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ELECTION REFORM

Nine States' Experiences Implementing Federal Requirements for Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists



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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-247](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) was enacted in part to help ensure that only eligible persons are registered to vote. Under HAVA, as of January 1, 2004, states were to create computerized statewide voter registration lists to serve as official rosters of legally registered voters for elections for federal office. States, however, were given the option to seek a waiver to postpone implementation of HAVA provisions until 2006. All but nine states did so.

This report discusses the experiences of the nine states that were subject to the original HAVA deadline—Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Minnesota, South Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia. The report describes actions election officials in these states reported taking to meet specific HAVA requirements—as applicable to their states—for (1) establishing computerized statewide voter registration lists and (2) verifying the accuracy of information on voter registration applications and maintaining accurate computerized voter lists. GAO is also reporting what states said about challenges they faced and lessons learned implementing the requirements.

Draft sections of this report were reviewed by the nine states; the Election Assistance Commission, which was responsible for coordinating HAVA waivers; and the Department of Justice. GAO incorporated technical comments, as appropriate.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-247.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact William O. Jenkins, Jr., at (202) 512-8777 or jenkinswo@gao.gov.

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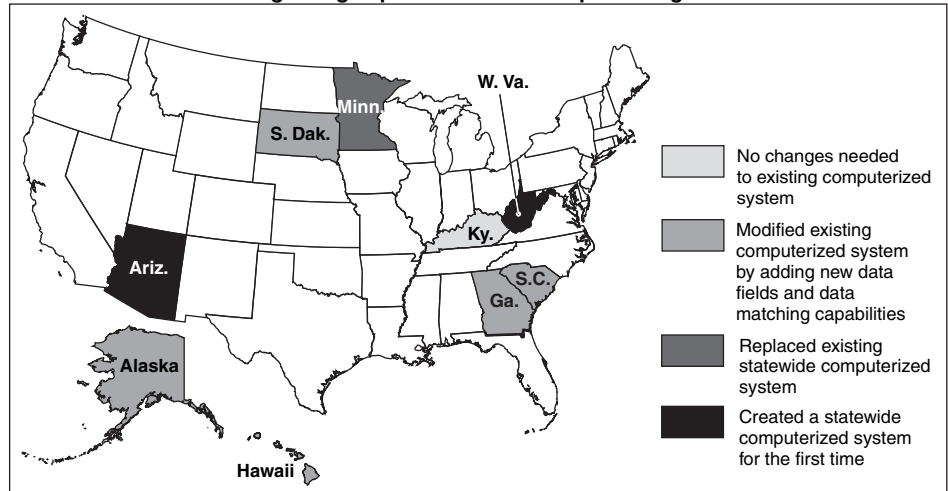
What GAO Found

To establish the HAVA-required registration lists, five states modified existing computerized statewide voter registration systems; one state replaced an older system with a new one; and two states created statewide voter registration systems for the first time, according to election officials (see below). Officials from the ninth state reported no actions were taken because the state had such a registration list in place prior to HAVA.

State election officials reported they took steps to verify information provided on voter registration applications and maintain their voter lists as required by HAVA. States either completed or were in the process of completing the required matches of voter registration information with state motor vehicle agency or Social Security Administration records. Officials from all nine states reported conducting the list maintenance activities required by HAVA: eliminating duplicate registrations and coordinating the voter list with state agency records on felons and the deceased to identify and remove the names of ineligible registrants. According to officials from four states, implementing HAVA improved the accuracy of the voter lists, for example, by correcting errors in voter information before they were entered into the statewide list. Officials from the other five states reported little to no improvements to the accuracy of their lists in part, some said, because they had established systems similar to those required by HAVA prior to the enactment of the law.

State election officials reported they faced challenges and learned lessons while implementing the HAVA requirements. For example, officials from seven states reported their experiences taught them that collaborating with local officials to develop the computerized statewide systems later helped them successfully implement the systems.

States GAO Contacted Regarding Implementation of Required Registration Lists



Source: GAO interviews with state election officials.

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Abbreviations

AAMVA	American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators
DOJ	Department of Justice
EAC	Election Assistance Commission
HAVA	Help America Vote Act
HAVV	Help America Vote Verification
MCD	minor civil decision
MVA	motor vehicle agency
NASED	National Association of State Election Directors
NASS	National Association of Secretaries of State
SSA	Social Security Administration
VRAZ	Voter Registration Arizona

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

February 7, 2006

The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Confidence in the electoral process to produce free and fair elections is of the utmost importance to a legitimate democratic political system. The basic goal of an election system is simple to state but not simple to achieve—enable all eligible voters to register to vote, cast their votes, and have those votes counted accurately. The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) was enacted, in part, to help ensure that only eligible persons are registered to vote.¹ This law provides that, among other things, as of January 1, 2004, states are to create computerized statewide voter registration lists that serve as official rosters of legally registered voters for elections for federal office.² Under this provision, most states are also to verify the accuracy of information provided on voter registration applications by matching it with information contained in the state motor vehicle agency's (MVA) database or the Social Security Administration's (SSA) records, as appropriate.³ In addition, states are to perform list maintenance on statewide voter lists by coordinating them on a regular basis with state records on felony status and deaths, in order to identify and remove names of ineligible voters.

¹Pub. L. No. 107-252, 116 Stat. 1666 (2002).

²HAVA in general applies to elections for federal office in the 55 U.S. states and territories, including the District of Columbia, but for the purposes of this report, we refer only to the states. North Dakota does not require voters to register to vote and is, therefore, not subject to the HAVA requirements to create and maintain a computerized statewide voter registration list.

³Not all states are subject to the HAVA requirement to verify voter registration application information by comparing or matching it with MVA or SSA records. In general, under HAVA, states requiring full Social Security numbers on voter registration applications prior to 1975 in order to verify the identity of a registrant are not subject to this HAVA requirement.

Under HAVA, states could apply to the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) by January 1, 2004, for a waiver, postponing the effective implementation date of the statewide voter registration list requirement for 2 years until January 1, 2006.⁴ All but nine states exercised the waiver option. The nine states that were to implement the HAVA requirements described above, by the original 2004 deadline were Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Minnesota, South Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia. This report discusses the experiences of these nine states as they implemented these HAVA requirements, in particular, the actions that state election officials reported taking to (1) establish computerized statewide voter registration lists and (2) verify the accuracy of information on voter registration applications and maintain accurate computerized voter lists. In addition, we report what states told us regarding (3) the challenges they faced and lessons they learned while implementing these requirements.

In addition to this report, we have issued or plan to issue reports this year on other specific election issues. These reports, as did our earlier work issued in 2001,⁵ in general focus on the people, processes, and technology associated with the preparation for and administration of elections. Specifically, in June 2005, we issued a report on the efforts of selected state and local election officials in seven states to ensure that voter registration lists are accurate.⁶ In September 2005, we issued two reports, one on the efforts of selected local election officials in these same seven states on managing voter registration and ensuring eligible citizens can vote⁷ and the other on significant security and reliability concerns that have been identified for electronic voting systems.⁸ Later this year, we plan

⁴HAVA established the EAC to provide guidance and manage payments to the states for the implementation of HAVA's requirements.

⁵GAO, *Elections: Perspectives on Activities and Challenges across the Nation*, [GAO-02-3](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 15, 2001).

⁶GAO, *Elections: Additional Data Could Help State and Local Elections Officials Maintain Accurate Voter Registration Lists*, [GAO-05-478](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 10, 2005).

⁷GAO, *Elections: Views of Selected Local Election Officials on Managing Voter Registration and Ensuring Eligible Citizens Can Vote*, [GAO-05-997](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2005).

⁸GAO, *Elections: Federal Efforts to Improve Security and Reliability of Electronic Voting Systems Are Under Way, but Key Activities Need to Be Completed*, [GAO-05-956](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 21, 2005).

to issue a report on the Department of Defense's implementation of the Federal Voting Assistance Program to facilitate absentee voting by military personnel during the November 2004 election. These reports respond to congressional requests made prior to the November 2004 election. In addition, we are undertaking a broader, more comprehensive review of election administration processes related to the November 2004 general election. This comprehensive study, which we plan to issue in 2006, will address activities and challenges—people, processes, and technology—associated with each major stage of election administration to include registration, absentee and early voting, election day preparation and activities, and vote counting and certification.

To meet our objectives for this report, we conducted structured telephone interviews with state election officials in each of the nine states. We also interviewed officials with and obtained documents from the EAC and the Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division, which is responsible for enforcing parts of HAVA. In addition, we reviewed relevant state and federal laws.

We did not independently verify the responses to questions posed to state officials during our telephone interviews. However, state election officials were provided the opportunity to verify the accuracy of their responses for this report. We also provided relevant sections of the report to EAC and DOJ officials to verify the accuracy of the information they provided. Appendix I provides a more detailed description of our scope and methodology.

We conducted our work from January 2005 through December 2005 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results in Brief

Officials from eight of the nine states reported taking a variety of actions in order to establish the HAVA-required computerized voter registration lists; an official from one state, Kentucky, reported no actions were taken because, according to the official, prior to HAVA, the state had a system in place that met the HAVA requirements. With regard to the other states, officials from Alaska, Georgia, Hawaii, South Carolina, and South Dakota reported they had computerized statewide voter registration systems in place prior to January 2004 that they modified in order to implement the HAVA requirements; officials from Minnesota said their state replaced rather than modified the computerized voter registration system it had in place prior to HAVA. Officials from Arizona and West Virginia said their states did not have computerized statewide voter registration lists in place

prior to HAVA and created them for the first time to implement the law. Additionally, election officials from all states except Alaska, where state officials are responsible for maintaining the statewide voter registration list, told us that their states provided some form of support to local election officials to ensure that they could operate the computerized statewide voter registration system to enter and update voter registration information.

State election officials reported taking the steps required by HAVA to verify information provided on voter registration applications and maintain their voter lists, and some officials reported the accuracy of the voter lists improved as a result. The steps states took depended on what HAVA provisions applied to them. Of the states we reviewed, Alaska, Arizona, Minnesota, South Dakota, and West Virginia were subject to the HAVA provision for verifying information provided on voter registration applications by matching it with SSA and MVA records. These states were in various stages of implementing the requirement, officials told us. At the time of our review, four of these five states were matching information with MVA databases, and two states—Arizona and South Dakota—were matching information with SSA records, according to officials. Alaska, Minnesota, and West Virginia officials said they were in the process of making arrangements with SSA to conduct matches. The requirement to verify information on voter registration applications by matching it with MVA and SSA records, in general, is optional for states that collect voters' full Social Security numbers on these applications.⁹ Of the states we reviewed, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, and South Carolina fall into this category; officials from Hawaii reported their state voluntarily matched information on registration applications with MVA records. Officials from all nine states also reported conducting the list maintenance activities required by HAVA; all of the state officials said their states eliminate duplicate registrations and coordinate the voter list with other state records to identify and remove names of deceased voters and persons ineligible under state law to register to vote because of their felony status.

⁹HAVA provides that for those states using full Social Security numbers on voter registration applications in accordance with Section 7 of the Privacy Act of 1974, HAVA's voter registration verification requirements are optional. Of the states we reviewed, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, and South Carolina collect the full Social Security number and, therefore, have not been treated as subject to the HAVA registration information verification requirement. Georgia's right to this Privacy Act exemption, however, was in litigation at the time of our review. A district court order (*Schwier v. Cox*, Civil No. 1:00-CV-2820, (N.D. Ga. January 31, 2005)) that Georgia does not qualify for this exemption was appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.

Arizona, Minnesota, South Dakota, and West Virginia officials said that implementing the HAVA requirements led to some or great improvement in the accuracy of their voter lists by reducing duplicate registrations or improving the quality of voter information before it was entered into the statewide voter list. Officials from the remaining states—Alaska, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, and South Carolina—reported that HAVA had little or no effect on the accuracy of their voter lists. This result likely occurred, some of these officials said, because their states had operated computerized statewide lists for many years prior to HAVA. While HAVA contains requirements directed at maintaining accurate voter registration lists, even after such requirements are implemented, maintaining accurate computerized lists will likely remain a challenging task for state and local officials. In part this is because of the inherent risks of managing a dynamic body of information that is constantly changing as voters move, change names, come of age to vote, or become ineligible to vote.

