

Voter Registration for the 21st Century

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Modernizing voter registration



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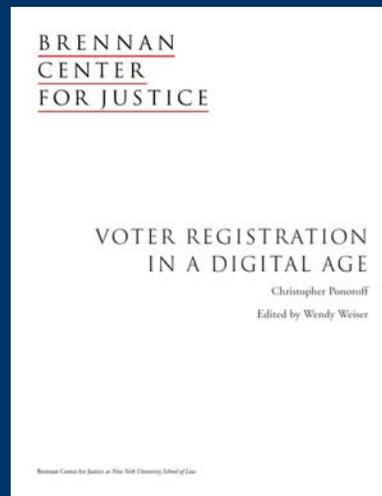
For the past few years, the Brennan Center has been conducting research on modernizing the voter registration system.

We have been especially interested in this topic, because new technology and techniques hold the promise both to increase voter registration rates and improve the accuracy of the rolls at the same time--without sacrificing either goal.

Report on recent reforms

- Studied automated agency registration and online registration
- Detailed interviews with 29 state and local officials in 15 states
- Detailed analysis of all available documentary evidence and registration data from past 10 years

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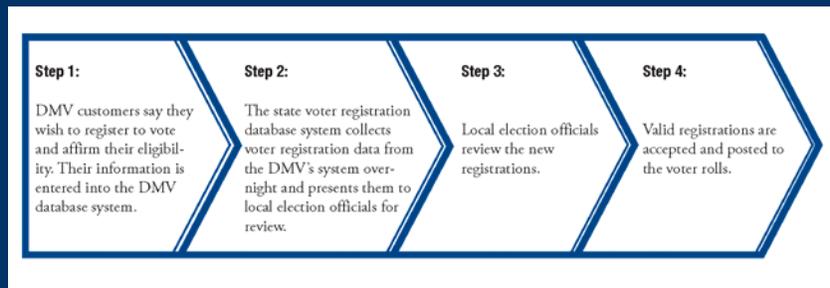


Our most recent study shows that these benefits are not just theoretical.

We looked at two new innovations put in place in a number of states across the country: automated voter registration at DMVs and other voter registration agencies, and online registration.

We studied these state experiences extensively – conducting detailed interviews with 29 state and local officials in 15 states, and conducting a detailed analysis of all available documentary evidence and registration data from the past 10 years.

How automated voter registration works



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The first innovation we studied is what we call “automated registration,” where DMVs and other voter registration agencies collect and transfer voter registrations to election officials electronically, without using separate paper forms.

The states that have adopted automated registration at their DMVs all follow basically the same process.

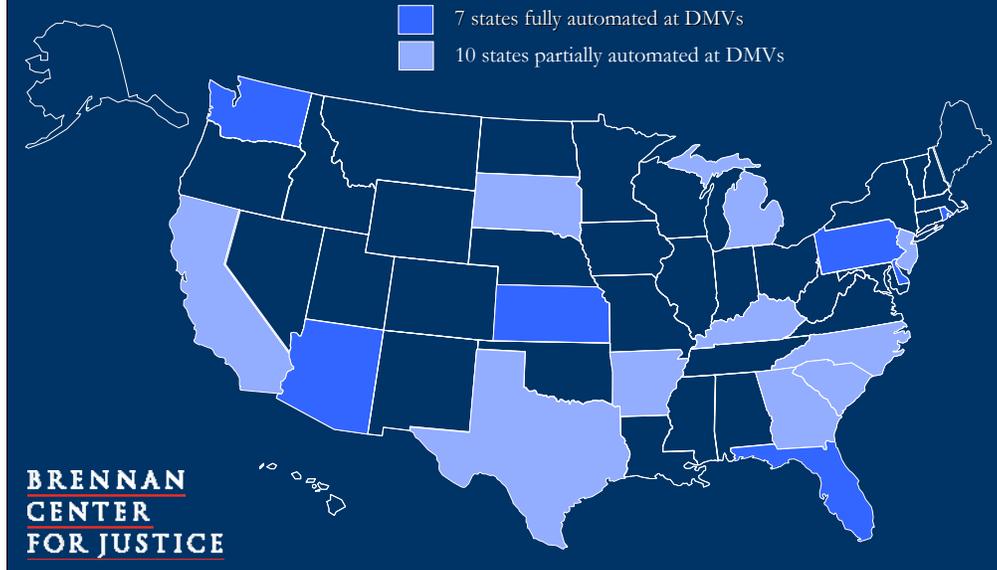
Step 1: When a customer wishes to register to vote and affirms her eligibility, DMV officials enter her information into the DMV database system.

