

# Module 5



## **Hard Core Evidence:** Adopt Part of an Election Check On Voter Registration Lists

This is a records gathering, tracking, matching and sleuthing job. You and/or your group will ask for many different kinds of public records, track changes and updates in voter registrations, match up some information to check its accuracy, and investigate oddities.

Voter registration lists present one of the thorniest challenges facing elections officials and voters in the United States. Voter registration technology is changing rapidly, as are the computerized components of the voting system that access these lists.

New statewide computerized voter registration databases were mandated by the Help America Vote Act, and the new privatized software sometimes doesn't work very well. Political operatives have manipulated voter registrations in the past – registering people more than once, registering dead people and comatose nursing home residents, and "accidentally" purging voters they don't want.

### **Guide for Checking on Voter Registration Lists**

#### **Goals:**

The purpose of checking up on voter registration rolls is to get a general idea, ahead of the election, of how many voters to expect, to identify oddities or manipulation of the voting rolls, and to get a general idea as to whether your local voter rolls are accurate.

#### **Obtain the following kinds of information:**

- A copy of your state's "uniform and nondiscriminatory" list maintenance program for removing the names of voters. This is required by the National Voting Registration Act. A state may legally remove an individual from the voter registration rolls for the following reasons:
    - Upon the death of voter;
    - Upon written confirmation that the voter has changed his or her address to a location outside the registrar's jurisdiction (in most states outside a county);
    - Upon failure to respond to mailings from state or local elections office asking the voter to confirm that he or she has moved to an address outside the registrar's jurisdiction AND the voter fails to vote in two subsequent federal general elections;
    - Upon the request of the voter;
    - Upon the finding of mental incapacity of the voter as provided by state law; or
    - Upon the criminal conviction of the voter under state or federal law.
  - Local deadlines: Your jurisdiction will have written requirements for purging voter registrations and entering new registrations. Find out the following deadlines:
    - The last date a voter can register before requesting an absentee ballot.
    - The last date a voter can register before voting in the next election.
    - The deadline when all new voter registrations must be entered into the system.
  - Request your jurisdiction's written policies pertaining to voter registration.
  - Request information on what vendor and brand of software is being used to track voter registrations in your jurisdiction.
  - Get the number of registered voters (total, and by party) from last two elections.
  - Ask for a CD for the voter registration database for your county, and ask for the updates periodically. In some jurisdictions, you must be a representative of a political party to obtain this. In that case, make contact with someone who is, explain your project, and collaborate.
  - Ask for the "ineligible voter list" (removed from the rolls since 2004 election)
  - Ask for the list of "inactive voters" (different from ineligible)
  - If possible, request a copy of any and all contracts between database companies doing work related to the voter registration system from both your state and your local jurisdiction.
  - Ask for the names of any professional firms doing voter registration drives.
- Here are some of the things to look for when checking voter registrations:**

- Track the number of registrations up to the deadline for entering them into the system.
- Check to see that voters aren't purged after the deadlines. Purging of names on the basis of change of addresses should not occur any no later than 90 days before a primary or general election.

- Find out about the political affiliations and ownership of firms conducting voter registration drives. It is generally legal for partisan firms to do voter registration drives, but it is not legal for them to double-register voters and toss out registrations for voters not in their preferred party. For more about how to research vested interests, see **Module 14**, Money Trail.
- Spot-check some of the addresses in the database. Following your best hunches, spot-check whether they are residences. Google "maps" has a satellite option that allows you to enter an address and see a satellite photograph of the area, though it is not 100 percent accurate. If you spot addresses that appear to be vacant lots, or industrial areas, drive out and see for yourself.
- Do you find clumps of dates? For example, large numbers of voters who were added on the same dates, or an unusual number of birthdays on the same date, or birthdates that are impossible (for example, in the 1800s).
- Using the "ineligible voter list" (removed from the rolls since 2004 election) choose a small percent and call and ask: "In the 2004 election did you vote by early, absentee, in the precinct or did something come up that prevented you from voting that day?" If they did vote, they should not be on the ineligible list.
- "Caging" tactics: See if you notice evidence of a large number of purges in a specific demographic group or area. Some political parties undertake the expense of sending registered letters out, then urge the removal of any voter who did not respond to their registered letter. This has been documented in areas like military bases, where the citizens losing their right to vote are deployed overseas.

### **On Election Day:**

- Does the voting turnout make sense, given what you know about past trends and the number of current registered voters?
- Compare the number of registered voters on the results sheets on Election Night with the number of registered voters reported as of the last deadline for the voter registration list prior to the election.
- Are there too few or too many votes overall? For a particular party? For example, in spring 2004, for example, Prairie County Arkansas had a 120 percent turnout for a primary election where the statewide average was only about 25 percent.

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# Your Own Additions to the Voter Registration Check-up Module

You can share your ideas by sending to [crew@blackboxvoting.org](mailto:crew@blackboxvoting.org)



What worked well?

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What new ideas did you come up with?

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Was there anything that didn't work very well?

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