

Voter challenges result in few tossed ballots

Texas group targeted 360K Ga. voters but just a few dozen rejected.

By Mark Niese Jan 15, 2021

After a vast effort to challenge the eligibility of 360,000 Georgia voters, election officials rejected just a few dozen ballots, undermining suspicions of significant voting fraud.

The allegations of ineligible voters came from the Texas-based group True the Vote, which worked with members of the Republican Party in an attempt to disqualify ballots of voters whose names showed up on lists showing they had moved.

Bipartisan election boards across the state found few illegitimate voters as they finished certifying results of the U.S. Senate runoffs Friday. In Forsyth County, where over 5,000 voters were challenged, county election officials disqualified just six absentee ballots from people who had moved to different states.

“I believe the election was fair. For the most part, people are very honest, but that’s not to say there wasn’t somebody who tried it with us. I’m going to assume they didn’t,” Forsyth County Elections Board Chairwoman Barbara Luth said. “I’m just glad it’s all over.”

True the Vote relied on a Georgia law that allows residents to challenge the eligibility of voters, using change-of-address forms filed with the U.S. Postal Service as evidence.

Elections officials said very few of those voters cast ballots, likely because they truly had moved away. Many of the other voters retained their eligibility because they remained Georgia residents after changing their addresses because they were students, members of the military or had temporarily relocated.

“True the Vote’s effort here was one of the most bold-faced voting suppression attempts in Georgia history. It’s just completely outrageous,” said Lauren Groh-Wargo, CEO for the voting rights group Fair Fight Action. “This was just a red herring attempt to sow more disinformation and that all this voter fraud was going to happen.

Well, none of that did happen.”

Fair Fight had sued True the Vote, alleging it was engaging in voter intimidation. True the Vote then filed a counterclaim that said it was the one being intimidated.

“Fair Fight Action’s legal attack sought to chill the efforts of True The Vote and Georgia voters across the state who petitioned their counties to protect the right to vote for all legal voters in the Jan. 5 runoff election,” True the Vote President Catherine Engelbrecht said in a statement earlier this week. She didn’t return a message seeking comment Friday.

Across Georgia, at least 56 counties voted against moving forward with consideration of voter challenges, finding there wasn’t probable cause to reject ballots based on change-of-address forms alone. Seven other counties considered the challenges before their boards of elections decided whether to accept ballots.

In Muscogee County, the elections board discarded just one ballot after a resident had challenged over 4,000 voters. About 30 of those 4,000 voters cast ballots in the runoff, and the one that was discarded came from a woman who acknowledged she had moved to Nevada but told election officials she didn’t realize she couldn’t retain her registration in Georgia.

“Many of the challenges were actually people who have relocated to another state and don’t intend to be voters in Georgia,” Muscogee Elections Director Nancy Boren said. “Honestly, I think it’s confusion on the part of the voters.”

Banks County’s elections board rejected 31 ballots of voters who didn’t return paperwork verifying their residency, Elections Supervisor Andra Phagan said.

The county elections board accepted 25 other ballots from voters who provided documentation.

“We’re trying to make sure they are here and registered where they should be,” Phagan said.

In Ben Hill County, election officials counted all ballots because the person who had brought the challenge to voter eligibility withdrew it, according to board meeting minutes. It’s unclear how many of the 152 Ben Hill voters who had been challenged cast ballots.

Combined, election officials rejected at least 38 ballots in Georgia. Election boards in Jasper, Pike, Upson and Wheeler counties were also considering voter challenges, but it wasn’t clear Friday how they were resolved.