



ERIC

Electronic Information Registration Center

Partisanship Can Destroy the Most Useful Ideas

How Do States Keep Track of Voters



When someone moves from Connecticut to Florida, how does Connecticut find out the voter has moved?:

It doesn't unless the voter tells the state.



When someone from Pennsylvania buys a beach house in Delaware, how do the two states know in which state the person is registered to vote?

They don't.



If a voter in Wisconsin changes their driver's license to Arizona, how does the Registrar of Voters in Wisconsin learn that person no longer has a Wisconsin license?

It doesn't.



When someone lives in Iowa but attends University in Massachusetts, in which state is the student eligible to vote?

Probably both.

How do States Keep Track of Voters-2

When someone votes in two states, how do each of the states find out about the double voting?

They don't

When someone dies, how does the state learn it has lost a voter?

It doesn't. The Social Security Administration knows when someone dies and stops paying benefits, but the registrar of voters in each state has no clue, unless a bereaved informs them.

Keeping track of voters should be easy, but it is not.

With the IRS, the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Postal Service, and the Departments of Motor Vehicles in each state, it should be easy to keep track of the names and addresses of all eligible voters.

But It isn't because states don't share information.

How Bad is the Registration Problem?

Maintaining accurate voter registration rolls is a challenge, because every day voters move or die.

- Voters don't always remember to update their registration.
- Family members rarely report the death of a loved one to election officials.

A 2012 study from Pew Research found, *

- 1 out of 8 voter registrations in the U.S. were no longer valid or significantly inaccurate.
- 2 million deceased individuals were listed as voters.
- 2.75 million people had registrations in more than one state.
- 51 million eligible U.S. citizens, 24% of the population, were not registered to vote.
- 12 million records have incorrect addresses, meaning mailings will not reach them.
 - In many states, if voters do not respond to mailings, they are deregistered.

This is not to say that millions are voting illegally, but inaccurate data bases make elections more difficult and questionable.

Registration Issues are Nonpartisan

Having 1 in 8 registrations inaccurate, 2 million dead people still registered, and 2.75 million people registered in multiple states presents a serious problem for our election system.

- Republicans, Democrats, and Independents all want a system where everyone has a vote, and no one has more than one vote.
- For Republicans claiming millions, including dead people, voted illegally, and for Democrats claiming voters were hassled because they went to the wrong polling place, having a secure national data base seems like a no-brainer.

What could be easier and more nonpartisan than ensuring the voters rolls were accurate and no one was beating the system?

ERIC Seemed like a Simple Solution

In 2012, with funding from the Pew Charitable Trust and the leadership of David Becker, blue states Delaware, Maryland, Colorado, and Washington, purple states Nevada and Virginia, and red state Utah founded ERIC, the **Electronic Registration Information Center**.

ERIC's mission is:

- “to create a data base to assemble information from the Federal government and from its member states, and then deliver that information to the relevant states for them to maintain their voting roles, and
- to help states reach out to potentially eligible but not yet registered individuals with information on how best to register to vote.” *

In a time when many question election results, such an organization seems both necessary and nonpartisan.

HOW DOES ERIC WORK?

ERIC obtains information from 4 sources:

- State motor vehicle departments.
- State voter registrations.
- Social Security Administration death data
- U.S. Postal Service Change of Address forms.

ERIC provides this information to the relevant states, so the states can update their voter registration rolls. Possible cases of illegal voting are reviewed by each state, and, if found credible, are referred to law enforcement.

ERIC also tracks citizens who are eligible to vote but are not yet registered and provides this information to the relevant states. The states may then reach out to these voters with information on how to register. However, there are no requirements for them to do so.



How is ERIC Organized

- ERIC is led by State Election Officials from its member states.
- While most of these leaders are elected or political appointees, ERIC is nonpartisan.
- David Becker, the founder of ERIC, became a non-voting Board member, and then left the organization.
- ERIC has only three employees and no office. Everyone works remotely.
- ERIC's \$1 million budget is funded by states.
 - Based on membership at the start of 2023, this equates to less than \$30,000 for an average state, a very low amount for updating voter roles.

