



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on February 15, 2012

Nearly 2 Million Deceased U.S. Citizens Still Registered to Vote

As the 2012 election nears, a report published by the non-partisan Pew Center on the States asserted that nearly two million deceased Americans are still registered to vote, while one in every eight voter registrations contains significant errors. More than 2.7 million Americans have active registrations in more than one state, and approximately 12 million contain address inaccuracies, likely preventing them from receiving voting-related mail; further, more than 50 million eligible U.S. citizens are unregistered.



The Pew study, which was released Tuesday, also shows that the United States spends more on voter registration while producing worse results than many other countries such as Canada. In fact, the authors note, "Canada, which uses modern technology to register people as well as data-matching techniques common in the private sector, spends less than 35 cents per voter to process registrations, and 93 percent of its eligible population is registered." Contrarily, a 2008 Pew study administered in Oregon indicated that taxpayers were paying more than \$4 per voter to keep lists up to date, and other states have generated similar numbers.

"Voter registration is the gateway to participating in our democracy [sic], but these antiquated, paper-based systems are plagued with errors and inefficiencies," [alleged](#) David Becker, Pew's Director of Election Initiatives. "These problems waste taxpayer dollars, undermine voter confidence and fuel partisan disputes over the integrity of our elections."

"We have a ramshackle registration system in the U.S.," echoed Lawrence Norden, Deputy Director of the Brennan Center's Democracy Program at New York University. "It's a mess. It's expensive. There isn't central control over the process." Norden and his colleagues have been advocating modernization of the voter registration system, but they also caution against states rushing to discard voters from the rolls. "This is something that has to be done very carefully," he warned.

Experts note that the U.S. voting system uses paper-based methods that are outdated, expensive, and prone to errors, and that electronic records should replace paper forms that often lead to errors when officials manually enter data themselves. Further, data-matching computers, critics allege, should be utilized to benefit from other government databases that might already hold valid information needed to keep voter records updated.

"The system has been using technology that's really paper-based, mail-based, 19th century technology for a long, long time and it hasn't moved into the 21st century yet," [claimed](#) Becker, who advocates a complete modernization of the country's voting system. One solution, the Pew report suggests, is expanding online registration, which has been largely successful in the few areas where it was implemented. For example, Pew reported:



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Maricopa County, AZ — which includes Phoenix and has a larger population than 23 states — saved more than \$1 million over five years by providing online voter registration, reducing the county's dependence on paper and manual data entry. Printing costs were reduced 75 percent. Each online registration costs an average of 3 cents to process, compared with 83 cents per paper form.

Election administrators contend that many of the errors occur when people move or have their names changed, as they fail to realize that their records are not automatically cross-referenced by a state computer. Eight states have implemented measures to change that situation. Colorado, Utah, Virginia, Nevada, Oregon, Maryland, Delaware, and Washington are building a central, computerized database to share records with each other. "Twenty-first century technology really affords election officials the opportunity to better serve their voters," Becker observed, "by having more accurate lists, more convenient and more cost effective ways of being on those lists, and obtaining more accurate records."

With guidance from a group of 42 experts, Pew contracted a comprehensive plan that employs methods already utilized in the private sector and other areas of government to modernize the voter registration process. The plan is comprised of three core elements:

- Comparing registration lists with other data sources to broaden the base of information used to update and verify voter rolls.
- Using proven data-matching techniques and security protocols to ensure accuracy and security.
- Establishing new ways voters can submit information online and minimize manual data entry, resulting in lower costs and fewer errors.

"By combining these elements," Pew affirmed, "states can phase out many laborious, wasteful, and error-prone procedures and use sophisticated technology to improve the accuracy, integrity, and cost-effectiveness of the registration process."



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