We are professional political scientists. We write to clarify the evidence in our field for President Trump's claim, which he has repeated several times, that millions of non-citizens voted in the 2016 general election.

The president has cited a 2014 article by Jesse Richman, Gulshan Chattha, and David Earnest, published in the peer-reviewed journal Electoral Studies, as evidence for this claim. In that study, Richman and his colleagues used data from the 2008 and 2010 iterations of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), a large-scale, regular survey that contained more than 30,000 and 55,000 respondents, respectively. The researchers leveraged questions about respondents' citizenship status and voting to argue that "between 7.9% and 14.7% of non-citizens voted in 2008." Given the non-citizen population of about 19.4 million, the authors concluded, "the number of non-citizen voters. . . could range from just over 38,000 at the very minimum to nearly 2.8 million at the maximum." The higher bound in this statement is the one that appears to have shaped the president's rhetoric on the issue.

The analysis in this paper has been shown to be incorrect. In a survey as large as the CCES, even a small rate of response error (where people incorrectly mark the wrong item on a survey) can lead to incorrect conclusions. Importantly, the findings in Richman et al. rest on a sample of only 339 respondents who claimed to be non-citizens in 2008, out of about 30,000 CCES respondents. Stephen Ansolabehere, Samantha Luks, and Brian Schaffner demonstrated in a 2015 paper (also published in Electoral Studies) that response error explains nearly all of the supposed non-citizens in Richman et. al's sample who voted. The underlying intuition is relatively straightforward: Given the dynamics of the CCES (a very large overall sample with a very small subpopulation of non-citizens), even with a very low error rate of 0.1%, we would expect roughly 10% of the people in the "non-citizen" category would actually be citizens. If those people then voted at a high rate, it would appear as if a low (but consequential) percentage of non-citizens were voting, which is precisely the result Richman et al. describe.

Indeed, Ansolabehere and colleagues leverage a key feature of the CCES to investigate this possibility. When they examined the responses from people who were asked the citizenship question at two different points in time, they found inconsistencies. The citizenship status of 56 respondents changed in two years, and 20 people reported moving from citizen to non-citizen status (which is not even a plausible change). Of those who we can be more confident are non-citizens, there was not a single voter in 2010. In 2012, there is just one person who may have voted, but even in that case the evidence suggests that the respondent was actually not a voter. Thus, we believe that the findings in Richman et. al. are driven by measurement error in the CCES, and do not accurately reflect the rates of non-citizen voting in the United States. We agree with Ansolabehere et al. that "the likely percent of noncitizen voters in recent U.S. elections is 0."

The scholarly political science community has generally rejected the findings in the Richman et al. study and we believe it should not be cited or used in any debate over fraudulent voting.

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