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Don't let talked of 'rigged' election keep you from polls

There's been a lot of talk recently about voter fraud, but election officials and numerous studies overwhelmingly point to the fact that fraud represents a minuscule fraction of the total vote. Case in point: The conservative Washington, D.C.-based think tank The Heritage Fund has compiled a report showing about 400 documented instances of voter fraud in the United States dating back to the 1940s. That's out of approximately 8 billion votes cast between 1940 and 2012 in the U.S. presidential elections.

Similarly, Justin Levitt, the U.S. Department of Justice's deputy assistant attorney general, wrote in a Washington Post online op-ed that he has counted only 31 instances of alleged—not convicted—cases of voter ID fraud since 2000.

"In general and primary elections alone, more than 1 billion ballots were cast in that period," he wrote.

And out of the 307,400 Ventura County voters who cast their ballots in the 2014 election cycle, there was just one convicted case of voter fraud in the county, according to the district attorney's office, making it the first such conviction in Ventura County in at least 30 years, according to Mark Lunn, the clerk recorder/registrar of voters. The man was charged with a misdemeanor for using his dead father-in-law's ballot to vote twice. According to The Heritage Fund, it was one of three cases of voter fraud in California's 2014 election that saw 7.5 million people cast their vote.

Recently, the county's elections division released a short video on its website to show how ballots are handled and counted. It's a step-by-step process that begins weeks before Election Day as thousands of mail-in ballots arrive at the Ventura County Government Center in Ventura. The process continues 30 days after Nov. 8, known as the canvass period, which includes a detailed audit by the county office to ensure the accuracy of the vote count.

"(We) make sure that every legal ballot that is cast gets counted, and there is a tremendous check-and-balance system we have here to make sure that that happens. And it takes a lot of people to get that done," Lunn says in the video. "Elections are a fair, open and transparent process, and we want people to see our democracy in action."

To that end, the elections division allows residents to watch the ballot-counting process as it happens at the government center. What's more, the county invites residents to help staff the 360 polling places to take an even more active role in the elections process.

So what does professor Sean Kelly, chair of the political science department at Cal State Channel Islands, say about allegations of voter fraud both locally and nationwide?

"Silly beyond belief," he said. "Let's just focus on policy. That would be good."

By the way, Oct. 24 is the last day to register to vote in the presidential general election.

For more information, visit the elections division website at <http://venturavote.org> or call (805) 654-2664.

Election Day is Nov. 8.

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