

INSIDE DEMOCRATS' BEST-KEPT SECRET: MASS NONPROFIT VOTER REGISTRATION

How the Voter Participation Center aims to cement Democratic rule by remaking America's electorate

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There may be two major parties vying for votes, but one is fighting with sophisticated weaponry and the other is using pop guns.

The Democratic Party's best-kept secret is its massive weaponization of America's charities to supercharge voter participation in key states, undoubtedly tipping elections. Ensuring people vote—dubbed “saving democracy” by the Left—sounds innocuous, perhaps even admirable. But it may also be flat-out illegal.

This is the stealth juggernaut that threatens to seize permanent control of Washington if Republicans don't wake up to what's happening and fight back.

Weaponized Charity

When most Americans picture politics, they think of the two parties. What they should see is the vast array of tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofits—think the Salvation Army or your local church—working to elect Democrats and shape policy, all in the name of “charity.” For decades, leftists have weaponized America's charitable sector for partisan gain, thanks to loose laws and a near-limitless wellspring of cash from the Ford, Gates, and other foundations.



IRS nonprofit arcana may not sound sexy, but abusing nonprofit voter registration rules has proven one of the most effective ways of increasing Democrats' vote share in places like Colorado, Arizona, and Georgia, turning reliably red states blue over the past two decades.

Leftists wrote the book on partisan voter registration, and conservatives have yet to even notice it.

The IRS bars 501(c)(3) nonprofits from conducting biased registration campaigns—targeting only Republicans or Democrats, something reserved to partisan committees (PACs)—at the risk of losing their tax exemption. The law even prohibits nonprofit registration drives that have the effect of boosting one party over another.

Theoretically, both sides toe this line. In reality the Left is shameless about

pushing the law to its limits, arguably crossing it, while the Right is too afraid to engage in much nonprofit voter registration at all.

But what if nonprofits ran biased registration campaigns using data on where certain demographics live and how they vote? This is the code to the Democratic Party's ability to discover new "progressive" voters in just the right places to build an electoral majority, virtually from the shadows.

Erick Kaardal, special counsel on election law for the Thomas More Society, explained the challenge of litigating against biased registration to Restoration of America:

"The election integrity challenge is to have state courts hold that 501(c)(3) funds can't be used for voter registration of targeted progressive demographic groups—urban residents or students. The Internal Revenue Service has stated such funds can't be used directly or indirectly for biased voter registration. But there is no authorization for suing in federal courts. So, the only remaining choice is taxpayer standing lawsuits in state courts—which is good enough."

"But eventually," he pointed out, "the U.S. Supreme Court will have to rule whether urban cities and public universities can lawfully use 501(c)(3) funds for the political purpose identified: voter registration campaigns targeted to progressive voters."

Until then, groups will continue to operate like it's the Wild West.

Manufactured Participation

At the heart of this election machine is a pair of D.C.-based nonprofits: the 501(c)(3) Voter Participation Center (VPC) and 501(c)(4) Center for Voter Information (CVI). Both share a common founder, Page Gardner, who registered voters for Hillary Clinton's 2008 presidential primary campaign. (At one point Clinton crony John Podesta also sat on VPC's board.) Gardner is credited with discovering the "marriage gap" in 2003, a statistical revelation showing that unmarried women were less likely to be registered or turn out than married women but were more likely to support Democrats.

Of course, single women are just one part of the "New American Majority," the Left's euphemism for likely Democratic voters.

VPC and CVI were created to identify and register likely Democrats, cleverly using statistics to predict how individuals vote and microtargeting techniques to discover where they live. Using demographic data is the sharpest way to register certain voters without explicitly violating the IRS ban on biased registration drives. As VPC boasts: We're "dedicated to increasing the share of unmarried women, people of color, Millennials, Gen Z, and other historically under-represented groups in the electorate"—which happen to be the Democratic Party's core constituencies.

