

The Breach 305: Voting Rights Are Being Systematically Dismantled

Lindsay: Welcome to a special Election Day edition of The Breach, your deep dive into authoritarianism and corruption in the era of Trump. I'm your host, Lindsay Beyerstein. The Breach is a production of Rewire.news, your online home for cutting edge reporting and commentary on reproductive rights, health, and justice. If you're enjoying the show, please take a moment to rate and review us on Apple podcasts. Consider it an act of resistance.

I've known today's guest since we've covered Ned Lamont's senate bid in the early days of the liberal blogosphere. His name is Ari Berman and he's here today to talk about his jaw-dropping Mother Jones cover story about GOP voter suppression in Wisconsin in 2016, and how it might have tipped the key battleground state to Trump. Ari, welcome to the program.

Ari Berman: Hey, Lindsay. Great to talk to you. Thank you.

Lindsay: Can you start by giving us an outline of the logic of voter suppression? I.E., why Republicans do better when fewer people vote.

Ari Berman: Yeah. If you looked at the two parties' electorate, Republican voters are more reliable voters. They're more affluent, they are more regular in terms of their habits, and Democratic voters sometimes are less likely to turn out. They also are more reliant on groups of people that might be younger voters, newer voters, as familiar with the political process, or historically disenfranchised voters like African Americans and Latinos who face more barriers both because of historic conditions and because of socioeconomic conditions today. So, Republicans have a theory that when fewer people vote, they do better. And, that's proven true if you look at 2010 and 2014 in the midterm elections when fewer people voted, Republicans did much better. If you look at 2008 and in 2012 when more people voted, Democrats did much better. So, Republicans went into the 2016 election trying to figure out a way that they could lower Democratic turnout to gain a partisan advantage.

Lindsay: What are the major tactics of voter suppression that came into play in 2016?

Ari Berman: So, we saw a whole range of voter suppression tactics. People tend to focus on voter ID laws and those are obviously very important, but it was beyond voter ID. It was cutting early voting. It was closing polling places, making it harder to register to vote, purging the voting rules, disenfranchising ex-offenders. There was a whole range of things that were done to try to target Democratic leaning constituencies. And, I think this had ... First off, I think it prevented a lot of legitimate people from voting, but secondly, I think it had an impact on the election in some very important states like Wisconsin.

Lindsay: What's the official rationale from the Republicans? Their public-facing justification for making voting harder?

Ari Berman: Well, their official justification is voter fraud and they're basically operating on a premise that if you just say it enough, voter fraud, voter fraud, voter fraud, people will

start to believe it. And, they've been extremely successful in convincing their own base that there's massive voter fraud that benefits Democrats. During the entire 2008 election, we heard story after story about ACORN helping elect Barack Obama illegitimately, a poll showed that half the Republicans believed Obama was not legitimately elected, because of fraud. But, what's interesting is they presented very little evidence of the kind of fraud that they claim to be stopping, so voter ID laws only stopped voter impersonation, where someone pretends to be me, shows up, and tries to vote in my name. That's incredibly difficult to pull off without getting caught and even if you pull it off, you're only changing one extra vote. So, they haven't presented really any evidence of voter impersonation.

Then, they've moved to a different argument, which is that this about protecting the integrity of the election. That as Scott Walker once said, "Just because your house isn't being robbed, doesn't mean you don't lock the door", so faced with no evidence of the actual fraud, they've moved to this other argument, which is about integrity in elections. Ironically, these voter suppression laws have done more than anything to undermine the integrity of the political process.

Lindsay: It's such a specious argument, because you lock the door because other people don't have a right to come into your house. If people have a right to come into your house, then you shouldn't be locking the door.

Ari Berman: Exactly. As you point out, the right to vote is not private property. This is one of the most fundamental rights in our entire system and I don't think you should be able to restrict it without a very good reason. And, it's very, very clear from many, many, many court decisions at this point, that there's just no evidence of the kind of fraud that they're saying exists or the evidence is much, much, much smaller than they claim to be. So, if you look at what the real rationale for this, it's always been about trying to disenfranchise people of color and Democratic leaning voters. And, that's why we saw this explosion of voter suppression efforts following the election of the first black president in 2008.