Jonathan Brater: **Chair**
Director, Michigan Bureau of Elections

Mandi Grandjean: **Immediate Past Chair**
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State & Director of
Elections, Ohio

Blake Evans: **Vice-Chair**
Director of Elections, Georgia

David Maeda :**Secretary**
Director of Elections, Minnesota

Stuart Holmes: **Treasurer**
Director of Elections,
State of Washington

Jonathan Marks: **Executive Committee**
Deputy Secretary of Elections and Commissions,
Pennsylvania

Ryan Cowley: **Executive Committee**
Director of Elections, Utah

Everybody Seemed to Like ERIC



Despite the small staff, leaders of red, blue, and purple states applauded the ability of ERIC to improve the voting roles and limit illegal voting.



In June 2016, Ohio joined ERIC. Secretary of State Jon Husted stated,

*"Our goal has always been to make it easy to vote and hard to cheat in Ohio... We believe it is a robust and secure system that's going to help improve elections in Ohio. When the voter records are up-to-date opportunities for voter fraud decrease, polling place wait times are cut, fewer provisional ballots are cast, and more ballots are counted." **



In February 2023, Frank LaRose, the current Secretary of State in Ohio, called ERIC,

*"one of the best tools that we have for maintaining the accuracy of our voter files."***

Iowa Liked ERIC

On July 26, 2018, Iowa joined ERIC. In a letter to Iowa voters, Secretary of State Paul Pate wrote:

- *"My top two priorities are election integrity and voter participation. Joining ERIC will help us increase both. Over the next few months, ERIC will help us identify Iowans who are eligible to vote but are not registered. The \$60,000 estimated cost will be paid through a grant from the Pew Research Center. Participation with ERIC will allow Iowa to collaborate with other states to identify voters who moved inside and outside the state, recently deceased voters, and duplicate registrations."*
- In March 2023, Pate called ERIC **"a Godsend."** *

Florida and DeSantis Liked ERIC

On August 22, 2019, Governor Ron DeSantis Announced Florida would join the ERIC.

- *(With ERIC), “Florida will be able to crosscheck voter registration data with 29 other member states in order to identify duplicate registrations and outdated records from voters who have moved or passed away, leading to cleaner and more accurate voter registration rolls. One of my administration’s top priorities is protecting the integrity of Florida’s elections, which is why joining ERIC is the right thing to do...”**

Florida’s Secretary of State Laurel Lee added:

- *“I want to thank Governor DeSantis for his support of Florida joining ERIC...Governor DeSantis has taken action to put Florida in the best posture possible for safe and secure elections with accurate voter registration rolls and minimal voter fraud.”*

Tammy Jones, the Florida State supervisor of Elections stated:

- *“Supervisors of Elections have long advocated for Florida to join ERIC as it is an incredible tool to help ensure our voter rolls are accurate. On behalf of all Supervisors, I thank Governor DeSantis for his tremendous leadership on this issue.”*

*Press release from the office of Ron DeSantis

ERIC Grows

With its nonpartisan goal of fixing the registration system, and public support from leading politicians, ERIC grew rapidly.

- Blue states, Connecticut, Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington D.C.; purple states, Arizona, Georgia, Maine, Michigan, New Mexico, Vermont and Wisconsin; and red states, Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and West Virginia all joined.

By 2022, ERIC had 11 blue states, 9 purple states, and 13 red states.

- You can't get more bipartisan than this.

Well more than half the states- and majorities of blue, purple, and red, had joined an organization with a simple bipartisan goal of cleaning up registration data.

- The more states that joined, the more effective ERIC could be in accomplishing its mission.

Then The Attacks Started

As ERIC was attracting more states to improve their registration systems, it became the target of attacks from some of the major forces on the conservative right, including:

- The Federalist Society,
- Judicial Watch,
- Verify Vote,
- Gateway Pundit, and others.
- Even Donald Trump attacked ERIC claiming on Truth Social that it “pumped the rolls for Democrats.” *

The Right Turns Partisan

The Federalist Society penned articles with headlines like,

- *“Democratic Operatives Control Voter Rolls In 31 States, Report Shows”*
- *“Unregistered Citizens Equal The New American Majority ”*
- *“Here’s A Look Into Popular Voter Database ERIC’s Left-Wing Origins”*

Election Integrity called ERIC- ***“THE BEST DATA MONEY CAN’T BUY.”*** **

Judicial Watch wrote:

- *“Judicial Watch Study Details Left-Leaning Roots, Data Security Concerns, Possible Violations of Federal Law at the Electronic Registration Information Center.”*

