


# Substantial Disruption



## Ghost Voters in the Sky

By Mike Tully

*A delusion is a belief that is clearly false and that indicates an abnormality in the affected person's content of thought.*

- Chandra Kiran and Suprakash Chaudhury, "[Understanding delusions](#)"

When a man sees things others don't see, the most beneficial possibility is that he is a visionary. Unfortunately, visionaries are as common as icicles in Yuma and it's more likely the vision is the product of delusion, hallucination, or fabrication. For example, Donald Trump [told a rally](#) he "watched in Jersey City, New Jersey, where thousands and thousands of people were cheering" when they saw the World Trade Center collapse on 9/11. "I saw it," he told George Stephanopoulos of ABC News. "It was on television." Nobody else saw the thousands of invisible celebrants that Trump saw. The *Washington Post*, while [awarding Four Pinocchios](#), generously characterized the claim as "another case of Trump's overactive imagination." That's a politically correct way of saying "delusion."

Delusions are usually harmless unless they provoke a reaction, because actions resulting from delusions rarely turn out well. We have a new player in national politics that is nothing more than a reaction to a delusion: the [Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity](#). The delusion is Trump's [insistence](#) that "I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally." He joined the Commission's initial meeting and [told its members](#), "throughout the campaign and even after it, people would come up to me and express their concerns about voter inconsistencies and irregularities, which they saw." "In some cases," he added, "having to do with very large numbers of people in certain states." Apparently those are states that voted for Hillary Clinton.

The group's mission is to identify "those laws, rules, policies, activities, strategies, and practices that enhance the American people's confidence in the integrity of the voting processes used in Federal elections," as well as those that "undermine the American people's confidence," and "vulnerabilities in voting systems and practices used for Federal elections that could lead to improper voter registrations and improper voting." The [News Release](#) announcing the Commission said it "will utilize all available data, including state and federal databases." On June 28, 2017, the Commission's Vice-Chairman, Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, [wrote](#) his fellow Secretaries and asked for "the full first and last names of all registrants, middle names or initials if available, addresses, dates of birth, political party (if recorded in your state), last four digits of social security number if available, voter history (elections voted in) from 2006 onward, active/inactive status, cancelled status, information regarding any felony convictions, information regarding voter registration in another state, information regarding military status, and overseas citizen information." Exactly how compiling a federal-level database of voter registrations would serve the Commission's purpose is unclear, and [many states pushed back](#) against the voluminous request, although a federal court [refused to stop it](#).

Trump also told the Commission this: “Any form of illegal or fraudulent voting, whether by non-citizens or the deceased, and any form of voter suppression or intimidation must be stopped.” Take a minute to unpack that statement. First of all, voting by non-citizens is [incredibly rare](#) and a non-issue – studies of state prosecution records show that votes by non-citizens are, at most, one-thousandth of one percent of the votes cast. Suffice it to say the number of dead people voting is probably lower than that; nothing suppresses voting like death. Speaking of voter suppression, Trump’s reference to it – echoed in the news release – is curious, since the Commission’s [Charter](#) and Mission Statement (which is included in the Charter) do not mention voter suppression.

The Commission includes members with a history of supporting efforts to restrict voting, the [most prominent of whom is Kobach](#), the Vice-Chairman. Given the fictitious basis for the Commission’s existence, as well as the participation of [Kobach and others](#) with a history of voter suppression activity, it is not unreasonable to suspect the [actual mission of the group](#) is voter suppression, not protection. That suspicion is reinforced by the fact that it is relying on what *The Economist* [refers to](#) as “some really dodgy studies,” including one cited by Trump that claims 5.7 million non-citizens voted illegally in the 2008 election. That study is statistically invalid and widely disparaged, and Trump’s claim of illegal voting was [rated “False”](#) by *Politifact*. The entire basis for the Commission is fraudulent -- or delusional.

The Commission only has five hundred thousand dollars to conduct a study and release a report next year. Hopefully, its members will spin their wheels, crank out some kind of document, and quietly slink away as the report gathers dust in the Museum of Bureaucratic Futility. While it’s unlikely any substantive action will result, the President might take its report seriously and try to act on it. But that’s next year. Let’s wait and see what President Pence has to say then.