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Mr. Trump's Lies About the Vote

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

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One big fear in the weeks leading up to the presidential election was that Donald Trump would try to delegitimize the results by claiming rampant voter fraud -- a bogus specter he had raised throughout the campaign, particularly as his polling numbers got worse.

In that scenario, of course, Mr. Trump was the loser. No one imagined he would say the election was rigged if he won. And yet here we are.

On Sunday, President-elect Trump unleashed a barrage of tweets complaining about calls for recounts or vote audits in several closely contested states, and culminating in this message: "In addition to winning the Electoral College in a landslide, I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally."

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J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) November 27, 2016

This is a lie, part of Mr. Trump's pattern, stretching back many years, of disregard for indisputable facts. There is no evidence of illegal voting on even a small scale anywhere in the country, let alone a systematic conspiracy involving "millions."

But this is the message that gets hammered relentlessly by right-wing propaganda sites like InfoWars, which is run by a conspiracy theorist who claims the Sandy Hook school massacre was a hoax -- and whose absurdities

Mr. Trump has often shouted through his megaphone, which will shortly bear the presidential seal. Mr. Trump added more fuel to the fire with the false claim of "serious voter fraud" in California, Virginia and New Hampshire -- all states that went for Hillary Clinton.

In addition to insulting law-abiding voters everywhere, these lies about fraud threaten the foundations of American democracy. They have provided the justification for state voter-suppression laws around the country, and they could give the Trump administration a pretext to roll back voting rights on a national scale.

And why is Mr. Trump so hung up on the popular vote in the first place? After all, he won where it counts -- in the Electoral College. And yet, in the three weeks since his victory, Mr. Trump has already admitted at least twice that he would prefer the presidency be determined by the popular vote, and not by 538 electors. It's clear he feels threatened by Mrs. Clinton's popular-vote lead -- now

more than 2.3 million and expected to exceed 2.5 million; as a percentage of the electorate, that is a wider margin than five presidents enjoyed. With support for third-party candidates added in, 54 percent of voters rejected Mr. Trump.

So maybe his touchiness is understandable. Like most people, Mr. Trump senses the fundamental unfairness of awarding the presidency to the loser of the popular vote. In fact, he made that argument himself, back on election night in 2012, calling the Electoral College "a disaster for democracy" when he believed, incorrectly, that President Obama would lose the popular vote and still win re-election. (In recent weeks he's changed his tune, calling it a "genius" idea.) What Mr. Trump may not know, given his lack of interest in American history, is that the Electoral College was designed specifically to enhance the influence of white voters in Southern states, which were allowed to factor in their large slave populations.

Today the Electoral College continues to give an outsized benefit to smaller and less populous states -- a Wyoming resident's vote weighs 3.6 times more than a Californian's. So the less populous states will never agree to amend it out of the Constitution. But states may allocate their electoral votes however they choose, and that opens the door to greater equity without changing the Constitution -- namely, the National Popular Vote interstate compact. This is an agreement among a group of states to award all their electoral votes to the winner of the national popular vote. Eleven states and the District of Columbia have already adopted it, representing 165 electoral votes. The compact would take effect once states representing a majority of electoral votes, currently 270, signed on -- ensuring that the national popular-vote winner became president.

We can't expect Mr. Trump to throw his weight behind this initiative, given his new support for the Electoral College. But if he's truly worried about the legitimacy of the 2016 election, why doesn't he call for a recount?