

21st Century Voter Registration:

Election integrity demands
clean and complete voter rolls

By Erin Sapp
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I strongly support Heartland Democracy's call for this 21st Century innovation in voter registration. We now have the technology to move toward universal and automatic voter registration. I am happy to see Heartland Democracy emerge to engage everyday people across our region in a conversation about innovative election practices. This is the kind of public engagement we need to realize the full potential of our democracy.

—Joan Growe, Minnesota Secretary of State, 1975 to 1999

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Executive Summary

The United States' current system of voter registration is archaic. Voter rolls contain inaccuracies. Election administrators are flooded with new and repeat registrations before each election. Voter participation rates are usually lower than those of other mature democracies. A 21st century voter registration system would establish clean and complete voter rolls, which, in turn, would improve the integrity of our elections and the vitality of our democracy.

A 21st century voter registration system—universal voter registration—would place responsibility for ensuring maximal voter registration squarely where it belongs – on the governmental agencies whose mission is to serve communities, voters, and a well-functioning democracy.

Universal voter registration (UVR) systems help to increase voter participation, reduce swings in workload for election administrators, create voter rolls that are complete and cleansed of outdated registrants, and, ultimately, foster greater trust in elections and in the legitimacy of election winners.

In an era of ongoing governmental “reinvention” and “continuous improvement,” universal voter registration provides a feasible and ready-made solution. Moreover, technologies available in 2009 make such an automatic and instantaneous system possible as never before.

This report offers several options that could be employed on a state-by-state basis to move us closer to a system of Universal Voter Registration. States could populate voter rolls with information from driver's licenses, tax returns, and social service registries; offer pre-registration in high schools for students aged 16+; update registries from change-of-address forms; and continue to offer individual and same-day voter registration. Each state ought to select the best methods for its system.

Heartland Democracy is not endorsing a specific proposal or system. Rather, this report offers a menu of potential options to attain universal registration.

Countries throughout the world already use universal voter registration systems. The U.S. has the benefit of studying many models and lessons learned. Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin are all leaders in voter registration inasmuch as all three offer same-day registration (SDR, also known as Election Day registration). The three adjoining states

also share a common culture and tradition of pragmatic reform, innovation, and governmental efficiency. In short, our three heartland states are often at the vanguard of progress. Accordingly, they are prime candidates for adopting the most efficient, modern voter registration system available. Universal voter registration is the next step in voter registration progress: a 21st Century advancement for which the heart of the heartland is ready.

Introduction

Voting is a fundamental right of citizenship in the United States and one that should be exercised with the utmost integrity and sense of responsibility. At the same time, the American democratic system depends upon voters exercising that right. The strength of the system rises proportionately with voters' participation in it. An American who finds the time to vote is likelier to care enough to get involved in improving his or her community. The act of voting gives voters a "stake" in their community and its systems. Voting drives civic participation and vice versa. As civic participation rises, so, too, does a community's ability to thrive, to progress, to succeed in every aspect of the human endeavor. Therefore, removing impediments to voting – and encouraging voting – are absolutely critical components of any drive to encourage everyday folks to participate in their community at every level – local, state, regional, or national.

Our current registration system places the burden of exercising this fundamental right on voters rather than tasking government with helping citizens become active agents in their democracy. The burden of registration does not make voters any more educated on the issues, or cause voters to take their responsibility any more seriously. Constituting a hurdle to voting, our current systems discourage participation. Moving to a system of universal voter registration, where the government bears the primary burden of ensuring that all eligible voters are on the rolls on Election Day, would allow and, indeed, *encourage* more voters to participate actively in their democracy .

Full participation would help ensure that we govern ourselves in and through a true democracy. In these times of economic hardship, when we are all affected by drastic cutbacks, massive job losses, and personal belt-tightening, our ability to elect officials

who can best represent our interests and be held accountable for their job performance is of paramount importance. No longer can we “ride through the good times” and count on someone else to keep our schools adequately funded, roads in repair, or streets patrolled and safe. We must all participate in our government to rank needs and get our economy back on track. One of the single best ways to foster participation is for the government to register all eligible voters.

