

How to Plug the Holes in the USA's Voting Systems

Also advertised as the "[Save America Act](#)"?

What would a sane, principled, “one real U.S. citizen, one real U.S. voter, one real U.S. vote” system actually look like in the U.S.; given state by state control plus federal standards (per the constitution)? Let’s sketch out a nonpartisan, just, fair structural **model**. And let's find out what the proposed [Act](#) will and will not accomplish.

High-level design at a glance

Layer	Who’s in charge	What it does
Constitutional baseline	Congress + Courts (when rules/laws area broken)	Define minimum federal standards (rights, protections, “one person, one vote”).
Federal election code	Congress	Set uniform rules for federal races (ID, audits, security, transparency).
State implementation	States & local jurisdictions	Run the actual elections within all mandated federal guardrails.
Independent oversight	Bipartisan/nonpartisan bodies	Monitor, audit, and enforce rules.

1. Core principles

- **One person, one vote:**
 - **One live adult U.S. citizen = one ballot = one counted vote per federal race or position and/or candidate per election.**
- **State control, federal floor:**
 - States **administer** elections.
 - Federal law sets **minimum standards** for federal offices/positions (President, Senate, and House).
- **Verifiable, not just “trust us”:**
 - Every ballot is **traceable in process** (chain of custody) but **secret in content**.
- **Transparency over mystery:**
 - Rules, procedures, and audits are **public, predictable, and reviewable**.

2. Voter identity & eligibility

Goal: Strong enough to prevent abuse, simple enough not to block legitimate voters.

- **National baseline for federal races:**
 - **Proof of citizenship at registration** (passport, naturalization/birth certificate, REAL ID-compliant license + backend verification, etc.).
 - **Standardized data checks:**
 - Cross-check with **SSA** (for identity & death records).
 - Cross-check with **state DMVs** and **change-of-address** and/or property ownership or occupancy data to reduce double registration.
- **State flexibility:**
 - States can add **stricter** rules if they wish (within constitutional limits), but not weaker than the federal floor for federal races.

- **Continuous roll maintenance:**
 - Regular, transparent processes to:
 - Remove deceased voters.
 - Update address changes.
 - Flag potential duplicates across states (with due process and notice).

3. Voting methods & chain of custody

Design each method so that **every ballot has a clean, auditable life story.**

- **In-person voting:**
 - **Photo ID** (with free IDs available to avoid discrimination).
 - Electronic poll books or paper poll books with **real-time or near-real-time check-in** to prevent double voting.
- **Mail voting:**
 - **Verified request** (no unsolicited mass mailings for federal races).
 - **Unique ballot ID** tied to a specific voter record.
 - **Signature verification** plus optional **2-factor check** (e.g., last 4 of SSN or PIN).
 - Full **chain-of-custody logs** from printing → mailing out → receipt back in → storage → counting → archiving.
- **Ballot collection (“harvesting”):**
 - Either:
 - **Prohibit third-party collection for federal races**, or
 - Strictly limit to **designated caregivers/family** with logs and caps.
 - Trust but verify.
- **Physical security:**
 - Sealed containers, tamper-evident seals, cameras in storage areas, and vetted **bipartisan teams** handling ballots at every step.

4. Counting, auditing, and recounts

This is where a lot of trust is either created or destroyed.

- **Paper as ground truth:**
 - Every vote for federal races must have a **voter-verifiable paper record** (hand-marked or machine-marked).
- **Open, observable counting:**
 - Redundant (3 mode or 3 pass) counting done by vetted **bipartisan teams**, with:
 - Live, third party observation.
 - Clear rules for "no exceptions to the rules" challenges.
- **Mandatory audits:**
 - **Risk-limiting audits** (RLAs) after every federal election:
 - Randomly sampled ballots to statistically confirm outcomes.
 - Automatic **full recounts** when margins are below a set threshold.
- **Public reporting:**
 - Publish:
 - Turnout by precinct.
 - Number of ballots issued, returned, rejected, and counted.
 - Audit results and any discrepancies.

