

FACT BRIEF • SUMMER 2026

Election Fraud & Security

What is the ISSUE?

<0.01%

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 well below 0.01% of ballots cast.**

Know the Terms

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

Voter impersonation — voting as someone else in person; the type of fraud that photo-ID laws target. Repeatedly found to be vanishingly rare.

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when officials have approved the voter as eligible and the information appears current; *inactive* when it may be out of date, usually a possible address change.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 MOST-CITED DATABASE

The Heritage Foundation — which warns about election security — keeps the most-cited database of proven fraud. It lists about **1,500 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 700,000.^{[19][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 voter-impersonation cases** from 2000–2014 — out of more than 1 billion ballots, about 0.000003%.^{[17][2]}

DEAD VOTERS: NAMES, NOT BALLOTS

Federal law requires every state to match its voter list against state death records.^[21] **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 dead people 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.^[20]

ELECTION FRAUD & SECURITY

What Are the Facts?

VOTER FRAUD — continued

ARIZONA, 25 YEARS

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

THE 2020 BATTLEGROUND

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.”^[18]

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.^[21] 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.**^[23]

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.^{[11][12][13][16]}

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.^{[14][15]}

WHY COUNTING TAKES TIME

Longer counting periods usually reflect the time needed to receive, verify, and process legally cast mail ballots rather than evidence of fraud.^{[13][16]}

Election Safeguards

- ? Federal law prohibits noncitizens from voting in federal elections; violations can bring fines, prison time, or both.^[6]
- ? Most U.S. jurisdictions use paper records or paper-backed systems, and many states require post-election audits or other review procedures.^{[7][8]}
- ? Election administration is decentralized, which means errors or misconduct in one place do not automatically affect the whole country.^{[4][7][8]}
- ? Voter lists are matched against state death and felony records. Federal law bars removing anyone for not voting, halts systematic removals 90 days before a federal election, and opens the records of the process to public inspection.^{[21][22]}
- ? **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 well below 0.01% of ballots cast.^{[1][2][3]}
- ✓ Recounts, audits, lawsuits, and contests in the 2020 battleground states did not change the outcome.^{[3][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.^{[4][7][8]}
- ✓ Noncitizen voting is a federal crime; a review of Heritage's own database found 68 proven cases over roughly 40 years.^{[5][6]}
- ✓ In one state audit, over 1,400 dead people were found still on the voter rolls — and 2 ballots cast.^[20]
- ✓ Ballots received after Election Day still take time to verify and count — a longer count is not itself evidence of fraud.^{[13][16]}

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Go Deeper

Stay Current

- **MIT Election Data and Science Lab** — a nonpartisan research lab that collects and shares election-administration data and interactive tools, including the Elections Performance Index. electionlab.mit.edu
- **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

Sources and Links • verified July 10, 2026

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5. American Immigration Council, "Unpacking Myths About Noncitizen Voting" (August 1, 2024). americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/myths-about-noncitizen-voting-heritage-foundation-data/
6. U.S. Code, Title 18, §611, "Voting by Aliens." Cornell Legal Information Institute. law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/611
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8. Bipartisan Policy Center, "Bipartisan Principles for Election Audits" (November 8, 2021). bipartisanpolicy.org/report/bipartisan-principles-for-election-audits/
9. MIT Election Data and Science Lab. electionlab.mit.edu
10. electionline — Election Center / National Association of Election Officials, daily election-administration news. electionline.org
11. Caltech Science Exchange, "How Does Voting by Mail Work?" scienceexchange.caltech.edu/topics/voting-elections/vote-by-mail-security
12. Brennan Center for Justice, "Mail Ballot Security Features: A Primer" (October 15, 2020). brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/mail-ballot-security-features-primer
13. Bipartisan Policy Center, "Mail Voting is Safe and Secure" (updated February 2026). bipartisanpolicy.org/report/mail-voting-is-safe-secure/
14. El Dorado County Elections, "Drop Box Usage and Security." eldoradocounty.ca.gov/.../drop-box-usage-and-security.pdf
15. MIT Election Data and Science Lab and Stanford Healthy Elections Project, "Ballot Drop Boxes in the 2020 Elections" (final report). web.mit.edu/healthyelections/www/final-reports/ballot-drop-boxes.html
16. Center for Election Innovation & Research, "Is voting by mail secure, and how can I know my mail-in vote is counted?" (March 25, 2024). electioninnovation.org/update/is-voting-by-mail-secure...
17. 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/...
18. News21 (Arizona State University), "Who Can Vote?" — records-based review of 2,068 alleged election-fraud cases since 2000. votingrights.news21.com/article/election-fraud/
19. The Heritage Foundation, "Election Fraud Database / Election Fraud Map" (the group's own running tally of proven cases; ~1,500 spanning decades). heritage.org/voterfraud
20. 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
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22. 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

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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 Use three or more AI tools to assist searching and organizing; humans make all judgments.
- 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.

Get the Facts <> Share the Facts