Step 2: The statewide voter registration database system collects voter registration information from the DMV system and sends it to local election officials for review.

Step 3: Local officials review the new registrations.

Step 4: When local officials accept the registrations, they are posted to the voter rolls.

States with automated registration



Automated registration has become increasingly popular.

Seven states currently have fully automated systems. By this, we mean the entire process is paperless, so that all information election officials need is transmitted electronically in a format that can be uploaded into their databases.

Ten states now have partially automated systems. By this, we mean that agency officials transmit some information electronically, but they have not completely eliminated the transmittal of paper forms (such as for signatures) or local data entry.

Arkansas and Texas, listed here as partially automated, are currently moving toward full automation and they may have completed their work by now.

Distinguishing automated systems

- Data collection at DMV or voter registration agency

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The automated voter registration systems currently in place vary in two respects:

1. First, how the information is collected at DMVs:

The main differences are whether the DMV collects the information electronically or on paper, and whether individual signs a separate paper voter registration form at the DMV.

2. Second, how the information is electronically transmitted to election officials:

In most cases, the electronic transmission from the DMV includes all data elements needed for voter registration. In three states that have only partially automated their systems, the DMV transmissions include most data elements and the remaining elements are sent by paper.

In every state except for South Dakota, the information is transmitted in a format that can be directly uploaded into the voter registration database after election official review.

Distinguishing automated systems

Collecting Data
Has the DMV Eliminated Separate Forms for Voter Registration?

No	Applicants Fill Out a Single Form for the DMV and Voter Registration and Sign Separate Signature Cards for Voter Registration	New Jersey
	Interviewers Enter DMV and Voter Registration Data into Their Computers and Print Pre-Populated Voter Registration Forms for Applicants to Sign	Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, South Carolina
Yes	Applicants Fill Out a Single Form for the DMV and Voter Registration	Arizona, South Dakota
	Interviewers Enter DMV and Voter Registration Data into Their Computers; No Use of Paper	Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Rhode Island, Washington, Texas*
	Applicants Use a Self-Service Computer Program to Enter DMV and Voter Registration Data	Pennsylvania

Distinguishing automated systems

- Data transfer

Distinguishing automated systems

When the DMV Electronically Transfers Voter Registration Data to Election Officials.

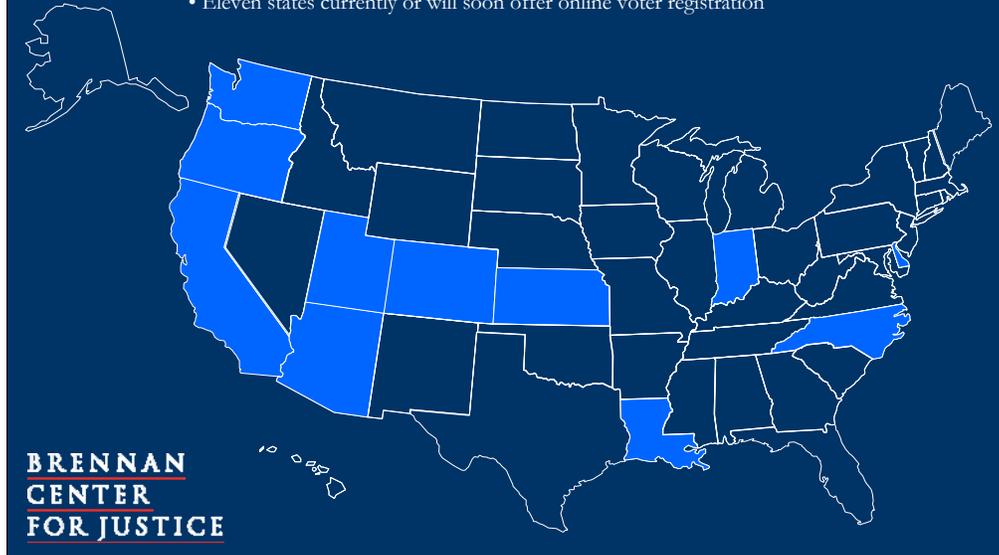
State	Does the DMV Include All Data Elements?		Does the DMV Do So in a Format That Uploads Immediately into Registration Databases?	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Arizona		✓		✓
Delaware		✓		✓
Florida		✓		✓
Kansas		✓		✓
Kentucky	X			✓
Michigan		✓		✓
New Jersey	X			✓
North Carolina		✓		✓
Pennsylvania		✓		✓
Rhode Island		✓		✓
South Carolina	X			✓
South Dakota		✓	X	
Texas*		✓		✓
Washington		✓		✓

* Texas is currently in the process of adopting an automated system. A minority of counties still use paper forms, but officials expect that these will have transitioned to a paperless system by the end of May 2010.