Liberal journalist Sasha Issenberg spelled out the obvious in his 2012 book *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*:

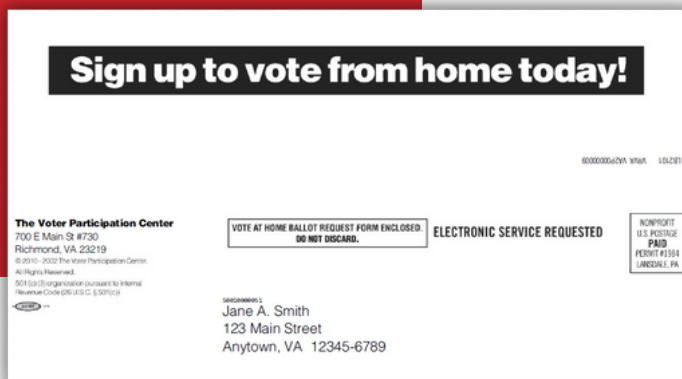
"Even though the [Voter Participation Center] was officially nonpartisan, for tax purposes, there was no secret that the **goal of all its efforts was to generate new votes for Democrats.**"

Does this violate the IRS prohibition on partisan registration drives? Any reasonable observer would probably agree with Issenberg. Yet the IRS has utterly failed to hold VPC accountable, and watchdogs have paid too little attention to the Left's nonprofit machine to push for that accountability.

Each election cycle, VPC and CVI mail out tens of millions of partially pre-filled-in voter registration applications and, in certain states, absentee ballot applications. Postage is pre-paid by the nonprofit. A custom graph "helpfully" compares the recipient's voting history with that of his neighbors, shaming low-propensity voters into turning out.

Their targets are far from random or uniform, focusing on battleground states in presidential elections and or states with key Senate and gubernatorial races in midterm cycles. In many cases, the return address is a local P.O. box—not the groups' Washington, D.C. address—giving the appearance of a grassroots effort as well as revealing which registered voters are no longer active at their current address. For a nation battling the threat of voter fraud, that ought to raise eyebrows.

Source:
Election Integrity Network, 2023.



Secret Strategies in 2020

If you've never heard of Mind the Gap, you're probably not a Democratic mega-donor. The Palo Alto, California-based super PAC quietly advises wealthy leftists on which races to fund with an eye towards winning control of Congress. "Secret" is the watchword. As Mind the Gap puts it in a 2019 private strategy memo:

"the magnitude of our efforts, the details of targeting, and the names of the organizations we are recommending, would be of great interest to [Republicans]. If that information becomes public, it would make [Mind the Gap] and the donee organizations targets for Republicans."

Critically, that memo advises donors to cut their checks to 501(c)(3) and (c) (4) nonprofits doing voter registration—specifically the Voter Participation Center and Center for Voter Information—instead of campaign committees. That money "donated to both organizations . . . will target minority populations in geographic areas crucial to victory in the [2020]

Presidential election and key down-ballot races," the group explains.

Why use nonprofits instead of PACs?

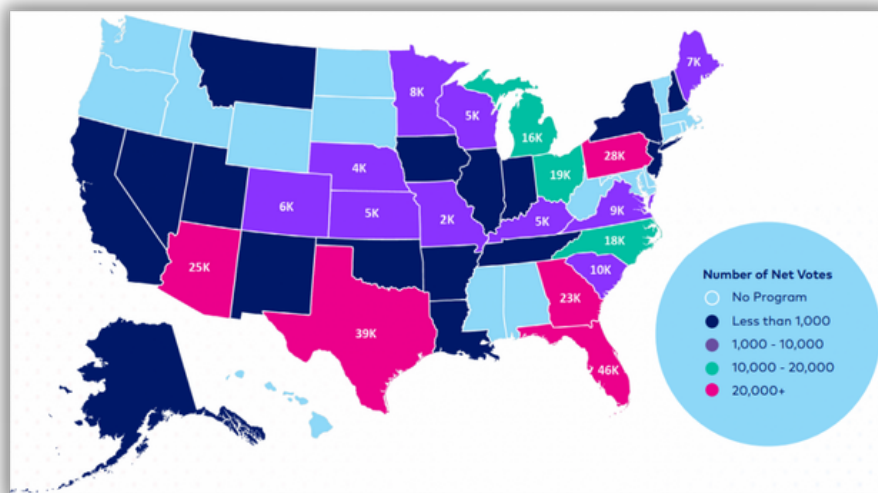
Because "on a pre-tax basis" nonprofit voter registration "focused on underrepresented groups"—meaning Democratic constituencies—is "2 to 5 times more cost-effective at netting additional Democratic votes than the tactics that campaigns will invest in (chiefly, broadcast media and digital buys)" [emphasis added].

