

Trump’s Claims About Noncitizens Voting Are False. We Can Prove It.

A number of states have undertaken investigations into noncitizen voting, cross-checking voter rolls with citizenship status, and found it virtually nonexistent.

FEBRUARY 5, 2026 • COMMENTARY

By **Stephen Richer**

SHARE



This article appeared in *The New York Times* on February 5, 2026.

↑ TOP

This week, President Trump **called** on his party to nationalize American elections, an unconstitutional move that he said would be justified because of the danger of noncitizens casting ballots. “These people were brought to our country to vote, and they vote illegally,” he said.

No president has so baldly proposed to intervene in state elections, but the charge that noncitizens are illegally casting ballots is sadly commonplace. Elon Musk **claims** on X, without evidence, that significant numbers of illegal immigrants vote. Rudy Giuliani erroneously **alleged** that my home state, Arizona, had allowed “probably about 250,000” votes from noncitizens in 2020, despite the fact that Arizona has long required proof of citizenship to vote in state elections.

Election officials usually respond to these allegations by pointing out that there are almost no prosecutions of fraudulent noncitizen voters. Reuters **has noted** that even the pro-Trump Heritage Foundation’s database of election crimes listed only 24 instances of noncitizens voting in U.S. elections from 2003 to 2023.

While these rebuttals are correct, they are incomplete: Just because something isn’t prosecuted doesn’t mean it doesn’t happen. Happily, there is new compelling evidence debunking the false claims. Recently, a number of states have undertaken investigations into noncitizen voting, cross-checking voter rolls with citizenship status, and found it virtually nonexistent.

A number of states have undertaken investigations into noncitizen voting, cross-checking voter rolls with citizenship status, and found it virtually nonexistent.

When confronted with allegations on noncitizens voting in Utah, Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson, the state’s top election official, **initiated** a monthslong review of Utah’s **approximately** 2.1 million registered voters. She and her team found one “confirmed noncitizen.” Just one. And that one noncitizen, while registered, had never voted.

Idaho, a state of one million voters, ran similar tests in 2024, and they **found** 36 “very likely” registered noncitizens. That may seem like a lot until you view it in light of claims that statewide elections are altered by such anomalies. Some, but not all, of those 36 people have previously voted, the secretary of state, Phil McGrane, said, but “out of the million-plus registered voters we started with, we’re down to 10 thousandths of a percent” of the overall count — not even close to affecting the outcome.

Louisiana’s **investigation** in 2025 netted some 390 noncitizen registrants, 79 of whom had voted in at least one election over the last several decades (out of 2.9 million registrants). Just a few weeks ago, Montana **found** 23 possible noncitizen registrants (out of approximately 785,000 people registered). And Georgia, in some ways the model for these investigations, **found** in its 2024 audit 20 registered noncitizens (out of 8.2 million registrations). In my four years in office in Maricopa County overseeing voter registration, I came across a total of two possible instances of noncitizens voting out of some 2.5 million registered voters.

Some politicians are trying to exploit even these small numbers. In Michigan, the Macomb County clerk, Anthony Forlini, who is running for the top election office in the state, the secretary of state, recently **announced** to great fanfare that he’d found 15 noncitizens on his county’s voter rolls of **over** 724,000 registered voters. The incumbent secretary of state, Jocelyn Benson, then tasked her team with investigating the 15 files. It **found** that three of the people were U.S. citizens, four were previously removed from voter rolls, four were under further investigation and four do seem to be noncitizens.

These investigations affirm what is simply common sense. People largely aren’t willing to risk their status in the United States — the land of economic opportunity — for the ability to cast one more vote out of hundreds of thousands or millions in a state and hundreds of millions in the country.

The investigations also suggest that many politicians and public interest groups, all of which have access to these reports, may not actually care that much about election security. The constant talk of noncitizen voting is more likely about scoring political points and bolstering fund-raising.

Playing politics with the idea of fraudulent voters and stolen elections comes at a real cost to American confidence in our elections. It’s an affront to our democracy and to all those who work to deliver free and fair elections. It’s also an ominous sign for where things may be heading this year.

For President Trump, the myth of noncitizens voting is part of the broader story he’s concocted to avoid accepting that he lost to Joe Biden in 2020. But it also appears to be about this fall’s election. Mr. Trump may well intend to send the F.B.I. to run elections in Fulton County, Ga., or the Department of Homeland Security to seize ballot tabulators from Los Angeles County.

I don’t think it’s likely he will do so. But I also wouldn’t have predicted that the F.B.I. would take hundreds of boxes of 2020 election materials from Fulton County, as it did last week. And I certainly wouldn’t have predicted that Republicans would attempt to derail the electoral count on Jan. 6, 2021.

Everyone — Democrats and Republicans — should use the new state-level proof that noncitizen voting is virtually nonexistent to push back against the real danger to our democracy: craven politicians using the issue to undermine our free and fair elections.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stephen Richer

Senior Practice Fellow in American Democracy, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School

Stay Connected to Cato

Sign up for the newsletter to receive periodic updates on Cato research, events, and publications.

[View All Newsletters](#)



1000 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20001-5403

202-842-0200

[CONTACT US](#)

[PRIVACY](#)

ABOUT

[Mission, Vision, and Principles](#)

[Leadership](#)

[Public Affairs](#)

[Financials, Funding, and Independence](#)

[Annual Reports](#)

[Congressional Fellowship Program](#)

[Careers](#)

BLOG

[CATO STORE](#)

DONATE

[Ways to Give](#)

[Partner Benefits](#)

[Planned Giving](#)

[Meet the Development Team](#)

EVENTS

[Upcoming](#)

[Past](#)

[Event FAQs](#)

EXPERTS

[Policy Scholars](#)

[Adjunct Scholars](#)

[Fellows](#)

PERIODICALS

[Cato Handbook for Policymakers](#)

[Cato Supreme Court Review](#)

[Economic Freedom of the World](#)

[Free Society](#)

[Human Freedom Index](#)

[Regulation](#)

PUBLICATIONS

[Books](#)

[Commentary](#)

[Public Filings](#)

[Studies](#)

[Survey Reports and Polling](#)

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

[Internships](#)

[Research Associate Program](#)

[Cato University](#)