5. Technology & security

Use tech as a tool, not a black box.

- **No internet-connected or off system vote tabulation and logging for official results.**
- **No counting with observers sent home or not present.**
- **Openly reviewed software:**
 - Source code for voting systems available for **independent security review** (under controlled conditions).
- **AI's role (carefully bounded):**
 - **Good uses:**
 - Detecting anomalies in turnout or patterns that suggest double voting or systemic errors.
 - Stress-testing procedures (simulating edge cases).
 - Helping design clearer, easier to understand ballots and instructions.
 - **Off-limits:**
 - Deciding voter eligibility.
 - Overriding human audits or legal processes.

6. Oversight, enforcement, and culture

Rules mean nothing without teeth and trust.

- **Independent election boards:**
 - Bipartisan or nonpartisan bodies at state and federal levels with:
 - Subpoena power.
 - Authority to investigate and refer criminal cases.
- **Clear, enforced penalties (1 year felony jail time minimum):**
 - For:
 - Double voting.
 - Fraudulent registration.
 - Tampering with ballots or counts.
 - Intimidating or coercing voters.
 - Organizing **coercive** get out the vote or prevent the vote efforts.
- **Radical transparency:**
 - Public education on:
 - How the system works.
 - What safeguards do and do not (but should) exist.
 - How to challenge or verify results.

Thus, a **good, realistic U.S. voting system** that honors state control but enforces “one live adult citizen, one vote per federal race” would:

- Use **federal minimum standards** for identity, proof of citizenship, audits, and security.
- Let **states run the machinery**—polling places, staffing, local rules—within those standards.
- Anchor everything in **paper ballots, auditable processes, and mandatory post-election checks.**

- Use technology and even AI as **supporting tools**, never as the final arbiter of who votes or who wins.

(1) Based on the above outline, what extra considerations might be required in order to establish any well managed state's voter registration systems and databases; within all states or territories where federal voting takes place?

(2) Would it be better to restart with empty databases and have everyone re-register while cross checks are performed? Or, would it be better to somehow run automated cross checks of some sort between multiple registration systems to try and find and delete outdated or suspected records and notify those who are removed from the system so they can re-register that way? Or, should re-registration happen after each vote, starting from scratch each time with a clean slate, so that voters get used to registering if they wish to keep voting in future election systems as needed?

This is the messy, unglamorous core of election integrity: **how to build and maintain clean voter rolls without breaking the law or breaking trust?**

Here's a grounded look at these three ideas, plus the extra considerations any serious nationwide registration system will have to deal with.

NVRA = National Voter Registration Act (already enacted), which currently sets federal rules for registration and list maintenance.

Quick comparison of the three approaches

Approach	Pros	Cons / Risks
Wipe & re-register everyone once	Clean baseline, forces fresh proof of eligibility	High disenfranchisement risk, NVRA issues, huge admin burden
Automated cross-checks and cleanup	Continuous improvement, less disruption	Needs good data, strong safeguards, careful notice and appeal processes
Re-register from scratch every cycle	Very "clean" lists in theory	Completely impractical, massive drop-off, likely illegal under federal law

1. Extra considerations for "well-managed" registration systems

Any serious design has to account for at least these:

- **Legal constraints (NVRA and civil rights law):** Federal law requires states to keep lists "accurate and current," but also **limits how and when voters can be removed** and requires specific notice and timing rules. Aggressive purges or forced re-registration can violate these protections. Failure to follow NVRA can end up allowing corrupt voting.
- **List maintenance is continuous, not one-and-done:** Best practice is **ongoing list maintenance**—using address changes, death records, felony records, etc.—not occasional shock therapy.
- **Interstate movement and duplicates:** People move constantly. Modern systems (applied in all states) should attempt to enforce fair voting using **interstate data matching** (e.g., multi-state compacts, NCOA, DMVs) to find likely duplicates and outdated registrations.

