

FACT BRIEF • FALL 2026

Election Fraud & Security

What is the ISSUE?

<0.002%

FRAUD RATE FOUND
ACROSS EVERY STUDY

Many Americans are genuinely worried about election integrity. This brief looks at what investigators, courts, and election experts have actually found. ***Across every study cited here, documented fraud runs below 0.002% of ballots cast — and in most, far below.***

Know the Terms

Voter fraud — a person casting a ballot they are not legally entitled to cast (impersonation, noncitizen voting, double voting).

Record match — a computer finding that a record in one list looks like one in another. A lead to be checked, not a confirmed case; matching systems have measured error rates.

Decentralized elections — U.S. elections are run by thousands of separate state and local jurisdictions, not one national system.

Paper-backed system — voting that produces a paper record that can be re-counted and audited after the fact.

Post-election audit — a check comparing paper records against reported totals to confirm the count.

Chain of custody — the documented handling of ballots at every step, so any tampering would be detectable.

Active vs. inactive registration — a record is *active* when officials have approved the voter as eligible and the information appears current; *inactive* when it may be out of date, usually a possible address change. An inactive record does not disqualify a voter. The voter may be asked to confirm or update their address before casting a ballot; once that is done, the record returns to active.

What Are the Facts?

VOTER FRAUD

THE HERITAGE DATABASE

The Heritage Foundation — which warns about election security — keeps a database of proven fraud cases that it calls “a sampling.” As of August 2026 it listed **1,619 cases** spanning several decades. Set against the more than 1 billion votes cast in that time, that is under **0.0002%** of ballots — roughly 1 in 600,000.^{[18][5]}

WHAT DOJ FOUND

A U.S. Department of Justice review of the 2002–2004 federal elections could prove fraud in **0.00000013%** of ballots and found no coordinated effort to tilt an election. A separate review of 84 million votes found 14 cases referred for prosecution.^[2]

IMPERSONATION IS RARE

A study in *The Washington Post* found **31** credible cases of voter impersonation — voting in person as someone else — from 2000–2014, out of more than 1 billion ballots, about 0.000003%.^{[16][2]}

DEAD VOTERS: NAMES, NOT BALLOTS

Federal law requires states to match voter lists against state death records.^[20] **One example:** in December 2024, Utah’s Legislative Auditor General matched two years of death certificates against the state voter list. Of Utah’s 2 million-plus registered voters, **over 1,400 likely deceased voters had not been removed and nearly 700 were still marked active.** Checking all 1,400 for voting activity, auditors found **2 ballots** cast, both in the November 2023 election. The audit notes some matches may be false.^[19]

ELECTION FRAUD & SECURITY

What Are the Facts?

VOTER FRAUD — continued

ARIZONA, 25 YEARS

In Arizona, going back 25 years produced **36 cases of voter fraud** out of 42,626,379 ballots — 0.0000845%, or about 1 in 1.2 million.^[1]

THE 2020 BATTLEGROUND STATES

An Associated Press review of the six disputed 2020 battleground states found **fewer than 475 possible fraud cases** out of more than 25 million ballots — under 0.002%.^[3]

ALL 50 STATES

An Arizona State University records search across all 50 states catalogued **2,068 alleged cases** of every fraud type since 2000 — a rate researchers called “*infinitesimal*.”^[17]

THE RESULT HELD

Recounts, audits, lawsuits, and contests in the 2020 battleground states **did not change the presidential result**.^[4]

FELONY CONVICTIONS: THE RULES VARY BY STATE

Federal law requires states to match voter lists against felony records.^[20] Whether a conviction costs someone the vote depends on the state: **3 jurisdictions** never remove it; **23** restore it on release; **15** restore it after parole and / or probation; **10** require a pardon, a waiting period, or other action. **A felony conviction alone does not make a ballot illegal**.^[22]

NONCITIZEN VOTING — COMPUTER MATCHES VS. CHECKED CASES

THE AUGUST 2026 CENSUS DOCUMENT

In August 2026 the Census Bureau posted a seven-page document. It says a computer match of records flagged **over 24,000** of 128 million 2020 voters as noncitizens — **2 in 10,000**.^[23] The Bureau's own 2014 test of the same matching system found errors at about **8 times** that rate.^[24]