Creating statewide registration lists required by HAVA presented a number of challenges and lessons learned, officials told us, as they developed their computerized statewide voter registration systems, made them operational, and later managed them. Election officials from Minnesota and West Virginia said that, for example, they adopted project timelines as they developed their systems that they later found were too compressed. Officials from Arizona, Minnesota, and West Virginia observed that completing the time-consuming task of converting existing voter registration data, which often were inaccurate and needed to be corrected, from old voter registration systems to the new statewide systems was a challenge. Arizona, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, South Dakota, and West Virginia officials also told us that as they developed their computerized systems, they learned that collaborating with local officials to design and develop the systems was important to the states' ultimate successful implementation of the systems. Officials also shared challenges and lessons learned related to making their systems operational. For example, some officials also told us they learned that prior to putting their systems into service, it is important to train staff to use the new system, and officials from Minnesota suggested providing the training manual online to make the most recent information available to staff. State officials also shared challenges and learned lessons from managing the computerized systems. For example, Hawaii officials said one challenge they faced was updating voter information and using their computerized system at the same time. Hawaii and Kentucky officials suggested officials keep in mind that selecting future upgrades to the system will likely involve negotiations with local jurisdictions that may have competing needs or administrative and technical constraints.

Background

As election officials manage voter registration processes and voter lists, they must balance two competing goals. On the one hand, officials seek to minimize the burden on eligible people registering to vote. On the other hand, they also seek to ensure that the voter lists are accurate, a task that involves including the name of each eligible voter on the voter list, removing names of ineligible voters, and having safeguards in place so that names of voters are not removed in error from the list.

Congress has passed legislation relating to the administration of both federal and state elections, pursuant to its various constitutional powers, including processes related to maintaining voter lists. The constitutional framework for elections contemplates both state and federal roles. States are responsible for the administration of both their own elections and federal elections. States regulate various aspects of the election process, including, for example, ballot access, registration procedures, absentee voting requirements, establishment of polling places, provision of election day workers, and counting and certifying the vote. The states in turn incur the costs associated with these activities. Although the states are responsible for running elections, Congress has authority to affect the administration of elections. Congress' authority to regulate elections depends upon the type of election. With regard to federal elections, Congress has constitutional authority over both congressional and presidential elections. In addition, with respect to federal, state, and local elections, a number of constitutional amendments authorize Congress to enforce prohibitions against specific discriminatory acts.

Most recently, HAVA was enacted in 2002, and among other things, mandated that each state establish a computerized statewide voter registration list to serve as the official voter registration list for conducting elections for federal office in each state.¹⁰ The voter registration list is to serve as a secure, centralized, and interactive database that is coordinated with other state agency databases and grants state and local election officials immediate electronic access to enter and update voter information. States and territories were to implement a computerized statewide voter registration database by January 1, 2004. States could apply to EAC by January 1, 2004, for a waiver of the effective date until January 1, 2006. Nine states and one territory—Alaska, Arizona, Georgia,

¹⁰In addition to states, the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico are generally subject to HAVA requirements.

Hawaii, Kentucky, Minnesota, South Carolina, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Guam—did not apply for a waiver.

States subject to HAVA must also take steps to ensure that the statewide voter registration lists are accurate. Under HAVA, states are to perform list maintenance on a regular basis by removing ineligible voters from the statewide voter list. States are to coordinate the computerized list with their state agencies' records on felony status and death to verify voters' eligibility. For example, states must cross-reference the voter registration list with their state's records on felons to remove the names of ineligible voters and records on death to remove deceased registrants. States are also required to remove duplicate registrants, that is, names of voters that appear more than once on the statewide voter list. HAVA, in general, leaves it to the states' discretion to determine the type and frequency of actions to implement this list maintenance requirement.

In addition to undertaking list maintenance, states are required under HAVA to verify voter registration application information. For federal elections, a voter registration application may not be processed or accepted by a state unless it contains the applicant's driver's license number or the last four digits of the Social Security number.¹¹ If the voter has neither of these numbers, the state must assign the voter a voter identification number. Voter registration information is to be matched with motor vehicle agency (MVA) records or Social Security Administration (SSA) records, depending on the information provided by the applicant. Certain state laws require applicants to provide their full Social Security number on voter registration applications. HAVA provides that for those states requiring full Social Security numbers on such applications, in accordance with Section 7 of the Privacy Act of 1974, the HAVA voter registration verification requirements are optional. Of the nine

¹¹With respect to driver's license related information, the REAL ID Act of 2005 (Pub. L. No. 109-13, 119 Stat. 302 (2005)) establishes certain minimum standards, effective in May 2008, for state issuance of driver's licenses in order for such licenses to be recognized for any official purpose by federal agencies. For a state driver's license to be recognized by a federal agency, the REAL ID Act provides, for example, that states require applicants to present certain types of information, such as documentation of a person's name, address of principal residence, and evidence of a person's U.S. citizenship or lawful immigration status prior to issuance. Federal recognition of state-issued driver's licenses will also be conditioned upon, among other things, a requirement that documents presented by an applicant be verified by the state, that states enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Secretary of Homeland Security to verify the legal presence of noncitizen applicants, and that states provide all other states electronic access to state motor vehicle database information.

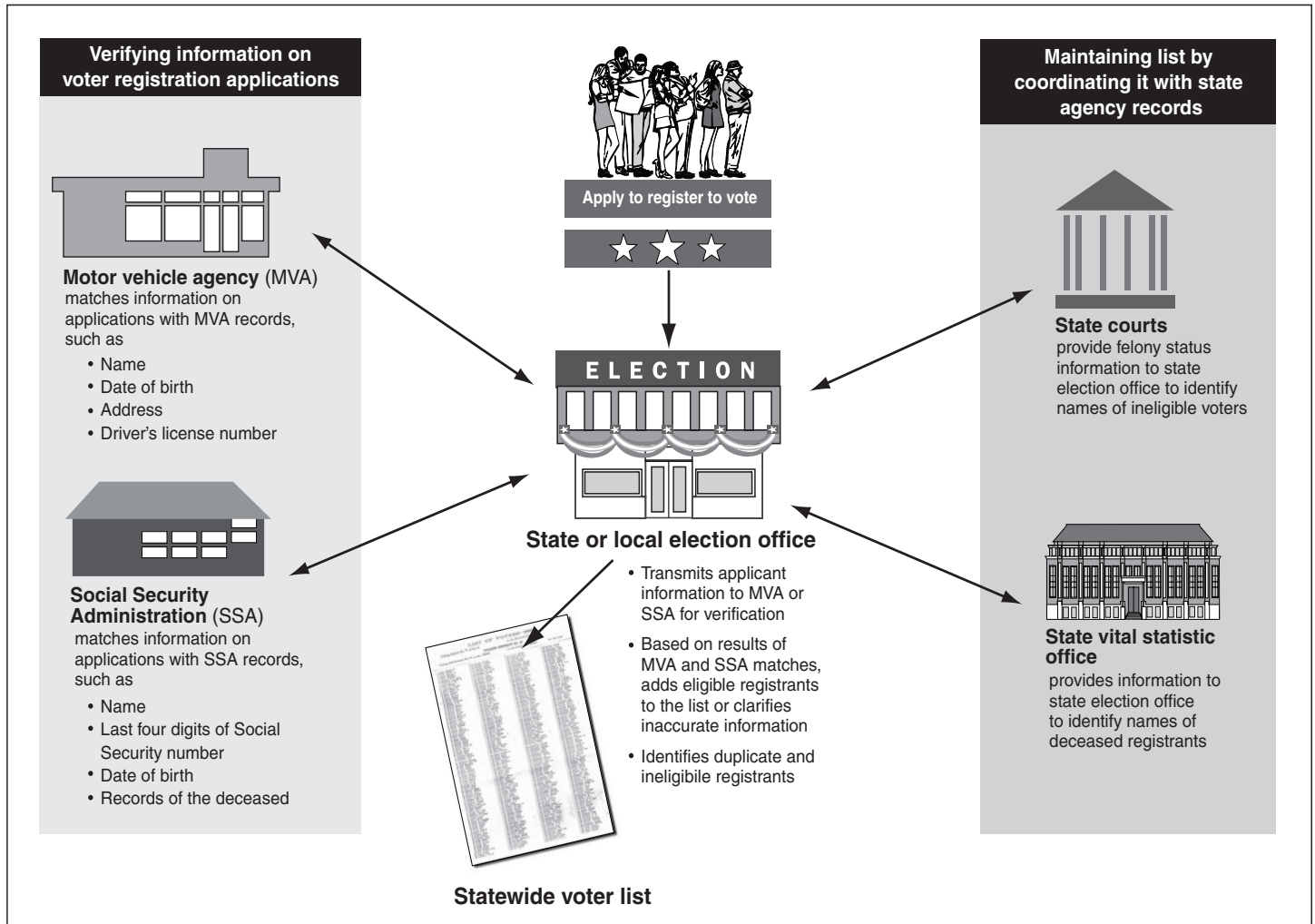
states that did not receive waivers, four—Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, and South Carolina—collect the full Social Security number and, therefore, are not subject to this HAVA requirement, according to state officials.

Under HAVA, the state MVA must enter into an agreement with SSA to verify the applicant information when applicants provide the last four digits of their Social Security number rather than a driver's license number on voter registration applications. HAVA additionally requires SSA to develop methods to verify the accuracy of information on the voter registration applications by matching the name, date of birth, and the last four digits of the Social Security number provided on the voter registration application with SSA records. SSA is to determine whether SSA records indicate the individual is deceased.

Figure 1 provides an example of how a computerized statewide voter registration list could verify voter eligibility through matching registration applications with MVA and SSA, matching the statewide list with state records on felons and death notices from the state courts and the state vital statistics agency, and identifying duplicate registrants in the statewide list.¹²

¹²Under federal law, U.S. Attorneys are required to give written notice of felony convictions in federal district courts to the chief state election official of the offender's state of residence upon conviction of the offender. The law also requires the state election officials to notify the election officials of the local jurisdiction in which an offender resides of federal felony convictions. See 42 U.S.C. § 1973gg-6(g). This provision was enacted into law in 1993 in section 8 of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA), Pub. L. No. 103-31, 107 Stat. 77 (1993).

Figure 1: Overview of Verification and Maintenance Processes That Could Be Implemented Using a Computerized Statewide Voter Registration System



Source: GAO analysis; graphics by Art Explosion.

