

## Arizona: Tens of Thousands of Duplicative Voter Registrations Found After 2020 Election

**JANUARY 2022** – Now is the time to ensure that Arizona’s voter registration rolls are in optimal condition before the midterm elections. If voter turnout comes anywhere near 2020 levels, one can expect tight margins in statewide contests and even slimmer room for administrative errors.

Looking back at Election Day 2020, Arizona’s voter rolls had tens of thousands of duplicate and potentially unlawful registrations. This research brief outlines the vulnerabilities of the rolls with the hope of seeing them resolved in the coming months, before federal laws shut this window of opportunity.

### 2020 Election Findings

**Interstate Duplicate Registrations – 31,641 Arizona (AZ) voter registrants registered a second time in their new state after leaving Arizona.** In this study, PILF utilized the U.S. Postal Service National Change of Address (NCOA) system and the organization’s national voter database to track those moving from their Arizona address to another state and determine if they established a subsequent registration before November 2020.

Top 5 - Registrants Leaving AZ for...	
CA	6,339
TX	4,316
CO	2,604
OR	1,745
FL	1,626

Arizona election laws specify what is required to duly register and vote when relocating to or from the state. Although Arizona law allows a registrant to permanently leave the state but still cast a ballot shortly before an Election Day<sup>1</sup>, the expectation is that the person did not have adequate time to register in the new location. Yet PILF’s data show 31,641 Arizona registrants moved well before the prescribed 30-day window leading to the election *and* managed to secure a second registration out of state. Some former Arizonans were long gone before November 2020. In one case, a person moved from Tempe to Virginia in 2017 and was actively registered in both states during the past election.

It’s not illegal under state or federal law to be registered in two different places. Rather, the onus is on election officials to keep track of movers when they are not forthcoming about their actions. Arizona utilizes NCOA and is part of an interstate compact called ERIC to track voters across the country. The more extreme examples should not be possible if these tools are being adequately used and are providing actionable data. If PILF can see them, any election official should, too.

Time is running out for Arizona officials to scrub rolls of those relocated elsewhere. Federal law prohibits such maintenance 90 days before a general election. This work pays off later in terms of fewer USPS-undeliverable and “Unknown status” mail ballots.

**Same-Address Duplicate Registrations – 863 Arizonans managed to become registered twice under variations of their names.** Arizona’s voter registration system, like nearly every other studied by PILF, can be tricked into registering a person multiple times with extremely similar biographical data inputs. Despite the relatively few occurrences of the problem around the 2020 Election, this still serves as an administrative challenge to be resolved as we see more automation to vote-by-mail. Otherwise, “John

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<sup>1</sup> AZ. Stat. § 16-126.

Public” and “John Q. Public” could each vote once, while the actual John is voting twice – a specific violation of Arizona election law.<sup>2</sup>

PILF researchers identified multiple scenarios<sup>3</sup> for how duplicates are occurring. Bear in mind, this happens when birth date and residential addresses perfectly match:

- John Q. Public vs. John Quincy Public (middle name/middle initial match)
- John Q. Public vs. Jon Q. Public (spelling error-first name)
- Mary Ann Smith vs. Mary Smith Thomas (maiden/married confusion)
- Karen Defazio vs. Karen De Fazio (spacing glitch)
- Jenny Taylor vs. Jenny Taylor-Smith (hyphenated surname)
- D’Angelo Harris vs. DAngelo Harris (punctuation in name)

Administrative fixes such as these can legally occur up to the final days before the election. Generally, officials are expected to take the best elements of a duplicate set and merge them into a single record. In most cases, the registrant may not even notice the change. There is essentially no risk of an eligible registrant losing their ability to vote during the process.

### **Claiming UPS Stores as Homes – 499 Arizonans claimed the stores as homes. 110 cast ballots in**

**2020.** State election law is gracious as to what consists of an acceptable residence for voter registration purposes well beyond single-family homes and apartments. Any group shelter or property is acceptable. Indigents and transients can claim courthouses and U.S. Postal Service buildings.<sup>4</sup> You can even leave the place vacant for a period so long as you plan to return.<sup>5</sup> But the same cannot be said for commercial entities like UPS Stores.

<b>County (Combined Stores)</b>	<b>Registrants</b>
Maricopa	354
Yuma	133
Pinal	6
Pima	3
Coconino	2
Yavapai	1

More work must be done to identify and blacklist addresses not in keeping with Arizona election statutes regarding acceptable use. PILF found a concentration of this problem in Maricopa County, particularly at Stores in Tempe.

### **Arizona’s Expanding Use of Mail Ballots Requires Heightened Attention to Voter List Hygiene**

During the 2020 Presidential Election, 15 million mail ballots went unaccounted for nationwide.<sup>6</sup> Another 1.1 million were returned as USPS-undeliverable. Maricopa County was a significant driver in those figures. In fact, the county led the nation with 110,000 undeliverables. It ranked 10<sup>th</sup> with 229,000 “status unknown” ballots, according to federal data.<sup>7</sup> An undeliverable ballot typically means the voter data is out of date and available tools are not being leveraged to spot the problem in advance. “Unknown” ballots are defined as those transmitted without tracking which never returned for counting.

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<sup>2</sup> AZ Stat. § 16-1016.

<sup>3</sup> All names are fictional for demonstration purposes only

<sup>4</sup> AZ Stat. § 16-121(B).

<sup>5</sup> AZ Stat. § 16-103.

<sup>6</sup> <https://publicinterestlegal.org/featured/nearly-15-million-mail-ballots-went-unaccounted-for-in-2020-election/>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Election Assistance Commission; Election Administration and Voting Surveys for 2020

**PILF President J. Christian Adams**

“Arizona election officials still have some time on their side to prepare voter rolls for the midterms – no maintenance scenario is off the table under law. Recent history has shown how seemingly silly errors in the voter roll can fuel election misinformation and heighten public stress amid a close outcome. PILF looks forward to doing its part in seeing that data findings are swiftly addressed before the 2022 Elections.”