WHAT THE CENSUS DOCUMENT LEAVES OUT

It names no author and no office. It reports no error rate. Its team had no access to names, and it describes no check of any individual case. Its voter list came from a private company, not from state election records. Its totals do not add up: 128 million checked plus 32 million remaining is 160 million, but the one voter file it used holds **146.7 million**. It counts anyone once listed in a federal noncitizen record as a noncitizen unless a citizenship record is found.^[23]

ANNOUNCED NUMBERS VS. CHECKED CASES

In July 2026 the Department of Homeland Security announced close to **16,000** noncitizens on Nevada's voter rolls. In August it sent Nevada a list of **185** it was confident about. It said more than 14,000 names still needed review.^[25] North Carolina's bipartisan elections board audited the 2016 election: **41** noncitizens voted, out of nearly 4.8 million voters.^[29] Michigan's Department of State reviewed 2024: **16** likely noncitizen votes, out of more than 5.7 million.^[30] Georgia's Republican secretary of state audited the rolls in 2024: **20** noncitizens among 8.2 million registered voters. Only 9 of the 20 had ever cast a ballot; 156 more records went for further review.^[31]

WHAT THE SAVE DATABASE IS

SAVE is a Homeland Security system built to check the immigration status of noncitizens and naturalized citizens applying for government benefits. After a March 2025 executive order, the department rebuilt it to check voter rolls, adding Social Security records and U.S. citizens. The department says it checked more than 65 million voters in 26 states and flagged **28,635**. In Utah and Texas, some of those flagged proved to be citizens.^[28] North Carolina's elections board wrote in 2017 that a SAVE match “*is not a reliable indicator*” that a person is not a citizen.^[29] In June 2026 a judge ruled, in a case brought by voting and privacy groups, that the rebuilt system violates privacy law. The government says the ruling makes ineligible voters harder to detect. It has asked the Supreme Court to lift it; no ruling as of September 21, 2026.^[28]

ELECTION FRAUD & SECURITY

What Are the Facts?

MAIL-IN VOTING, DROP BOXES, PROCESSING AFTER ELECTION DAY

MULTIPLE CHECKS

Mail ballots pass through multiple checks: voter registration verification, signature or ID matching, ballot tracking, and documented chain-of-custody handling.^{[10][11][12][15]}

DROP-BOX SECURITY

Ballot drop boxes are typically subject to security measures such as locked design, regular collection schedules, documented *chain of custody*, and, in many jurisdictions, camera or in-person monitoring.^{[13][14]}

WHY COUNTING TAKES TIME

Mail ballots take extra time to process, verify, and count. Election-night totals may not include all of them.^[12]

THE 2026 MAIL-BALLOT RULE AND CITIZENSHIP LISTS

A March 2026 executive order led to a Postal Service rule: states would give the Postal Service lists of mail-ballot voters, and it could refuse ballots for anyone not listed. A federal judge blocked the rule, finding it likely violates the Constitution, under which states run elections. The administration says the rule will prevent voter fraud. On September 14, 2026 the Supreme Court left the block in place. The Postal Service cannot enforce the rule while the lawsuits continue.^[33] The same order directs federal agencies to send each state a list of people its records show to be citizens. The first deadline, September 4, 2026, passed with no list.^{[26][27]}

FEDERAL ELECTION-SECURITY SUPPORT

THE CYBERATTACK WARNING CENTER

From 2018 to early 2025, a federally funded national center alerted election officials to security threats, at no cost to them. In March 2025 the Department of Homeland Security ended the funding, saying the work no longer supported its priorities.^[34] In April 2026 Congress directed the department to continue the center. On September 2, 2026 the senior Democrats on the Senate and House election committees wrote that none of the more than \$39.6 million had been paid. They reminded the department of Congress's direction and asked for an answer by September 9.^[35]

Election Safeguards

- ? Federal law prohibits noncitizens from voting in federal elections; violations can bring fines, prison time, or both.^[6]
- ? In 2024, over **98%** of election jurisdictions used voting equipment with a paper ballot or auditable paper record; 93% of states, territories and D.C. require voting-system testing and certification.^[32] Many states require post-election audits.^{[7][8]}
- ? Election administration is decentralized, which means errors, hacking or misconduct in one place do not automatically affect the whole country.
- ? Voter lists are matched against state death and felony records. Federal law bars removing anyone solely for not voting, halts systematic removals 90 days before a federal election, and opens the records of the process to public inspection.^{[20][21]}
- ? Hear a count of "noncitizen voters"? Ask: was each case checked, or is it a computer match?
- ? **YOU are part of security.** Observe your own voting experience. Ask questions to clarify.