Registration is an important gateway to active citizenship. Voters who can be assured that on Election Day they can simply show up to their polling place and cast their ballot are likelier to do so.¹ As business studies demonstrate, a positive experience often yields repeat “customers.” Not only should leaders make clear to voters that they want them to participate in their democracy by voting, they should also encourage voters to engage in active citizenship by making the process straightforward and welcoming.

As we update our voter registration systems, it will be essential to maximize election integrity. There is nothing partisan about creating voter rolls that are complete and clean. In fact, doing so would help reduce the margin of uncertainty over close elections. The 2008 election put this issue front-and-center when the legitimacy of thousands of voter registrations was called into question. On Election Day, once more we witnessed problems throughout the country emerge from the inaccurate and archaic registration system. Days after the 2008 election, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton remarked that, “All eligible Americans should be able to cast their ballot without barriers, and the registration problems we saw Tuesday and during the weeks that preceded Election Day make clear that the system needs improvement.”² Some 50 million eligible voters were not registered to vote during the 2004 election cycle, fewer than 75 percent of eligible voters.³ The current system of individual, voluntary voter registration is not only ineffective; it contains room for inaccuracies. Voter rolls might include former residents, have been incorrectly purged of eligible voters, or both.⁴ Implementing a system that moves toward universal voter registration would help to ensure complete and clean rolls. It would address conservatives’ concerns about the potential for voter fraud while assuring progressives that (nearly) all eligible voters are on the rolls on Election Day. For all these reasons, many political scientists, election experts, and leading supporters of election reform support universal voter registration.

With the release of this report, Heartland Democracy is beginning, rather than concluding, its work on voter registration. Heartland Democracy will continue to study universal voter registration in other nations as well as the facts of state systems in the United States. Equally important, Heartland Democracy will now engage the Midwestern public in an ongoing discussion about voter registration in the context of our region's movement toward more effective election systems, the development of our 21st Century democracy, and the modern fulfillment of timeless American principles of self-governance. We invite you to join us in the conversation. Please visit www.HeartlandDemocracy.org.

Concerns about the Current System

The United States voting system suffers from relatively low voter participation, confusing registration regulations, inefficiencies in registration processing, voter rolls with the potential for inaccuracies, voter disenfranchisement,^a and unnecessary registration costs that could be eliminated. Many of these problems are the direct or indirect result of our archaic system of voter registration, which requires voters themselves to initiate and maintain their registration. This artifact of days gone by, in turn, presents challenges for election officials in maintaining clean and accurate voter rolls.

Concerns about current systems include the following:

Low Voter Participation

There is a direct correlation between voter registration and voter participation,⁵ and the United States suffers from one of the lowest voter participation rates in the world, partly owing to the fact that millions of eligible voters are not registered to vote. For instance, more than 25 percent of eligible voters – more than 50 million people – were not registered to vote in the 2004 election cycle. Only 60 percent of eligible voters participated in that presidential election.⁶ In contrast, close to 85 percent of registered voters participated in that election. States that offer Same Day Registration – Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin are among them – enjoy higher participation rates since citizens are likelier to know that when they show up at the polls they will be able to cast their ballot.⁷

Inaccuracies in Voter Rolls

One out of every ten Americans moves each year.⁸ Each time, voter registrations need to be updated. Voters are responsible for re-registering at their new address – even if they’ve just moved down the street – but most voters fail to cancel their previous registrations, leaving the potential for voter rolls to become “bloated” with multiple registrations and incorrect information. Additionally, eligible voters are occasionally wrongly purged from voter rolls, typically due to clerical errors or slight data differences (e.g., one record stating “John Doe” and another “John H. Doe”). The resulting system creates rolls with the potential for extra and missing registrations.

