

I. In Focus This Week

Census data on prisoners available in time to affect redistricting

States will be able to remove prison populations from district counts

By [Samuel Derheimer](#)

Next May, the [Census Bureau](#) will release data on the populations of group quarters, such as prisons. The novelty isn't in the data itself, it's in the timing. For the first time, the bureau will provide this information in time to affect redistricting.

Until now, prisoners have always been counted at the location of the prison. But starting next year, states will be able to remove prison populations from district counts and a new data system currently being developed to modernize voter registration may provide a model for how to place those prisoners back into their home districts.

In April, Maryland passed the [No Representation Without Population Act](#), making it the first state in the nation to count prisoners "at their last known residence before incarceration."

Supporters of the act believe it will distribute the state population more fairly; no longer will districts with prisons be padded with large non-voting populations. Similar laws are currently being debated in a number of other states, including New York, Delaware and Rhode Island.

So Maryland has its mandate: remove incarcerated persons from the districts where they sit in prison and put them back where they came from. But...how?

The Maryland legislation is silent and state officials say they are still working out the details.

In Maryland, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services is compiling the database that will tell the state where to count prisoners. But data on prisoners — such as last known address — is notoriously bad across the country. And what to do with prisoners without an address on record or with an address that has not yet been determined?

The obvious solution is for states to collect better data at intake. According to figures from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the average time served in American jails is about two and half years. After just three years of aggressive data collection at intake, states would have nearly complete data files on their prison populations.

But that won't help in 2011.

Maryland and those states converted by its example may find inspiration in a new design being explored by several states for voter registration.

Much of the missing data on prisoners may already exist in other state databases, such as motor vehicles, tax and social services.

Technology exists, and is already widely used in private industry and by some government agencies, that would allow states to aggregate and match the data from these sources to update inaccurate information and fill in missing records.

States must already match their voter registration data against their motor vehicles data. Enhancing the process and including other official databases for reference will increase the accuracy of the records. (Not coincidentally, Pew has conducted extensive research on the topic which can be viewed at our [Voter Registration Modernization initiative](#).)

The same concept of data matching could have value for redistricting.

Vermont and Maine — the only two states that allow prisoners to vote — would have a unique advantage among states. Since prisoners vote by absentee ballot in both states, state elections officials have a non-prison address for every prisoner registered to vote.

This data could be extremely valuable if either state chose to match it against the state corrections database to fill in missing addresses and update inaccurate records.

As Maryland (and every other state exploring this issue) is finding out, reapportioning prisoners is much easier said than done. But the elections community, too rarely lauded for leading the way when it comes to government efficiency, may just have an important lesson for state administrators running census counts. While no system can provide data that is 100 percent perfect, smarter use of electronic records could give states a data advantage they have never previously had.

II. Election Reform News This Week

- Elections were held this week from Maine to California with most of the news coming out of the political winners instead of the process. **Arkansas** held runoff elections on Tuesday and even those couldn't decide on race for sheriff in Stone County which [ended in a tie](#). While Arkansas statute allows for drawing "lots" to resolve a tie in a November election, there's no such provision for a primary or a runoff, said Tim Humphries, general counsel for the Secretary of State. A tie is not listed in the statute as a reason for filling a vacancy, so no Democrat would be listed on the November ballot unless overseas votes or a recount changed the totals, Humphries told the Arkansas Democrat. Election day drama was fairly limited in **California** as many voters chose to [mail their ballots in](#), but that doesn't mean it was smooth sailing in the Golden State. In [Sacramento County](#), some ballots were unevenly cut and had difficulty being fed into scanners. In [Los Angeles County](#), when an election inspector failed to show up, residents were forced to cast provisional ballots. More than 24 hours after polls closed 153,000 ballots in [Riverside and San Bernardino](#) counties remained uncounted. The uncounted votes include mail, provisional and damaged ballots. Counting was still ongoing at press time in several counties including [Nevada](#), [Santa Clara](#) and [Sonoma](#). Voters approved Proposition 14 which will create [open primaries](#) in California although advocates on both sides are gearing up for court battles. And proving that Hollywood stars and politicians are people just like you and me, [Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger](#) had to recast his ballot after a scanning machine initially rejected it. A few problems popped in **Iowa** including some that were completely out of the control of election officials. In one Woodbury County precinct the vote totals could not be called in from the polling place because of a [printer problem](#). And election officials believe [strong morning storms](#) kept many people away from the polls. Sometimes you just have to do things the old fashioned way and that's why five elections workers in **Maine** found themselves [hand counting ballots](#) until the early hours of Wednesday morning. "The machines are wonderful, but we had more than 700 write-ins for 60 different people," Merton Brown, Kennebunk's assistant town clerk told *Maine Today*. Voters in **Montana** seemed to have no troubles with the states new [consolidated polling places](#). Consolidating the polling places saved Yellowstone County about \$20,000. But some voters were confused by [signature gatherers](#) who stationed themselves outside of polling places in the Missoula area. In **South Carolina** things got off to a bit of a slow start after a [poll worker overslept](#) and didn't open a polling place on time and a machine in another polling place needed to be [taken offline](#) after causing problems for voters.

