

670 ballots in a precinct with 276 voters and how the vote system in the USA is totally hacked

BY CHRISTINE CONDON
ccondon@mcclatchydc.com

WASHINGTON Habersham County's Mud Creek precinct in northeastern Georgia had 276 registered voters ahead of the state's primary elections in May.

But 670 ballots were cast, according to the Georgia secretary of state's office, indicating a 243 percent turnout.

The discrepancy, included in a number of sworn statements and exhibits filed as part of a federal lawsuit against the state by election security activists, comes amid swelling public concern for the security of Georgia's voting systems. Georgia is one of four states that uses voting machines statewide that produce no paper record for voters to verify, making them difficult to audit, experts say.

And cybersecurity experts have warned that there were security flaws on the state election website leading up to the 2016 contest that permitted the download and manipulation of voter information.

Breaking News

Be the first to know when big news breaks

Enter Email Address



SIGN UP

The court filings highlight various issues with Georgia's 16-year-old voting machines, as well as the system that runs them and handles voter registration information.

In one sworn statement, a voter explains that she and her husband, who were registered to vote at the same address, were assigned different polling places and different city council districts. In another, a voting machine froze on Election Day.


In several instances, voters showed up at their polling places as listed on the secretary of state's website, only to be told they were supposed to vote elsewhere.

An Atlanta Democrat's voting machine provided him a ballot including the 5th Congressional District, for which longtime Rep. John Lewis ran unopposed, instead of his 6th Congressional District ballot, which featured a competitive Democratic race.

Some issues, like the freezing machines, could be chalked up to the the age of the polling infrastructure, said Harri Hursti, a computer programmer who studies election cybersecurity.

But others, like the incorrect ballots, could have been caused by anything from a clerical error to a malicious manipulation of voter data, said Hursti, who is also the organizer for the Voting Village at hacking conference DEF CON, where participants demonstrate hacking into some state voting machines.

It's possible that there's a connection between the security issues reported at Georgia's Center for Election Systems and the issues chronicled in the court statements, but an immediate switch to paper ballots is necessary regardless, Hursti said.



“But the connection is not needed,” he said. “You don’t need to have a smoking gun to do the right thing.”

In a statement, the office of Georgia’s Secretary of State Brian Kemp defended the security of state elections.

“Alongside federal, local, and private sector partners, we continue to fight every day to ensure secure and accurate elections in Georgia that are free from interference. To this day, due to the vigilance, dedication, and hard work of those partners, our elections system and voting equipment remain secure,” spokeswoman Candice Broce wrote in an email.


Kemp has set up a bipartisan commission to look into changing state voting machines ahead of the 2020 elections, but not in time for the midterm elections this November.

RELATED STORIES FROM MCCLATCHY DC

Georgia election officials knew system had ‘critical vulnerabilities’ before 2016 vote

Timeline: A furor over Georgia’s election security

Marilyn Marks, the executive director of the Coalition for Good Government, which has led the charge against the state’s management of the election system, said the statements filed in federal court are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to voter complaints.



“We are submitting only a small sample from scores of known system malfunctions and irregularities,” she wrote in an email. “But those examples should raise alarms with officials, political parties, candidates and voters. Something is terribly wrong at a systemic level, and is not being taken seriously by Secretary Kemp, or the state and counties’ election boards charged with conducting secure elections.”

The court statements are the latest additions to the growing list of concerns surrounding Georgia’s election security.

In July, Justice Department Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s [indictment](#) indicated that Russian operatives charged with hacking into Democrats’ emails also visited county election websites in Georgia, among other states.

Kennesaw State University’s Center for Election Systems, which was responsible for running Georgia’s elections, was proven vulnerable by friendly cybersecurity experts both before and after the 2016 elections.

Voter information and other important data, which gets disseminated to polling places in Georgia’s 159 counties, was open to the public and could have been manipulated by bad actors, charged Logan Lamb, the first friendly hacker to notify the state of the issue. He sent that notification in August 2016, but the problem was not fully solved until March 2017.

Jasmine Clark, who will be on the ballot for Georgia’s House of Representatives in November, spent an extra half hour at her polling place on July 24. If she didn’t have that spare time, she may not have been able to vote at all, she said in her statement.

When Clark arrived at about 7:50 that morning, elections officials told her she’d gone to the wrong polling place, even though she hadn’t changed her registration information since 2016.



