FACT SHEET: Automatic Voter Registration Transforms Oregon Youth Registration and Turnout Rates
Also dramatically increases registration rates in communities of color.

By Henry Kraemer | April 21, 2017

After a half-decade of leadership and advocacy from the Bus Project (an affiliate of the Alliance for Youth Action) alongside a coalition of advocates, Oregon passed automatic voter registration in 2015. It became operational in 2016, automatically registering eligible citizens to vote and update their registration addresses through Department of Motor Vehicle records.

Since implementation of automatic voter registration, Oregon has seen tremendous growth in youth voter turnout – 20 percentage points higher in 2016 than 2012. Simultaneously, the state has also seen dramatic increases in registration rates in communities of color – rising by 26 percentage points between December 2015 to January 2017. Oregon led the nation in registration and turnout growth for both demographic groups in 2016 (among the over 40 states with data publicly available as of April 2017).

Based on this success, the Alliance for Youth Action has launched the Democracy Done Right campaign to empower other youth led organizations to win automatic voter registration reforms in states around the country – with the goal of replicating Oregon’s extraordinary youth turnout success in every state, along with increasing options for voting method, and ending disenfranchisement based on legal record. The Alliance has previously assisted Alaska in their successful automatic voter registration ballot measure, and is currently supporting active bills in Illinois and Rhode Island.

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![Graphs showing voter turnout and registration rates before and after automatic voter registration in Oregon.](image-url)
Voter Registration is a Major Barrier to Youth Turnout

- Approximately half of the turnout gap between voters age 18-to-29 and voters age 30+ is due to registration.
  - In the 2012 general election, 45% of young voters who were eligible to vote nationwide cast ballots versus a 66% eligible turnout rate of voters over age-30, a difference of 21 percentage points. The turnout gap in those who were registered to vote between older and younger voters in 2012 was just 11 percentage points – 78% for youth and 89% for older voters.\(^6\)
  - In 2012, “not being registered” was the most common reason cited by 18-29-year-old non-voters for why they did not vote. In all, 55 percent of black youth, 45 percent of Latino youth, and 61 percent of white youth said this was the reason they did not cast ballots in the 2012 election.\(^7\)
  - According to a July 2012 CIRCLE poll of young voters, only 13% of young voters held accurate understandings about their state’s voter registration deadline – meaning a shocking 87% did not know their state’s deadline or were misinformed.\(^8\)
  - Americans 18-to-29 change addresses at nearly 2.5 times the annual rate of Americans 30-and-over. Since voters must re-register to vote every time they move, this means young people are more likely to lose their registered voter status -- often without even realizing it.

After Implementing Automatic Voter Registration, Oregon Saw Huge Spikes in Youth Turnout and Registration Rates for People of Color

- Nearly half a million Oregonians directly benefited from automatic voter registration in its first year (15% of Oregon’s voting age population).
  - 225,796 voters registered for the general election through the program.\(^9\)
  - 264,551 voters received address updates through the automatic voter registration system, ensuring Oregon’s all-mail ballots reached them at their current residences.\(^10\)
  - Over 40% of automatic voter registrants were under-30, despite being only 20% of the overall adult population. Nearly 100,000 new automatic registrants were young (age distribution of automatic address updates were not available).\(^11\)
  - Between the 2012 and 2016 general elections, the number of registered Oregon voters age 18-to-29 increased by over 66,000.\(^12\) During the same period, the overall population of that cohort grew by fewer than 20,000 people.\(^13\)
• In the first general election after the adoption of automatic voter registration, Oregon achieved 57% voter turnout for all adults-under-30 – 20 percentage points higher than the 37% rate for Oregon youth in 2012.\textsuperscript{15,16,17}

• The 2016 and 2012 electoral environments were extraordinarily similar – limited presence of active presidential campaigns in the state, nor any competitive gubernatorial or senatorial statewide elections.

• Additionally, Oregon saw the largest increase in registration rates among communities of color in the nation in 2016.\textsuperscript{18}

• According to exploratory analysis done by Blue Labs, in December 2015, Oregon’s registration rate for people of color was 53%, ranking 31st in the US.

• By January 2017, that registration rate climbed to 79%, the second highest in the nation. Over half of eligible but unregistered people of color were added to the rolls after the implementation of automatic voter registration in Oregon – the most significant improvement of any state in the union.

How Automatic Voter Registration Works in Oregon

• As of 2016, Oregon automatically registers voters exclusively through the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), whose driver license, learners permit, and identification card applications require all information necessary to determine eligibility to vote.

• When an Oregonian provides their name, address, birth date, and verification of citizenship (most commonly United States birth certificates and United States passports) to the Department of Motor Vehicles, the agency securely forwards the information to the Elections Division of the Secretary of State.

• Applicants who provide other proofs of residence are not passed through to the Secretary of State, nor are individuals with protected records due to safety risks.

• All DMV address updates are also sent to the Department of Elections, who verifies the new information against the current records in the state voter file, and updates the voter address if it appears more up-to-date than the voter registration record.

• Newly registered and updated voters get a postcard saying 1) they have been registered to vote through automatic voter registration, 2) they can opt-out by signing and mailing back the postcard, and 3) to vote in the state’s closed partisan primary, they need to register with a political party by returning the postcard.

• New automatic registrants are allowed 21 days to return the postcard. Voters who do not return the card are added to the voter registration list as nonaffiliated voters.
Citations:


5 Ibid.


10 Personal communication with Steve Trout, Elections Director, Oregon Secretary of State, on April 17, 2017.