Voter Discrimination and Disenfranchisement

The burdens of current voter registration systems fall disproportionately upon low-income and less educated voters, who are more likely to move frequently and are forced to re-register with each move. They are also likelier to live in unconventional situations – such as shared apartments, with no utility bills to their name, or temporary shelters – that make proving residency difficult. In fact, the United States did not institute voter registration until the 19th Century. It was racist in intent, seeking to suppress immigrants in the North and former slaves in the South.⁹ Clerical issues can lead to the accidental purging of eligible voters from the rolls, disenfranchising even those eligible voters who have kept up their registrations. Voter registration is an essential component of a modern election, but it must eliminate, rather than allow for, disenfranchisement.

Wrongly Purging Eligible Voters

While practices vary between the states, many purge voters after a defined period of inactivity. This means that voters who have not voted in ten, five, or even fewer years, but who remain eligible and at the same address, may be purged in an attempt to “clean” the rolls. This disenfranchising practice is particularly problematic in the 41 states that do not offer same-day registration.

Time and Fiscal Costs

The administrative cost of processing registrations and cleaning voter rolls, combined with the cost of voter registration drives by non-governmental groups, is staggering.

^a Voters who have been disenfranchised by felony convictions or other reasons are not notified when their voting rights have been reinstated, causing many of them to believe that their disenfranchisement is indefinite. It has been well documented that some voters leave their polling station when they see long registration lines.

The savings in time and money to communities and the wider society from universal voter registration would be massive and widespread. Individual taxpayers, donors, companies, political campaigns, non-governmental groups, unions, and governmental agencies spend tens of millions of dollars every election cycle nationally to register Americans to vote. Voter registration drives unnecessarily drain time and money from every state's economy as well as on voluntary time donated by political activists of all stripes. Funds saved and time made available would be freed for other productive uses, like voter education and GOTV.

Potential for Fraud

While actual instances of voter fraud are extremely rare, some conservatives continue to raise concerns about the potential for voter fraud. There has been only a tiny number of voter fraud cases ever confirmed in the United States, just 24 from 2002 through 2006, or an average of eight per election. Nineteen of those 24 were ineligible to vote, and only five voted twice in the same election.¹⁰ Close to 290 million votes were cast during those three elections,¹¹ meaning that these votes accounted for an infinitesimally small percent of the vote. Because universal voter registrations systems register all and only eligible voters, they would, if anything, reduce the rare incidence of fraud and inadvertent improper voting.

21st Century Voter Registration = Elections of Integrity

Universal voter registration tasks the government with registering all eligible voters, rather than requiring voters to register and update their registries themselves. That process facilitates elections of integrity by ensuring complete and clean voter rolls. The benefits are many.

Complete and Clean Voter Rolls

Voter rolls generated through universal voter registration use verified data from other government agencies, thereby heightening the accuracy and legitimacy of the information. These verification and cross-check processes ensure that only and all (or nearly all) eligible voters are included, remedying any conceivable problem with rolls containing outdated registrations or purging eligible voters.

Increased Voter Participation

Research shows that voter participation is highly correlated with 21st century voter registration.¹² In a system with universal voter registration, elections in the United States would likely enjoy higher rates of participation. Participation rates in other industrialized democracies that use universal voter registration are significantly higher than those in the U.S. elections, and universal voter registration is one of the reasons why. Since voters no longer need to worry about whether or not they are registered or where, they can simply show up to their current polling place on Election Day and know that they will be able to cast their ballot. Moreover, the very fact of a voter's registration is likely to cause a voter to follow through – to “complete the transaction” – fulfilling the essential act of democratic self-governance by voting.

Resource-Efficient System

Registrations under a universal voter registration system are received on a steady, ongoing basis, rather than in floods just prior to an election. The streamlined process for accepting and dealing with registrations helps to facilitate a more orderly and efficient system by eliminating the need for increased staff and time to process waves of registrations prior to or during an election and to deal with multiple registrations. It also frees up time for election officials to pay even closer attention to other details in their election administration.

