

My experience using the SAVE Database

Yavapai County has consistently used every available tool to ensure the accuracy of its voter roll. We will use any available data to access records related to citizenship, deaths, and addresses. In 2025, we learned that USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) intended to offer an expanded version of the SAVE (System for Alien Verification and Entitlements) database, allowing voter registration department checks to extend beyond the limited use of searching for an Alien Identification Number to confirm naturalization. Yavapai County has been using the limited version for about two decades. The database was expanded to allow checks using the last four digits of a voter's Social Security Number instead of the previously required Alien ID Number. The database also expanded to allow more comprehensive death records which we have known have been limited.

After several months of waiting for the state to renegotiate the limited SAVE contract to permit the counties to have the expansion for use, I decided to request my own contract. My decision was based on several factors beyond the delays alone. I also received some pushback from our community members and third-party organizations, which was unexpected, as my intent has always been to support accurate voter-roll verification and maintain the integrity of our elections.

1. I wanted to be able to look at my voters and say confidently that our voter roll is as accurate as possible.
2. I wanted to expand access to the ballot for my Federal Only Voters who had not supplied their DPOC (documented proof of citizenship) and were only able to vote in limited races.
3. I wanted to ensure the remaining voters who were identified in the MVD Citizenship Glitch of 2024 would remain full ballot voters.
4. I wanted to be sure we had to most up-to-date death records as possible.
5. I was certain we wouldn't find any non-citizens on our roll and wanted to ensure our voters of this with confidence.

I can now say I achieved all of my goals after using the SAVE database. This was not without many surprises along the way.

Once the contract was approved, we began work immediately. We submitted our list of Active and Inactive Federal Only Voters (299). Once we received the citizenship verification results, we planned to provide expanded ballot access to the Active Voters. The information we received confirmed citizenship for 255 individuals, who may now vote a full ballot in Arizona. We also found that 5 individuals were deceased (2 of whom were Active). Additionally, 38 records could not be determined or matched, which may indicate an error on our side or theirs. Finally, 1 record involved a common name, and we were informed that a full Social Security number is required to make a determination. None of these voters from our initial list were identified as non-citizens. We have contacted the remaining voters to request voluntary additional information. We have no intention of changing any voter's status in a manner not permitted by law.

	Submitted	Citizenship	Deceased	No Record Found	Full SSN needed
Federal Voters	299	255	5	38	1

Next, we submitted our Active MVD Glitch Voters (Voters that MVD identified in 2024 without DPOC at the time of obtaining a license). We submitted these voters to obtain citizenship information to protect them from any future legislation that could negatively impact their voter status.

	Submitted	Citizenship	Deceased	No record Found	Full SSN needed	Non-Citizens
MVD Glitch	6,781	6,605	14	136	1	10 – 1 Voted

The results were unexpected for several reasons. First, of the 14 deceased voters identified, 8 were Active Voters. Based on this small sample of our registrants, we quickly realized there may be significantly more deceased voters on the rolls than we were aware of. We don't receive shared voter information from all states on deceased voters! We also didn't expect to find non-citizens; however, we recognized that if any were found, they would most likely be within this group of voters who were affected by the MVD glitch. We wanted to be absolutely certain of the information before changing any voter's status. To avoid any false-positive match that could negatively impact an eligible voter, I personally called every voter, sent emails, and mailed letters to each individual on both the deceased and non-citizen lists. I spoke with 2 family members of the 14 deceased voters I contacted; both confirmed that the voters had passed away in 2024 in other states. I did not speak directly with any of the voters flagged as non-citizens, but my staff reported that two individuals returned my calls, stated they are not citizens, and were sent removal forms. We followed the law and sent notices requiring documentary proof of citizenship. After the 35-day period, we cancelled the 10 voters and forwarded the non-citizenship information to both the County Attorney and reached out to the Attorney General's Office. It took almost a month to get a reply from the AG office on how to transmit the information to them. All 10 voters had been registered through the MVD, and 1 voter had cast a Provisional Ballot in a previous election. I also contacted the SAVE Agency again to request additional information regarding dates of death, to better understand where the gap in information originated.

We submitted our third list, consisting of rejected applicants who submitted an Arizona State Registration Form without DPOC. In total, 335 applicants had to be rejected because they did not provide citizenship information along with their state application. We were able to verify citizenship for 316 applicants using SAVE which has again expanded access to the ballot.

Not Registered -No DPOC

	Submitted	Citizenship
Not Registered – Pending DPOC	335	316

We also conducted additional HAVA checks in AVID (Arizona Voter Information Database) on voters with citizenship flags in to determine if changes were made in their voter records. This was where the warning signs became clear. As we double-checked and vetted this information in AVID, we discovered that multiple registrants appeared to have had their MVD citizenship records changed in the background of the system without our knowledge. In several cases, the MVD record status had been changed to "resident/permanent alien" without any notification to our office and without any flag in the system, yet they remained Active Voters. If I had not used SAVE and had not taken the additional steps to rerun HAVA checks in AVID against the MVD records, we would not have known about this. Some records appeared to be changed several years ago, and others were changing during this process in real time (one record in April 2026, and two in May 2026). This is a major concern, and I was shocked and angered to discover it. I made the Secretary of State's office, and a contact from MVD, and my fellow recorders aware after performing our internal checks. I have yet to get an answer from any agency on how or why this happened, who was aware of it, and how to prevent it.

