

North Carolina Voter List Maintenance: 2023 Update

Since the 2020 election, SCSJ has been tracking North Carolina's voter list maintenance, and specifically its massive voter removals that occur every odd year under North Carolina's "no-contact" process. In 2021, we uncovered that North Carolina's removal of 391,415 voters disproportionately impacted voters of color. Read more about this process and the 2021 in our explainer, [Understanding Voter Registration List Maintenance](#).

The data for 2023 is in, and it shows the same disproportionate impact as before. The full analysis is below, as well as recommendations for how we can, and must, do better to allow all voters to get and stay registered in North Carolina.

How many voters were removed in North Carolina's most recent List Maintenance?

In January/February 2023, North Carolina **removed 264,416 voters** who were inactive since August 2020, and did not have a record of voting in the 2020 or 2022 elections.¹ This brought North Carolina's total registered voters down 3.56% overall, from 7.4 to 7.2 million voters.

During the 2021-2023 removal cycle, North Carolina also **removed hundreds of thousands of voters** for various other reasons:

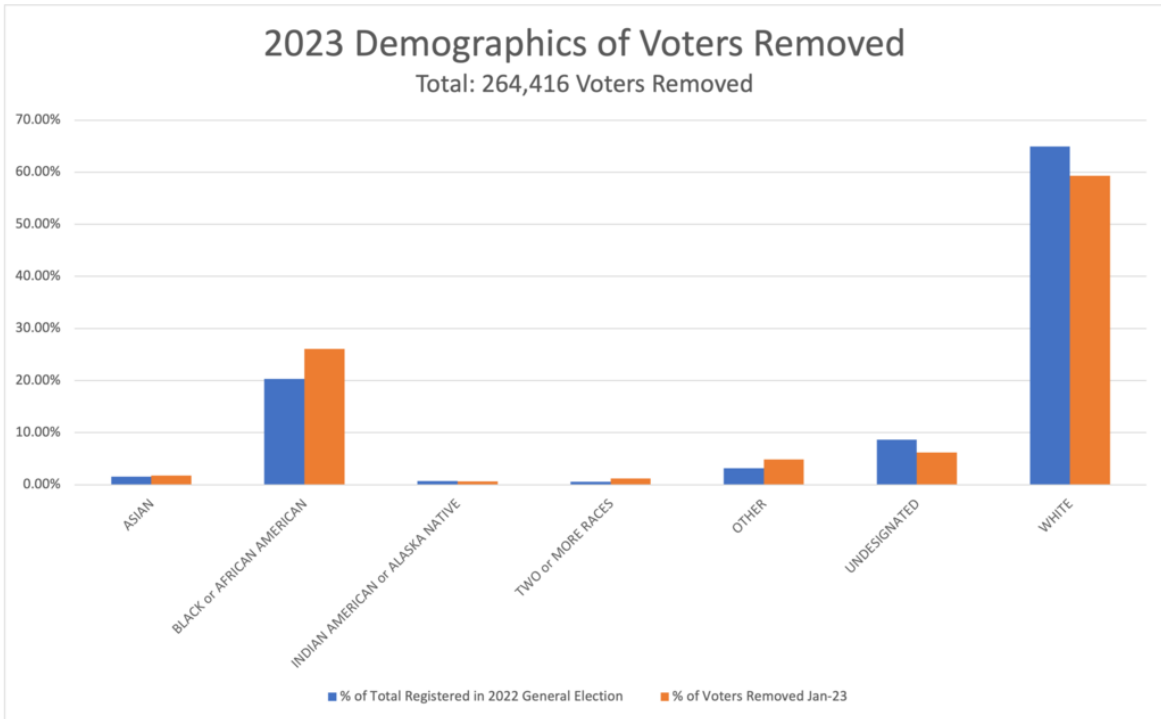
Removal Category	Number
Deceased Voters	167,605
Voters with Felony Conviction	8,920 "felony conviction" 3,512 "felony sentence completed"
Duplicates across counties	3,038 "duplicate" 31,536 "merged duplicate"
Change of Address (USPS or otherwise)	48,071 "moved from county" 298,573 "moved within state" 43,724 "moved from state"

¹ N.C. State Bd. of Elections, "County Boards of Elections Conduct Regular Voter List Maintenance (Feb. 27, 2023), <https://www.ncsbe.gov/news/press-releases/2023/02/27/county-boards-elections-conduct-regular-voter-list-maintenance>.



