

## Online Voter Registration

Unlike many election reforms, online registration has been championed in states controlled by both Democrats and Republicans and is seen as a rare bipartisan election reform. Online voter registration first began in Arizona in 2002 and now accounts for over 70 percent of Arizona registrations.<sup>1</sup> Online registration has increased in popularity across the country since Arizona's pioneering effort.

### Where Online Voter Registration Currently Exists

Online voter registration has been implemented in 26 states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. In addition, DC, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, New Mexico, and Oklahoma have approved online registration and are in the implementation process.<sup>2</sup>

### States With Partial Online Voter Registration

Michigan allows voters to update their address for voter registration and their driver's license online.<sup>3</sup> Missouri and New York allow voters to submit registration application online, but the administrative process is still paper-based, so the system is only electronic for the voter.<sup>4</sup> Ohio allows voters to update their registration online.<sup>5</sup> Until full online voter registration is implemented, New Mexico voters can update their registration online.

### Benefits

There are many benefits to offering voter registration online. Some of the greatest advantages include:

**Convenience for voters.** Voters are accustomed to completing many important tasks online in their daily lives including banking and interacting with state agencies such as the DMV. Adding online voter registration to the list of available online services will easily engage voters across the state in a medium with which they are familiar and comfortable. Arizona has reported an increase of 9.5% in registration since first implementing online registration in 2002.<sup>6</sup> Making it easier to register to vote by simplifying the process could lead to increases in registration and participation in others states as well.

Online voter registration also allows voters to update their registration in a convenient and timely manner. As many states require voters to reregister when they move across county lines, online voter registration portals can simplify the process of updating a voter registration, allowing voters to directly update their registration in a timely manner. Voters who do not update their registration following an address change are often forced to vote a provisional ballot, slowing down lines on Election Day and delaying the counting of ballots. Allowing voters easy access to update their voter registration can relieve some of these problems and provide great benefits on Election Day.

**Lower Costs.** Online voter registration is the most cost effective way to register voters. In Arizona, an EZ Voter online registration form costs just \$.03 to process, whereas it costs \$.83 to process a paper registration application.<sup>7</sup> In Washington State, the cost of an online voter registration application is estimated at \$.45 as opposed to \$1.55 for a paper registration.<sup>8</sup> States can save significant amounts of taxpayer dollars by connecting the DMV to the statewide registration system, thereby eliminating many of the registration process costs created by the 'motor voter' section of the National Voter Registration Act. Savings can also be generated in printing costs as well as freeing valuable staffing resources for more pressing election preparation activities as Election Day nears.

**Youth Appeal.** An early assessment of California’s online system when it was newly implemented in 2012, found that “[w]hile all demographic groups seem to be using the new system, younger voters appear to be flocking to register online. According to Political Data Inc. ... in the 31 counties that have reported, 28 percent of those registering online are under the age of 26, compared to only 12 percent of the current overall registrations in those counties.”<sup>9</sup>

**Greater Participation.** According to a UC Davis Center for Regional Change study, turnout among Californians who registered online was eight percent higher than among those who registered on paper. The highest difference between online and paper registration turnout rates, 22 percent, was among young voters between the ages of 25 and 34.<sup>10</sup>

**Accuracy.** By reducing the number of handwritten voter registration cards and data entry by local election officials, online registration greatly reduces errors in the voter rolls. Using an online registration system allows voters to directly input their information into the registration system. This direct input allows voters to ensure that they are submitting correct information and spelling for registration. Accuracy of name spelling is also essential to ensure that voters are properly listed in poll books. Data entry errors are common when transferring voter registration information from handwritten registration applications to voter databases. Maricopa County, Arizona, one of the first locations to use online registration in the United States, found that **paper-based registration forms were as much as five times more likely to introduce errors into the registration process than paperless registration.**<sup>11</sup>

**Security.** Any state implementing an online voter registration system must add the safeguards that protect sensitive information shared online. However, when done properly, online voter registration offers increased security for voters’ personal information. Through building a secure website to collect voter registration information, states can ensure that voters are giving their sensitive information directly to the voter registration system, eliminating the possibility of bad actors in the registration process. Much of the data which is required for voter registration is sensitive and private information, such as birthdates, social security numbers, and signatures. Allowing voters to enter the information directly into a secure website increases the safety of these sensitive items because it eliminates the need for the additional step of requiring an election official to enter the voter’s personal information into a database. Voters would also no longer have to worry about transmitting this sensitive information by postal mail and face the concern that it may land in the wrong hands.

States that choose to join the 25 states that have approved or are already utilizing online voter registration have little to lose and a lot to gain. They can increase security, save money, reduce errors, and engage more of their citizens in the voter registration process by building an online registration system. As one of the few non-partisan election reforms making progress, online voter registration stands to greatly simplify voter registration across the country.

## Sources and Additional Reading

<sup>1</sup> NCSL, Election Laws and Procedures Overview, Electronic (or Online) Registration, <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/elections/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx>;  
Bill 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](http://www.oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2010/02/oregon_offers_online_voter_reg.html)

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> NCSL, Election Laws and Procedures Overview, Electronic (or Online) Registration, <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/elections/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> Matt 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*. April 1, 2010, p. 93. available at, [http://www.pewstates.org/uploadedFiles/PCS\\_Assets/2010/online\\_voter\\_reg.pdf](http://www.pewstates.org/uploadedFiles/PCS_Assets/2010/online_voter_reg.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Bill 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](http://www.oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2010/02/oregon_offers_online_voter_reg.html).

<sup>9</sup> Press Release, California State Senator Leland Yee, *380,000 Californians Registered to Vote Online in Three Weeks* (Oct. 10, 2012) available at (italics) <http://ivn.us/2012/10/17/young-california-voters-utilize-online-voter-registration/>.

<sup>10</sup> Mindy Romero, UC Davis Center for Regional Change, *Online Voter Registration: Impact on California’s 2012 Election Turnout, By Age and Party Affiliation* at p. 1, Mar. 2013, available at (italics) <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/publications/ccep/ucdavis-ccep-brief-4-online-voter-turnout-impact>.

<sup>11</sup> Ponoroff, 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](http://brennan.3cdn.net/806ab5ea23fde7c261_n1m6b1s4z.pdf).

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