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Study calls into question number of non-citizen voters

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The former head of a Washington think tank specializing in immigration issues says that voter registration numbers in Texas and elsewhere may be inflated because of the presence of non-citizens on voter rolls.

David Simcox, former executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, released a study Tuesday afternoon that said an estimated 1.8 million to 2.7 million non-citizen immigrants in the United States may be illegally registered to vote, thereby potentially influencing the outcome of the upcoming presidential and congressional elections.

The report also estimated that anywhere from 161,000 to 333,000 non-citizens may be registered to vote in Texas.

Calling the state's political culture "a mix of the worst of Old South Dixieland politics and Latin American politics," Mr. Simcox said Texas has a political history marked by election fraud, sometimes involving Mexican or Mexican-American voters.

Using Texas population estimates from the 2000 census, Mr. Simcox said his study found a disproportionately high number of registered voters when compared to the total number of eligible voters in six major metropolitan counties and five counties near the Mexican border, all having a high percentage of non-citizen residents.

The counties mentioned in Mr. Simcox's report were Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, Maverick, Presidio, Starr, Tarrant, Travis, Valverde and Webb counties. The report found that, according to Mr. Simcox's calculations, Dallas, Harris, Presidio and Starr counties had a higher number of registered voters than legitimately eligible voters, a figure that excludes non-citizens and convicted felons.

But Starr County Election Administrator Rafael Rodolfo Montalvo disputed the claims in Mr. Simcox's report, saying he doesn't understand how Mr. Simcox got his registration figures.

"I'm not saying it can't happen, but [non-citizen voting] isn't a big issue here," Mr. Montalvo said. "I feel very sure that our elections are fair and our people who are voting are eligible."

Mr. Montalvo said Starr County has about 66,000 residents and about 27,500 are registered voters. Mr. Montalvo also said that despite the county's proximity to the Mexican border, the residents know each other and any non-citizens trying to vote would easily be pinpointed and stopped.

Mr. Montalvo also said there are plenty of safeguards in place in the registration process. Once a voter submits a driver's license number or social security number, it is entered into a statewide electronic system. Then, the Secretary of State's office must verify the information, and then approve a voter's application. Only after approval is granted are applicants sent a voting card, Mr. Montalvo said.

"If I thought there was an issue, I would go wherever, I would do anything to bring attention to it," said Mr. Montalvo. "It's getting closer to an election, and some people want to muddy the waters for one reason or another."

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