

Online Voter Registration Security

Online voter registration has improved access to the ballot, saved taxpayer dollars, and led to more accurate voter rolls in an increasing number of red and blue states. It is a rare example of bipartisan electoral reform. Much of the support for online registration has been a direct result of the success stories that arose from the early adopters of this innovation. In Maricopa County, Arizona, an EZ Voter online registration form costs just three cents to process, whereas it costs 83 cents to process a paper registration application.¹ In Washington State, the cost of an online voter registration application is estimated at 45 cents as opposed to \$1.55 for a paper registration.² Maricopa County also found that paper-based registration forms were as much as five times more likely to introduce errors into the registration process than paperless registration.³

To maintain the success of online registration, states must address legitimate security concerns that have been raised about keeping voter information secure and preventing others from changing registration information without the voter's permission.⁴ This issue brief will describe the simple and effective steps states seeking to adopt online registration can take to protect voter data and ensure effective implementation.

Requiring Input of Personal Information

All states allowing online voter registration authenticate a person's identity by requiring the input of personal information. Most states with online registration websites require individuals to input their driver's license or non-driver state ID number before they can register to vote or change their registration. The input of this personal identifying information allows the state to match a person's voter record with a signature already on file with the state, if available, or to request a signature from the individual in another way. Online registration websites require individuals to input their driver's license or non-driver ID number before they can register to vote or change their registration. In addition, local election officials in states such as Kansas must contact an online applicant for further investigation before adding them to voter registration rolls if the applicant's first name, last name, and date of birth do not match the driver's license record.⁵

There has been some concern that a person can change a voter's online data with access to the voter's driver's license or non-driver ID number, but some states protect the confidentiality of that number. For example, they generate part or all of the number randomly so it cannot be determined using publicly available data such as a person's name and date of birth. In Utah, driver's license and non-driver ID numbers are not tied to any personal identifier.⁶ All of the numbers are generated randomly in Nevada and South Carolina, and the last four are generated randomly in Colorado.⁷

Other states protect the confidentiality of the ID number by prohibiting by statute its public release such that it is exempt from state public records acts. Utah explicitly designates driver's license and non-driver state ID numbers in voter registration records as private.⁸ As a result, state and local governments in Utah cannot allow the general public to view those numbers.⁹ The numbers are also excluded from any voter file purchased from a Utah government.¹⁰ Denying access to ID numbers reduces the chances that the number may be obtained by a third party and used to access or change a person's voter registration records using an online registration system.

Requiring Input of Other Information Not Publicly Available

Some states require additional information from those seeking to register for the first time or update their registration. Ideally, such information is easily accessible to the correct individuals but not publicly available to third parties. Washington prompts prospective and current voters to provide the issue date of their driver's license or ID card on the same page in which they must provide their name, address, gender, date of birth, and driver's license number.¹¹ The issue date is listed on the front of the driver's license, but is not public information.¹² States may also consider including other information listed on the driver's license such as eye and hair color, weight, or expiration date while only allowing a limited number of login attempts if the data does not match the voter's driver's license record. Requiring additional data points that are not available in public records but are easily accessible to voters creates more hurdles for those seeking to alter a voter's information online without that voter's consent.

Advantages of Direct Data Input

One of the most important benefits of online voter registration is the prospective voter's direct input of data. Direct input saves money, reduces errors, and protects the data from manipulation by third parties. The states that have implemented online registration prevent third-parties from changing data without permission through a variety of security measures. Most use CAPTCHAs, the challenge-response authentication process in which a user types characters shown on the screen, to protect against automated attacks on registration websites. In South Carolina, all non-public data is encrypted and must be transmitted using a secure connection and servers with voter information are segregated behind firewalls and other security devices.¹³ In addition, applications require multiple levels of authentication and restrict access to data.¹⁴ In Maryland, election officials implemented a monitoring system that prevents frequent changes to voter records.¹⁵

Direct input of data also eliminates any potential mishandling of paper registration applications. Paper applications can be misplaced accidentally by individuals running third-party registration drives or by election officials. Online registration eliminates a physical form that can be placed in a desk drawer and forgotten until after the registration deadline or election has passed.

Sources and Additional Reading

¹Matt A. Barreto, Ph.D., et al., *Online Voter Registration (OLVR) Systems in Arizona and Washington: Evaluating Usage, Public Confidence and Implementation Processes*, A Joint Research Project of the Washington Institute of the Study of Ethnicity and Race (WISER) University of Washington, Seattle and the Election Administration Research Center (EARC) University of California Berkeley. (Apr. 1, 2010), p. 93 available at (italics) http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes_assets/2010/onlinevoterregpdf.pdf.

²Bill Graves, *Oregon Offers Online Voter Registration*, Oregonlive.com, Feb. 28, 2010, http://www.oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2010/02/oregon_offers_online_voter_reg.html.

³Ponoroff, Christopher; *Voter Registration in a Digital Age*, Brennan Center for Justice, July 13, 2010, p. 13, available at, http://brennan.3cdn.net/806ab5ea23fde7c261_n1m6b1s4z.pdf.

⁴See Nicole Perlroth, *Voter Registration Rolls in 2 States Are Called Vulnerable to Hackers*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 12, 2012.

⁵Email from Bryan A. Caskey, Assistant State Election Director, Office of Kansas Secretary of State, to Dan Vicuna, Staff Attorney, Fair Elections Legal Network (May 21, 2010, 16:36 EDT) (on file with author).

⁶Email from Justin Lee, Deputy Director of Elections, Office of Utah Lieutenant Governor, to Dan Vicuna, Staff Attorney, Fair Elections Legal Network (Apr. 25, 2013, 16:47 EDT) (on file with author).

⁷Emails from Gilberto de la Luz, HAVA Program Officer, Office of the Nevada Secretary of State (Apr. 26, 2013, 16:02 EDT), Brian Leach, Information Technology Manager, South Carolina State Elections Commission (Apr. 25, 2013, 21:33 EDT), and Michael Hagihara, Voter Registration Manager, Colorado Department of State (May 9, 2013, 11:51 EDT) to Dan Vicuna, Staff Attorney, Fair Elections Legal Network (on file with author).

⁸UTAH CODE § 63G-2-302(1)(j)(i).

⁹UTAH CODE § 63G-2-201.

¹⁰Email from Justin Lee, Deputy Director of Elections, Office of Utah Lieutenant Governor, to Dan Vicuna, Staff Attorney, Fair Elections Legal Network (Apr. 25, 2013, 16:47 EDT) (on file with author).

¹¹Office of the Washington Secretary of State, MyVote, <https://wei.sos.wa.gov/agency/osos/en/Pages/MyVoteOLVR.aspx>

(follow "start new registration" and affirm that citizenship and age requirements are met).

¹²Email from Patty Murphy, Voting Systems Specialist, Office of the Washington Secretary of State, to Dan Vicuna, Staff Attorney, Fair Elections Legal Network (May 2, 2013, 15:10 EDT) (on file with author).

¹³Email from Brian Leach, Information Technology Manager, South Carolina State Elections Commission to Dan Vicuna, Staff Attorney, Fair Elections Legal Network (Apr. 25, 2013, 21:33 EDT) (on file with author).

¹⁴Email from Brian Leach, Information Technology Manager, South Carolina State Elections Commission to Dan Vicuna, Staff Attorney, Fair Elections Legal Network (Apr. 25, 2013, 21:33 EDT) (on file with author).

¹⁵Beck Alleman, *Online Voter Registration Gains Traction Nationwide*, <http://ivn.us/2013/05/30/online-voter-registration-gains-traction-nationwide/> (May 30, 2013).

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Last updated June 30, 2015