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States with online registration

- Eleven states currently or will soon offer online voter registration

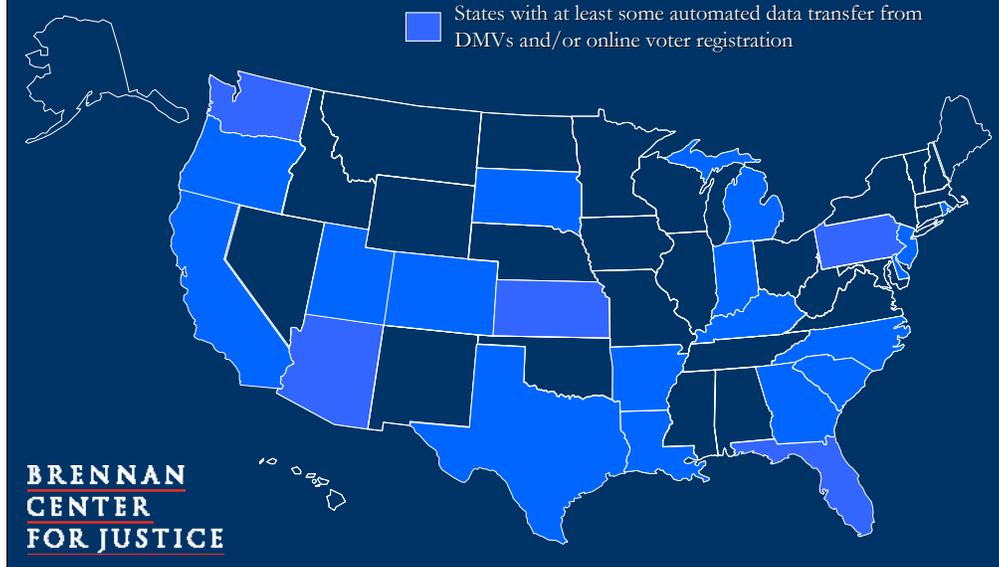


The second innovation we examined is online registration.

Ten states currently offer online registration, and an eleventh – California – will soon do so.

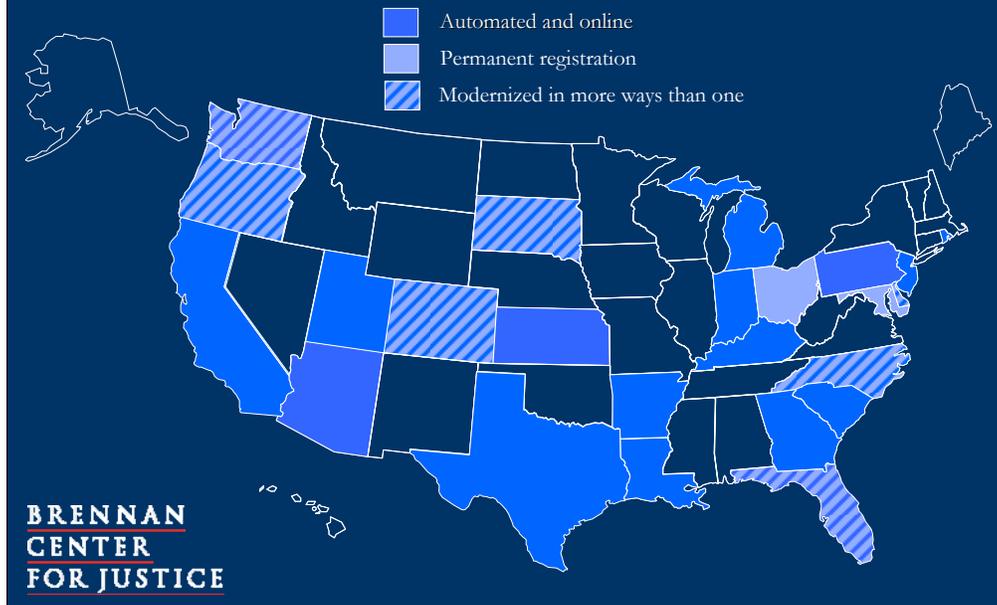
(Note that this map is more up-to-date than our report, since Indiana launched its online system after publication, on July 1, 2010. The only state included on this map whose system is not yet up and running is California. By statute, it is supposed to be working by 2012.)