Gateway Pundit wrote: ****

- *“How the Left Fooled States Into Boosting Democratic Turnout—and How to Stop It.”*
- *“Who’s “Cleaning” Our Voter Rolls? Soros Funded ERIC Is Now Used In 31 States.”*

The "Usual Suspects"

The conservative organizations that attacked ERIC had a variety of the "usual left-wing suspects." Among others, the attacks focused on:

- ERIC itself,
- David Becker, the Founder of ERIC,
- CEIR- an organization founded in 2016 by Becker,
- Mark Zuckerberg, a financial backer of CEIR,
- Pew Trusts, that provided the seed money for ERIC.
- George Soros, who provided money to Pew (although not necessarily to ERIC),
- The Brennan Center, and
- Other people and organizations associated with the Democratic party.



ERIC Management is Largely Mute

As negative publicity mounted, the management of ERIC said almost nothing publicly, and only released a letter on its website refuting the claims. Excerpts are included below.

- *“With recent misinformation spreading about ERIC, I want to set the record straight on a few important points. ERIC is a non-profit membership organization created by state election officials to help improve the accuracy of state voter rolls and register more eligible Americans to vote....We fund our day-to-day operations through payment of annual dues....*
- *We analyze..... data..., to provide our members with various reports...update their voter rolls, remove ineligible voters, investigate potential illegal voting, or provide voter registration information to individuals who may be eligible to vote.*
- *ERIC is never connected to any state’s voter registration system. Members retain complete control over their voter rolls and they use the reports we provide in ways that comply with federal and state laws.*
- *....ERIC’s Washington, D.C. address is a mailing address. Our employees work remotely. This approach reduces operating costs without sacrificing security or our ability to serve our member’s needs....”*
 - *Shane Hamlin Executive Director, ERIC**

An organization controlled by political appointees, with only three employees and no office, was hardly competition for the attacks it was receiving.

Red States Leave ERIC

With the attacks, Red states started to resign from ERIC.

- Louisiana and Alabama in resigned 2022.
- Florida, West Virginia, and Missouri all resigned on the same day in March 2023.
- Ohio became #6 on March 17.

One month after endorsing ERIC on NPR, Ohio Secretary of State LaRose stated,

- *“ERIC has chosen repeatedly to ignore demands to embrace reforms that would bolster confidence in its performance, encourage growth in its membership, and ensure not only its present stability but also its durability. Rather, you have chosen to double-down on poor strategic decisions, which have only resulted in the transformation of a previously bipartisan organization to one that appears to favor only the interests of one political party.”*
- Iowa was the 7th to leave, after its Secretary of State had formerly called it a "Godsend."
- Virginia was #8, resigning on May 11th.
- On May 23, the Legislature in Texas passed a law paving the way to Texas to leave ERIC as State #9.

ERIC Loses Members and Effectiveness

The organization that had built a strong bipartisan base was suddenly losing its Republican members.

- By the end of June 2023, the number of Red States belonging to ERIC had dropped from 13 to 5, while a purple state with a Republican governor also left.

	2012	2019	2022	2023
Blue	4	10	11	11
Purple	2	9	9	8
Red	1	11	13	5
Total	7	30	33	24

- Losing states made ERIC less effective, because it had less data to share.
- Losing Republican states made ERIC more partisan.
- What were the issues that caused Republican states to quit ERIC in 2023?

Issue#1-ERIC Backing from the Left

Why did the Conservatives suddenly turn against ERIC?

The first argument was that ERIC was backed from the left. The right alleged:

- The initial funding had come from the Pew Trust, which the Federalist Society and others claimed was “left leaning.” *
- Pew was funded by “left-wing billionaire”* George Soros, although it was unclear whether any of Soros’ money went to ERIC.
- ERIC’s founder, David Becker was attacked as a “hard core leftist who couldn’t stand conservatives.”*

There is a major problem with these attacks.

- From its inception, everyone knew Becker was its founder and its seed money had come from Pew. These facts did not seem to deter the Republican states that joined.
- The arguments against Pew, Becker, and Soros were old arguments that should have carried little weight.