WHAT DO THE FACTS SAY?

- ✓ Across the studies and reviews cited here, documented fraud has been found at rates below 0.002% of ballots cast — most far lower.^{[1][2][3]}
- ✓ Recounts, audits, lawsuits, and contests in the 2020 battleground states did not change the outcome.^[4]
- ✓ U.S. elections are decentralized across thousands of jurisdictions, most using paper records or paper-backed systems, and many states require post-election audits.^[8]
- ✓ Noncitizen voting is a federal crime; a review of Heritage's own database found 89 proven cases of noncitizen voting.^{[5][6]}
- ✓ In one state audit, over 1,400 likely deceased voters were found still on the voter rolls — and 2 ballots cast.^[19]
- ✓ Mail ballots take extra time to verify and count; election-night totals may not include all of them.^[12]

ELECTION FRAUD & SECURITY

Go Deeper

Sources and Links • verified September 21, 2026

1. Elaine Kamarck, Brookings, "How widespread is election fraud in the United States? Not very" (October 28, 2024). brookings.edu/articles/how-widespread-is-election-fraud-in-the-united-states-not-very/
2. Brennan Center for Justice, "Debunking the Voter Fraud Myth" (January 31, 2017). brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/debunking-voter-fraud-myth
3. Associated Press, "AP review finds far too little vote fraud to tip 2020 election to Trump" (December 14, 2021). apnews.com/article/voter-fraud-election-2020...
4. Stanford-MIT Healthy Elections Project, "Vote Recounts and Election Contests in Battleground States" (March 10, 2021). web.mit.edu/healthyelections/www/final-reports/recounts-election-contests.html
5. Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, American Immigration Council, "Unpacking Myths About Noncitizen Voting" (updated August 13, 2026; 1,619 cases, 89 noncitizen). americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/myths-about-noncitizen-voting-heritage-foundation-data/ Earlier edition (August 1, 2024) with the 1-billion-ballot count: americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/noncitizen-voting-heritage-foundation-data-2024/
6. U.S. Code, Title 18, §611, "Voting by Aliens." Cornell Legal Information Institute. law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/611
7. Verified Voting, "Audit Law Database" (state audit laws, 50 states and D.C.). verifiedvoting.org/auditlaws/
8. Bipartisan Policy Center, "Bipartisan Principles for Election Audits" (November 8, 2021). bipartisanpolicy.org/report/bipartisan-principles-for-election-audits/
9. electionline — Election Center / National Association of Election Officials, daily election-administration news. electionline.org
10. Caltech Science Exchange, "How Does Voting by Mail Work?" scienceexchange.caltech.edu/topics/voting-elections/vote-by-mail-security
11. Brennan Center for Justice, "Mail Ballot Security Features: A Primer" (October 16, 2020). brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/mail-ballot-security-features-primer
12. Bipartisan Policy Center, "Mail Voting is Safe and Secure" (February 20, 2026). bipartisanpolicy.org/report/mail-voting-is-safe-secure/
13. El Dorado County Elections, "Drop Box Usage and Security." eldoradocounty.ca.gov/.../drop-box-usage-and-security.pdf
14. Axel Hufford, Stanford-MIT Healthy Elections Project, "Ballot Drop Boxes in the 2020 Elections" (March 10, 2021). web.mit.edu/healthyelections/www/final-reports/ballot-drop-boxes.html
15. Center for Election Innovation & Research, "Is voting by mail secure, and how can I know my mail-in vote is counted?" (March 26, 2024). electioninnovation.org/update/is-voting-by-mail-secure...
16. Justin Levitt / *The Washington Post*, "A comprehensive investigation of voter impersonation finds 31 credible incidents out of one billion ballots cast" (August 6, 2014). washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/08/06/...
17. Natasha Khan and Corbin Carson, News21 (Arizona State University), "Comprehensive Database of U.S. Voter Fraud Uncovers No Evidence That Photo ID Is Needed" (August 12, 2012). 2,068 alleged cases, 2000–2012. votingrights.news21.com/article/election-fraud/
18. The Heritage Foundation, "Election Fraud Database / Election Fraud Map" (the group's own list of proven cases, which it calls a "sampling"; last updated December 12, 2025; its last stated total was 1,567, December 2024). heritage.org/voterfraud