Lindsay: Can you expand on that idea of election integrity and how voter suppression is compromising it?

Ari Berman: Well, if people, number one, believe that their vote won't count, and number two, if people actually try to vote and they're not able to, and I've told dozens and dozens of these stories in Wisconsin, and North Carolina, and Texas, and other states. What undermines election integrity more than people who qualified to vote, who are legitimate, who have voted their entire lives not being able to vote? So, you have a situation now where Republicans basically believe something that's completely untrue, which is that voter fraud is incredibly widespread, and many Democratic leaning voters have a completely different experience, which is they feel that voter suppression is real. They've experienced it. So, both sides now have no real faith in the political process, because one side is peddling a gigantic lie, and the other side is feeling the real world ramifications of the lie in terms of their right to vote being suppressed.

Lindsay: What happened at the Supreme Court in 2013 to make it easier for the GOP to suppress

votes?

Ari Berman: Well, the Supreme Court gutted a key part of the Voting Rights Act and they ruled that states with the longest histories of discrimination no longer needed to approve their voting changes with the federal government. What that meant was that parts of 16 states no longer had to approve their voting changes with the federal government and it meant that states with the longest histories of discrimination, North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Alabama, could put new voter suppression measures in place without having to approve it with the federal government, meaning that laws went into effect and then it was very, very difficult to challenge them. So, that Supreme Court decision took away the most effective tool the federal government had to stop voting discrimination in the places where it historically had occurred most often.

Lindsay: What reason did the Supreme Court give for taking these states off the prior approval list?

Ari Berman: Well, basically what Chief Justice John Roberts, who wrote the majority opinion said was that the country had changed dramatically since 1965 when the Voting Rights Act had passed, but that the Voting Rights Act had not, that it continued to treat states like it was 1965, like voter suppression was flourishing, when in fact, things had changed immeasurably for the better. Then, what Ruth Bader Ginsburg said in her dissent was that was like throwing away your umbrella, because you weren't getting wet. It was still going to rain. Voting discrimination had not been eradicated and just because there was higher black turnout, more black office holders, doesn't mean that you got rid of the law that made all of that possible. In fact, what happened after the Supreme Court decision, the fact that 22 states had new voting restrictions in effect for the first time in the 2016 election, I think was the best rejoinder to what Chief Justice John Roberts was saying.

We saw voter suppression in the southern states that were covered by the Voting Rights Act and we saw voter suppression in the northern states that historically had not done voter suppression nearly as much.

Lindsay: John Roberts is a pretty plugged in guy in terms of GOP politics. Do you think it's conceivable that he wouldn't have known that there were efforts afoot in the Republican party to undertake major voter disenfranchisement?

Ari Berman: He had to be aware of it, but I think it goes back much longer. I write about Roberts in my book "Give Us the Ballot", about the history of the Voting Rights Act. Roberts was someone who in the 1980's served in the Reagan Administration at the time that the Reagan Administration was trying to weaken the Voting Rights Act and other civil rights laws. There was a big fight with the congress over whether to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act, because parts of the Voting Rights Act were temporary, and had to be renewed. And, Roberts became the point person in the Reagan justice department for arguing that the Voting Rights Act either should not be reauthorized or should be as weak as possible. So, I mean, ever since the 1980's, he was out to get this law. He said in his words, that the Voting Rights Act would lead to the largest possible intrusions into affairs of the states. He said it would violate so-called "Norms of colorblindness" by prioritizing African Americans over whites. So, he's someone who has been ideologically

out to get the Voting Rights Act for over three decades.

So, I don't think you can read his opinion without realizing that the history that this guy has in terms of opposition to the Voting Rights Act and other civil rights laws.

Lindsay: Why was Wisconsin such a pivotal state in the 2016 election?