Issue #2: CEIR

The second, target was a potential conflict of interest with a new organization founded by David Becker after the 2016 election,- The Center for Election Innovation & Research (CEIR) ,

CEIR's mission statement is:

- *“ CEIR is a nonprofit whose core mission is to work with election officials and build confidence in elections that voters ...trust. CEIR has a proven record of working with election officials from around the country and both sides of the aisle. Our team has spent decades building trust with key stakeholders in the field and is committed to a fiercely nonpartisan approach.”*
- *“CEIR's two specific goals are to **restore trust in the American election system and promote election procedures that encourage greater voter participation while ensuring election integrity and security**. CEIR has.... also managed difficult media narratives, ensuring voters could vote easily and conveniently, countering unsubstantiated voter fraud claims, and setting the record straight when it comes to foreign interference in our elections.”*

CEIR sounds both bipartisan. So why did it become a target?

ERIC and CEIR: Divergence in Goals.

- While ERIC is focused on cleaning up voter rolls and as well as helping states register new voters, CEIR appears largely focused on helping to register new voters.
 - Many Republicans believed many of these new registrants would vote Democratic.
- CEIR donated large sums to states to register voters. In Michigan, it helped to register about 120,000 new voters.
- While ERIC has taken no stand on the 2020 election, CEIR has come out strongly stating, “The 2020 election was the most secure, transparent and secure election in American history”*
- While ERIC has avoided the debates over election integrity, CEIR gave its 2022 Defenders of Democracy Award to January 6th Hearing witnesses such as Al Schmidt, Former City Commissioner of Philadelphia, Brad Raffensperger, Georgia Secretary of State, and others.**
- While ERIC had an annual budget of \$1 million, CEIR is much larger organization.
 - CEIR received approximately \$50 million from Mark Zuckerberg and his family. (a donation The Federalist described as “Zuck Bucks.”)***
- It is not unreasonable to claim that CEIR is somewhat more partisan than ERIC.

Is there a Conflict of Interest Between ERIC and CEIR?

- While ERIC is chartered to fix voting lists and register new voters, it was marketed to states primarily as a tool to fix voting lists. (Although the Secretary of State in Iowa and Ron DeSantis in Florida, both applauded it for registering more voters.)
- ERIC is an organization managed by states, with 3 in staff, no offices, and a very limited budget.
- CEIR is an organization managed by a David Becker with a large staff, major donations from wealthy individuals, and a focus on registering new voters.
- Many opponents of ERIC claim there is a conflict of interest between the two organizations, claiming CEIR used voter information from ERIC to pursue its own goals.
 - The extent of the data provided by ERIC to CEIR, and the extent to it was used by CEIR is unclear.

However, the conservative opponents of ERIC continually raised questions about whether CEIR was taking advantage of the relationship between the two organizations to use ERIC's data for its own ends.

REN and CEIR

Reform Elections Now has no issue the goals of CEIR.

- REN believes it should be easy to register and vote.
- REN supports early voting and mail-in voting.
- REN believes election integrity should be enhanced.

The question about CEIR is whether the relationship of the two organizations and their founder in any way jeopardized the goals of ERIC.

- It is clear the right wing jumped on this relationship and on David Becker to help impair ERIC.
- We can not judge whether these claims have merit.
- What we do know is the relationship between ERIC and CEIR impaired ERIC's ability to remain nonpartisan and provide states with the best information to maintain their voting lists.
- The Right could be wrong in their attacks. David Becker could be wrong in the way ERIC and CEIR intertwined, or the U.S. could be just too partisan to accommodate any nonpartisan organization, no matter how simple its goals.



It Could Just Be Politics

One other potential explanation for the departures of Red states, voiced by media like NPR and the N.Y. Times, is that it is just politics today.

Many Secretaries of State were running for reelection or even for higher positions.

- Many voters on the right started to voice the arguments against ERIC.
- To give themselves an advantage in the primaries, many of the state election officials who had praised ERIC, quickly turned against it.
- In several instances, this position helped them get elected or re-elected.

Pure politics is always a good explanation for why people stake out new positions.

- It is very possible, even likely, that candidates in Red states seized on this issue as a way of pandering to their bases.

However, if politics is the answer, the future of nonpartisan organizations looks extremely dim.



What Happens to ERIC

No matter your politics, it is clear that the victims in this dispute are ERIC and the U.S. voting system.

- Right wing opponents, like the Federalist Society and Judicial Watch, will clearly survive. CEIR is well funded. But the future of ERIC and of its goals is in jeopardy.
- As states leave, the information tracked by ERIC becomes less valuable.
 - Data bases are less useful if they only contain a portion of the information. If someone moves to Florida, that information is no longer shared with the person's original state.
- As most of the Republican states leave, it is more difficult for ERIC to portray itself as "nonpartisan."
 - Red states are now discussing creating their own organization to check registration records.
 - If there are two competing partisan organizations attempting to solve the same problem, both will fail because neither will have sufficient data to identify problems between states.