Fiscal Savings

Because registrations under a universal registration system happen electronically, counties and states can reap huge fiscal savings. For instance, Ramsey County in Minnesota (St. Paul) estimates that it takes 30 seconds to process voter registration data received electronically, versus 90 seconds if it needs to be hand entered. After upfront programming costs to put the system in place, 21st century voter registration would *actually cost less* than our current system. While data on such potential savings varies, Minnesota's Secretary of State's office estimates that it would save “several million dollars” each election cycle.¹³

Fosters Greater Trust in Election Systems and the Government

By eliminating barriers to voting, state governments would raise their accountability to voters, fostering confidence and trust in the system by ensuring that every eligible

voter could cast his or her ballot on Election Day. When government places the primary burden of registration on itself, rather than on voters, it will improve its own legitimacy as well as the health of our democracy.

Shorter Lines at the Polls

Since all eligible voters would be on the rolls during an election, they would likely enjoy shorter lines at the polls. Time currently spent searching for wrongly purged voters on the rolls, finding new polling locations for voters who have moved since the last election, and simply sorting through so-called “bloated” rolls to find eligible voters would be virtually eliminated.

More Effective GOTV and Voter Education Efforts

Organizations and campaigns who contact voters to educate them about issues or candidates, or to get out the vote, typically use voter rolls provided by their Secretary of State. Since that list includes only registered voters, rather than all eligible voters, seeking out new voters to register and involve them is more difficult than it needs to be. If all eligible voters were automatically registered, each eligible voter could be targeted with the same information and resources. The number of “touches” each potential voter receives is highly correlated with the amount of voter “education” that they receive prior to the election and their likelihood to show up to vote.¹⁴

Less Hassle for Voters

Last, but certainly not least, a 21st century voter registration system would significantly decrease the hassle imposed on voters. The government, in one department or another, already has all of the information needed to determine eligibility and residency requirements for voting. Utilizing the power of technology to use this existing information to populate voter rolls saves voters the hassle of standing in lines and filling out forms with information the government already has.

How It Can Be Done

At least 24 countries use some system of universal (or automatic) voter registration.¹⁵ Dozens of models exist and provide valuable experience and guidance on how to construct and implement a system of universal voter registration that would work here in

the Midwest and throughout the nation. The ideal model nationally would be one instituted, directed and funded by the federal government, creating a system that populated voter rolls from existing databases and provided a mechanism for states to track voters as they moved across state lines.

The states have an opportunity to move individually toward 21st century voter registration. Through a combination of "piggy-backing" on current processes where voters interact with government, as well as instituting easy and low-cost new processes, our region could enjoy near 100% voter registration for a cost less than current registration systems.¹⁶

While Heartland Democracy is not endorsing a specific proposal or method, it offers the following as a menu of potential options. Since each of the states in our region – Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin – currently offer same-day voter registration, they are well positioned to take the next step and lead the country in implementing a system that moves us closer to universal voter registration.

Use state driver's license and identification card registries to populate voter rolls. The vast majority of eligible voters has a driver's license, pays taxes, or receives social benefits. Obtaining a driver's license or other state identification in Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin requires at least two documents – primary and secondary – to prove one's identity. Typical "primary" documents include a U.S. birth certificate, current passport or Homeland Security-issued documents, and "secondary" documents are often social security cards or foreign birth certificates. Each of these documents can be obtained only with verification of identity, and the information from them can be linked to citizenship status. Therefore, using driver's license and state identification card databases initially to populate voter rolls with eligible voters would be an efficient and accurate system. The department of motor vehicles simply would submit names and addresses of every person who would be 18 by the next election, and the Secretary of State would then automatically register those eligible to vote.¹⁷

Use state tax rolls to populate voter rolls. The vast majority of eligible voters pays taxes and does so under unique, traceable identifiers: Social Security numbers or Tax Identification Numbers. Since these numbers can be used to verify identity and citizenship status, taxpayer records provide another efficient and accurate method for initially populating the voter database. The method for submission would mirror that

used for driver's licenses, with the revenue department forwarding information to the Secretary of State.