Automated and online registration



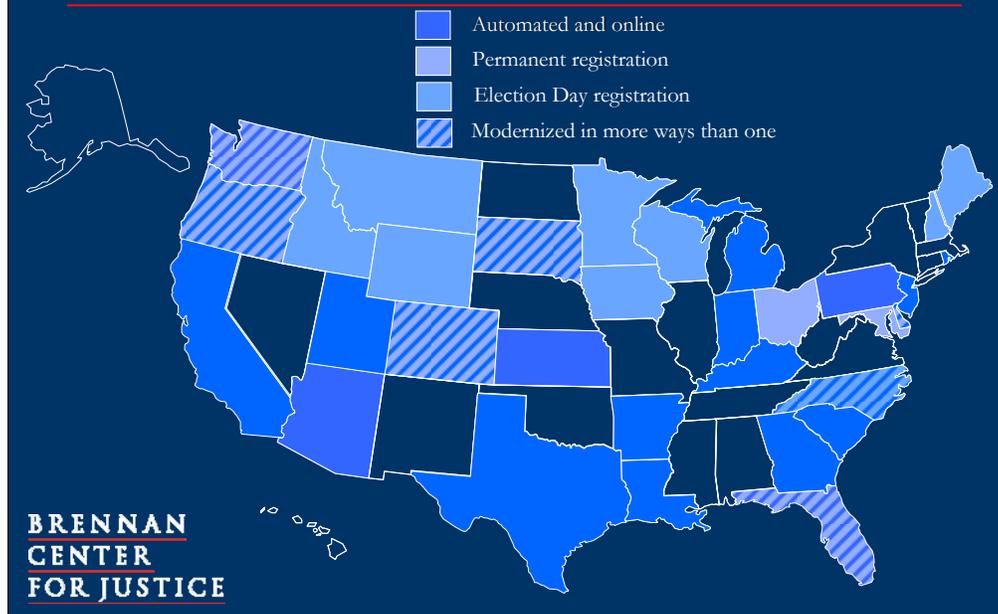
This map shows the total number of states that have embraced paperless registration reforms.

Automated, online, and permanent registration



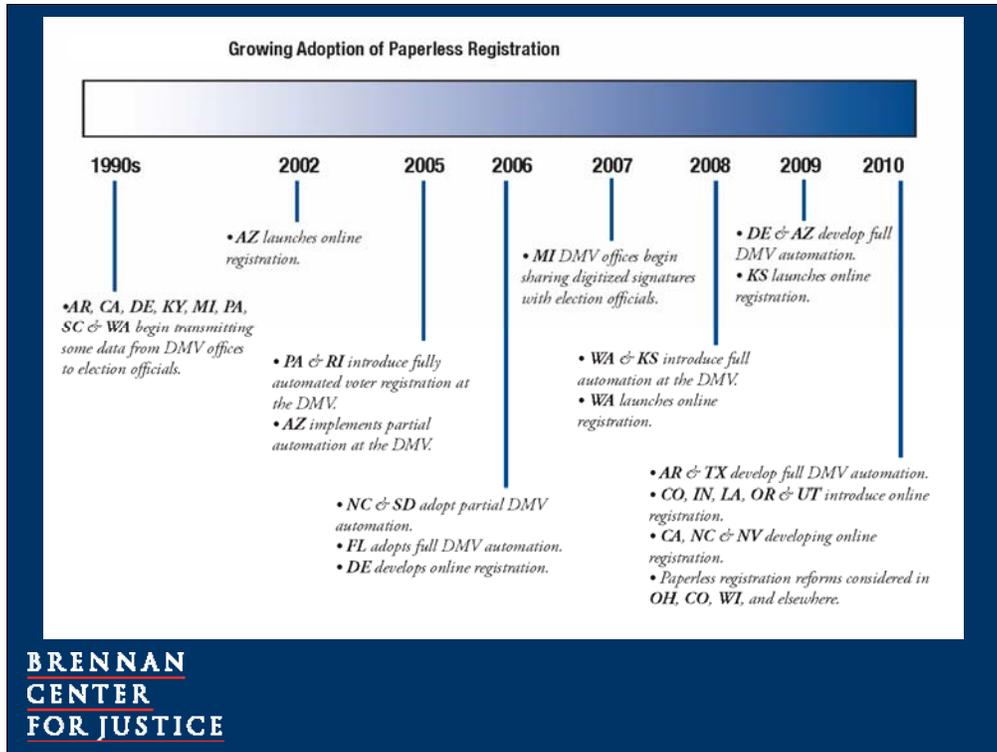
This map includes the states that have adopted statewide permanent registration – which is a system in which voters stay registered and can update their information without re-registering if they move anywhere within a state.