Inexplicably, she was told 25 minutes later that her name had appeared on the electronic poll book for that voting location, and she was able to cast her ballot.

“Unlike other people I met that day who were turned away, I had the flexibility to stay to fight for my right to vote in the right precinct on the correct ballot,” she said in her statement.

Duluth voter Dana Bowers experienced a similar problem. She was told, “Don’t worry Ms. Bowers, this has been happening all day,” according to her sworn declaration.

Bowers, who works as an advocacy coordinator in Josh McCall’s campaign for the 9th Congressional District, had checked her “My Voter Page” on the secretary of state’s office website before heading to the polls in July and found she’d been assigned a new precinct — number 100.

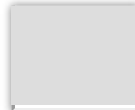
But when she arrived at what she thought was her new polling place, she was told she was still assigned her original polling place in precinct 96. She wound up filling out a provisional ballot that day. When she checked her “My Voter Page” after the election, she wrote in her statement, she was assigned to precinct 96 once more.

Other statements chronicled issues with the voting machines themselves.

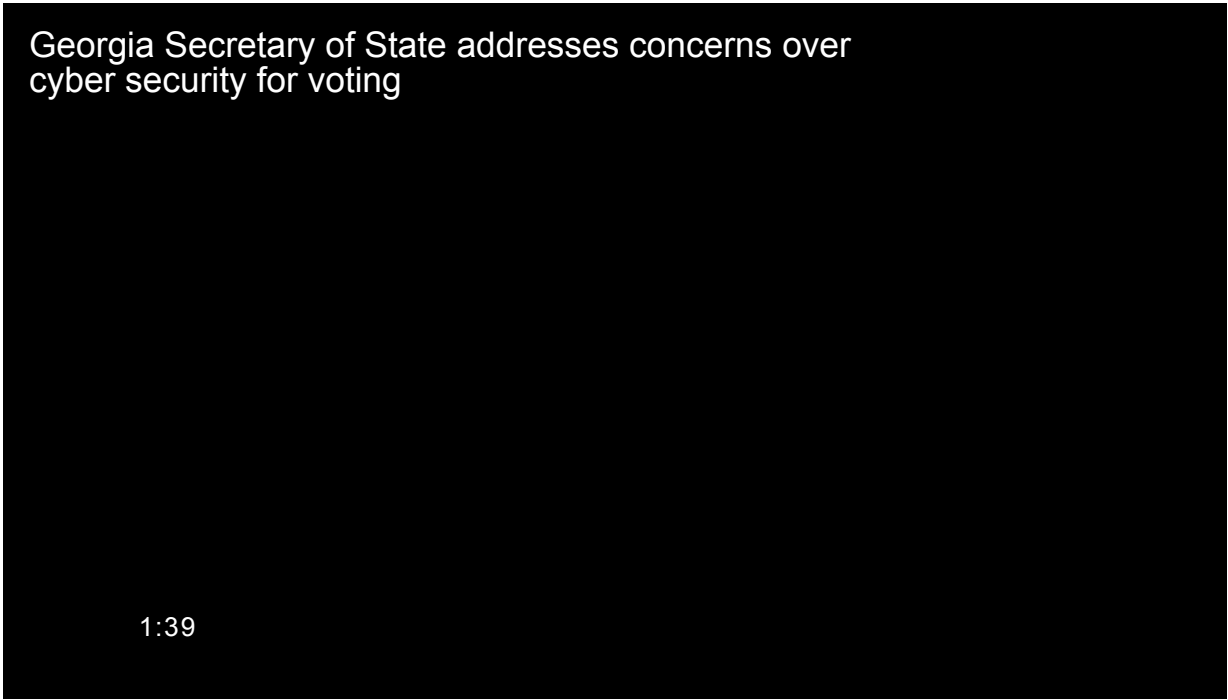
Bowers, for example, noticed that a machine was marked “Do Not Touch,” when she went to vote in July. One poll worker told her votes had been cast on the machine prior to its failure on Election Day.

After the polls closed, Bowser noticed the results tape from the machine showed it hadn’t collected any votes.

Two statements also indicated that the race in the 9th Congressional District were omitted from a results tape in one precinct of Hall County.



Hall County Elections Director Lori Wurtz later said there had been “no discrepancies” with the results.



Georgia Secretary of State, Brian Kemp, addresses concerns over cyber security for voting in Columbus before the Election Day.

By Ang Li

Christine Condon: @cchristine19

