

AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION

To promote voter participation and maintain up-to-date voter rolls, advanced democracies automatically register those eligible to vote once they reach voting age.

In 2016, Oregon became the first U.S. state to implement Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), changing voter registration at motor vehicle departments from opt-in to opt-out. Sixteen more states have adopted AVR at motor vehicle departments and other government agencies. These programs automatically register eligible citizens during driver's license or state ID transactions or at other government agencies – unless the person declines the option. This updates “motor voter” registration instituted as part of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. AVR has proved to be an impactful and effective complement to policies like Same-Day Voter Registration and Online Voter Registration. Together, these policies expand registration rates while also creating more accurate and up-to-date voter registration rolls.

How it Works

- AVR makes voter registration “opt-out” instead of “opt-in.” Eligible citizens who interact with government agencies are registered to vote or have their existing registration information updated unless they affirmatively decline.
- Depending on the state policy, voters can opt-out in response to a notification sent either after or during the transaction. Oregon and Alaska send mailers to all enrolled registrants with the option to choose a party affiliation or to opt-out. If no mailer is returned after some period of time, the individual is then registered. Other states like California and Colorado do the opt-out in person.
- Registration is fully automatic in agencies like motor vehicles that can confirm citizenship.
- If citizenship can't be confirmed or in states with laws that bar ex-offenders from voting post-release, AVR can still take place effectively, but eligibility must be confirmed during the transaction in person by the registrant.
- Most states transfer the data electronically to election officials. Some use paper registrations.

Impact on Turnout

Realizing the full turnout benefit of AVR will take time because only a portion of voters interact with motor vehicles and other agencies included in AVR in any given year. However, initial registration data and related studies show a promising impact.

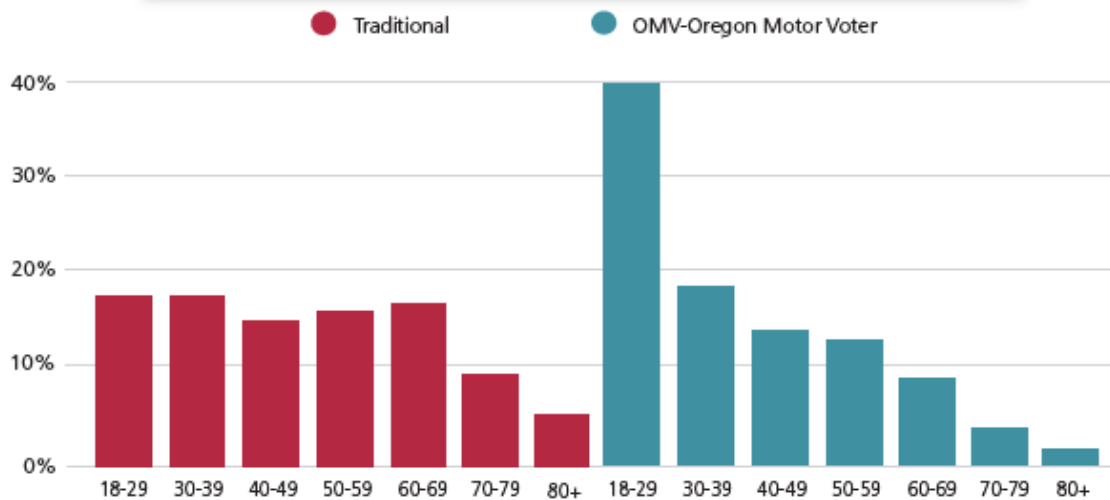
- As shown in the five states highlighted on page 11, AVR expands the number of registered eligible voters who may not have registered or voted otherwise.
- For now Oregon's 2016 experience is the only source of turnout data until researchers are able to analyze data on who voted for 2018 later this year. In Oregon AVR over a third of AVR registrants voted – lower than average but with a net impact on turnout both positive and statistically significant.²
 - Oregon led the nation in its growth in voter turnout in 2016, even though it neither was a battleground state nor had a competitive statewide election.³
 - More than 272,000 new registrants were added to Oregon's voter rolls. More than 98,000 (36%) of them voted.
 - 116,000 (43%) of those who became registered were unlikely to have done so otherwise.⁴ Another 260,000 voters had their addresses updated through AVR.
 - Over 37% of AVR voters were ages 18-29. In comparison, only 13% of traditional voters were ages 18-29 as the chart shows.

² Who Votes with Automatic Voter Registration, Center for American Progress, 2017, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2017/06/07/433677/votes-automatic-voter-registration/>

³ <https://www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2017/03/america-goes-polls-2016.pdf/>

⁴ Ibid, Who Votes with Automatic Voter Registration

AGE COMPOSITION OF TRADITIONAL AND OMV 2016 OREGON REGISTRANTS



Source: Who Votes with Automatic Voter Registration, Authors' analysis of Oregon voter list, obtained from Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, "Request for Voter List," available at <http://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Pages/request-for-voter-list.aspx> (last accessed January 2017)

Benefits and Attributes

- Increases accuracy of information on voter rolls, such as names and addresses.
- Once they are on the voter rolls, helps low-propensity voters get more education and become more engaged through contact with candidates and campaigns.
- Saves states and counties time and the costs of processing registrations.⁵
- Increased participation of younger, less-educated, and/or lower-income voters.
- Enrolls voters who wouldn't otherwise be contacted to register and vote.