Ari Berman: Well, Wisconsin has been a pivotal state for a long time. If you look at the 2000 and 2004 elections, Wisconsin was decided by fewer than 10,000 votes. I don't think people realize that it was going to be so close in 2016, because Barack Obama won the state by seven points in 2012, but there had been a lot of close elections. Close elections for Scott Walker, recall elections, close elections for the US Senate, and I think Republicans knew that they had to flip one of those blue states that went for Obama, and Wisconsin was one of the key places they wanted to flip. And, that effort really began with the election of Scott Walker in 2011 and the Republican majorities when they passed laws to gut unions, which took away the number one arm of the Democratic party. They passed laws to gerrymander the map, so that Republicans would have the majority in the legislature and congress for the next decade. And, they passed this voter ID law and other changes to make it harder for Democratic leaning voters to be able to vote.

So, they were very systematic about what they were trying to do. They were trying to gut all of the institutions and all of the people that supported the Democratic party in the state of Wisconsin. So, what Scott Walker and the Republican legislature did in 2011 really bore fruit in the 2016 election when they were able to flip the state at a time that no one thought it would go red.

Lindsay: Voter suppression didn't get a lot of media attention, but it wasn't exactly a secret that this was going on to politically involved people. Why didn't Hillary Clinton do more to go to Wisconsin and shore up her own support, if she knew that all these measures were going to be on the ballot to be depressing the Democratic vote?

Ari Berman: That's a very good question. I mean, clearly, the Clinton campaign underestimated the influence of voter suppression and obviously their polling was off in terms of believing that she had a large lead in Wisconsin, but I don't fault Hillary so much as I fault the media for not covering this, because there were 25 presidential debates, and there wasn't a single question about the gutting of the Voting Rights Act or the attack on voting rights. But, there were debates during the primary in Wisconsin and the issue of voter suppression never came up in Wisconsin. The fact that they had a voter ID law, the fact that the laws were changing. And, Republicans were very clear about what they wanted to do. A Republican congressman Glenn Grothman said on the night of Wisconsin's primary on April 5th, 2016, that the voter ID law in his words was "Going to help Hillary Clinton win the state of Wisconsin". He was asked "Why do you think a Republican is going to win the state of Wisconsin?" And, he said, "Hillary Clinton is the weakest candidate Democrats would have ever nominated and now we have photo ID, and photo ID is going to make a difference, as well."

There was a trial and during the trial it came out that in closed door meetings, Republicans said behind closed doors they wanted to pass the voter ID law in their

words, "Because of neighborhoods around Milwaukee and college campuses across the state." Meaning, African American voters in Milwaukee and college students were targeted by this law. And, it was very obvious what was going on here. It didn't take a rocket scientist to try to figure out the purpose of this voter ID law. And, a lot of people just ignored it until it was too late.

Lindsay: When you think about it, photo ID's are really expensive and if you're a person of a certain amount of means, that's just part of the cost of doing business of adulting. But, if you're not, doesn't that amount to a poll tax?

Ari Berman: It does. And, that's a really good point, because I hear it all the time. Everyone has an ID, you need an ID to get on a plane, you need an ID to buy sudafed, yada, yada, yada. And, I would say two things. Number one, Wisconsin shows that about 10% of the electorate according to a federal court didn't have strict forms of voter ID, which means a Wisconsin state ID or a Driver's License. Secondly, some people had a really hard time getting these ID's, because they didn't have underlying documents like a birth certificate, which many people don't have or don't have on them, that you needed to get an ID. Third, everyone I talked to had some sort of ID, but they didn't have the ID that was accepted. For example, I met a ton of people that moved from Illinois to Wisconsin, particularly African American voters who moved from Chicago to Milwaukee or Madison. They had Illinois IDs. They had Illinois photo IDs. They had Illinois drivers licenses, but they couldn't use that to vote in Wisconsin. And, if they wanted to get a Wisconsin ID, they had to trade in their Illinois ID, they had to pay money for a driver's license.

