

Trump, citing “voter fraud,” moves to escalate attacks on voting rights

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US President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he would be seeking a “major investigation” of alleged voting fraud. “Depending on results, we will strengthen up voting procedures!” he tweeted. In an interview with ABC News, Trump said that none of the allegedly illegal votes would have been cast for him. “They would all be for the other side,” he stated.

The promise of an investigation, which could be formally announced via executive order, follows days in which the president doubled down on his lies about a popular vote victory having been stolen from him by the casting of 3 to 5 million fraudulent votes.

Trump has reversed course on the subject of ballot rigging numerous times both before and after the vote last November 8. During the campaign, he charged that vote rigging was being planned to steal the election from him. After he won the electoral vote but lost the popular vote by a margin of almost 3 million, Trump dropped the subject briefly, but then returned to it with the lie that he would have won the popular vote if millions had not voted illegally.

When Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein called for vote recounts in several states that Trump won narrowly and were the source of his electoral vote margin, the president-elect’s lawyers told a court that “all available evidence suggests that the 2016 general election was not tainted by fraud or mistake.” Now Trump is reversing himself once again, with talk of fraud in “urban areas” of “big states.”

The shameful truth of the American electoral system is that of voter suppression, not voter fraud. Even in the most hotly contested presidential contest, less than 60 percent cast ballots, both because of voter ID laws and a host of other techniques designed to discourage turnout, as well as the widespread and justified alienation of most workers from the two-party election charade.

There is no evidence of significant voter fraud.

Secretaries of State in California, Virginia, Ohio and elsewhere said, in response to Trump’s latest claims, that cases of fraud were vanishingly rare. The Ohio official, a Republican who voted for Trump, said, according to the *New York Times*, that there were 667 allegations of fraud in the state in the 2012 and 2014 elections, of which only 149 were referred for further investigation.

The Pew Center for the States conducted a survey two years ago in which it found millions of names on the voter rolls that should not be there because citizens had died or moved. Since voting laws are administered on a state-by-state basis, duplication and inefficiencies are virtually inevitable, but they virtually never lead to voters seeking to cast ballots in two or more states, or casting a vote in the name of someone who has died. A recent report in the *Washington Post* documented a grand total of four cases of fraud out of 135 million votes cast nationwide. The author of the Pew report, David Becker, was quoted as saying, “It does exist, but it happens in very, very small numbers and nothing like what is claimed by the president.”

Ironically, considering Trump’s outrage over registrations in more than one state, it appears that Stephen Bannon, the neo-fascistic White House chief strategist and founding member of Breitbart News, is registered to vote in both New York and Florida.

Trump’s “investigation” could take the form of one conducted by the FBI or through the establishment of some form of commission or task force.

It is not fraud that is driving Trump, but rather the obsession to prove that he is the legitimate victor in the face of the widespread repudiation of the real estate billionaire and fascistic demagogue, a repudiation that was only partially reflected in his sizable loss of the popular vote and in the mass demonstrations that took place on January 21.

The bogus charges of voter fraud did not begin with

Trump. There is a long history of the charge being used to attack the voting rights of the working class, particularly among minorities and the poor who tend to vote Democratic. These attacks have escalated since the theft of the 2000 election, delivered to George W. Bush by a divided Supreme Court.

One of the most infamous examples took place during the second term of George W. Bush. The Justice Department, in actions orchestrated by Bush adviser Karl Rove, purged seven US attorneys because they were deemed insufficiently aggressive in pursuing unsubstantiated voter fraud allegations in New Mexico, Texas and a number of other states. The effort backfired and led to the resignation of Attorney General and longtime Bush protégé Alberto Gonzalez, followed soon after by the departure of Rove from the White House.

The failure of the Bush administration's efforts to encourage prosecutions was followed, over the past decade, by legislative efforts around the country to restrict voting rights via such measures as photo identification requirements. This relentless reactionary campaign was also reflected in the 2013 Supreme Court decision gutting the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Trump is thus part of an ongoing effort. His allegations reflect not merely the new president's own obsessions, but more significantly the deepening political crisis of the capitalist system. Hence, along with Trump's quest for "legitimacy," there is a search for new ways to disenfranchise a working class that is becoming angrier in the face of growing inequality and poverty.

Dale Ho, the head of the Voting Rights Project for the American Civil Liberties Union, has warned that a possible outcome of the investigation that Trump is promising is even more restrictions, in addition to the demand for photo identification before the right to vote can be exercised. In an op-ed in the *New York Times*, Ho points to Trump's ties to Kris Kobach, the Kansas secretary of state who supported a law requiring the presentation of citizenship papers when registering at an office of the Department of Motor Vehicles. The law was struck down in Federal District Court.

In yet another illustration of the hostility of the new administration to the basic democratic right to vote, the Justice Department filed a request within hours of Trump taking the oath of office last Friday requesting a delay in a scheduled hearing on a Texas lawsuit against the restrictive voter ID law in that state. A federal appeals court had already ruled the law unconstitutional. The Supreme Court announced several weeks ago its refusal to

hear the case, instead sending it back for hearings at the appellate level. The Obama administration had joined with the ACLU in challenging the Texas law. The new administration says it needs more time to review the case.

Former Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions, who is expected to win Senate confirmation as attorney general shortly, is known as a right-wing opponent of voting rights protections. He prosecuted several civil rights figures on voting fraud charges in the 1980s when he was the US attorney in western Alabama. Kristen Clarke, executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, attacked the request as "astonishing."

Trump's lies about voter fraud have aroused the indignation of numerous Democratic politicians. California Senator Dianne Feinstein, for instance, said, "We can't allow this attack on voting rights to continue, and it's shameful to see such debunked conspiracy theories emanating from the White House."

Feinstein's words are aimed at covering up the role of the Democrats—in depressing voter turnout, in accepting undemocratic gerrymandering of congressional districts and in some cases engaging in such practices themselves, and in their own continuous attacks on democratic rights. While critical of some of the voting restrictions because they affect segments of the population that tend to vote for Democrats, the party is no less committed than Trump to the defense of the interests of the corporate and financial elite.

It is the increasingly aristocratic and oligarchic character of American society that is the basic cause of the decay of democratic forms of rule and the assault on the most basic democratic right, the right to vote.



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