

Election Integrity and Voter Registration Validation

Data-driven approach ensures voter eligibility, reduces costs, and protects voter rights

As vote by mail scenarios play out in wildly varied ways across the U.S., it is becoming clear that inconsistent processes and technologies have great potential to disenfranchise voters, invite fraud, and waste money. Most importantly, all these challenges continue to fuel the debate about how to cast a vote and point to growing challenges with voter data validation. Election boards nationwide are getting mixed reviews in their handling of

vote by mail strategies, with some very big operational failures getting more attention than the conversation about how to handle it better. Smarter data operations are required, increasing the effectiveness of voter data handling and addressing voting concerns across party lines.

Getting to Know ERIC

So how are voter registrations validated and what could be improved? Currently, the only thing close to a national standard is ERIC, or the Electronic Registration Information Center. Offering central data matching services, ERIC is a non-profit membership organization formed in 2012 to improve voter roll accuracy.

Today just 30 states and the District of Columbia are ERIC members, driving the group's primary goal of detecting incorrect and outdated voter registrations, as well as identifying unregistered citizens who are eligible to vote. The mission is to encourage registration and boost election turnout, even as incorrect records are purged and corrected.

Annually, each member provides resident DMV and mortality records to update ERIC's broader database. As driver license data is shared across the entire ERIC membership, participating states can properly determine the residence and therefore eligibility of registered voters. Inclusion of death records further refines voter validations, reducing illegitimate registrants and the resulting potential for voter fraud.

Yet ERIC is imperfect and much less comprehensive than originally intended. Because only about half of all states in the country participate, the system is insufficient to perform as a singular, all-encompassing authority on voter data.

For example, populous states like California and New York are non-members and do not contribute resident data to the database. Consider the simple fact that in 2019 some 31 million Americans moved including 4 million that moved out of stated. These numbers demonstrate the scope of the challenge election boards face in keeping voter lists clean and



up-to-date: 2.75 million people were errantly registered and could potentially vote in more than one state.

Taking the mystery out of voter data validation

In a reality that does not equate with ERIC's annual data processing, voter data changes in real-time and encompasses intensely personal events such as marriage, birth, and death. This scheduled processing – in a base data file that is further restricted to just ERIC's member states and the District of Columbia – demonstrates an inherent disconnect from the way data is generated and should be applied in voter validation.

In contrast, an optimized voter validation system taps into data representing a

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much larger subset of the U.S population, such as the USPS National Change of Address (NCOA or NCOALink) database. A full USPS NCOALink dataset of approximately 160 million records is accessible by service providers who fully license NCOALink services. Existing lists can be matched against this far-reaching dataset, which includes a 48-month record of all permanent change-of-address records filed with the USPS.

Third party data quality providers play a role in increasing data insights on this landscape as well, for example blending



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NCOA-provided information with additional proprietary data sources. In a more timely and comprehensive approach than offered by ERIC, NCOA files are updated weekly and proprietary sources may be updated quarterly. Voter registrations much more accurately reflect real-world data, accessing a broad blend of data sources that typically identify issues with 30-40 percent more entries than does NCOA alone. Election boards can take these data capabilities even further, for

example appending addresses with apartment numbers and suppressing records of deceased individuals to improve and streamline voter outreach and eliminate the cost and effort of wasted mail.

Voter data by the numbers

In analyzing a proposed voter purge list, one Midwest state's data sample included 232,579 voters. Review identified 138,075 changes from the address provided by the state, or about 60 percent, which were then further classified as moves within a single state, or to another state.

- In state moves totaled 116,937.
- State to state moves tallied 21,139.

These statistics represent lost voters or even potential voter fraud, each costly missteps in election integrity. Undelivered mail creates hard costs too – covering everything from the prepaid postage for initial mailing along with the cost of research, correction, and re mailing. By participating in ERIC and using NCOA processing, election boards can solve

some of the address challenge, however these options are only partial measures to perfecting a voter roll.

Updating and deduping voter contact information may be complex, but it is both manageable and worthwhile – essential to maintaining election integrity and fairness, as well as saving taxpayer dollars. Because of this, sophisticated data management must be a top priority for election boards nationwide, proactively addressing the need for data tools with a comprehensive approach to voter data. It is a challenge with the potential to remain significant for the long-term, as vote by mail options gain traction in the time of COVID and beyond.

(Editor's Note: Greg Brown is vice president of Melissa, provider of global data quality and address management solutions that span the entire data quality lifecycle and integrate into CRM, ecommerce, master data management and Big Data platforms. Contact Greg at greg.brown@melissa.com or via [LinkedIn](#).)

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