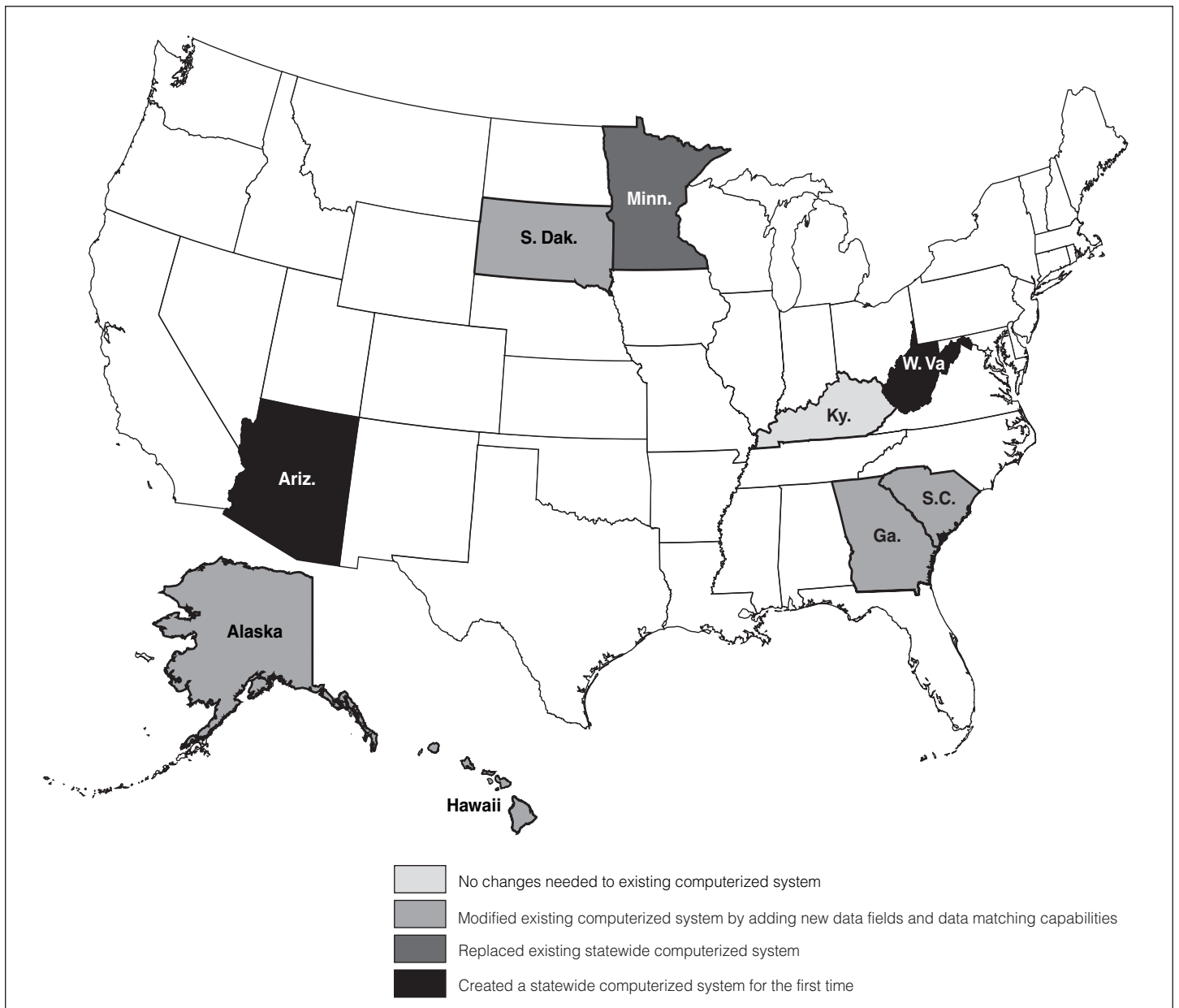
To assist states with implementing these federal mandates, HAVA authorizes funding to states for the creation and maintenance of the computerized statewide voter lists. In turn, HAVA requires states to provide such support as may be required to local jurisdictions to enable them to use the computerized voter list. HAVA also established EAC and charged it with, among other things, providing voluntary technical guidance on the administration of federal elections, serving as a national clearinghouse for information on election administration, and providing

federal funding to the states to implement the HAVA provisions. Also, DOJ has enforcement authority with respect to the uniform and nondiscriminatory implementation of certain HAVA requirements such as those relating to the statewide voter registration list and verifying information on voter registration applications. According to DOJ officials, following the passage of HAVA, it was unnecessary to take enforcement actions against any of the nine nonwaiver states. DOJ officials also reported working with the states to address initial challenges and provide informal guidance while EAC awaited staff and resources. Appendix II discusses EAC's and DOJ's roles regarding computerized statewide voter registration lists in greater detail.

Eight States Reported Taking Actions to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists, and the Ninth Reported Having Such a List Prior to HAVA

Officials from eight of the nine states reported taking a variety of actions in order to implement the HAVA computerized voter registration list requirement; an official from one state, Kentucky, reported no actions were taken because the state had such a system in place prior to the enactment of HAVA. Officials from Alaska, Georgia, Hawaii, South Carolina, and South Dakota reported modifying their existing computerized statewide voter registration systems; officials from Minnesota said the existing computerized voter registration system was replaced; and officials from Arizona and West Virginia said their states created computerized statewide voter registration systems for the first time. Although these eight states reported taking different steps to establish computerized statewide voter registration systems, election officials reported that all of these systems met the HAVA provisions that called for computerized statewide voter registration lists. According to officials, these computerized lists served as centralized and interactive databases containing the names of all legally registered voters in the state and granted election officials immediate electronic access to query, update, and enter voter information. They also said these computerized lists were capable of generating official voter registration lists. Figure 2 summarizes the actions that eight of the nine states reported taking to establish computerized voter registration lists.

Figure 2: Actions Nine States Reported Taking to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists



Source: GAO interviews with state election officials.

Election officials from six states, Alaska, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, South Carolina, and South Dakota, said their states' existing computerized statewide voter registration systems, in place in some cases for many

years prior to HAVA, allowed state and local election officials to share and maintain an interactive database of registered voters and generate official voter registration lists. As a result, officials from Kentucky reported they were required to make no change to their existing system to implement the HAVA requirements. Officials from these other states reported that they were required to only modify their existing systems, in some cases making only minor changes, in order to implement HAVA. For example, in Hawaii, election officials reported their state has operated a computerized statewide voter registration system since 1982 and only made minor technical changes as a result of HAVA, such as adding the ability to flag inactive voters. In addition, since Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, and South Carolina collect voters' full Social Security numbers on voter registration applications, they are not subject to the HAVA provisions for verifying information on voter registration applications by matching it with MVA and SSA records, officials reported. Accordingly, officials said they did not have to modify their existing systems to provide this matching capability. Alaska and South Dakota are subject to HAVA's data matching provisions. These states also had computerized statewide voter lists in place prior to HAVA, and their election officials said they modified them as a result of HAVA. Alaska election officials reported that they added new data fields to the computerized statewide voter registration system to capture the last four digits of the voters' Social Security numbers and to identify first-time voters who registered by mail, which required little or no effort.¹³ South Dakota election officials reported making similar changes as well as adding the capability to match voter registration applications with MVA and SSA records, actions that required a moderate level of effort, they said.

In the three remaining states, officials reported creating new systems in order to implement HAVA. Officials from Minnesota said their state operated a computerized statewide voter registration system prior to HAVA. Their state replaced rather than modified this system. Arizona and West Virginia election officials reported that their states did not have computerized statewide voter lists in place prior to HAVA and that they expended a significant level of effort to create such systems. Prior to HAVA, some counties and local jurisdictions in these states had computerized voter registration systems in place. However, the systems

¹³Individuals who register by mail and have not previously voted in an election for federal office in the state are, in general, required to provide identification at the polls the first time they cast a ballot.

were not interconnected to create statewide databases of legally registered voters. Election officials in Arizona said that creating the computerized list was also complicated because state and county election officials lacked the legal authority to access state records they were to match with the statewide voter list. The state had to pass new statutes and amend others so that election officials could receive information from state agencies, such as felony records, according to a senior election official.

Some officials told us that in addition to the capabilities required by HAVA their states' computerized voter registration systems provide election management tools that help them prepare for and conduct elections. For example, West Virginia election officials told us their computerized voter registration list is also able to identify voters who wished to serve as poll workers and produce reports on absentee ballots, early voters, poll workers, and election data statistics. Minnesota state election officials said that their computerized voter registration list includes a module that centrally tracks absentee ballots provided to military personnel or other citizens residing overseas.

Some state officials are planning to enhance their systems' election management features. For example, Arizona plans to award a contract to implement an updated version of its current system, which is to include the ability to track out-of-state moves by voters and manage issues such as petitions, provisional ballots, poll workers, and poll locations. Kentucky election officials told us that they wish to upgrade their system to provide more election management tools to counties, including a new function to identify poll workers and complete absentee ballot forms. See appendixes III through XI for more information on each state's current computerized statewide voter registration system and future plans.

Federal funds are available to states to assist them as they implement the HAVA provisions.¹⁴ In turn, HAVA requires states to provide such support as may be required to local jurisdictions to help them use the computerized voter lists. Officials from six states we interviewed—Alaska, Arizona, Minnesota, South Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia—reported receiving federal funds to establish computerized voter lists;

¹⁴To be eligible to receive federal payments to implement this and other HAVA provisions, states must comply with certain requirements such as appropriating state funds equal to 5 percent of the total funding to be spent on implementing HAVA.

these states said they spent a combination of federal and state funds totaling about \$8.4 million to establish their computerized lists. As required by HAVA, each of the nine states, except Alaska, where the state is solely responsible for entering and maintaining voter registration information, provided some type of support to local jurisdictions to help them operate the computerized statewide voter registration systems, according to officials. For example, South Carolina election officials told us that they provided personal computers and software to local jurisdictions, as well as training for staff.

States Reported Taking Steps to Verify Information on Registration Applications and Maintain Lists, Improving the Accuracy of Some Lists

State election officials reported taking required steps to verify information provided on voter registration applications and to maintain accurate computerized voter lists. Alaska, Arizona, Minnesota, South Dakota, and West Virginia—the states subject to the HAVA provisions to verify information provided on voter registration applications—took steps to do so by collecting the required unique identifying information from voters, officials told us. As of November 2005, Arizona and South Dakota were matching information on the applications with state MVA or SSA records, according to election officials. The remaining states were in various stages of implementing the matching requirement. All nine states conducted regular voter list maintenance activities to purge duplicates and remove names of persons ineligible to vote, such as deceased registrants, as required by HAVA, officials also reported. Officials from four of the nine states we reviewed said that implementing the HAVA requirements led to some or great improvement in the accuracy of their voter lists. While HAVA contains requirements that should help states maintain accurate voter registration lists, maintaining accurate voter lists will likely remain a challenge for election officials, in part because lists are dynamic and constantly changing as voters move, change names, or become ineligible to vote.

States Reported Taking Steps to Verify Voter Registration Applications with MVAs and SSA

Under HAVA, most states are to verify the accuracy of information on voter registration applications by matching information, such as the name and date of birth, with MVA or SSA records, depending on the information provided by the applicant. As noted earlier, HAVA also requires that voter registration applicants for federal elections provide or be assigned one of several types of unique identifying information that can be matched with other records for verification. For matching purposes, applicants are to be asked for their state driver's license number or, if an applicant has not been issued a driver's license, the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number. An eligible applicant who has not been issued a state

driver’s license or a Social Security number can still register to vote. In those cases, election officials are required to assign the registrant an identification number.

Not all states are subject to the HAVA requirement to verify voter registration application information by comparing or matching the information with MVA or SSA records. In general, under HAVA, states requiring full Social Security numbers on voter registration applications prior to 1975 in order to verify the identity of a registrant are not subject to the HAVA requirement that application information be matched with MVA or SSA records. HAVA provides that for those states the voter registration verification requirement is optional. Four of the nine states we reviewed—Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, and South Carolina—collect the full Social Security number on voter registration applications and, therefore, according to state officials, are not subject to this provision. Five of the nine states we reviewed—Alaska, Arizona, Minnesota, South Dakota, and West Virginia—are subject to this HAVA provision to collect or assign a unique identifying numbers and then verify voter information by matching it with MVA or SSA information.

Officials from all five of these states subject to this HAVA provision reported their systems collected or assigned the required unique identifying numbers for registered voters, as indicated in table 1.

Table 1: Reported Type of Unique Identifying Number Collected or Assigned by States to Implement HAVA Requirements

State	Driver’s license number	Last four digits of Social Security number	Voter registration number ^a
Alaska ^b	X	X	X
Arizona	X	X	X
Minnesota	X	X	X
South Dakota	X	X	X
West Virginia	X	X	X

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by states.

^aHAVA requires that for those applicants who have not been issued a driver’s license or a Social Security number, states shall assign them a voter registration number.

^bIn addition to this information, Alaska’s voter registration application allows voters to provide their full Social Security number or an Alaska state identification card number.

Officials from four of the five states also reported taking steps to match information on voter registration applications with state MVA records and provided the date by which MVA matching became available, as indicated in table 2.

