

Why GAO Did This Study

The NVRA was intended to increase the number of eligible citizens who register to vote in federal elections, protect the integrity of the electoral process, and ensure that accurate and current voter registration rolls are maintained.

GAO was asked to examine issues related to the NVRA's voter registration and voter registration list maintenance requirements, as well as issues related to election fraud. This report addresses (1) DOJ's efforts to ensure states and localities comply with NVRA requirements to offer registration opportunities and administer voter registration list maintenance programs, and address potential instances of election fraud; and (2) how selected data sources are used at the state and local level to help maintain voter registration lists, and perspectives on how these data sources help ensure list accuracy and address potential voter eligibility and fraud issues.

GAO analyzed data on DOJ's efforts to ensure NVRA compliance and address election fraud—as measured by matters initiated and cases filed—for fiscal years 2001 through 2017 (the last full year of data available when requested from DOJ). This period covered eight federal elections. GAO also interviewed DOJ officials. GAO selected six commonly received data sources that may be used in list maintenance efforts. GAO reviewed literature and interviewed state and local election officials in five states for perspectives on how the data sources are used and any benefits and limitations. These states used at least five of the data sources and provided geographic diversity. The results from these five states are not generalizable, but provide insight into state and local perspectives on list maintenance.

View [GAO-19-485](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Information on Federal Enforcement Efforts and State and Local List Management

What GAO Found

From fiscal years 2001 through 2017, the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Voting Section (which enforces the civil provisions of voting rights laws) initiated matters (e.g., investigations), filed cases against state or local governments in federal court, and engaged in other efforts to enforce provisions of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA). Specifically, the Voting Section:

- initiated 99 matters involving allegations of NVRA violations related to voter registration opportunities and list maintenance;
- filed 14 cases involving allegations of NVRA violations; eight included list maintenance allegations; four included registration opportunities allegations; and two included both types of allegations; and
- participated in eight NVRA cases as a “friend of the court” and entered into five out-of-court settlement agreements with states.

DOJ's Public Integrity Section (which supervises nationwide election law enforcement and prosecutes selected cases involving alleged corruption by government officials), and U.S. Attorneys' Offices (which enforce criminal laws within their districts) engaged in efforts to address election fraud from fiscal years 2001 through 2017, including filing cases against individuals in federal court. For example:

- The Section initiated 33 matters and filed 19 cases related to election fraud, accounting for about three percent of its overall caseload. Of these cases, 17 involved vote buying and false information charges.
- U.S. Attorneys' Offices initiated 525 matters and filed 185 cases related to election fraud, accounting for about .02 percent of their overall caseload. Of these cases, 52 involved charges such as vote buying and voting more than once, and 49 involved conspiracy.

GAO reviewed six data sources election officials may use to maintain voter registration lists and remove voters who become ineligible due to a move, death, or disqualifying criminal conviction: (1) the U.S. Postal Service's National Change of Address (NCOA), (2) the Interstate Voter Registration Crosscheck Program, (3) returned mail, (4) the public version of the Social Security Administration's Death Master File, (5) state vital records, and (6) U.S. Attorneys' records on felony convictions. Election officials GAO interviewed and literature reviewed reported benefits and limitations associated with each source. According to officials, each source helps improve list accuracy, despite some limitations, and list maintenance efforts in general help reduce opportunities for election fraud. For example, officials said that NCOA data helped them maintain accurate lists by identifying registrants who moved outside the election jurisdiction; however, they also noted that NCOA data may not capture all address changes because people do not always notify the U.S. Postal Service when they move.

GAO incorporated technical comments provided by federal agencies and state and local election officials as appropriate.