

Majority of states rebuff Trump voter fraud commission's request for data

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More than two dozen US states have refused to provide sensitive information on registered voters to the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity, citing privacy concerns or objecting outright to the composition and purpose of the commission. The body was appointed by Trump to promote his claims that widespread vote fraud accounts for his loss of the popular vote last year to Democrat Hillary Clinton.

The commission's vice chairman, Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, a Republican, sent a letter Wednesday to all 50 secretaries of state requesting information, including the full names of all registered voters, the last four digits of Social Security numbers, party affiliations, addresses, birth dates, history of felony convictions, military status, and voting history dating back to 2006. The letter notes that these records will "be made available to the public."

As of this writing, 29 states are not fully complying with the request, including California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, Virginia, Iowa, Arizona and Kentucky. Many states are entirely refusing to participate, while others are providing a minimum level of information that is already available to the public. The states that have entirely refused to participate represent 30.2 percent of the American population, while those only partially participating represent another 43.9 percent.

Kentucky Secretary of State Alison Lundergan Grimes, a Democrat, responded to the request by saying, "The president created his election commission based on the false notion that 'voter fraud' is a widespread issue—it is not. I do not intend to release Kentuckians' sensitive personal data to the federal government."

Mississippi Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann, a Republican, also refused to release any information, telling the voter fraud commission to "go jump in the Gulf of Mexico."

On Saturday, Trump took to Twitter to denounce the 29

states, writing, "Numerous states are refusing to give information to the very distinguished VOTER FRAUD PANEL. What are they trying to hide?"

A better question would be what is the purpose of the commission and what is it trying to accomplish, given that there is zero evidence of widespread in-person vote fraud in the United States—a circumstance where an individual who is not qualified to vote goes to the polls and succeeds in voting illegally.

The commission will create a vast database of all US registered voters, and then compare it to databases maintained by the Department of Homeland Security of undocumented immigrants. Given the nature of these databases, there is bound to be substantial overlap, in particular with common names in Hispanic and other immigrant communities, which will be presented as "proof" that millions of "illegals" are on the voting rolls and even casting ballots.

The database will also facilitate harassment of individual voters, mainly those with "foreign" surnames: Miguel Lopez, the registered voter in Texas, will have to prove he is not Miguel Lopez, the undocumented immigrant, and the effort required may discourage him from voting, which is the real purpose of the Trump administration campaign. Adding to the threat of voter suppression, of course, is the fear that, if citizen Miguel Lopez goes to the polls, he could be falsely identified as an "illegal," arrested and jailed in an Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention camp.

When Trump won the 2016 election through the Electoral College, it was already clear that he had lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by a landslide. The vote margin continued to rise to an unprecedented 2,868,691 votes when tallying was completed in late January. Before Trump, the largest such disparity came in 2000, when George Bush lost the popular vote to Al Gore by 543,895 votes, but was installed in office through the intervention

of a 5-4 majority of the Supreme Court.

Trump is widely hated by the American population and has the lowest approval ratings in the opening months of his tenure for any president in American history. Without any popular mandate to rule, he is seeking to deflect attention to the bogeyman of supposed “voter fraud.”

Thus, shortly after the election Trump tweeted, “In addition to winning the Electoral College in a landslide, I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally.” Then, after being sworn in as president, Trump allegedly told a private meeting of congressional leaders that he lost the popular vote due to 3-5 million illegal votes, an absurd claim for which he has provided no evidence.

The cynical character of Trump’s claims of voter fraud was most clearly expressed in his hostility to the recount efforts led by Green Party candidate Jill Stein in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Trump’s lawyers challenged each recount, writing in their official protest with Michigan’s Board of State Canvassers, “All available evidence suggests that the 2016 general election was *not* tainted by fraud or mistake.”

The real purpose of Trump’s Commission on Election Integrity, formed through a May executive order, is to serve as a catalyst to enact highly restrictive, antidemocratic voting laws and regulations. While the nominal head is Vice President Mike Pence, the driving force is vice chairman Kobach, an ultra-right hardliner on both immigration and voting rights.

Kobach has been one of the most outspoken promoters of voter ID laws, which by requiring a photo ID restrict voting access for the poor and working class, disproportionately impacting minority, immigrant and younger voters, who tend to favor Democrats.

Last week Trump added a new and equally noxious figure to the commission: Hans von Spakovsky, a former Justice Department lawyer in the Bush administration notorious for his opposition to extension or enforcement of the Voting Rights Act, and the originator of the claim of widespread “vote fraud” in US elections.

Based on such groundless claims, Republican state governments in 16 states required voters to show photo identification at the polls during the 2016 election. In Kansas, Kobach has pushed the requirements even further, demanding proof of citizenship, such as a passport or birth certificate, in order to even register to vote.

The United States is one of the few countries that maintains a separate “registration” process, rather than

simply allowing citizens to show up at the polls, identify themselves, and vote. Registration was instituted as one of many anti-democratic measures directed at excluding sections of the population from citizenship rights—African-Americans in the post-Civil War South, Native Americans in much of the West, newly arrived immigrants in some areas.

In reality, voter registration rolls are notoriously imprecise and inconsistent, since people change addresses, and sign their names differently, sometimes with a full middle name, sometimes with a middle initial, sometimes with none. The two capitalist parties routinely manipulate such data for anti-democratic purposes, using discrepancies in addresses or names to disqualify nominating petition signatures for their third-party opponents, for example. The Socialist Equality Party has had ample experience with such tactics, usually by Democratic Party office-holders and operatives, in Michigan, Illinois, Ohio and many other states.

The defects in the registration rolls, however, do not mean that vote fraud is rampant. One of the most comprehensive studies of voter fraud was conducted by Justin Levitt, a California law professor, who found only 31 “credible allegations” of voter impersonation out of 1 billion ballots cast from 2000 to 2014.

A study of the 2016 elections by New York University’s Brennan Center for Justice analyzed data from 42 election jurisdictions in 12 states, finding that officials flagged just 30 incidents of suspected non-citizen voting for further investigation or prosecution, out of roughly 23.5 million votes cast in those jurisdictions.

In the past, Kobach has cited a 2014 paper written by professors at Old Dominion University in Virginia, which estimated that 6.4 percent of non-citizens voted in the 2008 presidential election.

That study, however, was heavily scrutinized by the Harvard-run Cooperative Congressional Election Study, which called the analysis a “biased estimate” that resulted from a “measurement error.” That group concluded, “The likely percent of non-citizen voters in recent U.S. elections is 0.”



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