

Some Answers About Indiana's Voter Registration Probe

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Indiana State Police are investigating possible [voter registration](#) fraud in 56 of the state's 92 counties in a probe that began in August. The investigation is focusing on the efforts of a Washington, D.C.-based voter mobilization group, Patriot Majority USA, which denies any wrongdoing and says it is being unfairly targeted for political reasons. The probe expanded Thursday to nearly two-thirds of the state's counties only days before Tuesday's deadline to register to vote in the state.

WHAT ARE INDIANA STATE POLICE INVESTIGATING?

State Police spokesman Capt. Dave Bursten says the agency began its investigation in late August when it was contacted by voter registration officials in Hendricks County, just west of Indianapolis. They reported that some voter registration applications submitted by the Indiana Voter Registration Project may have been forged, or were otherwise suspicious, he says. Investigators then found "a number of applications" where the signatures were apparently written in the same person's handwriting, raising concerns about forgery. Bursten says other concerns that could suggest fraud were subsequently found on applications the group submitted in Marion County, home of Indianapolis.

WHY HAS THE INVESTIGATION EXPANDED?

The investigation has expanded to 56 Indiana counties because, Bursten says, the State Police have concerns the same problematic applications "might be happening" in those counties. Bursten says State Police are looking into whether the Indiana Voter Registration Project may have submitted applications on behalf of people already registered to vote, without those individuals' knowledge. The probe is also looking at whether the applications contain "possible fraudulent or false information and a combination of made-up names, made-up addresses, real names with made-up or incorrect addresses, false dates of births with real names" — and combinations of those examples, he says.

WHAT IS THE VOTER REGISTRATION GROUP THAT'S UNDER SCRUTINY?

The Indiana Voter Registration Project is a statewide voter registration push by Patriot Majority USA, which the Center for Public Integrity calls "a liberal nonprofit" group that's "the most active branch of a family of organizations" that includes a [super PAC](#). The group is helmed by longtime Democratic strategist Craig Varoga, who has worked on numerous Democratic campaigns, including Bill Clinton's, Al Gore's and John Kerry's presidential campaigns. Varoga says he's a Democrat and has "never quibbled" with the Center for Public Integrity's characterization of the group.

WHAT DOES PATRIOT MAJORITY SAY ABOUT THE ALLEGATIONS?

Varoga says some voter registration applications the group submitted to county clerk's offices were missing information, but none were fraudulent. Attorneys for Patriot Majority USA have asked the U.S. Department of Justice's [Civil Rights](#) division to look into whether the State Police investigation is an attempt to suppress the votes of black residents. Varoga says a Tuesday search by State Police of the Indiana Voter Registration Project's Indianapolis offices was a "partisan raid" by Indiana's Republican-dominated state government intended to "rig the election" by suppressing the votes of thousands of Democratic-leaning black voters. Indiana has closely contested elections for a U.S. Senator and for governor.

IS THE INDIANA SECRETARY OF STATE'S OFFICE INVOLVED IN THE PROBE?

Varoga has pointed a finger at Indiana Secretary of State Connie Lawson, a Republican whose office includes the state's Election Division. Varoga says Indiana State Police were "brought in to execute a political agenda." Lawson's spokeswoman, Valerie Warycha, says the agency is not involved in the State Police's investigation, but was briefed by the agency after the probe began. Bursten, the State Police spokesman, says the Secretary of State's office has no involvement in its investigation.

HOW MANY VOTER REGISTRATION FORMS HAS THE GROUP COLLECTED?

Varoga says Patriot Majority USA has successfully conducted voter registration drives in 11 other states in past years. He says that as of Monday the Indiana Voter Registration Project had collected about 45,000 voter registration applications, most of them completed by black residents. He says the State Police during a Tuesday search of the group's Indianapolis offices seized numerous laptop computers, files, maps and other information. He says that "basically shut us down" and prevented the group from collecting another 5,000 voter registration applications before Tuesday's registration deadline.

WHAT DOES INDIANA LAW SAY ABOUT VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES?

Varoga says Indiana law requires groups conducting voter registration drives to submit all of the registration applications they collect — even ones they suspect may contain inaccurate information, and to flag those applications for the county clerks. The Secretary of State's office says all such applications must be submitted within 10 days of the day they were collected. Varoga says his group has complied with Indiana's laws.