- Hoping to avoid a repeat of the 2008 election, the Minnesota Legislature approved a bill requiring cities and counties to create [ballot boards to review rejected ballots](#). The Hennepin County Board did so this week, in time for the June 25 start of absentee voting for the state primary election on Aug. 10. It approved a slate of five board members, who will be paid \$14.47 an hour and compensated for parking during meetings. Anoka County established its board last month, said elections manager Cindy Reichert. According to the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, the boards will consist mostly of election judges charged with ensuring that absentee ballots are accepted and counted in a consistent fashion. Part of the problem with the Senate recount in 2008-09 was that the procedures and measures for handling absentee ballots often varied from precinct to precinct, raising fairness questions. "They want to have some uniformity within the county, in terms of accepting and rejecting absentee ballots," said Gary Poser, the state's elections director. Another reason for the boards, he said, is to take absentee ballot work from election judges who already have enough to do at the polls. At least two members of the absentee ballot boards, from different political parties, will inspect applications and ballots to make sure they match (to prove their validity).
- The barista at your local coffee shop, the person who washes your hair at the salon, the doorman, the dog walker and the cab driver. People leave tips for just about everything and everyone these days, but poll workers? Poll workers in several Pennsylvania precincts [put tip jars \(or baskets\) out during the recent primary](#) and that has local activists concerned about voters feeling intimidated. "It kind of gives the impression that you need to pay (the workers) before you proceed," Rosanne Kolberg told The Times-Tribune. Kolberg said her mother used to work at the Moosic polling place and told her the practice had gone on for years. Marion Medalis, county deputy director of voter registration, who became de facto head of the county Bureau of Elections after the November election, agreed. She promised to address the matter at training sessions for poll workers. "This is really the first I've heard about it," she said, referring to a written complaint provided recently by Kolberg. "They (the poll workers) really shouldn't be doing that. ... We obviously will address that at the next election."
- [Dominion Voting Systems Corporation announced this week that it acquired the assets of Sequoia Voting Systems](#), a major U.S. provider of voting solutions serving nearly 300 jurisdictions in 16 states. As part of the transaction, Dominion acquired Sequoia's inventory and all intellectual property, including software, firmware and hardware, for Sequoia's precinct and central count optical scan and DRE voting solutions, including BPS, WinEDS, Edge, Edge2, Advantage, Insight, InsightPlus and 400C systems. Dominion will also retain Sequoia's facilities in Denver, Colorado and San Leandro, California and will consolidate Sequoia's Jamestown, New York facility with Dominion's existing Jamestown facility. Dominion has hired Sequoia's customer service and technical personnel to ensure capable, experienced and responsive customer service for all current Sequoia jurisdictions. Sequoia's DRE and optical scan election systems serve approximately 26 million U. S. voters, including the Chicago and Cook County, Illinois, Louisiana, Nevada and the majority of counties in California. The Sequoia acquisition comes on the heels of Dominion's transaction last month to acquire the primary assets of Premier Election Solutions.

III. Opinion

National: [Nonpartisan elections](#)

Alabama: [Recounts](#)

California: [Vote-by-mail](#); [Orange County](#); [Polling places](#)

Minnesota: [Election reform](#)

Mississippi: [Provisional ballots](#)

North Carolina: [Bilingual ballots](#)

South Carolina: [Poll workers](#)

Texas: [Election process](#)

Virginia: [Voting rights restoration](#)

Wisconsin: [Voter ID, II](#); [Elections oversight](#)

***some sites require registration*

IV. Job Opportunities

All job listings must be received by 12 p.m. Eastern on Wednesday for publication in our Thursday newsletter. Job listings are free but may be edited for length. Whenever possible, include Internet information. Please email job postings to mmoretti@electionline.org

Chief Operating Officer—Democracy Alliance, Washington, D.C. Reporting to the Managing Director, the Chief Operating Officer will have wide-ranging internal and external responsibilities, including strategy, project management and relationship management, as well as administration, human capital and financial management. The Chief Operating Officer will be responsible for enhancing the internal organizational processes and infrastructure that will allow the Democracy Alliance to continue to grow and fulfill its mission. S/he will manage the following functions: operational management; board management; financial management and oversight; operations and human resources. **To Apply:** Applicants should email staff@democracyalliance.org and must include a cover letter, resume, and salary requirements. Email **MUST** reference “Chief Operating Officer” position in the subject line. No calls, please. We believe that employees from diverse backgrounds are critical to achieving our goals. We seek to recruit, develop, and retain the most talented people from a diverse candidate pool. We strongly encourage applications from persons with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Program and Grants Management Officer—U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Washington, D.C. Are you interested in joining a small, independent agency whose work touches the lives of every American citizen? The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) is dedicated to improving the electoral process to ensure that all eligible citizens have the right to vote and have their votes counted accurately. Every EAC employee is proud to be a part of a team that works together to assure that every vote counts. Come, join us! The Program and Grants Management Officer at the U.S. Election Assistance Commission is responsible for managing and coordinating three critical functions within the organization: providing program support to the agency's grantees, managing the Election Management Guidelines program and, executing activities related to the minority language accessibility program. The incumbent will utilize his or her background and expertise in program management and election administration in order to develop and execute annual program goals and objectives for the commission. The incumbent will be able to balance the programmatic demands of each area and will focus on creating the maximum number of successful products or outcomes possible. With a background in public administration the incumbent will also understand the unique skills and capabilities required to successfully perform in a Federal agency. The position is perfect for an experienced professional who is seeking an opportunity to create and enhance a series of programs and initiatives for this relatively new Federal commission. **Application:** Send materials to resumes@eac.gov or U.S. Election Assistance Commission; 1201 New York Ave., NW Suite 300; Washington, D.C. 20005. **Deadline:** June 21.