- **Data quality and error rates:** Any automated matching (names, DOB, SSN fragments) will produce **false positives and false negatives**. You need:
 - Conservative matching rules.
 - Human review for edge cases.
 - Clear notice and appeal for affected voters.
- **Security and privacy:** Centralized or interconnected databases must:
 - Protect PII (addresses, DOB, partial SSN).
 - Log access and changes.
 - Be hardened against breaches and tampering.
- **User experience & trust:** If the system feels like a trap—people being dropped silently or forced to jump through hoops—trust collapses. Good systems:
 - Notify voters clearly.
 - Offer easy ways to confirm and update registration.
 - Provide transparent explanations of list maintenance.

2. Should we wipe everything and re-register from scratch?

Short answer: generally a bad idea.

- **Pros:**
 - You get a “fresh” list with current proof of eligibility.
- **Cons:**
 - Millions of eligible voters would likely miss the re-registration window.
 - High risk of violating NVRA protections against systematic removal close to elections and against discriminatory practices.
 - Enormous administrative cost and confusion.

This kind of “hard reset” might be justified only in **very narrow, extreme cases** (e.g., a proven, catastrophic data compromise in a specific jurisdiction, a state/jurisdiction found guilty of fraud or manipulation on a large scale), and even then with long lead times and heavy safeguards.

3. Or should we re-register everyone every election cycle?

This is even less workable.

- It would functionally turn voting into a **two-step process every time**: register → vote.
- Turnout would almost certainly crater, especially among people who move often, work multiple jobs, are unreliable voters or have limited access to government offices.
- It would almost certainly conflict with NVRA’s requirement that registration be reasonably accessible and removals follow strict procedures.

In practice, this would likely be seen as **systemic disenfranchisement**, not “good hygiene.”

4. Best direction: continuous, data-driven list maintenance

The middle ground idea—**automated cross-checks plus mandatory, regular, careful cleanup**—is closest to what experts recommend, if it’s done right.

A strong model would or should look like this:

- **Shared data sources:**
 - Intrastate: DMVs, death records, federal and state court records (for disqualifying felons where applicable), flag inactive voters with verification requests sent to last known address with no response.
 - Interstate: shared change-of-address data, 50-state registration matching; and possibly credit-bureau, landlord, tax assessor address data under strict rules.
- **Tiered matching and flags:**
 - **High-confidence matches** (same name, DOB, SSN4, and address history) can trigger automatic updates/removals with notice.
 - **Medium-confidence matches** generate a “needs confirmation” status and outreach to the voter.
 - **Low-confidence matches** are logged but not acted on without further evidence.
- **Notice + due process:**
 - Before removal for moves or inactivity, send **forwardable notices** and give a clear path to confirm or correct information.
 - Keep voters in an “inactive” status before full removal, as many (but not all) states already do.
- **Regular, transparent reporting:**
 - Publish stats on:
 - How many records were updated, inactivated, or removed.
 - Data sources used.
 - Error rates found in audits.
- **Targeted re-registration only where needed:**
 - If a county’s data is especially corrupted or incomplete, you could require **targeted re-registration** there with extended timelines and heavy outreach, rather than nuking the entire state’s rolls.

5. How this fits into a “one live adult citizen, one vote” goal

The most realistic path that respects both **state control** and **federal standards** is:

- **Keep permanent registration**, not per-cycle re-registration.
- **Mandate strong, uniform list-maintenance standards for federal elections** (data sources, notice rules, audit requirements).
- **Encourage or require interstate data sharing** to catch double registrations and outdated records.
- Use **automated tools (including AI) only as flagging and analysis aids**, never as the final authority on who gets removed.

If cross-checking works best, but not 100% of the time, would it improve results if voter-eligible citizens, with few exceptions, were asked to vote in person and if a few basic questions, such as "have you moved recently?", or "have you voted here before?" when voting in person were asked as one last cross-check within the process?