Use social benefit rolls to augment voter rolls. Those who are unlikely to have a driver's license or pay taxes often receive some sort of social benefit, such as food stamps or section 8 housing vouchers. The vast majority of these benefits are provided only after verifying identity, typically through social security numbers. Just like the methods for populating the voter rolls from driver's license and tax information, the rolls could be augmented with entries from those who are known by the state to receive social services and are eligible to vote.

Pre-register high school students. High school students are a captive audience and age group difficult to find elsewhere, particularly after they leave school. Each state could lower the age of voter registration to 16 and have all high school students who have reached their 16th birthday fill out a voter registration card, complete with their birth date. As each pre-registrant turned 18, the database would automatically activate their voter registration. To go a step further, each new voter could then receive notice of the active state of their voter registration, information on their polling place, the date of the next election, information on how to update their registration if they move, and other frequently asked questions, as California currently provides.

Preregistering Students: Wisconsin

Currently in Wisconsin, the voter registration age is 17, and the law requires each school to establish one or more "registration deputies" who facilitate(s) student registration. The pre-registration of students aged 16+ would simply be an extension of this current heartland program and help to catch students who leave school prior to graduation.

^b Students who leave school early are often "drop-outs," a group extremely difficult to find elsewhere and less likely to be civically engaged. At the other end of the spectrum are students who leave school prior to turning 18 due to their participation in Post-Secondary Educational Option programs. Additionally, many students graduate and leave school before prior to their 18th birthdays.

Address Updates: Minnesota

Minnesota is a leader in this area, having enacted legislation in 2008 that requires registrations to be updated with voters' new addresses on file with the Post Office. The law emplaces a proactive approach: the Secretary of State must obtain monthly a list of individuals from the United State Postal Service who have changed their permanent address, and updates the voter rolls accordingly. Minnesota law also provides safeguards should this system not catch all voters. When notices are returned as undeliverable and include a permanent forwarding address in the state, their addresses are updated and a notice is sent to the voter. Voters who have moved out of state are notified and have their registrations updated to "inactive" if they do not contact the auditor within 21 days. If no forwarding address is on file, the registration is updated to "challenged". Voters who turn up at the polls can update their registrations and cast their ballot on Election Day after clearing the challenge system. This system should be in place by March 2009.

Update rolls with current mailing addresses. One in ten Americans moves each year,¹⁸ and voter registrations must be updated with each current address if otherwise eligible voters are not to be disenfranchised during the next election. The majority of these mobile residents update their current addresses with the U.S. Post Office, creating an opportunity to tap into an existing system to update voter registration rolls. Residents must provide both their prior and new mailing addresses, creating an easy way to identify voters and update their records. Updates to and requests to change addresses could be forwarded by the Postmaster to the Secretary of State. Minnesota already has a similar system,¹⁹ which is explained in more detail on the top of page 11.

Continue to offer individual voter registration . Since the methods presented thus far will achieve close to, but not 100% complete, universal voter registration, states should continue to offer individual voter registration. Voters concerned that they may have been missed through the other methods, or who wish to update their registrations, would continue to be able to do so.

Continue to offer same-day voter registration. While the goal of the system would be to reach 100% universal voter registration, not all eligible voters would make it into the system, and not all would be listed under the correct address. By continuing to offer same-day voter registration in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, any voter not on the rolls could still cast a ballot upon verification of their eligibility and residency. The current system of same day registration, which requires proof of identity and address, would automatically place voters on the rolls. This would simply entail continuing a system that is already in place in the region.

Use unique identifiers to ensure one vote per voter. In the voter registration database, each voter could be identified using a unique number. The method of creating unique records helps to maintain data integrity when updating registration information, such as address, and helps to safeguard against duplicates.