Table 2: Reported Actions Taken by States to Implement HAVA-Required Verification of Information on Voter Registration Applications by Matching with MVA Records

State	Match applications with MVA records	Date matching capability became operational
Alaska	X	January 2004
Arizona	X	January 2004
Minnesota	X	January 2004
South Dakota	X	January 2004

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by states.

In West Virginia, officials said that their state was not yet conducting these required matches because they were still in the process of developing an agreement with the MVA to verify information on applications. They also reported difficulty conducting data matches because the MVA lacked the ability to interface with the statewide voter list. They expected this issue to be resolved by 2006. Although not required to do so, Hawaii voluntarily implemented this HAVA requirement, election officials said.

In addition, officials from all five of these states subject to this HAVA provision reported taking steps to match information on voter registration applications with SSA records. As noted earlier, if voter registration applicants provide the last four digits of their Social Security number on the registration applications rather than their driver's license numbers, states are to verify information on the application by matching it with SSA records. Officials from two states—Arizona and South Dakota—reported that their states were currently conducting the required matches. They were not able to conduct these matches by the January 1, 2004, deadline because SSA's computer program to process these matches was not operational until 8 months after the deadline had passed, in August 2004.¹⁵ Election officials from three states—Alaska, Minnesota, and West Virginia—said their states were not yet conducting these required matches because they were still in the process of developing an agreement with SSA to verify information on applications. Minnesota officials also said they encountered technical difficulties electronically sharing data with SSA but anticipated the agreement and the technological issues would be resolved so that they could conduct matches by 2006. Alaska and West

¹⁵GAO, *Elections: Additional Data Could Help State and Local Elections Officials Maintain Accurate Voter Registration Lists*, [GAO-05-478](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 10, 2005).

Virginia officials could not provide an estimated date by which the agreement would be completed and the required matches conducted.

All States Reported Taking Steps to Perform Required List Maintenance on a Regular Basis

In addition to requiring most states to verify information on voter registration applications, HAVA provides that all states, including the nine states discussed in this report, are to perform list maintenance on the HAVA-required statewide voter registration lists on a regular basis.¹⁶ In general, list maintenance activities include adding new voters to the voter list; updating voter information if a voter moves within the state; and removing the names of ineligible voters from the voter list, such as persons who are deceased or convicted of a felony that, under state law, makes them ineligible to be registered to vote. HAVA requires that the computerized list be coordinated with state agency records on felony status and death to remove the names of ineligible voters. Duplicate registrations, that is, names of voters that appear more than once on the statewide voter list, are also to be eliminated.

Election officials in all nine states reported taking the required actions to perform list maintenance on a regular basis to identify and remove duplicates and names of registrants ineligible to vote. The sections below identify the type and frequency of actions states reported taking to implement the HAVA-required list maintenance activities in accordance with state and local procedures. These procedures for maintaining the statewide voter list varied from state to state, as detailed in appendixes III-XI.

Identifying duplicate voter registrations. HAVA requires that states are to remove duplicate registrations, that is, names of voters that appear more than once, from the statewide voter list. Duplicate registrations may occur in the statewide lists when, for example, voters move within a state, reregister, and then fail to notify the county in which they were previously registered to vote. HAVA, in general, leaves it to the states' discretion to determine the type and frequency of actions to implement this list maintenance requirement. Officials from all nine states reported that their systems check for duplicate registrants to ensure that voters are not listed

¹⁶HAVA is not the first federal legislation affecting the administration of elections. The National Voter Registration Act, for example, was enacted, in part to establish registration procedures designed to "increase the number of eligible citizens who register to vote in elections for Federal office," "protect the integrity of the electoral process," and "ensure that accurate and current voter registration lists are maintained."

in the statewide voter list more than once. When applications are entered into the statewide database of registered voters, some states' systems automatically screen the applications on a real-time basis, that is, as the data are entered, to ensure that they do not duplicate an existing registration; other states screen the entire list on a regular basis. Table 3 shows the variation by state in the reported type and frequency of actions taken to identify duplicate registrations.

Table 3: Reported Type and Frequency of Actions Taken to Identify Duplicate Registration

State	Applications screened to identify duplicate registrations	Frequency of application screening	Voter registration list checked for duplicate registrations	Frequency of list checks
Alaska	X	Real time	X	Annual
Arizona	X	Daily	X	Periodic
Georgia	X	Real time	X	Monthly
Hawaii	X	Real time	N/A ^a	N/A ^a
Kentucky	X	Real time	X	Periodic
Minnesota	X	Daily	X	Annual
South Carolina	X	Real time	X	Quarterly
South Dakota	N/A ^b	N/A ^b	X	Annual
West Virginia	X	Real time	X	Periodic

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by states.

^aNot applicable. To meet the HAVA requirements, voter registration applications, not the entire database of registered voters, are checked on a real-time basis. HAVA, in general, leaves it to the states' discretion to determine the type and frequency of actions to implement this list maintenance requirement.

^bNot applicable. To meet the HAVA requirements, the entire list, not voter registration applications, is checked annually. HAVA, in general, leaves it to the states' discretion to determine the type and frequency of actions to implement this list maintenance requirement.

Identifying names of deceased voters. HAVA requires that states are to coordinate the voter list with their state agencies' death records to verify voters' eligibility. HAVA, in general, leaves it to the states' discretion to determine the type and frequency of actions to implement this list maintenance requirement. Officials from all nine states reported that they or local officials regularly matched state agency death records with the statewide voter lists to ensure that names of deceased registrants do not remain on the rolls. Most of these matches were based on electronic or paper records. Table 4 shows the variation by state in the reported type and frequency of actions taken to identify deceased registrations.

Table 4: Reported Type and Frequency of Actions Taken to Identify Names of Deceased Registrants

State	Applications screened to identify names of deceased registrants	Frequency of application screening	Voter registration list checked for names of deceased registrants	Frequency of list checks
Alaska	X	Real time	X	Monthly
Arizona	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	Monthly
Georgia	X	Real time	X	Monthly
Hawaii	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	Biweekly
Kentucky	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	Monthly
Minnesota	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	Monthly
South Carolina	X	N/A ^a	X	Monthly
South Dakota	X	Daily	X	Weekly
West Virginia	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	Monthly

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by states.

^aNot applicable. To meet the HAVA requirements, the entire list, not voter registration applications, is checked. HAVA, in general, leaves it to the states' discretion to determine the type and frequency of actions to implement this list maintenance requirement.

Identifying persons convicted of a disqualifying felony. HAVA requires states to coordinate the voter list with their state agencies' records on felony status to verify voters' eligibility. HAVA, in general, leaves it to the states' discretion to determine the type and frequency of actions to implement this list maintenance requirement. Officials from all nine states reported that their states matched state court records with the statewide lists to identify persons ineligible under state law to vote because of a disqualifying felony conviction. These matches were based on electronic or paper records. Table 5 shows the variation by state in the reported type and frequency of actions taken to identify voters ineligible to register because of a felony conviction.

Table 5: Reported Type and Frequency of Actions Taken to Identify Ineligible Felons

State	Applications screened to identify names of ineligible felons	Frequency of application screening	Voter registration list checked for names of ineligible felons	Frequency of list checks
Alaska	X	Real time	X	Monthly
Arizona	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	Periodic
Georgia	X	Real time	X	Monthly
Hawaii	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	Biweekly
Kentucky	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	Monthly
Minnesota	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	Monthly
South Carolina	X	Monthly	X	Monthly
South Dakota	X	Daily	N/A ^b	N/A ^b
West Virginia	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	Periodic

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by states.

^aNot applicable. To meet the HAVA requirements, the entire list, not voter registration applications, is checked. HAVA, in general, leaves it to the states' discretion to determine the type and frequency of actions to implement this list maintenance requirement.

^bNot applicable. To meet the HAVA requirements, voter registration applications, not the entire database of registered voters, are checked a daily basis. HAVA, in general, leaves it to the states' discretion to determine the type and frequency of actions to implement this list maintenance requirement.

Identifying individuals ineligible to vote because of mental incompetence. The voter eligibility requirements in the nine states we reviewed provided that applicants declared mentally incompetent to vote are not eligible to register to vote. Officials in eight states reported they have procedures in place to identify registrants ineligible to vote because of court orders of mental incompetence. All reported that removing registrants for this reason was a rare occurrence. The ninth state, West Virginia, did not report such procedures are in place.¹⁷

¹⁷West Virginia election officials told us that while state law provides that a person found mentally incompetent is ineligible to register to vote, they have not received such information from courts.

Four States Reported That Voter List Accuracy Improved as a Result of HAVA, but Managing Inherent Risks to Voter List Accuracy Remains a Challenge

Officials from four states—Arizona, Minnesota, South Dakota, and West Virginia—reported that implementing the HAVA requirements improved the accuracy of their voter lists somewhat or to a great extent. South Dakota officials reported that verifying applications has helped identify inaccurate information on applications and that matching applications with the MVA helped reduce the number of duplicate registrations. Officials from Minnesota, which replaced its existing computerized voter registration with a new one in order to implement HAVA, also reported that implementing the HAVA requirements reduced the incidence of duplicate registrations. And officials in the states of Arizona and West Virginia, which built entirely new systems to comply with HAVA, reported a great improvement in the accuracy of their voter rolls.

Officials from the remaining states—Alaska, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, and South Carolina—reported that HAVA had little or no effect on the accuracy of their voter lists. This result likely occurred, some of these officials said, because their states have had well-established computerized statewide lists, similar to those required by HAVA, in place for many years prior to HAVA. Officials from Georgia, Hawaii, and Kentucky also attributed this result to their states' ability to require the full Social Security number on voter registration applications. Having this unique identifier provided a means to identify and remove duplicate registrants from voter lists, they stated.

While HAVA contains requirements directed at maintaining accurate voter registration lists, even after such requirements are implemented, maintaining accurate computerized lists will likely remain a challenging task for state and local officials. In part this is because of the inherent risks of managing a dynamic body of information that is constantly changing as voters move, change names, come of age to vote, or become ineligible to vote. Managing these risks has challenged election officials across the country for some time, as we have documented in a series of past reports. In October 2001 we issued a report that described the operations and challenges associated with each stage of the election process, including list maintenance. We reported that, judging from our national survey of local election officials, officials were challenged by continually updating and deleting information from voter registration lists and had concerns related to obtaining accurate and timely information to keep voter lists accurate.¹⁸ In June 2005 we reported on the processes

¹⁸ [GAO-02-3](#).

14 local voting jurisdictions from seven states used to verify voter registration eligibility and the challenges officials faced in maintaining accurate voter lists.¹⁹ We reported that while some of these challenges, such as reducing duplicate registrations among jurisdictions within the state, may be resolved when HAVA is fully implemented, others may continue to be issues. Problems identifying voters who are registered concurrently in more than one state and problems using incomplete, untimely, or hard-to-decipher felony, death, and other information could also continue to hinder efforts to maintain accurate voter lists. In September 2005 we issued a report that described the experiences of selected local election officials in the same seven states as they processed voter registration applications.²⁰ We reported that officials in these jurisdictions face a number of challenges, such as processing incomplete or inaccurate applications received from voter registration drives sponsored by nongovernmental organizations.

Some of the concerns highlighted in our October 2001, June 2005, and September 2005 reports remain issues in states we discussed in this report, even after these nine states implemented the HAVA-required computerized lists. For example:

Duplicate voter registrants. Echoing concerns reported in our previous work, the majority of state election officials interviewed for this report said that their states might not receive information about residents who leave the state and reregister to vote in another state.²¹ As a result, voters could be registered and vote in two states concurrently. One senior election official described this type of duplicate registration as a “universal” problem affecting all states. States are not required to share information that would allow them to identify persons registered in more than one state,²² although some states voluntarily notify other states when a voter relocates and reregisters in that state, officials said. Officials from Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Hawaii, Minnesota, South Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia told us they notify other states of voters who

¹⁹GAO-05-478.

²⁰GAO-05-997.

²¹GAO-05-478.

