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## Group accuses Mike Pence of voter suppression after state police raid registration program in Indiana

By [Vanessa Williams](#)

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Republican vice-presidential nominee Indiana Gov. Mike Pence speaks during a campaign rally on Oct. 11 in Newton, Iowa. (Charlie Neibergall/AP)

*This post has been updated.*

A progressive advocacy group is launching an advertising campaign accusing Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, who also is the Republican vice-presidential nominee, of allowing voter suppression after state police raided the offices of a voter registration program aimed at signing up African Americans.

Patriot Majority USA will place the ads on black-oriented radio stations and in print and online with black newspapers throughout the state starting Saturday, said the group's director, Craig Varoga. Patriot Majority is affiliated with the Senate Majority PAC, a super PAC that supports Democratic candidates.

On Oct. 4, one week before the state's deadline to register to vote, state police raided the Indianapolis office of the Indiana Voter Registration Project, seizing computers, cell phones and records. The state police launched an investigation in late August after elections officials in Hendricks County, a suburb of Indianapolis, alerted authorities to some applications that seemed amiss. A spokesman for the state police told [local news media](#) that "at least 10" applications were confirmed to be fraudulent.

Varoga estimates that 45,000 people, most of them African Americans, might not be able to vote on Nov. 8 if investigators put a hold on applications collected by the group during its investigation. The group has asked the Justice Department to investigate, and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, an advocate for voting rights, sent a letter to Indiana Secretary of State Connie Lawson asking her to take steps to ensure that eligible voters who signed up through the voter registration drive will not be disenfranchised.

Matthew Lloyd, Pence's deputy chief of staff, said in a statement released Saturday afternoon: "These allegations are completely false and beyond absurd. In fact, the Indiana State Police has uncovered strong evidence of voter fraud by Patriot Majority USA. Among Governor Pence's top priorities is

ensuring the integrity of the election and that every single Hoosier vote counts. He has full confidence in the Indiana State Police investigation to achieve this goal.”

Pence made reference to the police investigation during a campaign stop in Iowa on Tuesday.

Captain David Bursten, spokesman for the Indiana State Police, also disputed the agency was engaged in voter suppression. “Every allegation by Patriot Majority USA against the Indiana State Police is completely false. In fact, it is clear from evidence documented to date that we have uncovered intentional acts of fraud by representatives of Patriot Majority USA,” he said. Bursten said no voter registration applications were taken from the Indiana Voter Registration Project.

Bursten said via email late Saturday: “While the investigation is still on-going, I can tell you at this time there are more than 300 copies of voter application forms that fall within the categories of being fraudulent or forged.” He also said that “it will be many more weeks before this investigation is concluded and submitted to various county prosecutors for their review and action as they deem appropriate.”

A spokesman for Secretary of State Connie Lawson could not be reached late Friday to provide information about how many voter applications are affected and what is the status of would-be voters who signed up during the registration drive.

Patriot Majority’s one-minute radio ad opens with a wailing siren and a male announcer referencing the raid: “Indiana state police recently shut down our state’s largest voter registration program. This police raid was under the leadership of Republican Governor Mike Pence. Now 45,000 citizens, almost all African Americans, could lose the right to vote.”

## Patriot Majority USA 'Under Attack' | Campaign 2016

A left-leaning PAC released an ad, Oct. 14, saying GOP vice presidential candidate Mike Pence okayed an Indiana state police raid that shut down a voter registration effort targeting African-Americans. State police say some applications from the project were fraudulent. (Patriot Majority USA) (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/10/15/group-accuses-mike-pence-of-voter-suppression-after-state-police-raid-registration-program-in-indiana/> )

The ad also includes voices of some of the workers at the office. “They singled out one African American male, put him in handcuffs,” one woman says.

“They lined us up against the wall, treated us like criminals,” another woman says. The group also lays out its complaint on a website, [dontbetrayindiana.com](http://dontbetrayindiana.com).

Two days after the raid, the Indiana Voter Registration Project said it had asked the Justice Department to look into the state’s investigation. The Indiana State Police then announced that the investigation had expanded from nine to 56 of the state’s 92 counties.

Bursten [issued a news release Saturday](#) afternoon that stated: “The possible fraudulent or false information is a combination of made up names and made up addresses, real names with made up or incorrect addresses and false dates of births with real names as well as combinations of all these examples.”

The release did not give a number of applications confirmed to be fraudulent, but stated: “The expanded number of counties involved leads investigators to believe the total of potentially fraudulent records may be in the thousands, thus creating a potential to disenfranchise many voters.” Bursten did not immediately respond to a request for further comment.

The news release also stated: “When the search warrant was executed on October 4, copies were made of voter application forms and the originals were left with representatives of Indiana Voter Registration Project, a subsidiary of

Patriot Majority USA.” It also said that applications received by voter registration offices were being processed “according to established policies.”

The voter registration applications flagged by election officials in Marion and Hendricks counties “contained minor inaccuracies like missing Zip codes and area codes,” Varoga said. “Based on the fact that they found (problems in) 10 forms out of tens of thousands . . . to launch a statewide investigation into a voter registration program is a political agenda.

Varoga said the investigation and raid were done to cripple his group's voter registration effort and to create fear and confusion among black voters. “Every single public employee involved in this illegal voter suppression and abuse of law enforcement is a partisan Republican,” he said. “With every unlawful action and every partisan statement, they are providing more evidence that this is an abuse of civil rights and voting rights.

Varoga said the Indiana Voter Registration Project was launched in May and had hoped to sign up 50,000 voters by the Oct. 11 deadline. Patriot Majority has conducted voter registration drives in 12 other states.

Indiana generally leans red, although President Obama won the state by just over 1 percent in 2008, the first Democrat to take the Hoosier State since 1964. But he lost the state by 11 percentage points to Mitt Romney in 2012. The RealClearPolitics average of polls for the state shows Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump leading Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton by 4.5 percent.

Democrats are hoping that former senator Evan Bayh can win back his old seat, which is being vacated by retiring Sen. Daniel Coats (R). Bayh is in a tight race with Rep. Todd C. Young (R).

At the Iowa campaign event, Pence told the crowd: “In the state of Indiana, we have a pretty vigorous investigation into voter fraud going on right now. And I encourage you here in Iowa, let’s be sure that our state officials are upholding the principle of ‘one person, one vote’ and the best antidote to that is to be involved in the election process. If you are concerned about voter integrity and you haven’t signed up to be a poll watcher, to volunteer at a polling place to be a part of the integrity of that process, then you need to do it.”

Pence’s comments lacked the conspiratorial tone of those made by running mate Donald Trump, who warned his supporters that the presidential election might be stolen from him and has said it might be necessary for them to go to “certain areas” and keep an eye out for people trying to “vote five times.”

In recent years, Republican governors and legislatures, citing concerns about voter fraud, have enacted numerous laws requiring specific forms of identification, curbing early voting periods and requiring additional verification for people trying to register to vote. Such changes accelerated after the Supreme Court struck down a section of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that required states to seek prior approval from the Justice Department. But legal scholars and studies have found that **in-person voter fraud is very rare** and such laws adversely affect turnout among minorities and younger voters.

*Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated that the Indiana State Police seized 45,000 voter registration applications during an Oct. 4 raid of the Indiana Voter Registration Project. A state police spokesman and the head of the voter registration group say copies of some voter applications were photocopied during the raid, and the originals were left at the office.*

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