Automated, online, permanent, and Election Day registration



This map includes states that offer Election Day registration as well.

When you look at them all together, it is remarkable how widespread efforts to improve and modernize the voter registration system are.



Paperless registration started in the mid-1990s, when a handful of states partially automated the voter registration process at their DMVs as part of their efforts to comply with the newly enacted NVRA.

The major impetus for paperless registration was HAVA. HAVA provided all states with a critical tool -- statewide voter registration databases -- to implement automated and online registration.

States adopting paperless registration in past 2 years



There is a growing momentum toward paperless registration.

As you can see from this map, most of the states to have adopted paperless registration did so in the past two years.

Four additional states are currently undertaking efforts to automate or further voter registration include: Arkansas, Delaware, Nevada, and Oregon.

At least four more states considered registration modernization bills in their legislatures last session: New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Colorado.

And in two more states -- Utah and Washington, DC -- commissions recommended adopting paperless registration and a range of other modern reforms.

Infrastructure in place in every state

- Statewide voter registration databases
- Most agency lists are now in computerized databases
- Selective Service registration

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The infrastructure for modernization is now in place in every state:

1. Every state now has a statewide voter registration database.
2. Most other reliable government lists are now in computerized databases.
3. The Selective Service builds its registration lists largely through automated registration and data transfer from government agencies in every state, and it has been doing so for a number of years.

Benefits of voter registration modernization

Cost effective

Makes voter rolls
more accurate

Increases
registration rates

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Our detailed study of these innovations found that paperless voter registration

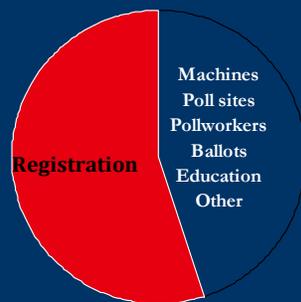
- is cost effective
- increases the accuracy of the voter rolls; and
- boosts registration rates.

Modernizing is cost effective

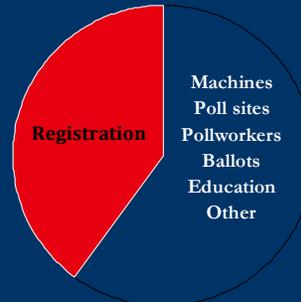
Cost effective

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Current system: big drain on county budgets



Sources: Los Angeles County, CA



Sources: Franklin County, OH

Cost effective

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The current paper-based voter registration system is exceedingly expensive to maintain.

In LA County, managing voter registration takes up about 55% of the county's election budget. It spent \$6.5 million on voter registration quality control alone in 2008.

At the other end of the spectrum, Franklin County, Ohio, spends about a third of its election budget on voter registration. In 2008, the county spent over \$1 million on voter registration personnel alone.

Last minute registration costs in Ohio in 2004

<u>County</u>	<u>Additional Cost</u>
Allen County (pop. 100,000)	\$120,000
Franklin County (pop. 1.1 million)	\$337,000
Cuyahoga County (pop. 1.3 million)	\$1.5 million

Cost effective

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This is an example of the myriad unnecessary expenses of a paper-based voter registration system. These are the additional costs that three Ohio counties incurred in 2008 to handle the unexpected rush of last-minute voter registrations. These funds were used largely for the salaries of temporary workers and overtime pay.

These costs quickly add up



- Oregon's registration system
 - Cost nearly **\$9 million** in 2008
 - Average of **\$8.43** per registration transaction
 - Average of **\$4.11** per active registration record
- Extrapolation: **\$700 million** nationally in 2008 for 174 million active records



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These costs add up to a major drain on state budgets. Pew's recent study of Oregon's voter registration system found that it cost an average of more than \$8 for each voter registration transaction, and \$4 for each active voter registration record, for a total of \$9 million. If you extrapolate this nationally, the cost of voter registration is more than half a billion annually.

Modernization: Inexpensive to implement

Automated Registration

- South Dakota \$60,000 for partial automation
- Rhode Island \$70,000 at the DMV

Online Registration

- Oregon \$200,000

Both Automated & Online

- Kansas No separate appropriations
- Arizona \$130,000
- Washington \$279,000

Cost effective

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Fortunately, it is not at all expensive to modernize the voter registration system.

Here are some of the implementation costs.

Significant annual savings

Savings from Paperless Registration

Jurisdiction	Savings
Maricopa County, Arizona	Over \$450,000 in 2008
Delaware	Over \$200,000 in 2009, beyond prior savings from partial automation
Washington	\$126,000 in 2008 in the Secretary of State's office; more in the counties

Cost effective

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These costs are quickly recouped in substantial annual savings.