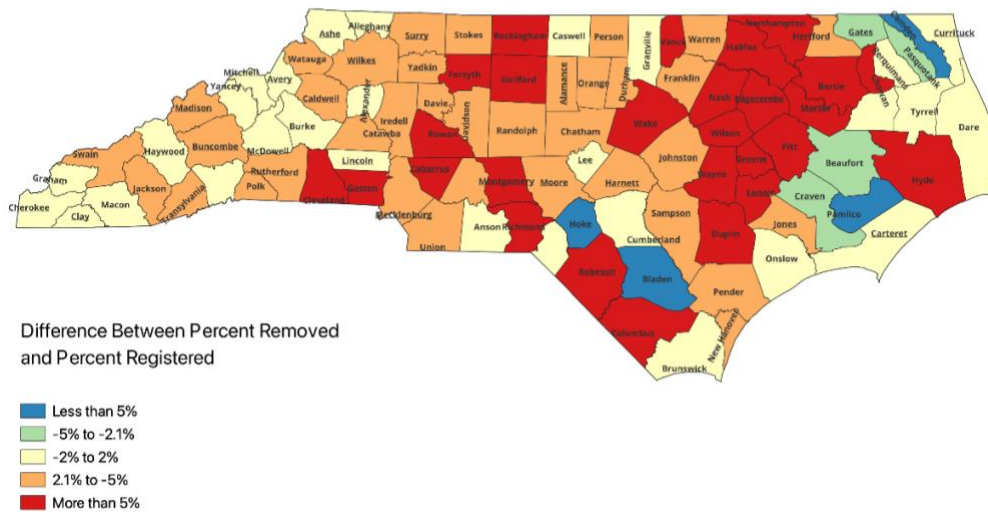
Who was impacted by these removals?

In 2023, removals disproportionately impacted voters self-identifying as Black or African American, who represented 26.10% of removals while comprising only 20.31% of total registered voters:

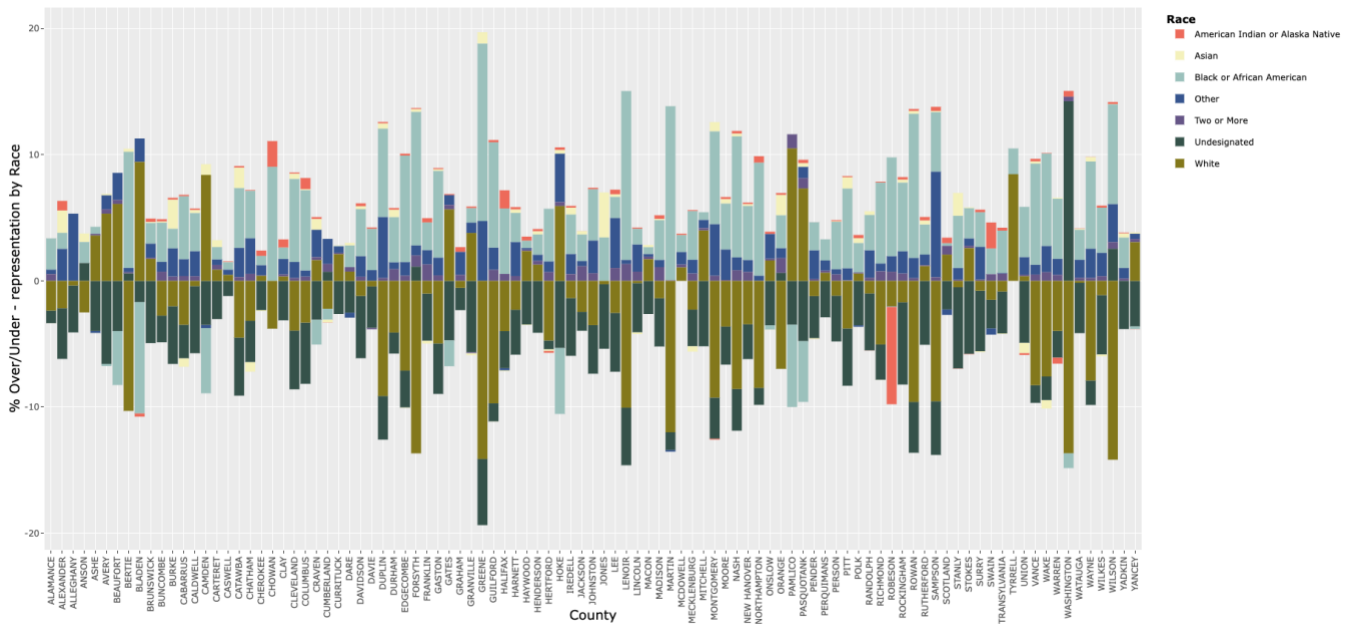


This is the same trend we saw in 2021. This disparate impact on Black and African American voters occurred across the state, but was concentrated in areas impacted by disaster relief such as North Carolina's "Black Belt" in the state's center-eastern region:

2023 List Maintenance / Percent Removed - Percent Registered (Black Voters)



This disparate impact was consistent across the vast majority of North Carolina's counties, and across several minority groups:



Note: Tyrrell and Hyde counties are not included in this chart because their relatively small number of removals (10 and 7, respectively) result in representation percentages that may be misleading.