²²As discussed earlier, under the REAL ID Act of 2005 federal recognition of state-issued driver’s licenses will be conditioned upon, among other things, a requirement that states provide all other states electronic access to state motor vehicle database information.

relocate and then reregister. However, such notifications are possible only if voters disclose on their voter registration application they have relocated from another state, officials also told us. This issue, caused in part by a lack of consistently available information, poses an inherent risk to the accuracy of voter lists and may not be resolved solely by implementing the HAVA-required computerized list requirement.

Deceased registrants. We previously reported that concerns regarding timeliness and completeness of vital statistics data on deceased persons used to match against voter lists may continue to be an issue, even after the HAVA requirements for a computerized list are implemented.²³ However, the election officials we interviewed in most of the states did not share concerns about the timeliness of information their offices receive on deceased persons from the vital statistics office. One official observed that the vital statistics office may not receive timely information from coroners or funeral home directors. Officials in a majority of the states we reviewed observed that data on deceased persons may not be complete because states are not able consistently to identify and remove names of deceased registrants if the deaths occur out of state. According to an official in South Dakota, some states are prohibited by state laws from sharing information on deaths, a fact that has, in part, prevented this issue from being resolved. Even in states that share such information, unless officials are aware that the deceased was registered to vote in a certain state, officials are not able to pass the information to the appropriate election office. This issue, related in part to the unavailability of information, poses an inherent risk to the accuracy of voter lists and is not resolved by implementing the HAVA-required computerized list requirement.

Felons. While HAVA requires coordinating the voter list with state information on persons convicted of a felony, election officials we interviewed in several of the states expressed concerns similar to those reported in our previous work that the criminal information they receive is incomplete, not timely, or difficult to decipher.²⁴ This issue, similar to concerns related to the availability, timeliness, and quality of other types of voter registration information, poses an inherent risk to the accuracy of lists because it could limit the ability of officials to identify and remove names of felons ineligible to register to vote from the computerized voter lists.

²³ [GAO-05-478](#).

²⁴ [GAO-05-478](#).

U.S. citizenship. In addition to having concerns regarding felony status, election officials from two states also expressed concerns regarding the willingness of registrants to self-attest that they were U.S. citizens and therefore eligible to vote under state eligibility requirements, concerns that are consistent with those documented in our previous work.²⁵ The HAVA-required unique identifying numbers, such as driver's license numbers or Social Security numbers, are not useful for this purpose because neither is generally accepted as evidence of U.S. citizenship. This lack of information poses an inherent risk to the accuracy of lists, as illustrated by an example from Minnesota.²⁶ Officials told us that they discovered 30 noncitizens on the Minnesota voter list during the November 2004 general election despite having the HAVA-required computerized statewide voter list in place. Minnesota's MVA has since added visa expiration dates to the driver's licenses of noncitizens to indicate their citizenship status. South Dakota officials reported their MVA provides similar information on driver's licenses. To address this concern, Arizona officials told us that their state no longer accepts the registration applicants' self-attestation of citizenship; all voter registration applicants are now required to provide proof of citizenship. As we reported in our June 2005 report, federal jury administrators could identify possible noncitizens on the basis of information that potential jurors provide when identifying themselves as noncitizens on their jury service questionnaire.²⁷ We recommended that the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts determine the feasibility and steps necessary for U.S. district court jury administrators to provide notice to state election officials of potential jurors who identify themselves as noncitizens. Officials from Hawaii reported that their state periodically checks the voter list with this type of information and other citizenship indexes.

Receiving voter registration applications. Officials from Georgia, South Carolina, and South Dakota said that their state received voter registration applications from registration drives that contained inaccuracies such as

²⁵ [GAO-05-478](#).

²⁶ As discussed earlier, under the REAL ID Act of 2005, federal recognition of state-issued driver's licenses will be conditioned upon, among other things, a state requirement that applicants provide certain information relating to their U.S. citizenship or lawful immigration status prior to issuance. Federal recognition is also to be conditioned upon, among other things, a requirement that states enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Secretary of Homeland Security to verify the legal presence of noncitizen applicants.

²⁷ [GAO-05-478](#).

fictitious names, a problem that we had identified in past reports.²⁸ South Carolina officials also said that only a small number of such applications are generally received. Officials from a majority of the nine states we reviewed reported that they received a small number of complaints from voters who said that they had registered through a registration drive but that their names did not appear on the voter list on Election Day.

State Election Officials Reported Numerous Challenges and Lessons Learned while Implementing HAVA Requirements for Their Statewide Voter Registration Lists

Creating statewide computerized lists required by HAVA presented a number of challenges and resulted in lessons learned, officials told us, as they developed their computerized statewide voter registration systems, made them operational, and later managed them. The challenges and lessons learned they shared are consistent with those that our past research has shown to be important to effectively acquiring, developing, and implementing information systems in public and private sector organizations.²⁹ Officials shared their experiences as they developed their systems, for example:

- Election officials from Minnesota and West Virginia reported that meeting the time frames they established for developing their computerized lists was challenging, in part because of limited staff available to complete the work.
- Designing a system with the appropriate scope was an issue raised by Arizona, Hawaii, Kentucky, and Minnesota officials. This challenge involved determining the functional requirements of the system, for instance, the number of election management features the system should provide, if any, in addition to the capabilities required by HAVA. A senior Minnesota official reported Minnesota reduced the scope of its new system from what it had initially planned because of resource and time constraints, keeping the necessary elements but eliminating some election administration functions. Officials said this experience taught them that the functional requirements of the system should be prioritized as early as possible to differentiate features that are necessary from those that would be nice to have. Arizona officials addressed this design challenge by

²⁸We reported in the past that state election officials we interviewed expressed concerns regarding (1) the receipt of inaccurate voter registration applications from voter registration drives sponsored by nongovernmental organizations and (2) failure of these organizations to submit completed applications to election officials. See [GAO-05-997](#).

²⁹For additional information on best practices associated with acquiring and implementing vote systems, see [GAO-05-956](#).

initially implementing a system that performed only the basic tasks required under the HAVA provisions, they reported. In the near term, they told us, local officials used the computerized statewide system to manage voter registration information while continuing to use their local computerized systems to manage elections. This decision minimized changes to the way counties historically managed elections, officials said. The state plans to expand the scope of its new statewide system in the future, providing counties with additional election management capabilities, an official told us. Their plan, officials said, is to draw upon local and state officials' experiences with the statewide system to identify and prioritize what additional features to add to their system. The Kentucky official offered a lesson learned as well, suggesting that election officials, as they define the capabilities the system is to offer, should be mindful of selecting a system that the state can afford now and in the future.

- Converting data on registered voters from the old system to the new system was time-consuming and required processes to ensure that data were accurately entered into the new system, election officials from Arizona, Minnesota, and West Virginia observed. This work was complicated, in part, because of inaccurate information in existing records such as misspelled street addresses or duplicate registrations that needed to be resolved before inputting the corrected data into the new systems' databases. Minnesota officials said that to help local officials with this work, they developed a tool that allowed them to compare old records of voter information with the new ones on a case-by-case basis.

Officials from Arizona, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, South Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia also said that as states develop their computerized systems, they should adopt a collaborative approach, working with local officials to design, develop, or implement the systems in order to obtain local officials' cooperation. The state officials provided various reasons for emphasizing the importance of maintaining cooperative relationships with local officials. For example, West Virginia officials told us local officials resisted moving from their county-based systems to the statewide system, which made implementing the system more difficult. Local officials resisted in part because many of them viewed the new statewide system as an intrusion into a domain of election administration that had been a local—not a state—responsibility, state officials told us. Involving county officials in designing and implementing the system, the state officials said, might have addressed this issue and simplified implementation of the new system. Arizona and South Carolina officials said they involved local officials by convening a working group composed of both local and state officials that was responsible for

developing the system. Hawaii state officials told us that frequent, regular communication helped their state maintain a cooperative relationship with local officials; for instance, this state holds quarterly meetings with county officials in order to coordinate activities such as completing list maintenance and data entry before poll books and voter lists are printed. Kentucky officials said the key to their success was the cooperative working relationship they cultivated with local officials by keeping them involved.

Officials also shared challenges and lessons learned while making their systems operational. For example, West Virginia officials said that their system became operational in every county on the same day. However, it may have been beneficial for their state, they stated, to introduce the system incrementally county by county rather than bringing every election jurisdiction online the same day. They reasoned that such a staggered rollout schedule might have been easier on the state election officials, given their staffing constraints. Officials from some states also told us that prior to putting systems into service, it is important to train staff to use the new system. In order to provide local officials access to the most current information, Minnesota officials said they provide the user's manual online.

State election officials also shared their lessons learned from their experience managing computerized voter registration systems once they were operational. Officials from Hawaii and Kentucky, two states that have managed computerized voter registrations systems for some years, observed that as technology develops, officials may decide to enhance their systems, as both of their states have done over the years. These officials offered lessons to keep in mind as states contemplate system upgrades: be mindful that selecting upgrades to the system may require compromises among local jurisdictions that may have competing needs or different administrative or technical constraints and that changes to the system affect all local jurisdictions equally. Hawaii officials shared another issue they encountered while managing their system; they could not use the computerized system while updating voter information. To address this issue, officials from Hawaii said their staff created a shadow system so that the system could be updated and available at the same time. Hawaii officials also recommended that states establish uniform processing procedures among their jurisdictions so that all jurisdictions function as one.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days after the report date. At that time we will make copies available to others on request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions regarding this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8777 or jenkinswo@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors are listed in appendix XII.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William O. Jenkins, Jr.", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

William O. Jenkins, Jr.,
Director, Homeland Security
and Justice Issues

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This report describes the experiences of election officials in Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, Georgia, Kentucky, Minnesota, South Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia implementing the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) requirements pertaining to the establishment of computerized statewide voter registration lists and steps to verify and maintain the accuracy of those lists. Specifically, our objectives were to describe the actions election officials from nine states reported taking to (1) establish computerized statewide voter registration lists and (2) verify information provided on voter registration applications and maintain the statewide voter lists. In addition, we describe what these state officials told us regarding (3) the challenges they faced and lessons they learned while implementing these requirements. Most states obtained a waiver from the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to postpone implementation of this HAVA requirement until January 1, 2006. However, these nine states did not obtain a waiver and, therefore, were to implement these HAVA requirements by the original deadline, January 1, 2004.

To meet our objectives, we reviewed HAVA provisions related to the establishment of statewide computerized voter registration list requirements. We then identified the proper points of contact within each state and conducted telephone interviews using a structured interview format. Among other things, we asked election officials in the nine states to describe when their computerized systems had been developed; the capabilities of their systems; what actions, if any, their states took to implement the HAVA requirements for a computerized list; what level of effort was required to make any HAVA-related modifications; what effect implementing these changes, if any, might have had on the accuracy of their statewide voter lists; and what challenges they faced and lessons they learned while implementing these HAVA requirements. We did not independently verify the accuracy of state election officials' responses. However, state election officials were provided the opportunity to verify the accuracy of their responses for this report, and on the basis of the comments we received, we made technical changes where appropriate. As part of our interviews, we also asked state officials how much federal and state money was spent on their computerized statewide systems in order to implement the HAVA requirements. We did not independently verify the amounts they reported to us. However, we attempted to compare the amounts of money the states reported that they spent with data reported by them to EAC on the implementation of all HAVA requirements. Because of variations in the way these amounts were reported by the states, we could not identify the amounts spent solely on implementation of the computerized list requirement.

Our work focused primarily on the states, since most of the responsibilities for implementing HAVA statewide computerized list provisions took place at the state level. We did, however, communicate with officials from the EAC and Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division to obtain information about and documentation on their roles and responsibilities related to the HAVA statewide computerized list provisions. We also provided sections of the report discussing EAC and DOJ to officials with those organizations to verify the accuracy of the information they provided and, on the basis of their comments, made technical changes where appropriate. In addition, we reviewed prior GAO reports on elections, including voter registration issues.

