

DETROIT

NATIVE SUN

25 million Black and Latino voters are missing or incorrectly listed in U.S. database



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An eye-opening report titled “Surfacing Missing Voters: Addressing Data Systems, Tools, and Engagement Models that Invisibilize Black and Brown Communities,” authored by Miriam McKinney Gray for the Democracy & Power Innovation Fund (DPI), has unveiled a concerning reality: Nearly 25 million Black and Latino eligible voters are effectively absent from voter databases, making them virtually unreachable by traditional outreach methods.

The revelation is crucial as America heads toward the all-important November general election between Democratic incumbent Joe Biden and the twice-impeached and four-times indicted former president Donald Trump.

Drawing from U.S. Census data and a recent Stanford study, the report estimated that approximately 24.76 million Black and Latino voters are either missing or inaccurately listed in databases sold by vendors.

The disparities revealed in the report are stark, with 40 percent of Black and Latino individuals missing from voter outreach efforts, compared to only 18 percent of white individuals. The paper-thin margins seen in recent crucial races serve as evidence that such glaring disparities in representation could significantly impact the results of future elections. During the 2020 election, Biden beat Trump in the popular vote by approximately 81.2 million to 74.2 million votes, or a 51.3 percent to 46.9 percent margin.

“For instance, almost half of eligible Black and Latino voters won’t be seen or contacted by traditional campaigns. This is a five-alarm fire for our democracy,” said Miriam McKinney Gray, founder and CEO of McKinney Gray Analytics, who analyzed the data based on U.S. Census records and a Stanford study.

“The only way many people will learn about the election is through independent power-building organizations. Groups like Voces de La Frontera in Wisconsin and Detroit Action are using friends-and-family organizing to find missing voters and manually rebuilding lists of voters who have been wrongly purged from government voter rolls.”

Twenty-five million Black and Latino people “are invisible to the very campaigns that want their support. From our research on Black values, we know who they are and the tools needed to reach them,” said Dr. Katrina Gamble of Sojourn Strategies. “It’s not too late to change course, but that takes breaking barriers

that campaigns have blindly accepted for decades. We think democracy is worth it, and so are the people who have been excluded.”

Gamble is conducting groundbreaking nationwide research into the differences in values and political behavior of the Black electorate and analyzing clusters or segments of Black voters for the first time.

All involved said the report spotlights the systemic marginalization of Black and brown communities within the ostensibly inclusive, data-driven digital systems of voter engagement prevailing in the United States. It identifies aggressive voter purges and biases inherent in vendor-generated models appended to voter files as key factors exacerbating this invisibility.

According to the Democracy & Power Innovation Fund report, “One serious consequence of missing or incorrect data in purchased voter databases is that it distorts the algorithms that assign vote propensity scores to individual voters.”

“Traditional campaigns regularly and intentionally leave out people with low vote propensity scores, deeming them not worth the investment. To put it plainly, this approach is wrong,” stated Ranada Robinson, Research Director for New Georgia Project.

Similarly, Prentiss J. Haney, Senior Advisor to the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, highlighted the limitations of relying solely on political industry databases, noting that such dependence leads to the exclusion of millions of Black and Latino voters and inaccurate race modeling.

To address these disparities and ensure a more equitable electoral process, the report proposes philanthropic investments in community-based data collection, support for antiracist modeling efforts, and adopting broad relational organizing strategies.

The report called for concerted efforts to rectify the systemic biases ingrained within existing data systems and engagement models. The author asserted that a failure to address these issues risks perpetuating the disenfranchisement of marginalized communities and undermining democratic principles.

“The people unseen by voter files are still capable, if organized, to make moves and wield their latent power,” added Joy Cushman, Senior Advisor to DPI. “People deemed ‘low propensity’ by models and the political industry are defying the odds and still turning out to vote. And many are doing even more than that: they are becoming active members and leaders in power-building organizations, mobilizing their friends and family to vote as well.”

Former state employee found guilty of embezzlement

LANSING - This month, a Wayne County jury in the 3rd Circuit Court found Rufus Chappell, a former state of Michigan employee, guilty of embezzlement from the State, announced Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel. The felony conviction on one count of Embezzlement, \$20,000 to \$50,000, carries a maximum penalty of 10 years’ incarceration.