What Does ERIC Teach Us?

ERIC started with a simple nonpartisan goal– to share voter registration information so states could improve the accuracy of their databases.

- For one decade ERIC grew rapidly.
- By 2022, it appeared ERIC might be a real national solution.
- As attacks from the right started, Republican members started to flee.
- A simple, nonpartisan idea focusing on a critical problem at a very minor cost is now suddenly jeopardized.
- In our hyper-partisan world, is there any way a nonpartisan organization can survive?



Can ERIC Be Saved?

The successful Republican attacks are threatening ERIC. Is there a way to save ERIC or its goals?

- One solution would be for the remaining members of ERIC to make adjustments that would attract states to rejoin the organization.
 - People like Brad Raffensperger, Georgia's Secretary of State, are currently attempting this.
- If ERIC did nothing but focus on the goal of maintaining voter lists, many states might be convinced to rejoin it.



Are There Other Ways to Accomplish this Goal?

If ERIC cannot succeed as a nonpartisan organization, there might be other ways of accomplishing the same goal.

- The Secretaries of State of all of the states could also get together and develop their own organization with the limited goal of keeping the voter roles up to date.
 - One potential problem is that many of the Secretaries of State are seeking higher offices and such a goal, in this hyper-partisan world, could jeopardize their electoral prospects.
- Congress could also create a national organization to share information between states.
 - This seems logical, but given the partisanship in the country, this could also be a challenge.



Voter I.D.s-A Simple Nonpartisan Solution

The simplest solution is to provide all Americans with a voter I.D. card and a national voter data base.

- Americans have Social Security cards, why not Voter I.D. cards.
- The Voter I.D. card would be a Federally issued identification just like a passport or a Social Security card.
- If a citizen moves that citizen could apply for a change of address on a national data base, much the same as the citizen would do for Social Security.
- The Federal government would then automatically transmit the information to the relevant states.
 - If I citizen moved from Scarsdale N.Y. to Palm Beach, Florida, both states would be informed so they could adjust their records.
- Citizens would still have to comply with local requirements, but the Voter I.D. card would provide a national data base which every state could utilize.





The Need Exists

We need to recognize that there is a problem with voter registration that requires a solution.

- 1 in 8 voter registrations are inaccurate. Millions of dead people are still registered. Millions of people are registered in multiple states. Tens of millions of people have incorrect addresses.
- It does not matter whether there is substantial cheating— there probably is not— but as long as people from both parties do not trust the system of registration, people will question elections.
- The information is not difficult to obtain.
 - Social Security knows when people die.
 - The USPS knows where people live.
 - State motor vehicle departments have addresses.
 - The U.S. government knows the identity of all citizens.
 - A Voter I.D. card and a national database would be the easiest solution.
- There is no reason why this information can not be provided to every state so that they can maintain their voter rolls.

The Solution

We need a solution to the issue of voter rolls in the U.S

- ERIC is a good concept that could have and still could work.
 - However, if both parties create their own systems, the data will be greatly diluted.
- Secretaries of State could get together and create their own system.
 - Of course, this was the concept with ERIC, and it is being hurt by partisanship.
- The Federal Government could fund a system that could work for all states.
 - Given the issues related to voting, it would be nice to think both parties would come together to solve this simple problem– but parties may not want to solve problems?
- A National Voter I.D. card, like a Passport or a Social Security card, would be a simple solution that would allow the Federal government to work with the states in a nonpartisan manner.
- **The problems are clear. The solutions are simple. It is sad to think we are too divided to solve this simple issue.**



Moderates Have to Speak Up

ERIC was a simple ideal to deal with a critical problem, working and helping states purge voters who had died, moved, or were registered in other states. Yet, at this point in time, it has become another victim of the partisan divide.

Organizations like ERIC can be challenged because a small group, on one extreme or the other, starts yelling fire in a crowded theater, and the majority in the middle who benefit from a safe and secure election system remain mute.

- We need to know who is registered to vote.
- We can't have a voting role filled with dead people or with people who are registered in multiple states.
- We need to speak out against those who are trying to coop simple solutions for their own partisan goals.
- We can't let nonpartisan institutions fall victim to partisan extremes.