Case study: Maricopa County, Arizona

Over **\$450,000** in savings in 2008

Cost to manually process paper registration form:	\$ 0.83
Cost to manually process an electronic registration:	\$ 0.33
Cost to process electronic registration with partially automated review:	\$ 0.03

- Time for manual data-entry saved by paperless registration: **20,000 hours** (10 FTEs)

Cost effective

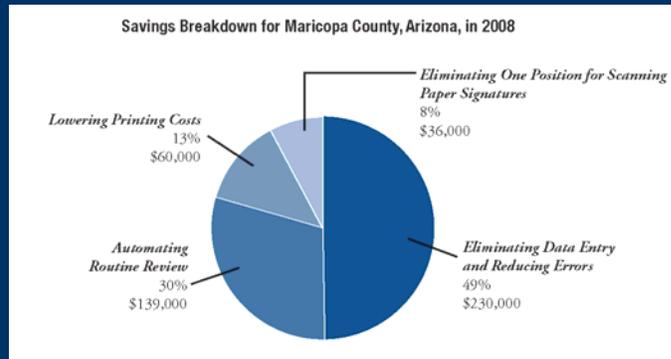
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Where do these savings come from? Maricopa County, Arizona studied the costs of processing voter registrations both before and after automation.

It found that the cost to manually process a paper registration form was \$0.83, as compared to \$0.33 to manually process an electronic form, and \$0.03 to process an electronic registration using a partially automated review.

Based on this, the current voter registration system is almost 30 times more expensive than it has to be.

Breakdown of savings in Maricopa County



Cost effective

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This is a breakdown of where Maricopa County's savings came from. About half the savings come from eliminating data entry and reducing errors. The next biggest savings came from its automated review process. Other major savings items were reduced printing and scanning costs.

Modernizing makes rolls more accurate



Makes rolls
more accurate



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Our second major finding is that modernizing the system makes the voter rolls more accurate.

Challenge: Reliance on paper

FLORIDA VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATION

Check boxes for apply: New Registration Address Change Party Change Name Change Card/ID Renewal System Update

Any previous election registration? Yes No

When last used a computer to vote, or if I am, my right relating to voting has been restored? Yes No

When last used a computer to vote, or if I am, my right relating to voting has been restored? Yes No

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Date of Birth: 07/10/1976

Address: [Handwritten Address]

City: [Handwritten City]

County: [Handwritten County]

State: [Handwritten State]

Party Affiliation: [Handwritten Party]

- Handwriting
- Data entry
- Typos
- Mail problems
- Duplicates

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Makes rolls
more accurate

Many of the biggest challenges of managing registration lists under the current system derive from the reliance on paper.

You have all seen registration cards like this one, with virtually illegible handwriting.

Paper also means that a significant portion of election administration resources are devoted to data entry.

Data entry, especially in a compressed time before an elections, means there is a risk of typos and errors.

Paper also means that registrations may be lost or delayed in the mail.

And paper can result in many duplicate registrations for officials to process.

A modernized system does away with all these problems with paper.

Challenge: Keeping rolls up to date

- 12% of voting-age citizens (almost 20 million) moved in 2008
- 23% of voting-age citizens below poverty line moved in 2008
- Numbers higher in jurisdictions with high rates of foreclosures
 - E.g., in Clark County, Nevada, 20% of voting-age population moved in 2009; 5,000 in one week of April alone

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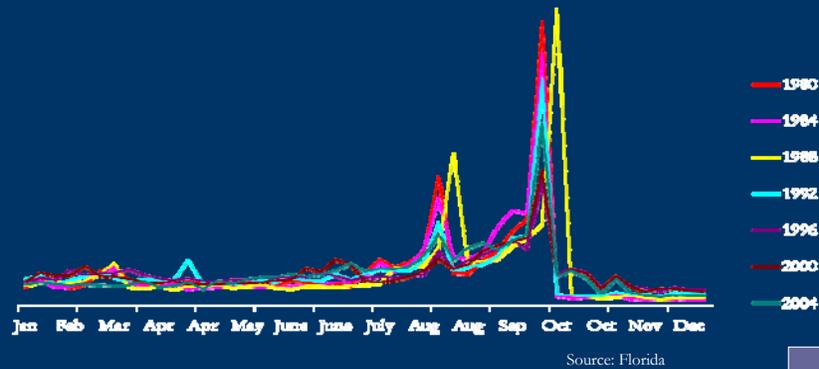


Another major challenge is keeping the voter rolls up to date in the face of a very mobile population.