NOTE: Past research shows that in person voting is by far better than mail in or other variants, in order to reduce/prevent fraud, etc.

In-person voting can add an extra layer of verification, but it can't replace the deeper structural safeguards that keep voter rolls accurate. Still, asking voters simple, well-designed questions at check-in *can* help catch errors—as long as it's done carefully, consistently, and within legal limits. And, as always, confirmation of any election-related details with trusted official sources would be advisable.

Why in-person check-in questions *can* help

Cross-checking databases will never be perfect. People move, change names, or have similar identities. A human-in-the-loop moment—right at the polling place—can catch things that algorithms miss.

Examples of useful, legally safe questions:

- **“Is this your current address?”** helps catch outdated registrations.
- **“Have you already voted in this election?”** helps catch accidental double attempts (e.g., someone mailed a ballot and forgot).
- **“Has your name changed recently?”** helps reconcile mismatches.

These questions don't interrogate the voter per se; they simply confirm or crosscheck the information already in the system.

But there are important constraints

Election law in the U.S. is very clear about a few things:

1. No question can be used to deny a lawful voter their ballot

If someone says “I moved last week,” the poll worker can't just turn them away. They must be offered the correct process—often a provisional ballot or same-day update, depending on the state's ability to perform such actions.

2. Questions must be uniform

You can't ask some voters and not others. That opens the door to discrimination/fairness claims.

3. Questions must be simple and non-intimidating

Anything that feels like an interrogation risks suppressing legitimate voters.

4. States—not the federal government—control the check-in process

Federal standards can set a floor, but states run the machinery.

Would requiring most people to vote in person improve accuracy?

It would improve **identity verification**, but it would also create tradeoffs:

Benefits

- Stronger real-time identity confirmation
- Fewer opportunities for ballot miss delivery or in mail loss with others voting illegally
- Easier to prevent accidental or on purpose double voting
- Cleaner chain of custody

Costs

- Harder for people with disabilities, the elderly, rural voters, deployed military, and people with inflexible jobs (unless absentee voting is allowed)
- Longer lines and higher administrative burden (unless several days voting is supported)
- Higher risk of disenfranchisement if ID or address issues arise (should be rare)
- Some states' laws explicitly protect mail voting options (even if they shouldn't)

A system that *encourages* in-person voting but still provides secure absentee options tends to strike the best balance.

So what's the best hybrid approach?

Here's is a model that election-administration experts often converge on:

1. Strong list maintenance + cross-checks

Use data to keep rolls clean year-round.

2. In-person voting as the default, not the mandate

Encourage it through convenience; more polling places, early voting, weekend voting.

3. Simple, uniform check-in questions

Not to interrogate, but to confirm data.

4. Secure absentee voting for those who need it

With:

- Verified requests
- Signature or ID verification
- Clear chain of custody

5. Provisional ballots as a safety valve

- If something doesn't match, the voter still votes, and the issue is resolved afterward.

Would this materially improve accuracy?

Yes—**incrementally**, not magically.

- In-person check-in catches errors that databases miss.
- Crosschecks catch errors that humans miss.
- Provisional ballots protect voters when either system misfires.

No single layer is perfect, but **stacking multiple imperfect layers creates a strong system**.

Does current federal law already support a best case voting system in the USA and within each state (assuming every state followed the law and federal guidelines); or would passing the House version of the **SAVE America Act** materially improve federal elections; or will there still be some huge gaps between those options and what could be devised based on the parameters covered earlier?

For anything election related, it's always worth double-checking details with official sources like state election offices, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, and Congress.

1. What current federal law already provides (in theory)

Under existing law, the U.S. already has a **framework** that can support a pretty strong system *if* it's fully and correctly implemented by every state (which it is not):

- **NVRA (National Voter Registration Act):**
 - Requires states to make registration accessible (DMVs, mail, etc.).
 - Requires states to keep rolls “accurate and current,” but with protections against improper purges.
- **HAVA (Help America Vote Act):**
 - Requires statewide voter registration databases.
 - Sets some ID rules for first-time voters who register by mail.
- **EAC guidelines and state laws:**
 - Provide best practices on list maintenance, audits, accessibility, and security (but are unevenly adopted).