Contributions to 501(c)(3) groups are tax-deductible for donors, too. "On an after-tax basis such programs are closer to 4 to 10 times more cost effective than the next best alternative. They are also eligible recipients of donations from donor-advised funds and private foundations" [emphasis added].

In other words, to win the Democratic congressional majorities, turn to tax-exempt nonprofits—not the Democratic Party.

Never mind that the IRS expressly prohibits 501(c)(3) nonprofits from running registration and get-out-the-vote drives "conducted in a biased manner that favors (or opposes) one or more candidates" or one political party over another.

But that's VPC's main selling point to the Left. The group brags that its registration-by-mail campaign netted an additional 272,443 votes in the 2020 election—"votes that would not have happened without VCP/CVI's efforts"—214,000 of them in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Arizona.



Source: Voter Participation Center 2020 Impact Report.

Not surprisingly, VPC all but ignored uncompetitive states in the Northeast, South, and West Coast.

VPC claims credit for registering over 935,000 new voters in 2020 at a cost of \$277 per net vote. A significant portion of those, nearly 100,000 voters, were “downstream” from the group’s registration efforts in the 2016 and 2018 cycles, highlighting the staying power of these drives.

Targeting the Youth Vote

In August 2022, VPC commissioned a poll of black voters in (largely) battleground states—including Arizona, Florida, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Florida—to determine how to improve vote-by-mail results among this key Democratic demographic.

VPC determined that “messages . . . referenc[ing] threats to black people’s right to vote,” “validation” from Michelle Obama and other black elected officials, and efforts to promote mail-in ballots “as a potential boost for black voter turnout could sway more black voters to vote by mail.”

VPC estimated that there were 8.3 million newly eligible young voters up for grabs in 2022 alone. Critically, young black voters reported the most interest in voting by mail as well as strong views on abortion “rights” and preventing mass shootings.

In contrast, VPC’s survey revealed that black voters who mistrust voting by mail were both “less active as voters in general” and “less likely to identify as Democrats or liberals” by as much as 10 percent. Interestingly, the poll also showed that vote-by-mail skeptics were far and away more likely to self-identify as “conservative”

than “Republican,” and reported reasonable concerns about the security and trustworthiness of both mail-in ballots and early voting policies.

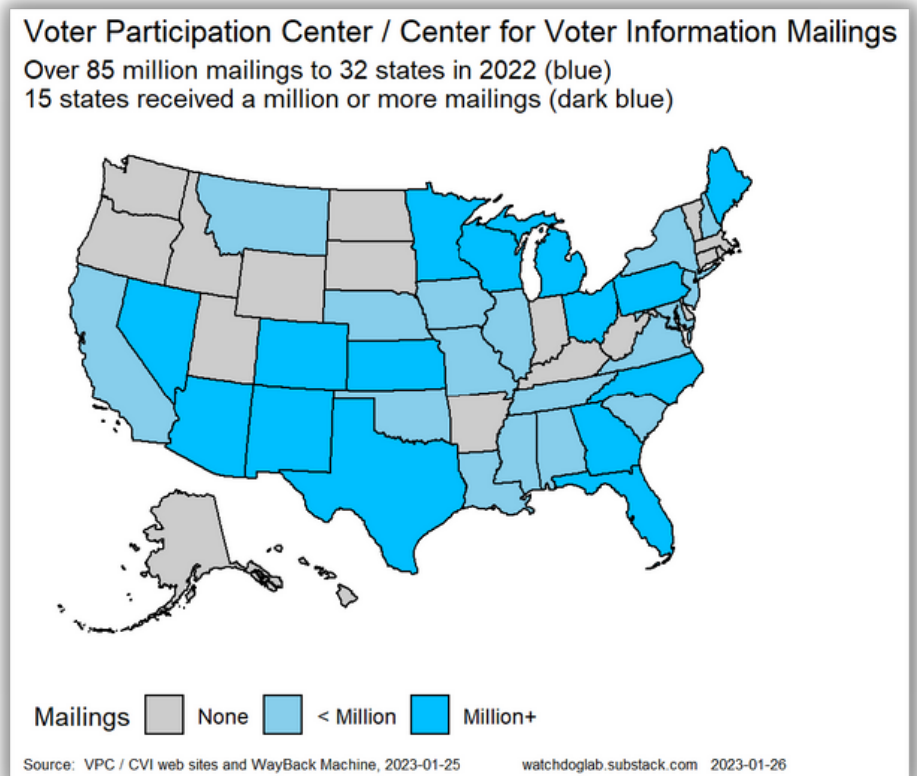
For VPC, the bottom line was clear: Use “in-state black elected officials and civil rights organizations to explain why voting by mail can be trusted,” then counter critics by blasting that “efforts to undermine [vote-by-mail] translate to undermining black political power.”