Recommended Practices

States can provide opt-out options one of two ways:

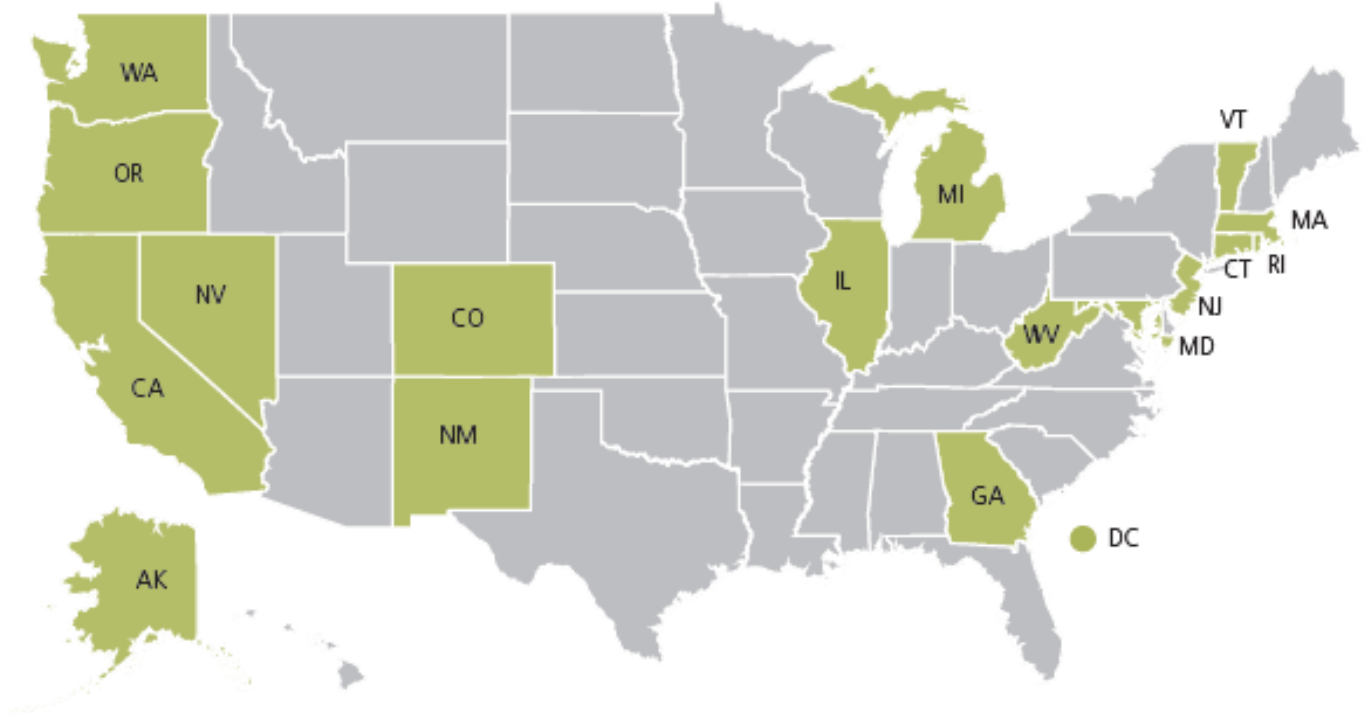
- In a confirmation mailer to the registrant after the transaction to allow them to opt out and choose a party affiliation. This has the advantage of lower declination rates and giving voters more time to consider the option.
- In person during the transaction depending on their laws regarding ex-offenders, confidentiality concerns for domestic violence survivors, and the ability of the department of motor vehicles or other agencies to confirm citizenship.
- States can reach a broader population using other government agencies to also implement AVR such as in health care enrollment sign-up for other benefits and services.

Resources

- Who Votes with Automatic Voter Registration, Center for American Progress, americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2017/06/07/433677/votes-automatic-voter-registration/
- Brennan Center for Justice, brennancenter.org/issues/voting-rights-elections
- Center for Modern and Secure Elections, modernelections.org/
- National Conference of State Legislatures, Automatic Voter Registration, ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/automatic-voter-registration.aspx

⁵Chapin, Kuennan, The Cost (Savings) of Reform: An Analysis of Local Registration-Related Costs and Potential Savings Through Automatic Voter Registration, vote.org/wp-content/uploads/registration-related-costs_030817.pdf

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Source: National Conference of State Legislators

Automatic Voter Registration and Year Implemented

State	Year of Implementation	State	Year of Implementation
Alaska	2017	Michigan	2019*
California	2018	New Jersey	2018
Colorado	2017	Nevada	N/A
Connecticut	2016	New Mexico	N/A
District of Columbia	2018	Oregon	2016
Georgia	2016	Rhode Island	2018
Illinois	2018	Vermont	2017
Maryland	2019*	Washington	2019*
Massachusetts	2020	West Virginia	2019*

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