If every state used these tools optimally, you'd have:

- Continuous list maintenance.
- Reasonable ID checks (though not uniform).
- Audits and paper trails in many—but not all—places.

So: current law gives **building blocks**, but not a fully specified “best case” system like the one sketched earlier.

2. What the House SAVE America Act would change

From neutral summaries (CRS, NCSL, news coverage), the House-passed **SAVE America Act** would, for **federal elections**:

- **Require documentary proof of U.S. citizenship** to register.
- **Require photo ID** to vote.
- Direct states to use **DHS’s SAVE system** to help verify citizenship/immigration status for registration and list maintenance.

Supporters argue this would:

- Better enforce “citizens only” voting.
- Create more uniform national standards for federal races.

Critics argue it could/might:

- Disenfranchise eligible voters who lack matching documents (e.g., name changes, older records).
- Rely on a database (SAVE) that is **not a definitive citizenship list** and has known accuracy limits.

So it **improves the foundation** (registration) and **materially changes the front door** (show ID), but it doesn’t redesign the whole dwelling or the roof.

3. How both compare to the “best case” model outlined above

In the system outlined, the pillars were:

- Strong but fair **identity and citizenship verification**.
- Continuous, data-driven **list maintenance** with due process.
- **Paper ballots** with **some exceptions** and robust, mandatory **audits**.
- Transparent **chain of custody** for all voting methods.
- Carefully bounded use of **technology and AI**.
- Clear **oversight and enforcement**.

Now, lining that up:

If current law were perfectly followed

- **Strengths:**
 - You can get decent list maintenance and some ID checks.
 - You can implement paper trails and audits **where** states choose to.
- **Gaps vs our “best case”:**
 - No uniform national standards for:
 - Proof of citizenship.
 - Photo ID for all federal voters.
 - Mandatory risk-limiting audits.
 - Chain-of-custody requirements.

- Interstate duplicate detection and data sharing are still patchy and voluntary.

If the SAVE America Act were added on top

- **What it clearly strengthens:**
 - **Front-end eligibility checks** (citizenship documentation + photo ID).
 - More **uniform national rules** for federal races on those two points.
- **What it does *not* fully address:**
 - The accuracy and limitations of the **SAVE database** itself.
 - Mandatory, nationwide **post-election audits** and **paper-ballot** requirements.
 - Detailed **chain-of-custody standards** for and mail ballots and in-person handling.
 - Broader **technology transparency** (e.g., open review of voting system software).
 - The human-factors side: training, clear procedures, and public transparency.

So even with the House **SAVE America Act**, there would still be **significant gaps** between:

- What's on the books now,
- What that bill would change, and
- The fully layered, “one live adult citizen, one vote, fully auditable” system everyone should—conceivably—want designed.

Final answer

- **Does current federal law already support a best-case system, if perfectly followed?** It supports a **solid baseline**, but not the fully specified, uniform, multi-layered model we outlined.
- **Would the House SAVE America Act materially change federal elections?** Yes, it would **materially change registration and ID rules** for federal races by tightening and nationalizing them—but it focuses mostly on **who gets on the rolls and who gets a ballot**, not on all the other structural layers.
- **Would there still be big gaps compared to what could be devised?** Yes. Even with perfect compliance with current law *and* something like the **SAVE America Act**, there would still be room—**and need**—for more comprehensive standards on audits, chain of custody, technology transparency, interstate data sharing, and voter-facing processes.

Those who claim prior elections may have been rigged or abused have good reason to suspect such was actually the case; until and unless Congress acts to plug far more holes—within many of the 50+ states' systems—than the **SAVE America Act** will plug.