Blanketing America in Mailers

In total, the Voter Participation Center and Center for Voter Information disgorged an incredible 85.5 million mailers across 32 states between March and October 2022, according to figures reported by Earl Glynn, a private researcher.

The pair’s first wave of mailers in March targeted eligible-but-unregistered individuals with voter registration applications, particularly those “who have just turned 18” and “voters who have recently moved.” In August, the groups specifically targeted New American Majority voters—“people of color, young people, and unmarried women”—largely in Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Pennsylvania. A month later it sent registration mailers to New American Majority voters “who are not very likely to vote” in the midterms.

VPC hammered a whopping 52.8 million homes throughout October with get-out-the-vote (GOTV) mailers, one-third of them New American Majority voters. Glynn points out that in certain states VPC and CVI partnered with local “progressive” groups, such as Mississippi’s NAACP Legal Defense Fund, which sent 103,000 registration applications to black residents across the state in August.



Credit: Earl Glynn, Watchdog Lab (2023)

It's hard to believe that 85.5 million mailers played no role in tipping the 2022 midterms in the Democrats' favor, especially when one sees where they went.

While VPC didn't specify any targeted races, certain states were undoubtedly hit hardest: Georgia, North Carolina, Florida, Pennsylvania, Texas, Arizona, Nevada, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Maine, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, and Minnesota.

20 states with U.S. Senate races in 2022 were swamped with VPC/CVI mailers, the vast majority in the last few weeks before Election Day. By the end of October, over 9 million Americans had voted early.

Pennsylvania, which John Fetterman (D) flipped, was VPC's single most-targeted state at an incredible 14.2 million mailers, 82 percent of which hit mailboxes in October before Fetterman debated Republican nominee Mehmet Oz on October 25th—by which time some 700,000 voters had already cast their ballots. Recall that Pennsylvania also held a competitive race for governor in 2022.

VPC sent 11.8 million mailers to Georgia, where Sen. Raphael Warnock (D) defeated Herschel Walker (R) by 2.8 percent (99,389 votes). 90 percent of them landed in October.

In Wisconsin, Democrat Mandela Barnes came within 1 percent (27,398 votes) of defeating Republican incumbent Sen. Ron Johnson. VPC slammed the state with 4.1 million mailers, 87 percent of them in October. VPC/CVI similarly poured 10.5 million mailers into Michigan, where Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) defeated Republican challenger Tudor Dixon by nearly 470,000 votes. 86 percent of the mailers landed in October.

Democrats held their Senate seat in Nevada by less than 5,000 votes (a margin of 0.5 percent). VPC poured close to 3.9 million mailers into the Silver State, 91 percent of them in October. And VPC sent 7.7 million mailers to Arizona, 90 of them in October. Sen. Mark Kelly (D) defeated Republican Blake Masters by less than 5 percent, or 125,719 votes.

Contrast those tight races with Senate elections in non-battleground states, even populous ones with large minority populations. VPC/CVI sent 5.2 million mailers to New York, California, Maryland, and others with lopsided election results—just 6 percent of its 2022 total.

That's pretty jarring for a pair of groups supposedly boosting the "New American Majority," given that 37 percent of New Yorkers are non-white, one-third of Maryland residents are black, and California's been majority-minority since 2014. And where's VPC's outrage over racial disparities in Washington state, where the New York Times reported that 1 out of every 4 disqualified mail-in ballots in the midterms came from a black voter?

But of course we know that the Voter Participation Center was created to help Democrats win elections, not "empower" minorities.

Who Registers, Wins

If that doesn't infuriate or alarm law-abiding conservatives, it's because they don't grasp the power of the Left's voter registration machine.

The Left's top 24 voter registration nonprofits spent \$434 million in 2020 alone. VPC was the largest, raking in \$88 million and spending over \$100 million that year. That the money went to politics,



not charity, is only highlighted by its finances in 2021, an off-year: Just \$11 million in revenue and \$15 million in expenditures.

