VOTER REGISTRATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The voter registration system in much of our country is frayed. One in four eligible citizens is not on the rolls, and one in eight registration records is invalid or has serious errors. The source of the problem is outdated technology and thinking. We use computers for virtually everything from depositing checks to chatting with our friends overseas, but too many states still rely on ink and paper for voter registration. Americans deserve a 21st century approach: one where every eligible voter is on the rolls, only eligible voters are on the rolls, and the government automatically updates voters' records where possible to ensure accuracy. That would require modernizing our voter registration system.

VOTER REGISTRATION MODERNIZATION HAS FOUR CENTRAL FEATURES:

- **Automatic Registration:** State election officials automatically register eligible citizens using reliable information from other government lists. All would be given the chance to "opt out," or decline registration — nobody would be registered against their will. Many states have already streamlined the process at DMVs and other government agencies by making the registration process partially or fully electronic, and automatic registration takes this one step further.
- **Portability:** Once an eligible citizen is on a state's voter rolls, she remains registered and her records move with her.
- **Online Access:** Voters can register, check, and update their registration records through a secure and accessible online portal.
- **Safety Net:** Eligible citizens can correct errors on the rolls or register before and on Election Day.

A MODERNIZED VOTER REGISTRATION SYSTEM WOULD:

- **Upgrade** our outdated, paper-based registration system, by leveraging existing technology and reliable information on other government lists to update and expand the voter rolls.
- **Boost registration dramatically**, adding up to 50 million to the rolls, and get us closer to the goal of registering every eligible American. Agencies with electronic registration have boosted registration more than seven-fold, and Election Day registration has increased turnout 5 to 7 percent. Oregon, for example, could add more than 300,000 eligible voters to the rolls when it implements automatic registration, and even more in subsequent years.
- **Increase convenience** for voters, who can be added to the rolls in a seamless way and be confident their registration will be updated when they move. Automatic registration means more chances to be added to the rolls and update registration, portability means voters can vote at a new address, and online access provides additional convenience.
- **Prevent voting barriers** due to registration. According to a Harvard/MIT study, nearly 3 million eligible citizens could not vote because of problems related to their voter registration record. In 2012, over 3.6 million Americans experienced registration problems. Inaccurate voter rolls also contribute to long lines at the polls. A more reliable registration system will mean fewer errors, and Election Day options mean voters are not disenfranchised.

- **Reduce errors on registration lists** stemming from typos or other mistakes, and illegible handwriting on thousands of forms. Maricopa County, Arizona, found that registrations submitted electronically were five times less likely to contain errors.
- **Save taxpayer money.** For example, Washington spent about $280,000 to electronically register voters at DMVs and introduce online registration. The Secretary of State's office saved over $125,000 in the first year, and the counties saved even more. Maricopa County, Arizona, found processing a paper registration form cost 83 cents, compared to an average of 3 cents for applications received electronically through the DMV or online.

WHERE MODERNIZATION IS HAPPENING IN THE STATES:

Already, the vast majority of states — without fanfare or partisan wrangling — have moved forward on important elements of this plan.

- **Electronic Registration**: At least **30 states** currently or will soon have fully or substantially electronic voter registration at DMVs. At least 3 states have expanded or are soon expanding electronic registration to public service agencies.
- **Automatic Registration: Oregon and California recently took this one step further**, passing breakthrough laws to automatically register eligible citizens in the driver's license database (and who do not ask to remain unregistered). Similar legislation is now pending in 18 states plus the District of Columbia**.**
- **Portability**: **8 states** have systems of portable registration that allow registered voters who move to cast valid ballots even if they do not update their registrations before Election Day.
- **Safety Net**: **13 states** currently offer, or have enacted laws which provide for, Election Day registration, allowing eligible citizens to register or update their records on Election Day.
- **Online Access:** At least **28 states** currently or will soon offer online voter registration. At least 34 states allow citizens to look up their voter registration information online.

GROWING BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR VOTER REGISTRATION MODERNIZATION:

Prominent leaders of both parties have expressed support for modernizing voter registration. For example, the bipartisan Presidential Commission on Election Administration, co-chaired by Mitt Romney's and President Obama's top campaign attorneys, endorsed key modernization reforms. In the states, modernization efforts have been championed by Republicans and Democrats alike.

***

For more information, including policy details and answers to commonly asked questions, visit www.brennancenter.org/vrm, or contact wendy.weiser@nyu.edu or myrna.perez@nyu.edu.