Under the current system, we rely primarily on individual voters to keep their records up to date, even when other government agencies get more up-to-date information.

Election officials can and should get all available update information. In a modernized system, they do.

Challenge: last minute registrations



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Makes rolls
more accurate

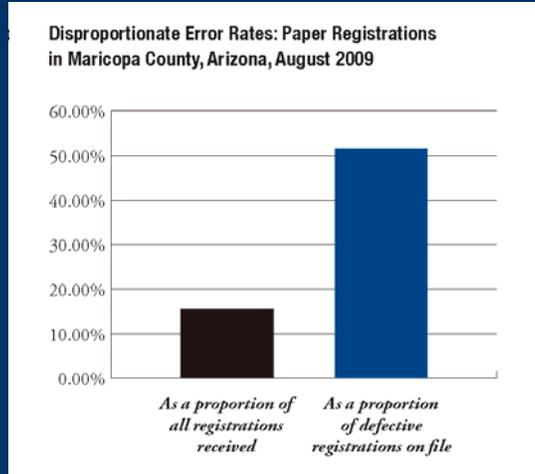
Another major challenge is the fact that a significant portion of registrations come in the busy weeks before an election.

This chart shows the rate at which registration forms were submitted in Florida each federal election year from 1980 through 2004. As you can see, in every year, there is a spike before the primary and an even bigger one – reflecting more than 20% of all registrations in a year – right before the general. We did the same analysis in a number of other states, including Washington and North Carolina, and found the same pattern.

As you know, this creates administration challenges, increases costs, makes it harder to prevent errors, and diverts far too many resources to voter registration at a time when officials should be able to focus on Election Day preparation.

In a modernized system, registrations come in at a far more steady pace.

Reduced errors in Maricopa County



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Makes rolls
more accurate

Our research confirmed that paperless registration significantly reduces errors on the voter rolls.

This chart shows the results of a 2009 survey of incomplete and incorrect registrations in Maricopa County, Arizona.

That study found that electronic voter registrations are as much as five times less error-prone than their paper-based counterparts.

Reduced errors

Officials across the country confirm that automation increases accuracy

Arizona
Kansas
Michigan
North Carolina
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
South Dakota
Washington

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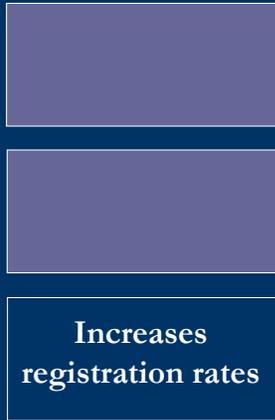


Makes rolls
more accurate



Our interviews with election officials who have adopted paperless registration across the country confirmed Maricopa County's experience that automation increases accuracy.

Modernizing increases registration rates



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The last major finding of our study is that modernization boosts voter registration rates.

Challenge: Low voter registration rates

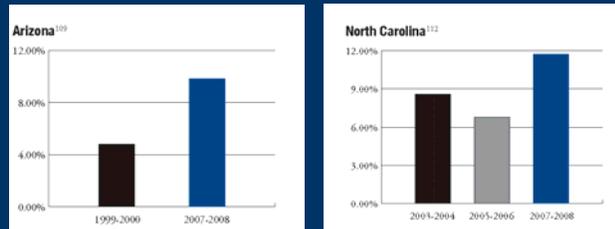


Another major challenge of our current voter registration system is the fact that our registration rates are so low.

The United States is an outlier among the world's democracies in voter registration rates. Among the main reasons for this difference are the facts that unlike in other democracies, our voter registration system is primarily paper-based, and it is one of the only systems that relies primarily on individuals to ensure that the voter rolls are complete and up-to-date.

Modernization promises to close this gap.

DMV registration rates before and after automation



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Increases
registration rates

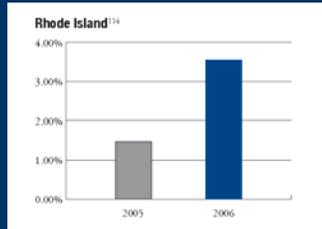
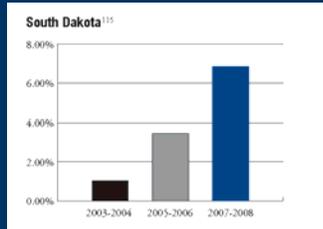
We studied the registration rates before and after automation, and in almost every case, the total number of registration transactions – including both new registrations and updates – increased dramatically after automation.