Offer an opt-out feature. The voter registration systems could each offer an opt-out clause for those who do not wish to be registered to vote for religious, political or other reasons. Those choosing to do so could fill out a voter *un*-registration form, or simply contact their Secretary of State's office or county auditor's office with name and birth date information, to remove their name from the rolls. Using their unique identifiers, these otherwise eligible voters could be tagged in the database and remain un-registered until or unless another notification to opt-in is received by the Secretary of State.

Provide a website and call-in number for voters to check the status of their voter registrations. Each state should provide a toll-free number and website where voters can check the status of the registrations. If such information as an address needs to be updated, or if a voter simply needs to be added to the rolls, he could be mailed or emailed an individual voter registration card to update or add his registration.

Each of these recommendations could be implemented on a state level. New York and California are each reviewing plans to include some combination of the methods outlined above.²⁰ While the most comprehensive system would be a federally sponsored universal voter registration system that worked with each of the states, these potential methods would work in concert to move closer to 100 percent universal voter registration at the state level. Each of the processes would be relatively low-cost, primarily

using existing data and "piggy-backing" on systems already in place. Such methods would ensure the accuracy of data and promote elections of the highest integrity.

Where It Works

Various models of automatic or universal voter registration predominate throughout the world, a few of which are explored here.

Canada

Canada uses multiple methods to register its voters. It offers an opt-in clause on income tax returns and automatically updates registrations from information given on vehicle registrations, tax returns and provincial voters' lists. Additionally, Canada performs a partial enumeration, similar to the U.S. door-to-door census, that targets students, mobile home residents, and other low-turnout communities.²¹ Canada also offers a phone number for voters to call to check if they're registered.

United Kingdom

The U.K. uses a dual system of individual and household registration. Individual registrations are done on a rolling basis, similar to the current U.S. system. In addition, the U.K. government mails each household a form that asks for the details of all household residents eligible to vote, or who are 16 or 17 and will be eligible on their 18th birthday.²² This system has been estimated to register more than 90 percent of eligible voters, including 84 percent of 18-24 year-olds.

North Dakota

While it is not a *universal* voter registration system, North Dakota's process does the opposite with instructive results. For more than 50 years, North Dakotans have simply turned up at their polling place with acceptable forms of identification and cast their ballots. The state does maintain a list of voters who have voted in previous elections. So long as the name and address match this list from a voter's ID, or the voter can show that he has moved from a previous address, he can then cast his ballot. If it does not, a poll worker who knows the voter can vouch for him, or the voter can sign an affidavit under oath. This "challenge" system is considered a normal part of North Dakota's system, as it serves as a safeguard against fraudulent voting, of

which they have no known incidents.²³ This system works effectively and cost-efficiently. While this system would not be a good fit for most states, some of the effects of this system are similar to a universal voter registration system and it poses an instructive alternative.

Conclusion

The United States would be well served by joining the majority of the world's modern, industrialized democracies and instituting a universal voter registration system. Doing so would create complete and clean rolls, which, by bringing more voters into the process, would heighten the integrity of our elections. Various models throughout the world provide years of experience and lessons from which we can draw. We have the tools and capacity to institute a system that is both effective and cost-efficient. A state-by-state approach can be implemented, as the options above demonstrate. The heart of the heartland is well positioned to lead the country in this progression to the best and final stage of modern voter registration. As same-day registration states, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin are already leading progress on this front. To reach the highest and most effective form of voter registration, these three states ought to lead the way toward universal voter registration.

Universal Voter Registration: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Shouldn't people have to take some proactive step to be able to vote? Don't we want only voters who bother to educate themselves on the issues and take the step to register to cast ballots?

A: In the words of Norman Lear, "Voting is the gateway experience to a life of active citizenship." People who vote become more active in their communities. Having voted, they have a "stake" in the governmental system. They follow the course of events, they develop opinions, and they seek information as they evaluate the performance of election winners. Ergo, if we can help people to vote, we take a huge step in encouraging their involvement in their communities. This principle is much more important to a robust democracy, in the final analysis, than the worthy goal of voter self-education. In fact, we argue that voter registration and the act of voting *cause* greater voter self-education.

