

Trump establishes commission to attack the right to vote

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President Donald Trump signed an executive order May 11 creating the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity, a bipartisan commission that on the pretext of investigating voter fraud will seek to justify new attacks on the right to vote. This follows Trump's false claims after the November 8 election that he lost the popular vote due to illegal voting by undocumented immigrants.

Trump won the Electoral College and the presidency, but lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by approximately 3 million votes. He declared in January that he would investigate voter fraud in the election, claiming that anywhere from 3 million to 5 million votes were cast by "illegals" and all of those votes went to his Democratic opponent.

"The commission will review policies and practices that enhance or undermine the American people's confidence in the integrity of federal elections, and provide the president with a report that identifies system vulnerabilities," stated Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House spokesperson. The order makes no mention of voter suppression or unwarranted restrictions on voting, but specifies only "improper" and "fraudulent" registration and voting as issues to be explored. The report is scheduled to be complete in 2018.

Several Democratic Party politicians and civil rights groups in the US have criticized the commission, arguing that "vote fraud" will be used as a pretext to justify voter suppression tactics. Some of them fear that the commission will recommend erecting new barriers to voting such as requiring photo ID cards at the polls. Such measures tend to hinder voting by minorities and youth, who disproportionately lack such ID, and who tend to favor Democrats.

Much of the suspicion about this commission is based

on the selection of Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach as its vice chairman. With Vice President Mike Pence named as chairman, but unlikely to spend much time on it, Kobach will be the real driving force of the commission's work.

Kobach is notorious as a proponent of anti-immigrant laws and efforts to make it more difficult for minorities and youth to vote. He was one of the instigators of Arizona's SB 1070, which requires police to determine a person's immigration status where there is "reasonable suspicion" that they are undocumented.

He also pushed through a Kansas law that required new voters to produce a passport, birth certificate, or naturalization papers as proof of citizenship. A federal court struck down the state law last year, finding that it had deprived 18,000 state residents of their constitutional right to vote, while not a single "illegal immigrant" voter was detected or prosecuted.

Last month Kobach finally won his first case against an alleged illegal voter, more than six years after taking office in Kansas, and after dozens of elections and millions of votes cast in the state.

Some Democratic state officials have been induced to join the commission and justify its title as "bipartisan," including New Hampshire Secretary of State Bill Gardner and Maine Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap. Dunlap stated that the commission should go forward and show that the president's claims will remain unfounded. "I'm as far away politically as you can get to the positions of the President and Vice President, but they're elected and in office. Give them the benefit of the doubt," he said.

Past research has shown that voter fraud is negligible and is so insignificant that it has virtually no influence over the outcome of elections. Senator Dianne Feinstein, who sits on the Senate Judiciary Committee,

stated that “there’s simply no evidence of widespread voter fraud in this country. Period.” The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a Freedom of Information Act request seeking whatever information the Trump administration is using as a basis for creating this commission in the first place.

Nathaniel Persily, a professor of political science at Stanford, who performed such research for a similar commission in 2012, told the *New York Times* that “there are problems in the registration system that don’t translate into fraud, there are sporadic and very rare instances of fraud, and voter impersonation is the rarest of all. The notion that there is widespread voting by undocumented immigrants or other ineligible voters has been studied repeatedly and found to be false.”



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