So, there were issues they had. They had to try to get their birth certificates. If people had mistakes on their birth certificates, if people were born in segregated south, they never had a birth certificate. They were in this crazy chicken and egg scenario where they couldn't get the ID they needed, because they didn't have the underlying documents they needed to get the ID. So, I think it requires a little bit of peeling back the curtain. And, as you mentioned, a little bit of empathy to realize that people in poverty, people who move, people who are struggling, they face these real impediments to get a new ID that someone like you or I might not have.

Lindsay: Can you tell us the story of Zack who was one of the figures in your piece? I found his story really moving.

Ari Berman: Yeah, so when I went to Madison in September of 2016, I met a guy by the name of Zack Moore who I met through Molly McGrath who was an organizer helping people get voter ID's, and Zack was a guy who had moved from Chicago to Madison. He was working as a landscaper. He broke his leg. He became homeless and he wanted to be able to vote, and he had the Illinois photo ID, so he had a photo ID, but he went to the DMV to try to get a Wisconsin ID, and there was a sign at the DMV that said, "No Birth Certificate, No Problem" you could get a voter ID, literally a sign right where he was. And, he said, "I want to get a Wisconsin ID, I have my social security number, I have proof of residency, I have my Illinois ID, but I don't have my birth certificate". And, they told him at the DMV he had to go back to Illinois and get his birth certificate, even though the sign at the DMV literally said, "No birth certificate, no problem". And, this

was happening all across the state of Wisconsin.

Molly McGrath, the organizer I mentioned, her and her mother went undercover, went to all of these different DMVs and said, if we don't have birth certificates can we get an ID? And, basically they were told no, you can't get one. Or B, you have to pay for one. Or C, it will take six to eight weeks to get one. Well, this was late September at that point. The election was going to be over in six to eight weeks. So, there was really a systematic violation. Not just of the laws, of implementation of the law. And, when I wrote about this for The Nation, and it was also written about in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, a federal judge actually ordered an investigation into the state of Wisconsin, and basically told them, "You guys have done nothing to help people get voter IDs. Either you intentionally didn't do it, or the training was so bad you guys had no idea what was going on." So, this to me is the real evidence of voter suppression. People tried to get IDs, people tried to vote, and weren't able to.

It wasn't like they were just a bunch of people sitting around with no ID who made no effort to get one. People went in some cases to extraordinary lengths, making multiple trips to the DMV to try to get their IDs and they weren't able to.

Lindsay: And, some of the people you talked to were homeless or insecurely housed, so this was a big sacrifice on their part to be spending time they needed to survive trying to exercise their basic democratic rights.

Ari Berman: And, the DMV was telling people who were homeless, "Go back to your home state and get your ID", I mean these people don't even have somewhere to sleep in Madison let alone the ability to get on a bus, go back to Illinois, come back to Wisconsin, find their documents. I mean, I didn't know where my birth certificate was, Lindsay, until I got married out of the country at 30 years old. So, I mean, I think a lot of people just have no idea where their birth certificates are, have no idea where a lot of these underlying documents are, and people have had to go to extraordinary lengths to try to get them. And, all of these people were qualified to vote. All of these people were registered to vote. All of these people had other forms of ID. There are much easier ways to try to verify who people are than what the state of Wisconsin did, and we know for a fact, indisputably, people were prevented from voting who otherwise should have been able to vote.

Lindsay: How much did voter turnout decline in Wisconsin between 2012 and 2016?

Ari Berman: There was a really serious decline in voter turnout. Wisconsin had always basically been right behind Minnesota when it came to voter turnout. It was number two in the nation of voter turnout in 2012 and in 2008. And, the 2016 voter turnout fell three point three percent in Wisconsin. But, it fell in some places more than others. So, there was half the decline in turnout was in the city of Milwaukee, where 70% of the state's African American population lives. If you look at the statistics, in white middle class areas of the city, voter turnout barely fell. In predominantly black and low income areas of the city, voter turnout fell by up to 30% and the head of elections there said that he believes that was because of the voter ID law in large part, and he told me that he believes that it changed the outcome in the state of Wisconsin.

