

UNDERSTANDING LIST MAINTENANCE

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Understanding List Maintenance

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In North Carolina, County Boards of Elections (CBOEs) must regularly update their voter registration lists to maintain accuracy and efficiency in administering elections. Every state undergoes a process to update their voter rolls as people move, pass away, or otherwise become ineligible to vote. Both federal and state laws govern how officials manage the list maintenance process.

What is the National Voter Registration Act?

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA, also sometimes referred to as the “Motor Voter Act”)¹ places specific requirements on voter registration for federal elections in order to ensure that states keep accurate voter rolls. Accurate list maintenance is a good thing, as we want safe and secure elections. Importantly, the NVRA also provides pathways for historically marginalized communities to access voter registration via state agencies.

How does the National Voter Registration Act impact list maintenance?

The NVRA prohibits the removal of voters simply because they have not voted. Under the NVRA, states must send voters a confirmation mailing and provide voters an opportunity to respond. This is designed to protect the integrity of elections.

How does list maintenance work in North Carolina?²

In North Carolina, CBOEs review their voter registration lists to ensure accurate information about eligible voters. For example, CBOEs regularly receive information from the state to remove county residents who died or have been convicted of a felony. List maintenance is a routine process required by state and federal law. North Carolina voters can check their registration status [here](#).

In odd-numbered years, like 2021, CBOEs begin a more comprehensive process to update voter rolls. In addition to removing deceased voters or people with felony convictions, CBOEs engage in three key list maintenance procedures: (1) **Biennial List Maintenance**, (2) **Removal of Inactive Voters**, and (3) **National Change of Address (NCOA) Mailings**.

¹ The name “Motor Voter Act” comes from the requirement that driver license offices accept voter registration forms.

² County Boards of Elections Begin Regular Voter List Maintenance Processes. Press release. NCSBE. January 14, 2021.

Biennial List Maintenance

- During odd-numbered years, CBOEs send a confirmation mailing to every voter who has **both**:
 - not contacted the CBOE for a total of four years, **and**
 - has not voted during that time.
- Voters must return this confirmation mailing to the CBOE within 30 days.
- If voters do not respond, their registration is marked **Inactive**. **Inactive** means that the voter is **still registered**, but will be required to verify their address if they vote again.
- Specifically, mailings will be sent to voters who have not contacted the CBOE since October 12, 2018. CBOEs are required to send all mailings by April 15, 2021.
- If no confirmation or contact is received by 2025, these voters will be removed from the voter rolls (legally, their registration will be “canceled”).
- The State Board of Elections estimates that 450,000 of these mailings will be sent this year.

Removal of Inactive Voters

- Voters already marked **Inactive** will be removed from the official roll this year if:
 - the CBOE has not had contact with the voter for four federal election cycles (2020, 2018, 2016, 2014),
 - the voter has not voted in any election during this time, **and**
 - there has been no response to a confirmation mailing.
- The State Board of Elections estimates CBOEs will process **380,000 removals in 2021**.

National Change of Address (NCOA) Mailings

- CBOEs receive change of address data from the United States Postal Service in January and July of each year. CBOEs must send these voters confirmation mailings.
- If there is no confirmation within 30 days, CBOEs mark these voters as **Inactive**.

Why does list maintenance matter?³

[In recent years](#), list maintenance processes across the county, sometimes referred to as “voter purges,” have been wielded in an error-prone, unaccountable, and discriminatory manner that disproportionately impacts Black people, people of color, people with criminal convictions, rural communities, and poor and housing insecure people. Eligible voters can be removed from voter rolls through no fault of their own, presenting higher barriers to voting and a serious risk of disenfranchisement.

List maintenance processes must be **transparent, accountable, and designed to ensure all eligible voters maintain their registration and ability to vote**.

2021 List Maintenance Data

County boards of elections removed over 391,000 voters in the 2021 biennial list maintenance process, compared to over 570,000 voters in 2019. This change may be partly explained by high turnout in the November 2020 general election and by the implementation of online voter registration, which made it easier for voters to update their voter registrations.

³ Id.

Even though fewer voters were removed in the 2021 process than in 2019, the makeup of this year's removals is concerning:⁴

- Black registered voters were more likely to be removed from than voters from other demographic groups. Specifically, Black voters made up 21% of all registered voters in November 2020, but made up 28% of the voters removed through list maintenance.
- Multiracial voters, Indigenous voters, and Latinx voters were also over-represented in the removals, while white voters were underrepresented.
- Younger adults were particularly impacted by 2021 voter roll removals: while voters aged 26-40 represent only a quarter of North Carolina voters, they represented nearly half (46%) of voters removed from the rolls in 2021.

For More Information

- North Carolina State Board of Elections [Press Release](#), January 14, 2021
- [Report](#) on "Voter Purges," Brennan Center for Justice

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⁴ Democracy North Carolina analysis of NCSBE files. Current files do not include Perquimans County. However, this likely does not impact statewide disproportionality by percentage.