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Dead And Still Voting

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Thousands of dead Californians remain eligible to vote

By [Stephen Stock](#), [Felipe Escamilla](#) and [Kevin Nious](#) | Friday, Nov 9, 2012 | Updated 11:25 AM PST[View Comments \(152\)](#) | [Email](#) | [Print](#)

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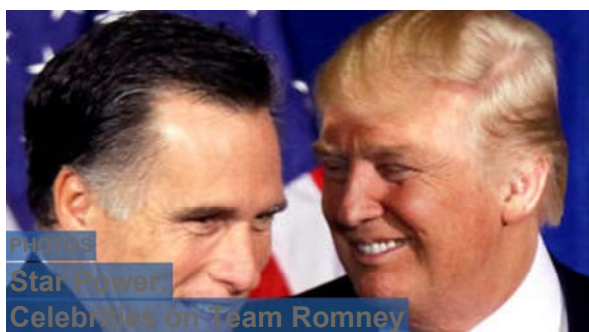
NBC Bay Area used the Social Security Administration's Death Master File to cross reference with the California state voter rolls using name, date of birth, and similar zip codes to find matches. We found over 25,000 in a report that Stephen Stock originally aired at 11 p.m on Nov. 5.

An NBC Bay Area Investigation has uncovered thousands of California voters who remain on the voter rolls despite having died several years ago.

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That discovery prompted several state and Bay Area election officials to re-examine their records, after our investigation brought this issue to light.

NBC Bay Area used the [Social Security Administration's Death Master File](#) to cross reference with the California state voter rolls using name, date of birth, and similar zip codes to find matches. We found over 25,000 questionable names still on the state voter rolls.

A closer look at the data revealed that some of the dead people were not only registered, but somehow, even voted, several years after their death. Sometimes, clerks say the mistake can purely be a clerical error, such as a misplaced signature or an outdated registration list that hadn't been purged. Other times, though, the voting turns out to be fraud, clerks say, where family members vote on their dead relatives' behalf.

Our findings came as no surprise to Bill Morrison of Palo Alto. For Morrison, every trip to the mailbox during election season brings constant reminders of his late wife, Carol Morrison, who died in 2004 after battling cancer.

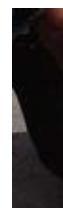
Morrison continues to receive election materials including voter guides, pamphlets, and even ballots for his late wife.

"It angers me and it hurts because she's dead," Morrison said.

According to state records, Carol has voted in the last two presidential elections, despite having passed away.

Morrison has made several attempts to notify the county that his wife died, including sending back her ballots with "DECEASED" marked on the envelope.

"I don't know why, when somebody dies. It doesn't go to the elections and they just cross the name off of the list," Morrison said.



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NBC Bay Area found several other examples, too. People like [Sara Schiffman](#) of San Leandro who died in 2007 yet still voted in 2008, or former Hayward police officer [Frank Canela Tapia](#) who has voted 8 times since 2005, though he died in 2001.

County election officials are responsible for removing names from the voter rolls.

NBC Bay Area gave Contra Costa County Clerk and Recorder Steve Weir a list of more than 100 voters in his county who may have passed away. Around half a dozen of these voters have recorded votes since their death.

“This is embarrassing,” Weir said. “This is something we should have caught.”

After reviewing our list, Weir was able to confirm that he had the death certificate in his office for at least four of these voters, yet the names still weren’t removed.

USEFUL LINKS

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Weir attributes most of the posthumous votes to mistaken signatures and clerical errors.

However, in at least one other case NBC Bay Area uncovered, Weir suspects something else could be afoot. Though he wouldn’t be specific, he referred one of the cases to the district attorney for a potential fraud investigation.

Barry Garner serves as the registrar of Voters in Santa Clara County where NBC Bay Area found the names of 83 people who are dead and still have active voter registration files.

“If we have found someone who has signed someone’s name fraudulently we will turn it over to the D.A.” Garner said.

Some of the matches between the two databases appear to be a coincidence. For example, two people who were born on the exact same day, with the exact same name living in the exact same state.

While many of the names we found should have been removed from the rolls, it is important to note that 25,000 people makes make up less than 0.2 percent of the entire state electorate.

Still, Garner believes that one questionable vote is one too many.

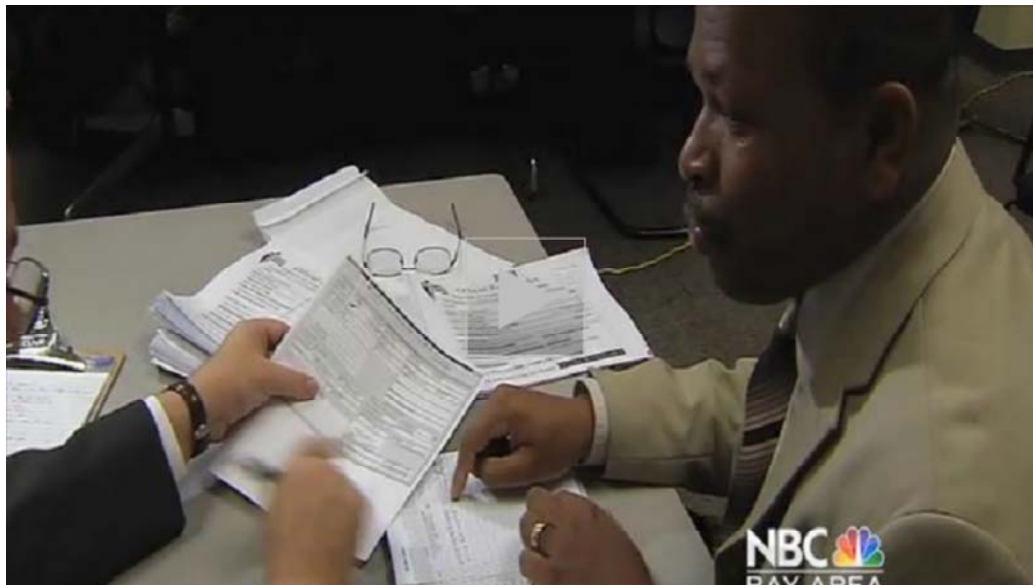
“Too many people have sacrificed and died for the opportunity to vote in this country,” Garner said.

The lag between when a person dies and when they are removed them from the voter rolls extends beyond California.

A recent [study by the Pew Center on the States](#) found 1.8 million dead people still on the active rolls nationwide.

Potentially Dead Registered Voters	
Alameda	1046
Contra Costa	119
Marin	31
Napa	51
San Francisco	365
San Mateo	134
Santa Clara	83
Solano	101
Sonoma	34
Bay Area	1964
California	25,252

"I don't think the issue is how this is possible. It's actually hard to imagine this not occurring given the fractured data that we have throughout this country," said David Becker with Pew Center on the States. "This isn't a Democrat problem this isn't a Republican problem. This is a problem for our system. It's a problem that affects everyone. We need to make sure that the information is accurate."



All of the Bay Area election officials we spoke with confirmed finding names on their rolls that should have been removed before we contacted them and say they will do a thorough investigation of every name we send them after Tuesday's election and have flagged the ballots for voters that they have been able to confirm are dead before Election Day.

County officials stressed that they count on the public to help keep their voter rolls up to date. They request that anyone who knows of a person that has died, notify your local county election office so that their name can be removed.

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Requiring a valid ID would disenfranchise the dead people!

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Except those who vote by mail.

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