There was also a study by the University of Wisconsin, a very carefully done study, that surveyed people who didn't vote in 2016 in Milwaukee and Madison, the two most Democratic areas of the state, and they asked them why. And, one in 10 people who didn't vote in 2016 cited the voter ID law as a reason why they didn't vote. So, that's up to 23,000 people who were prevented from voting in two counties alone, because of this law. And, Donald Trump only won the state by 22,000 votes. So, I don't think you can do a perfect apples to apples comparison, but we know from both my reporting, from studies, from talking to election officials, that the number of people disenfranchised is in the thousands in Wisconsin.

Lindsay: So, he won by about 23,000 votes and there were like 45,000 votes that were discovered to have been suppressed by the study?

Ari Berman: I mean, if you look at the University of Wisconsin's study, they found that up to 23,000 people were deterred or prevented from voting in Milwaukee and Madison. If you extrapolate statewide, which is not a perfect scientific comparison, but if you extrapolate statewide, that's up to 45,000 people statewide who would've been prevented from voting. Now, they didn't do the study in all of the other counties in Wisconsin. There's obviously going to be some rural counties and some other place where people didn't have as much problems with the ID law, but I think it's also fair to say that there were places they didn't survey like in Racine or Kenosha or college campuses in other parts of the state that would've also had big issues with the voter ID law. So, I think it's very fair to say that tens of thousands of people were disenfranchised according to this study from the University of Wisconsin.

There's also other data points that show that voter ID laws, decreased turnout by two or three percent, which in a state like Wisconsin is enough to swing the outcome of the election.

Lindsay: Are there any other states that voter suppression might have thrown to Trump?

Ari Berman: Well, I think there's other states in which voter suppression played a role in the election and it's hard to point out exactly what the overall impact on the outcome was, but I just talk about a few places. Like, in North Carolina, where they closed a tremendous amount of polling places in majority black areas. Or, in Ohio, where they eliminated early voting and purged people from the voting roles. Or, in Florida, where they just disenfranchised ex-offenders. So, if you serve your time and get out of jail, you just can't vote in Florida. And, one in four African Americans in the state weren't even able to participate in the 2016 election, because of that. So, there were a lot of under the radar changes that I think had an impact, but I think the greatest impact was in Wisconsin, because of how close it was and how bad the law was.

Lindsay: But, you're not arguing that that was the only factor. There were other reasons why Democratic turnout might have been down in Wisconsin besides voter suppression, right?

Ari Berman: Oh, absolutely. And, I mean, I say that in the piece. It's funny, I've gotten really good

feedback to the article, but a lot of people are like, "There's other factors!" And, I'm like, there's literally a sentence in my piece that says there was no one thing that changed the election. And, I say there was Jim Comey, there was racism, there was sexism, there was Russian interference, there was a lack of enthusiasm for Hillary Clinton, there was a backlash to the first black president. There were tons of factors, but the whole purpose of writing the piece was to say voter suppression was a factor, and so many people are arguing that it had no impact on the election, and that's just completely, demonstrably false. It absolutely had an impact on the election. We know from talking to voters. We know from talking to election officials. We know from numerous academic studies and other data points that have been done. And, even if voter suppression had no impact on the election, we know for a fact that many qualified Americans were prevented from voting in the year 2016, more than 50 years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act. And, I found that outrageous and scandalous. So, that needs a lot more attention.

Lindsay: Absolutely. And, when it's that close, even it's a small factor, any one of the small factors could've tipped the balance.

Ari Berman: Absolutely. And, the thing that's annoying to me is that people are treating as an either/or thing. Saying that it was lack of enthusiasm for Hillary Clinton that reduced turnout. Well, that's absolutely true. But, think about this. If you're already not that excited to vote and then you know that you have to find your birth certificate and go to the DMV and pay for an ID or try to negotiate a free ID, and you're already not that motivated to vote, well that might tip it for you to say forget it, I'm just not going to vote at all, because I don't want to deal with this process. So, people don't think like, "Oh, well, I would've voted, but I didn't have ID" or "Yes, I'm going to vote, because I have ID". I think it's a little bit more complicated in the calculus. And, the whole thing was to put up enough barriers just to dissuade people from participating. And, I will say it wasn't just voter ID. Wisconsin made it harder to register to vote. They made it harder to count absentee ballots. They eliminated deputies that did statewide voter registration charts.