We conducted our work from January 2005 through December 2005 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Appendix II: EAC and DOJ Roles in Implementing HAVA Statewide Voter Registration List Provisions

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) provides that the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) are to have specific roles in states' efforts to implement the Help America Vote Act's statewide voter registration list provisions. HAVA established EAC to, among other things, serve as a national clearinghouse for information on election administration and provide information and guidance with respect to laws, procedures, and technologies affecting the administration of federal elections.

On August 4, 2005, EAC released its final version of the Voluntary Guidance on Implementation of Statewide Voter Registration Lists. The purpose of the voluntary guidance was to assist states in their efforts to develop and maintain a statewide voter registration list pursuant to HAVA Section 303(a). The guidance describes a set of specifications and requirements states may use to implement the HAVA provisions, such as establishing real-time access to all registration data, securing the registration list, synchronizing the statewide list with local databases at least every 24 hours, and coordinating with other databases for the purpose of performing voter registration verification and list maintenance. EAC's guidance also contains recommendations on dealing with outcomes that may result from the verification process, the type of voting history information states should track, and the type of system that is most closely aligned with HAVA requirements. In addition to the voluntary guidance, EAC has also created and posted on its Web site two best practices documents—"Best Practices in Administration, Management, and Security in Voting Systems and Provisional Voting" and "Best Practices for Facilitating Voting by U.S. Citizens Covered by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act"—and other information on election administration. According to EAC officials, EAC expects that the clearinghouse will be fully operational during 2006.

HAVA also provides enforcement authority to DOJ with respect to the uniform and nondiscriminatory implementation of certain HAVA requirements such as those relating to the statewide voter registration list and voter eligibility verification provisions. Officials with DOJ's Civil Rights Division told us that in addition to monitoring states' compliance with HAVA, DOJ has promoted pre-enforcement compliance, which includes working with states to identify what actions are reasonable to expect them to take, educating state and local officials, and responding to states' inquiries. According to DOJ officials, at the time of our review, DOJ had not taken enforcement actions against any of the nine nonwaiver states. DOJ officials also said that they worked with the states following

**Appendix II: EAC and DOJ Roles in
Implementing HAVA Statewide Voter
Registration List Provisions**

the passage of HAVA to address initial challenges and provide informal guidance while EAC began operations and hired staff.

Appendix III: Reported Experiences of Alaska Election Officials Implementing HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions

This appendix describes steps Alaska election officials reported taking to implement selected provisions of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and manage the election process with regard to establishing computerized statewide voter registration lists, verifying the accuracy of information provided on voter applications, and maintaining accurate statewide voter lists. In addition, this appendix summarizes challenges and lessons learned election officials reported with respect to implementing HAVA requirements. The statements in this appendix reflect the responses to our telephone interviews with Alaska election officials and were not independently verified by us.

Steps Taken to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists

Alaska had in place a computerized statewide voter registration system prior to the enactment of HAVA. The state created a mainframe-based system in 1985. To implement the provisions of HAVA, minor modifications were made to the system to allow election officials to record driver's license numbers and the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number. These modifications cost approximately \$5,000 in state and federal funds to implement. Alaska state officials awarded a contract to upgrade its statewide voter registration system, in order to include additional election management capabilities, such as poll worker management and Internet voter registration, at a cost of \$2.6 million.

Verifying Accuracy of Information Provided on Voter Applications

To implement the HAVA voter application verification requirements, the state's four regional election supervisors, who function as state employees,¹ verified application information by comparing voter eligibility information (full name; date of birth; and either a driver's license number, full Social Security number, the last four digits of the Social Security number, or a unique identifier assigned by the state if the individual lacks a Social Security number and a driver's license) with state motor vehicle agency records to verify identity, age, and duplicate registrations. At the time of our review, Alaska was not comparing information with the Social Security Administration (SSA) because the state did not have a signed memorandum of understanding with SSA.

¹Alaska does not have counties; instead, there are four election regions responsible for administering elections. The state director of elections appoints the regional election supervisors.

Maintenance of Accurate Statewide Voter Lists

To implement HAVA, Alaska has taken steps to maintain the accuracy of its voter registration list by coordinating the list with other state agency records, as described below.

- *Duplicate registrants.* State officials perform an electronic check on the entire statewide voter registration list for duplicates once a year and on an as-needed basis.
- *Deceased registrants.* State officials conduct monthly electronic updates of vital statistics death records by checking name, date of birth and either the full Social Security number or the last four digits.
- *Disqualified felons.* State officials update court system records on a monthly basis. Specifically, court system records from the Department of Corrections and Bureau of Vital Statistics are checked against the voter registration list, comparing name, date of birth, and full Social Security number.
- *Disqualification of those declared mentally incompetent.* In the event of a court declaration of mental incompetence, the court would notify state officials of the judgment and the Division of Elections would inactivate the voter's registration. Officials reported that disqualification because of mental incompetence does not occur often.

To ensure that eligible voters are not inadvertently removed from the state voter registration list, election officials send letters notifying individuals of their pending removal from the statewide voter registration list. These letters are sent to those who have not voted in the most recent two federal elections and those who have disqualifying felony convictions, as allowed under state law. Alaska officials reported that they removed the names of ineligible voters in 2004.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Election officials did not report any challenges or lessons learned while implementing these HAVA requirements.

Appendix IV: Reported Experiences of Arizona Election Officials Implementing HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions

This appendix describes steps Arizona election officials reported taking to implement selected provisions of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and manage the election process with regard to establishing computerized statewide voter registration lists, verifying the accuracy of information provided on voter applications, and maintaining accurate statewide voter lists. In addition, this appendix summarizes challenges and lessons learned election officials reported with respect to implementing HAVA requirements. The statements in this appendix reflect the responses to our telephone interviews with Arizona election officials and were not independently verified by us.

Steps Taken to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists

Prior to HAVA, Arizona did not have a computerized statewide voter registration system in place, although several counties operated computerized voter registration systems. Arizona created an interconnected, statewide Web-based voter registration system called Voter Registration Arizona (VRAZ) to implement the requirements of HAVA. VRAZ became operational by the HAVA deadline of January 1, 2004. VRAZ had an initial development cost of \$1 million and was jointly funded by state and federal sources. The system took approximately 6 months to develop. The state had to pass new statutes and amend others so that election officials could receive information from state agencies, such as felony records. In addition to carrying out the required functions of the voter registration system, election officials can query all state voter registration records on Election Day if their polling place has an Internet connection.

A new version of VRAZ is under development and is expected to replace voter registration systems in 13 of 15 counties. The new version of VRAZ, called VRAZ II, is expected to reflect reciprocity agreements with other states whereby officials will be alerted when a voter moves from state to state and registers to vote in those states covered by the agreement. In addition, the new system is expected to contain additional election management capabilities beyond those required by HAVA, including the ability to retrieve data on election administration issues such as voter petitions, provisional ballots, training of poll workers, and polling locations. The estimated cost for VRAZ II is \$10 million. At the time of our review, Arizona officials were anticipating that VRAZ II would go online in 2007.

Verifying Accuracy of Information Provided on Voter Registration Applications

To implement the HAVA voter application verification requirements, Arizona compared the applicant's name, date of birth, driver's license number, or the last four digits of the Social Security number with motor vehicle agency (MVA) records to identify potentially inaccurate applications. In addition, Arizona's Web-based voter registration software, EZ Voter—which allows Arizona citizens to register to vote via the Internet—electronically verified the accuracy of the voter registration applications filed online by matching the applicant's name, date of birth, driver's license number, or last four digits of the Social Security number with MVA records. EZ Voter registrations were then entered at the county level daily and submitted to the statewide voter registration list.

At the time of our review, Arizona had completed a memorandum of understanding with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and was verifying information on voter registration applications by matching it with SSA records as required by HAVA.

Maintenance of Accurate Statewide Voter Registration Lists

As state officials developed the VRAZ system, they identified and corrected inaccurate voter registration data prior to entering the data into the new system; through this process they were also able to eliminate duplicate registrants from the statewide list. Election officials also took steps to maintain the accuracy of the voter registration list by coordinating the list with other state agency records, as described below.

- *Duplicate registrants.* State officials electronically identify duplicate matches by checking name, address, driver's license number, and the last four digits of the Social Security number on voter registration applications on a daily basis. The entire list is screened once a month to identify duplicate registrants.
- *Deceased registrants.* The Secretary of State's office receives an electronic file of recent deaths from the Department of Health Services once a month. Officials identify any matches by checking name, date of birth, and the last four digits of the Social Security number.
- *Disqualifying felons.* State officials receive information on felony convictions from Arizona courts on a varying basis—weekly or monthly in the case of the state's superior courts and on an ongoing basis from U.S. district courts. Once a felon's sentence has been completed, voting rights are reinstated and the individual may register to vote by submitting a new voter registration application. Officials identify any matches by checking name, date of birth, and the last four digits of the Social Security

number. This is a paper-based process in smaller courts and an electronic process in larger courts.

- *Disqualification of those declared mentally incompetent.* As with information on felons, courts submit information in an electronic or paper format to state officials on individuals declared mentally incompetent at different times for comparison with the statewide voter registration list.

To ensure that eligible voters are not inadvertently removed from voter registration lists, local officials send a letter to voters to notify them of their impending removal from the statewide voter registration list. For example, letters are sent to individuals with a disqualifying felony conviction.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

One challenge Arizona election officials faced was designing a system with the appropriate scope. Election officials said they addressed this design challenge by initially implementing a system that performed only the basic tasks required under the HAVA provisions. To minimize changes to the way counties historically managed elections, local officials used the computerized statewide system to manage voter registration information while continuing to use their local computerized systems to manage elections. The state plans to expand the scope of its new statewide system in the future, providing counties with additional election management capabilities. Another challenge reported by Arizona election officials was the conversion of data on registered voters from the old system to the new system. Officials said it was time-consuming and required processes to ensure that data were accurately entered into the new system.

Election officials also reported on the importance of collaboration among state and local officials. The state convened a working group composed of both local and state officials that was responsible for developing its statewide computerized system. Arizona officials stated that a communications plan that allows information about the voter list management process to be shared among state and county officials can help lessen political resistance and facilitate buy-in by state and county officials. The implementation of VRAZ in stages was another way state officials gained the trust of the counties.

Appendix V: Reported Experiences of Georgia Election Officials Implementing HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions

This appendix describes steps Georgia election officials reported taking to implement selected provisions of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and manage the election process with regard to establishing computerized statewide voter registration lists, verifying the accuracy of information provided on voter applications, and maintaining accurate statewide voter lists. In addition, this appendix summarizes challenges and lessons learned election officials reported with respect to implementing HAVA requirements. The statements in this appendix reflect the responses to our telephone interviews with Georgia election officials and were not independently verified by us.

Steps Taken to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists

Georgia had in place a computerized statewide voter registration system prior to the enactment of HAVA. The state created this mainframe-based system in 1995. To implement HAVA, state officials made one minor modification to their voter registration system—adding the capability to identify whether a voter had registered for the first time by mail. Officials have plans to enhance the current system in order to provide election administration management capabilities, such as identifying potential poll workers and giving election officials on Election Day immediate electronic access to the voter list so they can verify where voters are registered to vote. At the time of our review, officials were planning to conduct a pilot program to test the enhanced system.

Verifying Accuracy of Information Provided on Voter Registration Applications

In Georgia, voter registration applicants were required to provide their full Social Security number on voter registration applications as a unique identifier. Since Georgia collected the full Social Security number, the state was not subject to the HAVA requirements to collect a unique identifying number or to verify information on voter registration applications with motor vehicle agency or Social Security Administration records. Georgia elected not to verify information with these agencies, as HAVA allows. However, the state had processes in place to conduct real-time checks of voter registration applications to ensure they did not duplicate an existing registration and that the application information did not match the records of deceased persons. The state procedures also provide for verifying voter eligibility by comparing voter registration applications with state court records on felony lists to identify persons ineligible to vote because of a disqualifying felony conviction.

Maintenance of Accurate Statewide Voter Registration Lists

Prior to and since the enactment of HAVA, Georgia has maintained the accuracy of its voter registration list by coordinating the list with other state agency records, as described below.

