



Kemp off base on claim that ‘left’ is trying to disrupt election

Ariella Phillips

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With Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump’s talk of a rigged election and “large-scale” voter fraud, the rhetoric has trickled down to state offices.

On Oct. 19, Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp, the state’s election chief, tweeted, ”Stand with me in opposition to the left’s blatant attempts to disrupt Georgia’s elections!”

But how rampant is election interference in the state? PolitiFact Georgia decided to take a look.

Stormy situation

Following Hurricane Matthew, the issue of extending voter registration took hold in some Southern states where deadlines in Georgia, Florida and the Carolinas loomed as state offices closed to prepare for the storm.

In one Georgia lawsuit, the left-leaning American Civil Liberties Union sought to extend the state’s deadline. In response to the lawsuit, Kemp, a Republican, tweeted Oct. 18: “The ACLU wants to create chaos in our local elections offices. Stand with me & protect Georgia’s elections.”

The numbers

We reached out to Kemp’s office about the tweets regarding supposed interference from the left and to see how prevalent voter fraud is in Georgia.

His spokeswoman, Candice Broce, sent us a spreadsheet with every election incident from July 2014 to September 2016. In it, there are 152 complaints ranging from felons attempting to vote to signatures being rejected.

To be clear, voter fraud isn’t a generic term for any election shenanigan. Voter fraud refers to illegal interference in voting. It is rare and includes activities such as voter impersonation, vote buying and ballot stuffing. A recent poll by the nonprofit Public Religion Research Institute showed many feel their vote may not be counted, though studies of voter fraud do not back this up.

The spreadsheet Kemp's office sent us includes names but no party affiliations. About one-third of the complaints say "dismissed."

For some perspective, there are about 6 million registered voters in the state. About 1 million ballots have been cast so far in early and absentee voting for the 2016 general election. Broce said the office has received about 10 complaints in the past week or so. That equals to about 0.001 percent of votes receiving complaints.

Election rolls

Kemp's office has previously been accused of poor practices. Three lawsuits have alleged his methods disenfranchise people. One of the suits claims the majority of the people blocked from the registry are minorities, who tend to vote Democrat.

Georgia is traditionally a conservative state, or red state. Recent polls show Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in a close race with Trump.

A 2012 Pew Center study estimated about 24 million, or one in every eight, voter registrations in the U.S. are no longer valid or are inaccurate. But no evidence of voter fraud was found — this is about poor record keeping.

"Voter fraud is thankfully not widespread in the United States," said Andra Gillespie, a political science professor at Emory University who specializes in African-American politics and political participation. She said the issue comes down to ideologically different ways the two parties see voting.

Democrats tend to favor policies such as same-day registration that open up the process. Republicans view it as a responsibility, something the individual should plan for and execute.

Georgia requires voters to show a state-issued ID card when voting and additional proof of residence, such as a utility bill, upon registration.

"If Kemp wants to say it's a partisan issue to demand greater access, he must own the ways groups in power have resisted opening up the process," she said.

In a recent editorial, Ilya Shapiro of the libertarian Cato Institute said the system's flaws do not equate to election rigging.

Shapiro asserts that "allegations of voter fraud have increased in parallel with our country's political polarization during the (past) three presidencies."

He also says voter-ID laws have little purpose, as most voter fraud is not done in person. Additionally, most secretaries of state are Republican.

Issues

On Thursday, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported a voting machine in Bryan County was removed after voters reported it changing votes. Voters who spoke to the AJC said the machine changed their votes from Clinton to Trump.

Bryan County Election Supervisor Cindy Reynolds said the machine was removed.

Merle King, the executive director of the state's Center for Election Systems at Kennesaw State University, said the issue was likely related to the machine's calibration.

Kemp's office is investigating the incident.

Our ruling

Brian Kemp, Georgia's chief elections official, said in an Oct. 19 tweet that the "left" is trying to disrupt Georgia's election process.

When contacted, Kemp's camp was unable to supply much evidence.

The left-leaning ACLU did file suit, seeking to extend Georgia's voter registration deadline due to Hurricane Matthew, but a judge refused a statewide extension.

Georgia has a few reported cases of voting problems, but they do not amount to a left-wing conspiracy to disrupt the vote.

We rate Kemp's statement False.