Scott Walker and the Republican legislature passed 33 different election changes that undermined democracy in that state. So, Wisconsin, which I think is really important to note, is a state that has historically been one of the leaders in voting rights, was one of the worst states for voting rights in the last election. And, that to me is what's so interesting about Wisconsin. It's not North Carolina, it's not Alabama, it's not Texas. It's not a state that has the same kind of history. So, as I say in the piece, if voter suppression works in Wisconsin, which has a history of high participation, a history of high turnout, I think it could work anywhere in the country.

Lindsay: Why do you think there's so much resistance from these otherwise progressive people to even consider that voter suppression played a role?

Ari Berman: I think a lot of people are uncomfortable talking about the partisanship of it. I think a lot of people in the media are uncomfortable saying Republicans are trying to disenfranchise Democrats. I think a lot of people are uncomfortable with the racial dynamics of it, saying that in many cases, white Republicans are trying to disenfranchise Black and brown Democrats. I think that some wings of the party just want to blame

Hillary Clinton for everything, as opposed to saying that there are other facts at work here. So, I mean, it's very easy to just sit back and blame Hillary Clinton for not going to Wisconsin. And, there's lots of fair criticism to make of Hillary Clinton and the Democratic party. But, at the same time, I think we have to be honest that there were other factors that shaped the election. And, I think if the Democratic party doesn't make this a big issue, it's going to get worse in 2018 and 2020, because now Republicans have control of the courts. So, the courts are going to be less empathetic to these laws.

We have Trump's election integrity commission spreading all these lies about voter fraud to implement new measures with the President of the United States peddling the largest of voter fraud lies of all, and a lot of Republicans believing it, believing that 3 to 5 million voted legally. So, I think this is a wake-up call for Democrats, that if they don't really organize and not just Democrats, but outside groups, too. If they don't organize against these laws well ahead of time, it's going to get a whole lot worse in the next election or the next two elections.

Lindsay: What's the American Legislative Exchange Council and what role has it played in shaping various states' election laws?

Ari Berman: The American Legislative Exchange Council, otherwise known as ALEC, is basically a consortium where state legislatures are paired with corporations to write model bills. So, you know, all of the major corporations give a lot of money to ALEC, and they attend conferences with state legislatures, and they basically draft legislation for them to introduce. And, after the 2008 election, ALEC drafted mock voter ID legislation and virtually identical legislation was being introduced in Wisconsin, Texas, and Pennsylvania all across the country based on the ALEC mock legislation. So, when I see state legislatures all of a sudden restricting voting rights, restricting women's rights to choose, attacking unions, state legislatures are that not that organized. For every state to be introducing virtually identical pieces of legislation, someone has to be behind that effort and ALEC has been behind a lot of these efforts in various states.

Lindsay: How have the priorities changed now that Jeff Sessions has taken over the Justice Department in terms of voting rights?

Ari Berman: Well, the Justice Department has just completely changed positions. They've gone from under President Obama fighting voter ID laws and fighting voter purges, and fighting cutbacks in early voting to supporting them. And, there are two really important cases, the Texas voter ID law and the Ohio voter purge case, which is going before the Supreme Court where Jeff Sessions' Justice Department has already reversed the Obama administration's opposition to these kinds of things. Not only that, Jeff Sessions said in an oversight hearing for the senate that the DOJ is coordinating with Chris Kobach's "Election Integrity Commission", which, Kobach's commission is supposed to be advisory commission, they're not supposed to be working, at least without full disclosure, with the Justice Department, with the Department of Homeland Security. So, it also seems like there is some sort of coordination between the Justice Department and Kobach's commission, which I think is very worrisome.

