

Automatic Voter Registration

2015 POLICY GUIDE



State Policy

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Driver's licenses and tax databases can be used for automatic voter registration, increasing access to the polls.

The Problem: The United States is one of the few well-established democracies where the government does not automatically register eligible voters as they reach voting age. Because our "opt in" basis for voter registration does not produce complete or accurate voter rolls, Congress and the states should act to establish automatic, universal voter registration that ensures that every eligible voter is able to vote.

The Solution: Each state should enact laws directing the DMV and/or tax collecting agencies to send election officials the names and addresses of every citizen as they approach voter eligibility. Election officials would automatically register them, enter them into the statewide voter database and notify these new voters about their registration, with an opt-out provision. Before voting, newly registered voters would also be informed about voter eligibility rules to avoid potential mistakes.

Nationally, these rules would add tens of millions of citizens to the rolls, while effective interstate communication would eliminate millions of duplicate registrations. Existing identification systems would prevent fraud. Under rules for gaining a Social Security card, applicants must show proof of U.S.

citizenship or immigration status. Most states require every applicant for a driver's license to show proof of legal residence within the United States, verification of birth date, and a Social Security number. Many states' tax collecting agencies also require a Social Security number or an individual tax identification number for income tax forms. Therefore, these two databases already include information necessary for voter registration, including citizenship status, place of residence and age. Using these two databases, officials would add new recipients of a driver's license or tax filers to the voter rolls automatically. As more new drivers and tax filers are added to the rolls, states would approach 100% voter registration.

Success Stories: Oregon passed a law establishing automatic voter registration in March, 2015. A similar proposal had failed by only one vote in 2013. While Oregon led the way, other states have already begun pursuing the reform.

Canada, Denmark, France and Norway are among many nations with automatic voter registration, leading to rates well above the international norm of 90%. Our registration rate is estimated to be between only 70% and 75%.

Key Facts

Automatic voter registration is the norm in many democracies. Under American supervision, for example Iraq automatically registered its citizens using government databases and soon had a higher share of registered voters than the U.S.

Fiscal Impact

The coordination of government departments (such as DMVs or tax boards) with voter registration databases would impose short-term costs. Minnesota estimated that it would cost \$728,000 in the first year of statewide automatic voter registration and \$239,000 in the second. However, the state estimated that the annual cost after this period would be only \$15,000.

Bipartisan Support

Backers of proposals to modernize voter registration include former Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell (R) and former Sen. Hillary Clinton (D). In the Washington Times, Blackwell wrote that automating voter registration "would serve voters better and save states money by streamlining the process."

Part Two Resources

- Model statutory language