Big foundations funneled roughly \$461 million into these 24 nonprofits over the past decade, including the Ford and Tides Foundations, pass-through Proteus Fund, and Warren Buffett's Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation. A chunk of that money came from Swiss billionaire Hansjörg Wyss; much more flowed through donor-advised fund providers such as the Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund and Silicon Valley Community Foundation, totally masking the original donors' identities.

It may sound counterintuitive to pour money into registration rather than straight get-out-the-vote drives (and they do fund both). But research suggests that 501(c)(3) groups have better reach among independents leery of both parties. Once identified and added to the voter rolls, these individuals tend to vote in the next two to three election cycles, netting 6 years of votes for a one-time cost.

Microtargeting techniques developed by the tech industry have made it possible to target highly specific demographics (e.g. unmarried female college graduates) in a precise geographic location (say, a congressional district).

Armed with that priceless data and limitless funding, the Left's fleet of registration groups can run everything from a mass direct-mail to local door-knocking campaign.

And naturally, they do. In the 2018 midterms, 180 left-leaning nonprofits engaged thousands of eligible-but-unregistered individuals and netted thousands of new registrations. Later analysis showed that "voters of color" constituted 22 percent of all registered voters but 53 percent of the targeted by these groups, each of whom was 4 to 7 percent more likely to turn out in elections after being targeted.

The key to this machine is the "Integrated Voter Engagement Model," brainchild of a left-wing donors' collective called the Funders Committee for Civic Participation (a front for the pass-through funder NEO Philanthropy), which assembles these and other mega-funders on the Left to coordinate their spending. In 2020 these members commanded \$11.5 billion in combined total expenditures.

The model's theory of impact is straightforward: Shuffle money to "democracy groups" advancing "structural reforms" to obtain "power" for Democrats. An older rendition of the theory was even starker: registering and turning out voters to "hold elected officials accountable" and "achieve policy impact." The Funders Committee expanded the theory in 2017 to include "defend + expand voting rights."

Many credit the Funders Committee model with turning Colorado from a red to purple state by massively boosting Democratic registration and turnout, flipping the legislature, and ultimately securing election "reforms" like vote-by-mail which further cement Democratic advantages.

Thanks to a secret strategy document uncovered by the Capital Research Center in 2022, we now know that in 2015 the Left ran "large-scale, multi-year voter registration programs" which it believed could "fundamentally reshape the electorate in as many as 13 states" by 2020, exclusively by

registering "non-white" residents. Many of the Democratic Party's gains in places like Maricopa County, Arizona, and Atlanta, Georgia, are the fruits.

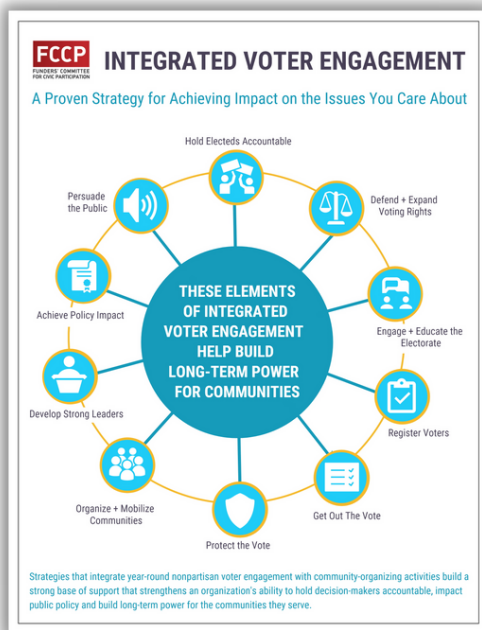
The price-tag: \$105-\$210 million, virtually all of it from the tax-exempt members of the Funders Committee provided the bulk of funds for this project, which has since expanded to every other battleground state in America (and clearly at a much higher cost).

Defeating the Juggernaut

So what can conservatives do about it? This writer sees two strategies for success.

Beat them at their own game

Whereas the Left has hundreds of 501(c)(3)s engaged in voter registration, the Right can count theirs on one hand. Conservatives have instead relied almost exclusively on Republican Party committees and political campaigns to register and turn out voters—think Karl Rove's famous GOTV campaigns of the past two decades. But these tend to miss wary independents.



Source: Funders Committee for Civic Participation. Credit: Capital Research Center.



