Recent reports confirm that Vice President Mike Pence will lead a task force to investigate President Trump’s unsubstantiated voter fraud claims and is gathering names of individuals who will be part of it. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) opposes any effort to convene such a task force, and encourages responsible leaders and academics to play no role in legitimizing this effort.

The proposed White House voter fraud task force essentially doubles down on the wholly unsubstantiated insistence of the President and his team that millions of votes were cast by ineligible voters, resulting in Mr. Trump losing the popular vote. But the proposed task force to investigate unsubstantiated voter fraud claims should not be dismissed as a mere vanity project. It must be recognized for what it is: a prelude to nationwide voter intimidation and suppression. Although the justification for this task force is disconnected from reality, it constitutes a very real threat to the voters and in the communities where its work will most likely be targeted.

The President himself has repeatedly made unsubstantiated claims that he lost the popular vote by nearly 3 million votes because of 3 million to 5 million votes cast by “illegals.” In January when he first spoke of this investigation, the President said the voter fraud probe would be focused on “urban areas,” the same areas Mr. Trump told his supporters to “watch” on Election Day. These words barely conceal the racial targeting that lies at the heart of this probe. In January, Mr. Trump regaled congressional leaders with a story he claimed was told to him about an acquaintance who stood in line to vote with “people who look like they should not be allowed to vote.” According to reports, “the President threw out names of Latin American countries that the voters might have come from.”

The issue of voter fraud has been studied and every credible academic review has concluded that widespread voter fraud does not happen in this country. Therefore, a presidential command to convene a task force to investigate the existence of a phenomenon that has been demonstrated not to exist can accomplish only one thing: nationwide voter intimidation that discourages minority participation at the ballot box.

This task force is a precursor to the kinds of state-sponsored voter suppression civil rights activists fought and died to defend against in this country. No one truly committed and concerned about racial justice and civil rights should add credibility to or normalize the creation of this task force by accepting an invitation to serve on it. No responsible leaders or academics should enable this baseless effort to discredit the popular vote count and ramp up voter suppression nationwide.
Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization and has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.