Chappell, 64, of Farmington Hills, for years misused state vehicles for personal use over weekends, holidays, and outside business hours, racking up unauthorized vehicle usage and mileage fees totaling \$47,214.85 between August 2015 and January 2019. He had access to and permission to use the state motor pool vehicles, explicitly for work purposes, by virtue of his employment as an unemployment examiner with the Talent Investment Agency under the Department of Talent and Economic Development, now known as the Unemployment Insurance Agency and Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, respectively. It was expected Chappell would use the state vehicles to attend unemployment insurance benefit appeal hearings.

Upon learning Chappell’s driver’s license had been suspended, the Vehicle

and Travel Services and the Department of Talent and Economic Development investigated his vehicle use and uncovered rampant and flagrant misuse.

“This verdict sends a clear message that stealing from the State, and thereby the taxpayers, will not be tolerated,” Nessel said. “My office will continue to investigate and prosecute misuses of state resources to ensure all public servants are held accountable for the responsible use of taxpayer-funded resources.”

“We value integrity at the Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency and we expect staff to be models of ethical behavior,” said UIA Director Julia Dale. “We have implemented ethics and conflict of interest policies, pursued bad actors who steal money from taxpayers, created a Legal and Compliance Bureau, and won national awards for our work in bringing criminals to justice. We won’t waver from our mission to serve Michigan’s residents with integrity and we will aggressively go after anyone who breaks the law while working for the agency.”

Chappell is scheduled for sentencing on May 17 at 8:30 a.m. before Judge Mariam Bazzi in the 3rd Circuit Court in Wayne County.

Former Romulus mayor sentenced for theft

DETROIT - Former Romulus Mayor LeRoy Burcroff, 59, of Romulus, was recently sentenced to three years probation with four months home confinement following his theft and misuse of over \$15,000 in campaign funds, announced United States Attorney Dawn N. Ison.

Ison was joined in the announcement by Cheyvorrea Gibson, Special Agent in Charge of the Detroit Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Burcroff was elected mayor of the City of Romulus in 2014. As part of his election efforts, Burcroff established a committee to elect (CTE) fund entitled, “Committee to Elect LeRoy D. Burcroff.” According to court documents, over the next two-and-a-half years, Burcroff defrauded donors to his CTE account by using these campaign funds for his personal benefit rather than for his election. For example, in November 2017, Burcroff spent over \$3,500 of his campaign donors’ money to pay for a family member’s wedding. Burcroff spent the CTE money on a church fee, a banquet room rental, flowers, and the wedding bar tab. In 2017 and 2018, Burcroff used CTE funds to pay over \$11,600 in dues and expenses to a yacht club which he used for his personal benefit. On multiple occasions, Burcroff overpaid his yacht club dues using his campaign account, which resulted in the yacht club issuing a refund, which Burcroff deposited in his personal bank account. In 2018, Burcroff made a \$1,000 donation of campaign funds to a

trade industry with the hope that he would receive a promotion at his private sector job. In 2019, Burcroff spent over \$4,000 of campaign funds on a personal vacation to Florida with friends.

United States Attorney Ison said, “Trust in our state’s campaign finance system is a critical component of a healthy representative democracy. Mr. Burcroff’s conviction and sentence underscores our commitment to ensuring that the citizens of the Eastern District are represented by public officials who have integrity and are seeking office not for their self-interest, but for the good of the people they are elected to represent.”

“The citizens of Michigan demand and deserve utmost trust and integrity in our campaign finance system,” said Special Agent in Charge Cheyvorrea Gibson of the FBI in Michigan. “The former Mayor’s actions severely undermined the confidence of those who bestowed trust and faith in him and his office. The FBI and law enforcement partners are fully dedicated to fighting public corruption by investigating and exposing corrupt officials whose greed erodes the public’s trust in the government. We will not tolerate misconduct and will do everything we can to ensure justice is served.”

The investigation of this case was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Detroit Area Corruption Task Force. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Eaton P. Brown.

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