- DMV voter registrations have nearly doubled in Washington and Kansas, and increased even more in Rhode Island
- Registrations increased seven-fold in South Dakota
- Registration rates among 18-24 year-old citizens rose from 28 to 53 percent in Arizona

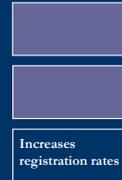
As you can see, automated registration can dramatically improve compliance with the NVRA. This is especially true at public service agencies, where compliance rates tend to be poor.

And that points to yet another benefit of modernization: By improving compliance with federal laws, and by reducing errors, modernization helps prevent litigation that is costly and time consuming.

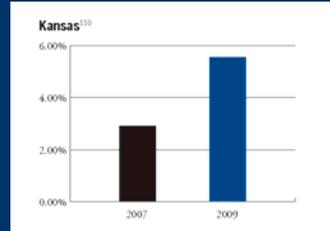
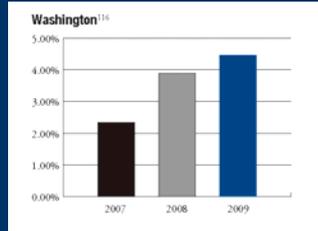
DMV registration rates before and after automation



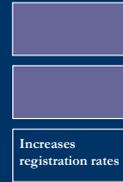
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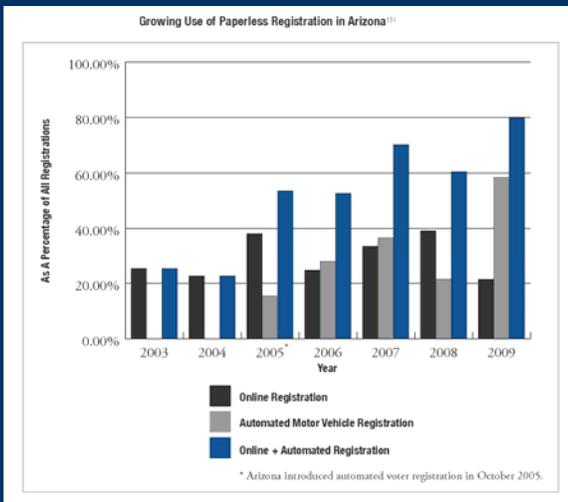
DMV registration rates before and after automation



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User support



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When states adopt paperless procedures, the public supports and uses those procedures.

Arizona is one state with many years of experience with paperless registration. It started with online registration in 2002, and by 2003, more than 20% of all registrations came in through the online system. It adopted automated registration at its DMVs in mid-2005, and its paperless registration percentage shot up to nearly 60%. By 2009, about 80% of the state's registrations came in through these paperless methods.

Support for modernizing the system

“There is a surprising amount of agreement on both sides of the aisle about how to modernize the registration system. . . Bringing our voter registration system into the 21st century must be the priority for improving the election process.”

— **Bob Bauer and Trevor Potter** (*The Washington Post*, 06/25/2009)

“One key area where improvements are necessary, and possible, is the modernization of our voter registration system.”

— **Robin Carnahan (MO) and Trey Grayson (KY)** (*Roll Call*, 05/10/2009)

“Voter registration modernization would "remove the single biggest barrier to voting in the United States, our antiquated registration system.”

— **Attorney General Eric Holder** (*Brennan Legacy Awards Dinner*, 11/17/2009)

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In addition to support from users, modernization has a broad range of support from key stakeholders:

- the chief counsels of both 2008 major presidential campaigns
- prominent election official leaders
- major federal government officials in charge of enforcing HAVA and the NVRA

Prominent supporters bridge party lines

- Robert Bauer (D)
- Ken Blackwell (R)
- Michael Bloomberg (R)
- Robin Carnahan (D)
- Doug Chapin
- Pedro Cortes (D)
- Matt Damschroder (R)
- John Danforth (R)
- Thomas Daschle (D)
- Marc Elias (D)
- Harold Ford Jr. (D)
- Trey Grayson (R)
- Dean Logan (D)
- Thomas Mann
- Susan Molinari (R)
- Ralph Munro (R)
- Norman Ornstein
- Trevor Potter (R)
- John Tanner

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And supporters bridge party lines.

These are some of the people who have spoken out in favor of modernization nationally.

Those who championed state efforts similarly come from both major political parties.

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For more information, contact
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We hope you will find our report useful and, if you are not already doing so, that it will spur you to consider adopting similar reforms in your state.

If you would like to learn more about specific state experiences, we have posted more detailed state-by-state reports on our website, at www.brennancenter.org.