After seeing evidence that Active Voters had MVD records appearing to change in the background of AVID to non-citizens without our knowledge, and remaining full-ballot voters, and seeing so many deceased voters slip through the cracks, I decided to expand our SAVE request again. We have now run our entire voter roll, including both Active and Inactive Voters. This has revealed significant vulnerabilities in the system that we are working on understanding. At the time, we were in the middle of investigating this information, preparing for the Primary Election, and trying to understand what was happening in AVID. We were also navigating federal and state law on voter list maintenance.

Therefore, when we received the information on the remaining voters in mid-June, we sent the required letters, but we could not act on the citizenship information until after Election Day.

The remaining list that we submitted with SAVE included all Active and Inactive Voters with a last four Social Security Number, totaling 187,719. We were able to obtain Citizenship for 183,562. We also received information that 1,155 voters were deceased (a majority were **Inactive**).

Voters	SAVE Confirmed Citizenship	Deceased	No Record Found	Full SSN Needed	SAVE Non- Citizens	Non-SAVE Citizenship Found (MVD/Voter DPOC)	Actual Non- Citizens
187,719	183,562	1,155	2,769	47	39	28	11

With the non-citizenship list from SAVE, we found DPOC from MVD for 25 Voters and DPOC from our records for 3 Voters (these were false positives). After the 35-day required period allowing the remaining voters flagged as non-citizens (all were registered through MVD) to pass, we made our final cancellation shortly after Election Day. We continued to follow the law and sent the information to the County Attorney and Attorney General.

During this process, we also received an MVD citizenship list, that has been statutorily required under ARS 16-165G, from the Secretary of State's office, which we had not previously seen. This list has been delayed for an extended period but is now valuable to our efforts. We received the final SAVE and MVD lists in June. We were able to use both lists to confirm citizenship and compare the data.

Final Results: Confirmed Citizenship (Active and Inactive)		
SAVE	190,424	98.41%
MVD	2,402	1.24%
Non-MVD (voters showed our office DPOC)	288	0.15%
	193,114	99.80%
Unknown Citizenship - Active Voters (276)	392	0.20%
Total	193,506	

Non-Citizenship Cancellations

Final Results: Canceled for Non-Citizenship	
SAVE	12
MVD 16-165G List	8
Both SAVE and MVD	9
Other (Voluntary Notice)	1
Total Non-Citizens Identified	30
(Total Voted a Ballot)	4

Conclusion: The SAVE database is not the only useful tool on which we should rely for voter registration purposes, but in my view, it has been by far the most valuable. The system is not without its flaws; however, as I have learned throughout this process, no government database is perfect. If the data is used carefully and properly vetted, it can build greater trust and confidence in the system from both an administrative and voter perspective. From deceased records to citizenship and non-citizenship information, this database has both expanded ballot access for many of my voters and helped us address issues in our data that we would not have known about without it. Unfortunately, the SAVE database is now limited again and going to legal challenges which now limit other counties and states from using it.

Remaining Questions:

1. What do we do with the Active Voters who both databases say are undetermined or have unknown information? These voters may very well be citizens, but we don't have proof of either status. My plan is to reach out to each Active Voter and ask them to voluntarily supply citizenship information. If they don't respond, they will remain on the roll unless future legislation is offered to address this grey area.

Unknown Citizenship			
	Grandfathered Pre-Prop 200	Not Grandfathered	Total
Active	107	169	276
Inactive	17	99	116
Total	124	268	392

2. How do we address these changes being made in citizenship status with the MVD, SOS and the counties to ensure that no future issues arise? I believe these recent findings are going to trigger additional conversations between all stakeholders. I have been starting those conversations as well.
3. Now that the SAVE database has become limited in use again due to the recent court judgement, what other methods can be used for other counties and states to verify the accuracy of their voter rolls who didn't take advantage of this opportunity? Yavapai County is an example of why Congress needs to act on the issue of using this data.
4. When information is found about non-citizens during the 90-day list maintenance prohibition, what should the future expectation be? This topic has not been addressed in the past but is now something that needs to be addressed in law. If a voter knowingly or unknowingly is registered and we find this out during the 90-day pause to voter list maintenance period, how can we be expected to stand by and not act? It is a very uncomfortable place to be.

I entered this field of work with considerable skepticism about elections. When I began working in elections in early 2020, I quickly learned that there are many ways for my office to verify registrants by obtaining citizenship information as Arizona law requires, but there were few ways to determine whether someone is not a U.S. citizen. I have never been comfortable with the statement that, "There is no widespread issue of non-citizens on the rolls", because until now, I had not seen a system or database that could verify this. Over the past several years, I have developed greater trust in the system and in the individuals on the ground who do this work, though I believe there is still more to be done and I feel we need to be proactive instead of reactive. Seeing these recent gaps in information from one database to another has been deeply concerning. What I can say to my voters in Yavapai County is that I am more confident in our voter roll today than ever before, and that has always been my goal.

Michelle M Burchill

Yavapai County Recorder