

VOTER REGISTRATION IN A DIGITAL AGE: FLORIDA

OVERVIEW

Our information about Florida is somewhat more limited than in the case of other states examined here, as we were not able to interview state election officials. That being said, we confirmed with officials in Leon County that voter registration at Florida's Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) has been fully automated since 2006.¹ The agency supplies a large proportion of all voter registrations in the state, accounting for nearly a third in 2007-08, and nearly two-thirds in 2005-06.²

OUTCOMES

Election officials in Leon County, home to Tallahassee, have found that the automated system works smoothly and conveniently, though in a few instances they have failed to receive a person's registration data. When the possibility of this arises, they can confirm that a person attempted to register by examining her printed receipt from the DHSMV or by contacting the agency directly to inquire whether her file has been marked for voter registration. If they find that a registration attempt occurred, they will add the person to the rolls or validate her provisional ballot.³

HOW PAPERLESS REGISTRATION WORKS IN FLORIDA

As in Delaware, a visitor to the DHSMV applies for or updates a driver's license or identification card by going through an interview, during which a DHSMV employee asks if she would like to register to vote. If so, the employee asks several questions to confirm the visitor's eligibility to register, and records her response electronically.⁴

The visitor's registration data and digitized signature are electronically transmitted to county election officials that night through the statewide voter registration system. County officials verify her address, check for duplicates, and assign a precinct. The statewide voter registration system then runs matching checks against motor vehicle or Social Security records, as with any registration.⁵ Previously, DHSMV employees would print pre-populated registration forms for interested visitors, which they collected and mailed after obtaining signatures.⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ Telephone Interview with Tameka Byer, Election Records Manager & Thomas James, Election Systems Manager, Leon County Supervisor of Elections Office (Apr. 2, 2010).

² U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMM’N, THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION ACT ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS FOR FEDERAL OFFICE 2007-2008, at 38-9; U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMM’N, THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION ACT OF 1993 ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS FOR FEDERAL OFFICE 2005-2006, at 30, 34. See generally the other two-year reports available at <http://www.eac.gov/program-areas/research-resources-and-reports/completed-research-and-reports/national-voter-registration-act-studies>; the page includes a link to older NVRA Reports issued by the Federal Election Commission.

³ Telephone Interview with Tameka Byer, Election Records Manager, Leon County Supervisor of Elections Office (Jan. 6, 2010); Telephone Interview with Tameka Byer & Thomas James, *supra* note 1. According to Ms. Byer there have been “a couple” of instances in which people for whom her office lacked records were able to establish that they had attempted to register to vote at the DHSMV.

⁴ Telephone Interview with Tameka Byer, *supra* note 3. Though we were unable to directly confirm that a negative answer to an eligibility question will stop the transaction, Ms. Byer does not recall her office receiving any applications from the DMV indicating the visitor had answered ‘no’ to an eligibility question. Telephone Interview with Tameka Byer, Election Records Manager, Leon County Supervisor of Elections Office (Apr. 14, 2010).

⁵ Telephone Interview with Tameka Byer, *supra* note 3.

⁶ *Id.*