Early Funders Committee model of integrated voter engagement

The solution: Copy the Left's strategy and start building data-driven registration nonprofits to discover "hidden" conservatives in battleground states. It isn't difficult to map out conservative Evangelical and Roman Catholic churches, for instance, nor to tap into the wellspring of volunteer poll-workers and members of grassroots election integrity groups nationwide. Go to places where patriotic, religious, traditionalist Americans gather. Seek out Ross Perot-type independents who are tired of "wokeism" and previously uninterested in a flaccid Republican Party.

But don't expect to replicate the Left's election machine, which took hundreds of millions of dollars and decades to build. Conservatives don't have the time or resources to follow suit. Fortunately, they don't need to.

When it comes to reliability, the average Republican and Democratic voter are not mirror opposites: Young renters generally make for spotty voters compared with middle-aged homeowners, veterans voted at a higher rate than non-veterans in 2020, etc. Put simply, Republicans are better voters. Democrats need a vast election machine to both register and reliably turn out their voters—but Republicans can pour all their resources into registration.

Even better, they don't need to match the Left dollar-for-dollar. In a scant few years—and more or less unintentionally—President Trump arguably accomplished for the Republicans what it took Democrats a generation of serious activism to do: Transform millions of disinterested Americans into reliable voters. Conservatives need a fraction of the Left's funds to register the rest.

Savvy activists will also take advantage of the monumental realignment among Latinos to win new voters, many of whom were added to the voter rolls by leftist groups eager to build the "New American Majority."

Ban nonprofit voter registration

Winning elections means taking the fight to the enemy, something the Left's GOTV activists have never suffered and certainly don't expect.

There are 22 Republican trifectas nationwide, states where the GOP completely controls the legislature and the governorship. They should ban 501(c) groups not based in their state from conducting voter registration or get-out-the-vote drives, hamstringing the Voter Participation Center and organizations like it. Better yet, states can ban all 501(c) registration and GOTV work.

All 501(c)(3) nonprofits are officially "nonpartisan" by law, which means they cannot affiliate with a political party (don't confuse "nonpartisan" with "nonideological"). To reiterate, 501(c)(3)s are strictly barred from intervening in campaigns, either directly or indirectly. They're only allowed to engage in voter registration drives if

"they are conducted in a neutral, non-partisan manner, for example, without reference to any candidate or political party. However, voter education or registration activities conducted in a biased manner that favors (or opposes) one or more candidates is prohibited."

If that wasn't clear enough, the IRS further adds that

"voter education or registration activities with evidence of bias that (a) would favor one candidate over another; (b) oppose a candidate in some manner; or (c) have the effect of favoring a candidate or group of candidates, will constitute prohibited participation or intervention."

The "progressive" nonprofit empire obviously violates the spirit of this prohibition, which was intended to block groups from using 501(c)(3) charities to win elections—the very thing this election machine exists to achieve. Cutting off the use of nonprofits for so much political work is the ethical thing to do.

It'd also gut the left-wing juggernaut and force Democrats to retreat to PAC registration (which is just as problematic for them as it is for Republicans), which is where voter registration belongs. It'd blunt the value of the Left's data on eligible-but-unregistered individuals, making it significantly harder for turnout groups to reach low-propensity voters in places like Atlanta, Milwaukee, and Detroit. National networks like that of States Voices and America Votes would become near-worthless, since their role is to coordinate local groups' registration activities and funnel money to battleground states.

Nothing would do more to level the playing field for the Right, which is why bold lawmakers ought to be financially prepared to battle the Left's army of lawyers in court. The IRS—under Congress's oversight—governs the rules surrounding 501(c) nonprofits, making it a federal issue. So why not use Congress to ban nonprofit voter registration instead of the states?

Use both. At its core, this is about federalism.

The Constitution gives state legislatures, not the federal government, strict control over how elections are run while reserving an oversight role to Congress. Voter rolls are each state's domain, as is determining how residents are added to the rolls. When 501(c) groups use federal law to engage in voter registration, they're trampling on the states' turf—and states should push back, starting with the 22 Republican trifectas. Congressional Republicans can supplement their work by investigating

the IRS's failure to strip tax exemption from nonprofits which violate voter registration rules, and later with legislation banning the practice outright.

Only one question remains: Are lawmakers bold enough to actually fight the Left?

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