on machines that he owns.

You know, we have a distinct aroma here of a third world country being manipulated by the Central Intelligence Agency, as was done under George H.W. Bush the first year. We're starting to feel in this country, and especially in this state, as if we're being treated like a third world country where our elections are manipulated and up for grabs. People are being eliminated from the voter rolls. As you know, in 2004 we had tremendously long lines in very specifically targeted African American precincts and in liberal student precincts, at Kenyon College and at Oberlin College, and we see this happening again. There is no accident here.

This confusion, entered in with the voting machines and of the electronic poll books, is very, very deliberate, and the Republicans are already talking about polls that the public doesn't know about. Those polls are linked to their ability to manipulate and to steal elections. The 2004 election was stolen here in Ohio, and we're afraid it's about to happen again in 2006, and we're not sure that the public is really prepared to deal with tracking this down.

We think there's been improvement. We think the word has spread, especially through your show and through the internet. But people have to be sworn in. Sworn testimony has to be given after this election. There have to be very detailed records, even in places where we don't think there's a problem, because there is a problem, and the people in Washington and the White House are very clear on what they're doing. They've been practicing for a long, long time. And this has to be stopped, or we are not going to have anything resembling a democracy in this country.

BOB FITRAKIS: Another concern is —

AMY GOODMAN: Bob, we just have about 20 seconds. Go ahead.

BOB FITRAKIS: The other problem is the privatization of the voter registration rolls. What we found from a quick survey is many of the counties have turned over the voter registration rolls to Republican-controlled or -connected firms like Triad, ES&S and Diebold, so a lot of people could show up on Election Day and find that they've been purged.

AMY GOODMAN: Bob Fittrakis and Harvey Wasserman, I want to thank you very much for joining us. Their book is called *What Happened in Ohio: A Documentary Record of Theft and Fraud in the 2004 Election*. We will continue to follow the story, of course. They were joining us from Columbus, Ohio. And as we wrap-up this segment, before we move to Pennsylvania, I wanted to ask you both, Bev Harris and Wendy Weiser, about how people can stop voter suppression or make sure their votes are counted. Let me start with Wendy.

WENDY WEISER: Well, the very first thing that all Americans can do is go vote next Tuesday. The best defense is a good offense.

AMY GOODMAN: But people who were just listening to this today might just say, "Why is it worth it?"

WENDY WEISER: Well, it is worth it, because it's important to send a message that Americans care about their democracy, care about voting, and want to live in the kind of democracy where people are not turned away from the polls. People should insist that they can cast a ballot and that their ballot count. And if they do experience — regardless of what people tell them. And if they do experience problems, there are a lot of nonpartisan organizations that could help them. There are voter hotlines like 1-866-OUR-VOTE, that anyone can call from around the country to get assistance from nonpartisan groups about how to overcome any problems they might be experiencing at the polls and to cast a vote that can count.

AMY GOODMAN: But how do people even do this? They race to the poll before work. You're already in a

long line. You don't have time for this. Then you're turned away. There's nothing you can do. You've waited on a long line, and then you have to go to work. How do you deal with this? Do you have to spend the day challenging?

WENDY WEISER: Well, I have no doubt that in places where there are really long lines that there will be court challenges to keep the polls open later in the evening, so people can come back after work if they can't make it. But people should try and vote and do what they can to get through those lines and call in problems. The election officials can try to fix the long lines by bringing in more supplies if the problems are reported.

AMY GOODMAN: So our vote is one. Bev Harris?

BEV HARRIS: Well, we say propagate the information to at least five places to make sure it gets out. And now is the time to go on the offense, not retreat. By "go on the offense," I mean go vote, and then go find out what happened to your vote. And you may run into a brick wall, and you may find public officials making it up as they go. That's important.

AMY GOODMAN: Wait, wait, wait. What do you mean, you have to find out what happened to your vote?

BEV HARRIS: Well, go look for the records, bring a camera with you. If you're stuck in a line, videotape the line, and then get it to the news media. Get it to the blogs. Get it to at least five different places. Propagate the information. It's very important, because we have to take this back. We are literally losing our democracy, and if we don't go out there and take it back, it's not going to be done for us.

AMY GOODMAN: I mean, long lines. You go to the poll in the morning, 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning, and it's standard that you wait for about an hour. Should it be?

BEV HARRIS: Well, six or seven hours is not standard, though. Waiting in the rain in the cold for six hours as they did in — and nine hours, as they did in Ohio in 2004 is not standard, and thank goodness that was captured on videotape. That was one of the few things that was captured on videotape. Had that not happened, it would just be a story. We've got to go out there and take this back.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you take your video camera into the polling booth?

BEV HARRIS: It depends on the location. You certainly can't do anything that would compromise anyone else's privacy. But there have been now — in fact, in Hacking Democracy's HBO special, there is actually very rare footage of a voting machine flipping votes, where a candidate is trying to vote for herself, and it keeps coming up for the other candidate. And this happens from machine to machine to machine. So, she got —

AMY GOODMAN: Where was this?

BEV HARRIS: This was in New Orleans. So — and it was a Republican candidate.

AMY GOODMAN: Before or after Hurricane Katrina?

BEV HARRIS: Before. So, in fact, this candidate videotaped this. They had the very first touch screens in the nation. And so this has been going on for a long time. She's been trying to get this story out for ten years. But this is an example of why it's so important. She's been trying to get this story out for ten years, and it is now going onto HBO. At least she had the video.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, we're going to leave it there. We will certainly link to your websites. Bev Harris, the documentary [Hacking Democracy](#) will air on November 2nd on HBO 9:00 p.m. around the country. Wendy Weiser, your [report](#), we will link to, at the [Brennan Center](#), which is based at New York University. Thank you both for being with us.

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