- *Duplicate registrants.* On a monthly basis, state officials check the statewide voter list to identify duplicate registrants and transmit the list of duplicates to the counties for updating.
- *Deceased registrants.* Every month, county officials receive electronic files on deceased persons from the Department of Vital Statistics. Officials identify any matches with the statewide voter registration list by checking name, date of birth, full Social Security number, and address. On a quarterly basis, the state receives an electronic report from the Department of Vital Statistics and verifies that the counties have made the changes and checks for errors. The information is compiled into a quarterly report that verifies that the counties have made the necessary changes and that an error report is generated showing the records that did not match.
- *Disqualified felons.* On a monthly basis, the state receives a paper list of felony convictions from state courts. The felony list is then sent to counties for updating. County officials identify any matches with the statewide voter registration list by checking name, date of birth, full Social Security number, and address.
- *Disqualification of those declared mentally incompetent.* In the case of mental incompetence, a court order must specify that a person is barred from voting; otherwise, the person may continue to vote. As with information on felons, on a monthly basis, the state receives from state courts a paper list of individuals declared mentally incompetent. The list is then sent to counties for updating. County officials identify any matches with the statewide voter registration list by checking name, date of birth, full Social Security number, and address.

To ensure that eligible voters' names are not inadvertently removed from the statewide voter registration list, county officials send a letter to voters to notify them of their impending removal from the voter registration rolls. These letters are sent to individuals who have requested to be removed, those with a disqualifying felony conviction, and those who have been declared mentally incompetent. Georgia officials reported that they removed the names of ineligible voters in 2004.

**Challenges and Lessons
Learned**

Although Georgia has had a statewide computerized voter list in place for 10 years, officials reported that a challenge they continue to face is training employees on how to use the system. Officials said that one lesson learned is that states need to get buy-in from county officials early on in the process of developing a statewide voter registration system. They suggested that one way to accomplish this may be to form a task force, composed of state and local officials, to review system development issues and design.

Appendix VI: Reported Experiences of Hawaii Election Officials Implementing HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions

This appendix describes steps Hawaii election officials reported taking to implement selected provisions of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and manage the election process with regard to establishing computerized statewide voter registration lists, verifying the accuracy of information provided on voter applications, and maintaining accurate statewide voter lists. In addition, this appendix summarizes challenges and lessons learned election officials reported with respect to implementing HAVA requirements. The statements in this appendix reflect the responses to our telephone interviews by Hawaii election officials and were not independently verified by us.

Steps Taken to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists

Hawaii has had a computerized voter registration system since the 1970s and developed a statewide interactive system in 1982. Hawaii's system provides election officials with immediate access to the computerized statewide voter list whereby they can enter new or update existing voter registration information and query all state voter registration records. To implement HAVA, election officials made minor technical changes to the statewide voter registration system, such as adding the ability to flag inactive voters. At the time of our review, Hawaii was making additional arrangements to enhance its current computerized voter registration system by modifying the absentee voting component of the system.

Verifying Accuracy of Information Provided on Voter Registration Applications

In Hawaii, voter registration applicants were required to provide their full Social Security number on voter registration applications as a unique identifier. Since Hawaii collected the full Social Security number, the state was not subject to the HAVA requirements to collect a unique identifying number or to verify information on voter registration applications with motor vehicle agency (MVA) or Social Security Administration records. Hawaii voluntarily matched information on voter registration forms with MVA records, comparing information such as the individual's name, driver's license number, and full Social Security number. The computerized voter registration system conducted real-time checks for duplicate registrations and age requirements prior to accepting the new application into the statewide voter registration system.

Maintenance of Accurate Statewide Voter Lists

Prior to and since the enactment of HAVA, Hawaii officials have maintained the accuracy of Hawaii's statewide voter registration list by coordinating the list with other state agency records, as described below.

- *Duplicate registrants.* The computerized statewide voter registration system automatically checks for duplicate registrations as soon as an application is processed.
- *Deceased registrants.* Twice a month, county officials check paper death records from the Department of Vital Statistics to identify deceased registrants by checking the name, date of birth, and the full Social Security number.
- *Disqualified felons.* Twice a month, county clerks receive paper records from circuit court officials. These records are then checked against the information in the statewide voter registration list by comparing name, date of birth, and the full Social Security number.
- *Disqualification of those declared mentally incompetent.* Officials reported that disqualification because of mental incompetence does not occur often in Hawaii. The courts are the only entity that can make a judgment regarding mental incompetence that would disqualify a person from being registered to vote.

To ensure that eligible voters' names are not inadvertently removed from the statewide voter registration list, local officials send a letter to every voter prior to the general election before removing voters' names from the list, in accordance with the National Voter Registration Act provisions for removing voters' names from lists.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Although Hawaii had a statewide voter registration system in place prior to HAVA, officials shared their general perspectives on implementing voter registration systems. Hawaii election officials said that one of the biggest challenges can be coordinating with counties and developing a rapport with county officials. To assist in coordination efforts, the state holds quarterly meetings with county officials. In these meetings, state and local officials coordinate activities such as completing list maintenance and data entry prior to the printing of poll books and voter lists. Another issue raised by Hawaii officials was designing a system with the appropriate scope. These officials also shared lessons learned about managing a computerized voter registration system. They stated that technological developments will require compromise among local jurisdictions that have different administrative and technological constraints. Officials also recommended that states establish uniform processing procedures among their jurisdictions so that all jurisdictions function as one. Finally, Hawaii

**Appendix VI: Reported Experiences of Hawaii
Election Officials Implementing HAVA Voter
Registration List Provisions**

created a shadow system so that the system could be both updated and available for use at the same time.

Appendix VII: Reported Experiences of Kentucky Election Officials Implementing HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions

This appendix describes steps Kentucky election officials reported taking to implement selected provisions of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and manage the election process with regard to establishing computerized statewide voter registration lists, verifying the accuracy of information provided on voter applications, and maintaining accurate statewide voter lists. In addition, this appendix summarizes challenges and lessons learned election officials reported with respect to implementing HAVA requirements. The statements in this appendix reflect the responses to our telephone interviews by Kentucky election officials and were not independently verified by us.

Steps Taken to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists

Kentucky had in place a computerized statewide voter registration system prior to the enactment of HAVA. The state created this mainframe-based system in 1973. Kentucky's current system allows all local election officials immediate access to enter new or update existing voter registration information in their jurisdiction, and immediate access to query all state voter registration records. In addition, election officials provided a toll-free number for precinct officers to access an interactive voice response phone system to check voter eligibility. As a result, Kentucky did not have to take any additional steps to implement HAVA statewide computerized list requirements.

Election officials planned to upgrade their computerized statewide voter registration system in the future to provide more election management tools to counties, such as including a function to track poll workers and complete absentee ballot forms. The state has developed the absentee ballot application and expects it to be used by its counties in the 2006 elections.

Verifying Accuracy of Information Provided on Voter Registration Applications

In Kentucky, voter registration applicants were required to provide their full Social Security number on voter registration applications as a unique identifier. Since Kentucky collected the full Social Security number, the state was not subject to the HAVA requirements to collect a unique identifying number or to verify information on voter registration applications with motor vehicle agency or Social Security Administration records. Kentucky elected not to verify information with these agencies, as HAVA allows. To verify information on voter registration applications, Kentucky's computerized statewide voter registration automatically checked for duplicate registrations before new registrants were added to the statewide list.

Maintenance of Accurate Statewide Voter Registration Lists

Kentucky currently has processes in place to maintain the accuracy of the statewide voter registration list by comparing the statewide voter registration list with state agency records, as described below.

- *Duplicate registrants.* The computerized statewide voter registration system automatically checks for duplicate registrations as soon as a new application is entered into the system.
- *Deceased registrants.* On a monthly basis, election officials check the computerized statewide voter registration list against the records from the Department of Vital Statistics to identify deceased registrants by comparing name, date of birth, and full Social Security number.
- *Disqualified felons.* On a monthly basis, court records are electronically checked against the computerized statewide voter registration list to identify persons convicted of a disqualifying felony by comparing name, date of birth, and full Social Security number.
- *Disqualification of those declared mentally incompetent.* Officials use court records to identify voters ineligible because of mental incompetence by comparing applicant's name, date of birth, and full Social Security number with the computerized statewide voter registration list.

To ensure that the names of eligible voters are not inadvertently removed from the statewide voter registration list, state officials match voters' identifying information with U.S. Postal Service, felony, mental competency, and death records. State officials also send letters to voters to notify them of pending removal based on a disqualifying felony conviction.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Since Kentucky had a computerized statewide voter registration system in place prior to HAVA, election officials did not report any challenges. However, Kentucky election officials provided examples of lessons learned while maintaining their current computerized statewide voter registration system. They said it is important to develop a computerized statewide voter registration system that will be sustainable now and in the future. Officials suggested that as states contemplate system upgrades, they be mindful that changes to the system affect all jurisdictions, despite their differing needs and constraints. A key to their success has been the cooperative working relationship they cultivated with local officials by keeping them involved. Election officials also recommended that states "think outside the box" when designing ways to use the voter registration

**Appendix VII: Reported Experiences of
Kentucky Election Officials Implementing
HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions**

database. For example, they utilized their statewide computerized system to established voter information centers on Kentucky's state Web site to assist applicants and staff in the voter registration process.

Appendix VIII: Reported Experiences of Minnesota Election Officials Implementing HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions

This appendix describes steps Minnesota election officials reported taking to implement selected provisions of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and manage the election process with regard to establishing computerized statewide voter registration lists, verifying the accuracy of information provided on voter applications, and maintaining accurate statewide voter lists. In addition, this appendix summarizes challenges and lessons learned election officials reported with respect to implementing HAVA requirements. The statements in this appendix reflect the responses to our telephone interviews by Minnesota election officials and were not independently verified by us.

Steps Taken to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists

Minnesota is unique in the way election administration functions are structured and can vary by jurisdiction. In this state, the county auditor has certain election responsibilities and can choose to delegate other election responsibilities to minor civil division-level (MCD) government—townships and cities. For example, while counties manage voter registration, county auditors may delegate other functions, such as absentee voting to MCDs. There are some functions that MCDs are responsible for handling, such as polling place matters.

Minnesota had a computerized statewide voter registration system in place prior to the enactment of HAVA. The state created this mainframe-based system in 1988. To comply with the provisions of HAVA, the state amended its election laws and replaced its existing computerized statewide voter registration system in 2004. The system included new election management capabilities, such as providing election officials with immediate access to enter and update applicant information and creating electronic matching capabilities with state agencies to verify voter eligibility. The system also centrally tracked absentee ballots provided to military personnel or other citizens residing overseas. The project was completed in 11 months at a reported cost of about \$5.3 million.

Verifying Accuracy of Information Provided on Voter Registration Applications

To implement HAVA, Minnesota verifies voter registration application information by comparing name, date of birth, driver's license number, or the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number with motor vehicle agency records to identify potentially ineligible applications. Since Minnesota is a same-day registration state, checks for duplicates are automatically run on voter applications on a daily basis. In addition, the Department of Public Service tracks visas issued to ensure that noncitizens are unable to vote.

At the time of our review, Minnesota was in the process of completing a memorandum of understanding with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to allow verification of information on voter registration applications by comparing it with SSA records. Officials anticipated that they would begin conducting matches by 2006.

Maintenance of Accurate Statewide Voter Lists

To implement HAVA, Minnesota election officials took steps to maintain the accuracy of the voter registration list by coordinating with other state agency records, as described below.

- *Duplicate registrants.* The statewide voter registration system produces maintenance reports to identify potential duplicates. In addition, checks for duplicates are run on an annual basis.
- *Deceased registrants.* On a monthly basis, county officials conduct manual checks of oral and paper death records from the Department of Vital Statistics by checking the name, date of birth, and the full Social Security number.
- *Disqualified felons.* On a monthly basis, officials receive paper records from the courts to check for those persons convicted of a disqualifying felony. Once the court computer system is in place, this process will have the capability to provide electronic matching by comparing the applicant's name, date of birth, driver's license, identification card, full Social Security number, and last four digits of the Social Security number.
- *Disqualification of those declared mentally incompetent.* On a monthly basis, officials receive paper records from the courts to check for those declared mentally incompetent.