Second, registration cannot be equated with "education". It is not for the government or non-governmental groups to subjectively to judge potential voters' level of education on an issue or candidate.

Q: Can governmental agencies really share data with each other?

A: State agencies regularly share information, as outlined and regulated by law. Specific provision(s) in state statute(s) generally outline which information can be shared, for what purpose, and by which methods. Sharing data for purposes of voter registration could be made with an update to state statute(s), and would simply be an extension of an already widely used practice.

Q: Aren't data from driver's licenses, tax returns, and welfare or benefits private? How could the state use this information to populate voter rolls, which are public?

A: The information made public on voter rolls – names, addresses, and birth dates – can be drawn from other governmental agencies to populate voter rolls, provided that the laws safeguarding the data are structured properly. Minnesota has among the most protective and complex data privacy laws, so we'll use it as an example here. Names and addresses associated with driver's licenses are already publicly available

data and therefore straightforward to use for voter registration purposes. Data from tax returns and benefits are private, but the information that would be disclosed on voter rolls (names, addresses, and birth dates only) could be made public by updating the data's classification in state statute. A full legal review would be required in Minnesota and every other state considering using such data to populate voter rolls. Still, populating voter rolls with such data could be a feasible practice. It is important to emphasize that the law must be structured in such a way to ensure privacy of the data that should *not* be made public (tax return information, benefits received, *e.g.*). This anonymity would also include any notation as to the database from which a voter's registration file was created. Those with access to the voter rolls would never be able to tell if the registration originated from a driver's license record, tax return, benefit, or independent voter registration. All voter registrations should continue to be subject to confidentiality programs that safeguard otherwise public data of survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or others who fear for their safety.

Q: How do you ensure that only *eligible* voters are placed on the rolls? Lots of non-citizens who don't have the right to vote have driver's licenses and/or pay taxes.

A: To ensure that only eligible voters are placed on the rolls, the Secretary of State's office would verify each potential registrant against data from the Department of Corrections to filter legally disenfranchised felons, from the Department of Public Safety to verify citizenship, and from the Social Security Administration to purge voters who have passed away. Using these other databases to verify eligibility is a commonly used practice to determine eligibility for many government-administered programs and practices.

Q: I don't think all of these recommendations will work well in my state. Would we really need to implement all of them to achieve 21st century voter registration?

A: No. Full, 100% universal voter registration can only be achieved at the federal level, since only a federal agency could track voters as they move between states. This report simply outlines a menu of options for states to help move them very close to full universal voter registration. It will be important for each state to pick which practices will work best for its system. Additionally, while it is a comprehensive list, it is not an exhaustive list of all of the options available.

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¹⁵ Blumner, Robyn (November 23, 2008) "Voter Registration Should Be Automatic" *Courant.com* courant.com/news/opinion/op_ed/hc-blumner1123.artnov23,0,529204.story.

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¹⁷ The Secretary of State's office would verify each potential registrant against data from the Department of Corrections to weed out disenfranchised felons, the Department of Public Safety to verify citizenship, and the Social Security Administration to purge voters who have passed away.

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²⁰ New America Foundation (October 2006) "Universal voter registration: A to empower and engage all Californians" *New America Foundation* p 6.

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²² The Electoral Commission (accessed December 2008) *Voter Registration* <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/voter-registration>.

²³ Secretary of State of North Dakota (August 1999) *Voter Registration in North Dakota: A History & Background* <http://www.nd.gov/sos/electvote/voting/vote-history.html>.

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About Heartland Democracy

Heartland Democracy is a new kind of 501(c)(3) charitable research and education group. It works to win over hearts and minds in the Midwest to just and sustainable community goals through sustained public engagement on regional policy initiatives.

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