Sessions is also someone himself with a very long history of opposition to voting rights

ever since he was a US attorney in Alabama in the 1980's and he actually prosecuted African Americans for trying to help people cast absentee ballots, which was a very, very controversial trial at the time, and one of the reasons why he was blocked as a federal judge in 1986. So, I think the Justice Department under Sessions is one of the clearest examples of a real sea change between the Obama Administration and the Trump Administration.

Lindsay: Can you elaborate on the Kobach Voting Integrity Commission and why it's leading people to essentially self-disenfranchise out of fear?

Ari Berman: Well, people are concerned because the Kobach Commission has requested voter data from all 50 states and people are very concerned what they're going to do with that voter data, how secure it is, whether it's going to be used to spread lies about voter fraud, whether it's going to be used to put in place new restrictions on voting. I just had a new article that came out this week about Chris Kobach's Crosscheck program. So, 32 states are part of this program called Crosscheck where they compare voter data among states to search for double voting. And, Crosscheck is an incredibly insecure program. It has huge security flaws. States are uploading their voter data on not-encrypted FTP sites, or FTP sites that could easily be hacked. They're sending around emails and passwords to access these voter systems just in plain texts of emails, like you and I are exchanging to set up this interview, which could easily be hacked.

They are releasing names of people that are flagged by Crosscheck without redacting the information. So, this is all the reasons why Americans are afraid of the trouble of the commission having their voter data. I think it's an absolute mistake to un-register. I think that's exactly what Kobach wants you to do. At the same time, I have a huge amount of fear about why this commission is requesting this voter data, because we've never seen the federal government request voter data from all 50 states before, and Kobach has such a spotty record both in running his Crosscheck program and just in passing voter suppression laws in Kansas that I think people are right to be worried about this.

Lindsay: You mention in the cover story that the ACLU and various voting rights groups are changing their strategy and not just looking to the courts to fix these problems. Can you describe what else they're doing now?

Ari Berman: This is a really important recognition, that the courts are not enough, that with more and more Trump appointees, it's going to be harder to challenge these laws in the courts. So, the ACLU has launched a 50 state effort to try to promote voting rights at the local and state level. It's their "Let People Vote" campaign. So, basically every ACLU chapter now is working on voting rights in some capacity. And, the membership of the ACLU has quadrupled since the election to 1.6 million members. So, they have a lot of people that can work on this. They've also hired Molly McGrath, who is an organizer I profiled in the piece, who helps people get voter IDs. And, she's an extraordinary person that has done a really tremendous amount of work. But, it's so difficult to do this kind of work. People who have issues with their IDs, they don't have birth certificates, they don't have stable residencies sometimes, they don't have financial means, and to try to get these people their documents, take them to the DMV is incredibly labor intensive. So, I think it's great the ACLU has Molly, but I think there needs to be thousands of

Molly's all across the country to help people get IDs, because of the barriers that are being erected.

Lindsay: Ari, that's all the time we have for today. Thank you so much for coming on the program. For those of you just tuning in, my guest today has been Ari Berman of Mother Jones magazine, and you can read his cover story on voter suppression and the Wisconsin election on our website.

Ari Berman: Thanks so much, Lindsay.

Lindsay: And, now it's time for recommended reading, a handpicked selection to make you a lean, mean debating machine for Thanksgiving dinner. Today's selection is by Zachary Fryer Biggs in Newsweek, and it's called The Hillary Clinton Uranium One Conspiracy Theory Doesn't Make any Sense. Read this and watch Joy Reid's MSNBC take down both linked on The Breach webpage and you'll be ready to put your conservative relatives in their place on the big day. That's it for recommended reading.

The Breach is produced by Nora Hurley for Rewire Radio. Our executive producer is Marc Faletti. Our theme music is Dark Alliance performed by Darcy James Argue's Secret Society. And, I'm your host, Lindsay Beyerstein. Follow Rewire at [Rewire_News](#) for the latest on the issues that matter most. See you next week.