To ensure that the names of eligible voters are not inadvertently removed from the statewide voter registration list, state officials send notices to voters prior to removing their names from the list.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Minnesota election officials reported that one of the major challenges they faced was replacing the existing voter registration system in an 11-month time frame. Also, officials told us that conducting elections while updating their voter registration system further complicated their efforts. Another challenge that election officials reported was converting data on registered voters from the old system database to the new system. Minnesota officials said that to help local officials with this work they developed a

**Appendix VIII: Reported Experiences of
Minnesota Election Officials Implementing
HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions**

tool that allowed them to compare old records of voter information with the new ones on a case-by-case basis.

In addition, Minnesota election officials discussed various lessons learned while implementing the HAVA requirements. The first lesson learned was the importance of identifying and prioritizing the functional requirements for the computerized statewide voter registration system. In order to manage the scope of replacing a computerized statewide voter registration system, election officials told us they had to separate the “nice to have” features from the features required by HAVA. This step assisted election officials in managing the scope and cost of their project.

Second, Minnesota election officials reported using in-house resources to replace the existing computerized statewide voter registration system. According to election officials, it is best to use in-house resources to establish a computerized statewide voter registration system when there are sufficient in-house resources and staff expertise.

Third, Minnesota election officials said that it was useful to create an online user’s manual for the computerized statewide voter registration system. Election officials reported that by having the user’s manual online, staff at all levels had immediate access to information on how to operate the computerized statewide voter registration system.

Appendix IX: Reported Experiences of South Carolina Election Officials Implementing HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions

This appendix describes steps South Carolina election officials reported taking to implement selected provisions of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and manage the election process with regard to establishing computerized statewide voter registration lists, verifying the accuracy of information provided on voter applications, and maintaining accurate statewide voter lists. In addition, this appendix summarizes challenges and lessons learned election officials reported with respect to implementing HAVA requirements. The statements in this appendix reflect the responses to our telephone interviews by South Carolina election officials and were not independently verified by us.

Steps Taken to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists

South Carolina had an interactive computerized statewide voter registration system in place prior to the enactment of HAVA. The state created this mainframe-based system in the late 1960s and modified it in 1992. Election officials made minor modifications to its system by adding additional data fields in order to implement the provisions of HAVA. The system also has election management capabilities beyond HAVA, including the ability to track absentee voters and poll managers. The state reportedly spent about \$67,000 in federal funds for the most current system modifications.

Election officials began work on a new Web-based, menu-driven system in 2000. The system is expected to be more flexible and is to allow election officials to perform election administration tasks such as signature verification. The new system is also expected to have the capability to run checks with the motor vehicle agency database. Officials reported that the implementation of the new system will not take place until after the 2006 elections.

Verifying Accuracy of Information Provided on Voter Applications

South Carolina required voter registration applicants to provide their full Social Security number on voter registration applications as a unique identifier. Since South Carolina collects the full Social Security number, the state is not subject to the HAVA requirements to collect a unique identifying number or to verify information on voter registration applications with the motor vehicle agency or Social Security Administration. South Carolina elected not to verify information with these agencies, as HAVA allows. Prior to entering applicants into the statewide list, county officials check to ensure the application does not duplicate an existing registration. State officials compare voter registration applications with records on deceased persons and persons

Maintenance of Accurate Statewide Voter Lists

ineligible to register to vote because of a disqualifying felony conviction, as allowed under state law.

Prior to and since the enactment of HAVA, South Carolina officials maintain the accuracy of the state's voter registration list by coordinating the list with other state agency records, as described below.

- *Duplicate registrants.* South Carolina produces a report on duplicates quarterly. The voter registration system identifies duplicate registrants using the full Social Security number and date of birth. County officials make the necessary changes.
- *Deceased registrants.* State officials conduct monthly electronic comparisons with state agency death records. Officials identify any matches by checking name, date of birth, and full Social Security number and remove names of ineligible registrants.
- *Disqualified felons.* State officials conduct monthly electronic comparisons with state agency felony records. Officials identify any matches based on name, address, date of birth, and full Social Security number and remove names of ineligible registrants.
- *Disqualification of those declared mentally incompetent.* The counties maintain paper records on the mentally incompetent. Upon receipt of a written court order, county officials identify and remove ineligible voters.

In order to ensure that eligible voters' names are not inadvertently removed, state officials send a letter to voters to notify them of their impending removal from the statewide voter registration list. Letters are sent to individuals who have filed a change-of-address with the U.S. Postal Service, failed to appear in the most recent two federal elections, or have a disqualifying felony conviction. South Carolina officials reported that they removed the names of ineligible voters in 2004.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Although South Carolina had a statewide voter registration system in place prior to HAVA, officials shared their general perspectives on implementing voter registration systems. Officials stated that forming a working group composed of state and local officials helped to ensure stakeholder buy-in. State officials also reported that the updated system that they are in the process of creating is proving challenging because they are developing it in-house instead of purchasing the system from a vendor. Officials

**Appendix IX: Reported Experiences of South
Carolina Election Officials Implementing
HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions**

reported that states should assess their available resources and skills before deciding to develop a system on their own.

Appendix X: Reported Experiences of South Dakota Election Officials Implementing HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions

This appendix describes steps South Dakota election officials reported taking to implement selected provisions of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and manage the election process with regard to establishing computerized statewide voter registration lists, verifying the accuracy of information provided on voter applications, and maintaining accurate statewide voter lists. In addition, this appendix summarizes challenges and lessons learned election officials reported with respect to implementing HAVA requirements. The statements in this appendix reflect the responses to our telephone interviews by South Dakota election officials and were not independently verified by us.

Steps Taken to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists

South Dakota had a computerized statewide voter registration system in place prior to the enactment of HAVA. The state created the system in 2002. Election officials added new data fields and data matching capability to the existing computerized list in order to implement the provisions of HAVA. The modifications cost \$302,004, of which \$103,598 came from federal funds and \$198,406 from state funds.

Verifying Accuracy of Information Provided on Voter Registration Applications

To implement HAVA, county election officials verified voter registration application information by comparing name, date of birth, and driver's license number, or the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number, with state motor vehicle agency records to identify potentially inaccurate applications. These officials also compared applications with records on the deceased and persons convicted of a disqualifying felony prior to adding them to the statewide voter list. South Dakota local election officials verified voter registration information by comparing it with the Social Security Administration's records beginning in August 2005.

Maintenance of Accurate Statewide Voter Lists

As required to implement HAVA, election officials have taken steps to maintain the accuracy of South Dakota's voter registration list by coordinating the list with other state agency records, as described below.

- *Duplicate registrants.* State officials check the statewide list for duplicates at least annually and more often during an election cycle. State officials identify duplicate registrants by checking for voters with the same name, driver's license number, and the last four digits of the Social Security number and forward the names of ineligible registrants to county officials for processing.

**Appendix X: Reported Experiences of South
Dakota Election Officials Implementing HAVA
Voter Registration List Provisions**

- *Deceased registrants.* Local officials match name, date of birth, and the last four digits of the Social Security number on voter registration applications with the state vital statistics agency's death records through weekly electronic batch comparisons.
- *Disqualified felons.* Local officials electronically compare voter registration applications with records of persons convicted of a disqualifying felony that makes them ineligible to register to vote. Officials identify persons ineligible to register to vote based on name, date of birth, driver's license number, and last four digits of the Social Security number.
- *Disqualification of those declared mentally incompetent.* In the event that a court issues a declaration of mental incompetence, the court provides the written declaration to the county election official who removes the ineligible registrant from the voter list.

In South Dakota, local officials are responsible for updating voter information and removing names from the voter registration list. To ensure that eligible voters are not inadvertently removed from the state voter registration list, local election officials send letters notifying individuals of their pending removal from the statewide voter registration list.

**Challenges and Lessons
Learned**

State officials reported that working as a team and maintaining a positive working relationship with the counties enabled South Dakota to implement HAVA by the deadline.

Appendix XI: Reported Experiences of West Virginia Election Officials Implementing HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions

This appendix describes steps West Virginia election officials reported taking to implement selected provisions of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and manage the election process with regard to establishing computerized statewide voter registration lists, verifying the accuracy of information provided on voter applications, and maintaining accurate statewide voter lists. In addition, this appendix summarizes challenges and lessons learned election officials reported with respect to implementing HAVA requirements. The statements in this appendix reflect the responses to our telephone interviews by West Virginia election officials and were not independently verified by us.

Steps Taken to Establish Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists

With regard to the HAVA statewide computerized list provisions, West Virginia created an interactive, computerized statewide voter registration system. According to state election officials, some counties had computerized voter registration systems prior to the enactment of HAVA, but they were not interconnected through a statewide computer system. Election officials hired a vendor to create the new statewide system, which went into service in January 2004 at a reported cost of approximately \$1.9 million in federal funds. The new system also has election management capabilities beyond the requirements of HAVA, including the ability to produce reports on absentee ballots, early voters, poll workers, and election data statistics. It also provides a separate database to track poll workers.

Verifying Accuracy of Information Provided on Voter Registration Applications

To implement HAVA, West Virginia developed the capability to verify voter registration application information by comparing name, date of birth, and driver's license number or the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number with motor vehicle agency (MVA) records. However, officials reported that the state had difficulty conducting data matches with MVA because MVA lacked the ability to interface with the statewide voter list. Officials said that they expected this problem to be resolved by 2006. Since the enactment of HAVA, the state system checks new applications for duplicates, automatically flags duplicates, and notifies county officials to eliminate them.

West Virginia is in the process of finalizing the agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to allow a comparison between voter eligibility information and SSA data as required by HAVA. This agreement will enable state officials to compare the last four digits of a voter's Social Security number with SSA records. Officials reported that they expected the agreement to be completed by December 2005.

Maintenance of Accurate Statewide Voter Lists

Prior to HAVA, county voter registration systems could only check for duplicates within the county, and local officials could only check felony and death lists using paper records. Since the enactment of HAVA, election officials have taken steps to maintain the accuracy of the statewide voter registration list by coordinating the list with other state agency records, as described below.

- *Duplicate registrants.* West Virginia checked the entire database for duplicates during the implementation of its new statewide system. The county clerks also periodically check the system for duplicate registrants.
- *Deceased registrants.* County officials maintain the voter registration list through a monthly comparison of the list with state death records. At the time of this report, officials rely on oral and paper records to identify any matches by checking name, address, date of birth, and the last four digits of the Social Security number. Officials said they expected in the future to conduct these comparisons electronically.
- *Disqualified felons.* County officials receive paper records from federal and state courts on disqualifying felony convictions.
- *Disqualification of those declared mentally incompetent.* The state does not conduct list maintenance based on this information.

Local officials are responsible for updating voter information and for removing voter records; state officials said that they follow the National Voter Registration Act provisions for removing names from the list. In general, section 8 of NVRA provides that, in the administration of voter registration for federal elections, states may not remove names of registrants for non-voting and that names of registrants may be removed only for certain specified reasons.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

West Virginia officials also said that meeting the time frames they established for developing their computerized lists was challenging, in part because of limited staff available to complete the work. The officials stated that it might have been better to introduce the system incrementally. West Virginia officials also reported that the counties resisted moving from county-based systems to the statewide system in part because many of them viewed the new statewide system as an intrusion into a domain of election administration that had been a local—not a state—responsibility. Involving county officials in designing and implementing the system, the state officials said, might have simplified

**Appendix XI: Reported Experiences of West
Virginia Election Officials Implementing
HAVA Voter Registration List Provisions**

implementation of the new system. Other challenges reported by West Virginia officials included data conversion, obtaining timely approvals for purchases, changing necessary provisions of state law, and overcoming technology problems.

Appendix XII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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