Overall, the following ten counties removed the largest portions of inactive voters from their voter rolls in the 2023 biennial no-contact process:

County	# Removed	% Registered Voters Removed
MECKLENBURG	52992	6.57
WATAUGA	2618	5.75
HOKE	1912	5.62
FORSYTH	14487	5.34
MADISON	844	4.81
BUNCOMBE	10071	4.75
ORANGE	5262	4.71
SWAIN	465	4.65
YANCEY	665	4.53

Where did SCSJ get this data?

We calculated data of no-contact removals using a list of removals provided by the State Board of Elections [available here](#).

Other categories of removals were calculated from the January 2023 VR Snapshot file available [here](#), by filtering for voters categories as



"REMOVED" who had a removal date (field: "cancellation date") after January 1, 2021. We then sorted by reason for removal (field: "voter_status_reason_desc") to determine frequency.

How do we know removals likely include eligible voters who should stay on the voter rolls?

Analysis on provisional ballots in North Carolina provides evidence that our list maintenance removals are likely over-, not under, inclusive.

Provisional ballots are intended to be a "fail safe" for voters that have an issue with their registration status when they go to vote. In practice, provisional ballots are cumbersome and time-intensive for county boards to administer, and there are documented mistakes where lawful provisional votes that should count by law are mistakenly rejected. It is also impossible to tell how many voters simply walk away without voting a provisional ballot when they are told they are not registered, but we know at least anecdotally that this happens.

As we [previously reported](#), an analysis of the 2020 general election showed that at least 2,280 of the voters removed in 2019 tried to cast a provisional ballot in 2020, and over 300 of those were not counted.

This trend continued in 2022, where we identified that of 25,000 provisional votes cast:

- i. ~1770 were coded as "previously removed" voters by counties,
- ii. ~1000 were coded as having "no record of registration" but actually *did* have a voter registration number, and
- iii. ~140 were coded as having "no record of registration" but actually did match *full name and address* to voters currently or previously registered.

This data all shows that our list maintenance removals are likely overinclusive, and capturing voters that are still eligible to vote and should stay on the voter rolls. It is worth noting, as well, that persistent and baseless allegations that North Carolina's voter rolls are overinflated, or susceptible to fraud, lack evidence and are repeatedly rejected by courts of law.²

Why are over-inclusive removals happening?

SCSJ is dedicated to continuing its research and monitoring to identify all the ways North Carolina's list maintenance can be improved.

² See, e.g., *Judicial Watch, Inc. v. North Carolina State Board of Elections*: <https://southerncoalition.org/voting-rights-groups-applaud-judges-recommendation-to-dismiss-lawsuit-to-purge-north-carolina-voters/>



From what we know, removals are likely over-inclusive for the following reasons:

1. Mail Deliverability is Not a Reliable Way to Assess Eligibility

According to the United States Postal Service, mail can be undeliverable for a host of reasons that have nothing to do with whether someone is eligible to vote.³ There are also approximately 3 million addresses in the United States assigned to Carrier Route R777 by USPS, meaning they are not eligible for mail delivery. And postal workers have testified in court under oath about how using U.S.P.S. to assess residency is not always reliable.⁴ It is thus entirely possible a voter can list his or her residence without providing a valid mailing address and thus be prevented from staying on the voter rolls despite being eligible to vote.

2. Counties Need To Do More Before Removing Voters

Since U.S.P.S. is not reliable alone, counties need to reach out to voters using alternative means, including phone and email where the voter has provided this information. This is successfully used to help voters cure absentee ballots already, and would similarly be a better way to notify voters when they are slated for removal to allow them to stay registered.

3. Underfunding of State and County Boards of Elections Is Threatening Our Elections

County Boards will need more funding to execute these measures. And it is worth noting that election boards (especially underfunded ones) can and have made mistakes on mailers that cause voters to be inappropriately slated for removal.⁵ North Carolina can and must do better!

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³ See U.S. Postal Service, "507 Mailer Services," <https://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/507.htm>.

⁴ See *Common Cause/New York v. Brehm*, 432 F. Supp. 3d 285, 295 (S.D.N.Y. 2020) (Summarizing testimony of Executive Director Ryan, who described several issues of deliverability including that the USPS often returns mail as undeliverable even though the voter continues to reside at the same location, and that there was a "poor quality and ... lack of consistency of the post office.").

⁵ See "Absentee ballot requests pile in at county elections office," *Statesboro Herald* (Apr. 9, 2020), <https://www.statesboroherald.com/local/absentee-ballot-requests-pile-county-elections-office/> (describing how state elections office sent mailers to wrong addresses).