19. Utah Office of the Legislative Auditor General, "A Performance Audit of Utah's Election System," Report 2024-20 (December 2024), Chapter 2. Death certificates from July 2022–June 2024 matched against the state voter list as of July 29, 2024. le.utah.gov/interim/2024/pdf/00004249.pdf
20. U.S. Code, Title 52, §21083 (Help America Vote Act) — requires each state to coordinate its statewide voter list with state agency records on death. Cornell Legal Information Institute. law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/52/21083
21. U.S. Code, Title 52, §20507 (National Voter Registration Act) — grounds for removal, the ban on removal for failure to vote, the 90-day quiet period, and public inspection of list-maintenance records. Cornell Legal Information Institute. law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/52/20507
22. National Conference of State Legislatures, "Restoration of Voting Rights for Felons" (updated September 2, 2026). Fifty-state table with statutory and constitutional citations. ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights
23. U.S. Census Bureau, "Noncitizen Voting in the 2020 Election, A Beginning Analysis" (August 2026). census.gov/library/publications/2026/dir/noncitizen...
24. U.S. Census Bureau, CARRA Working Paper 2014-02, false match rates in its record-matching system (July 2014), Tables 3–4. census.gov/.../carra-wp-2014-02.pdf
25. Jude Joffe-Block and Miles Parks, NPR, "DHS acknowledges the noncitizen numbers it touted on voter rolls were inflated" (August 25, 2026). npr.org/2026/08/25
26. Executive Order 14399 (March 31, 2026), Federal Register 2026-06601, Sections 2–3. federalregister.gov/d/2026-06601
27. NPR, "The Trump administration still aims to make state citizenship lists ahead of midterms" (September 3, 2026). npr.org/2026/09/03
28. Natalie Alms, The Washington Sun (NOTUS), "DHS Asks the Supreme Court to Revive Overhauled Voter Database" (September 8, 2026). washingtonsun.com
29. N.C. State Board of Elections, "Post-Election Audit Report: General Election 2016" (April 21, 2017). ncsbe.gov.../Post-Election_Audit_Report.pdf
30. Michigan Department of State, "Review confirms instances of noncitizen voting are extremely rare" (April 3, 2025). michigan.gov/sos
31. Georgia Recorder, "Audit found 20 noncitizens registered to vote out of 8.2M" (October 23, 2024). georgiarecorder.com
32. U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2024 Election Administration and Voting Survey summary (June 2025). eac.gov.../EAVS_2024_One_Sheet
33. Andrew Chung, Reuters, "In loss for Trump, US Supreme Court won't let Postal Service restrict mail ballots" (September 14, 2026). usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2026-09-14/...
34. Votebeat, "CISA halts support for states on election security" (March 11, 2025). votebeat.org/2025/03/11
35. Sen. Alex Padilla and Rep. Joseph Morelle, letter to the Homeland Security Secretary (September 2, 2026). padilla.senate.gov

- **electionline** — the nation's nonpartisan, non-advocacy clearinghouse for daily news on election administration, from the Election Center (National Association of Election Officials). electionline.org

ELECTION FRAUD & SECURITY

Our Research Process

Every Fact Brief follows the same discipline — so you can trust what's on these pages, and check it yourself.

- 1 Identify issues voters care about.
- 2 Do independent, nonpartisan research using primary documents and verifiable, most up-to-date data.
- 3 Human-defined and directed throughout: we set the questions and the scope, redirect the research as fact patterns emerge, and verify every source. Three or more AI tools assist with searching, organizing and drafting.
- 4 Cross-check for accuracy and fairness.
- 5 Produce a concise Fact Brief.
- 6 Verify that each key factual claim is backed by a directly relevant, credible source.
- 7 Present the facts on contested points; note where credible sources disagree.
- 8 Use sources across the political spectrum, chosen for reliability — not for the conclusions they reach.
- 9 Update each Fact Brief when appropriate.

Get the Facts <> Share the Facts