Voter registration requirements have become a deterrent to voting that depresses turnout nationwide. In 2008, at least 3 million voters nationwide were turned away because they lacked proper registration.[1] Since the 1960s, the imposition of voter registration requirements has directly decreased voter turnout by 3 to 4 percentage points, causing millions of Americans to stay at home on Election Days.[2] Simple reforms to voter registration can reverse that trend.

In 2016, 29 states introduced bills to instate some form of automatic voter registration.[3] Oregon was the first state to pass a bill that would automatically register eligible voters at the DMV. Since automatic registration took effect in January 2016, 200,000 more Oregonians have been registered to vote, at a rate four times the rate of registration before the law took effect.[4] California, the second state to pass automatic voter registration, had 6.6 million eligible yet unregistered voters in 2015. A lack of registration is a direct barrier that stands between voters and ballots, especially among youth. In a study of nonvoters ranging from ages 18 to 29, 61% of Caucasian Americans, 55% of African Americans, and 45% of Hispanic Americans gave "not being registered" as their primary reason for not voting, the most common factor respondents cited.[5] With automatic voter registration, that barrier would be lifted, providing a gateway for millions of Americans to turn up at the polls.

Yet, the problem with voter registration stretches much farther than constituents merely failing to sign up to vote. Under the current registration system, voters who are already registered must update their registration each time they change their address or other identifying information. That fact is unknown to a vast portion of the electorate. In fact, 25% of voters are under the false impression that their voter registration is automatically updated when they change their address with the US Postal Service. Considering that every year, one out of every nine Americans moves, this misconception creates a large gap in the voter registration system.[6] One

---

[1] Charles Stewart III, et al. *2008 Survey of the Performance of American Elections*, Working Paper no. 81. Caltech/MIT Voting Project (2009): i.

[2] David M. Konisky and Stephen Ansolabehere. *The Introduction of Voter Registration and its Effect on Turnout,* Working Paper no. 14. Caltech/MIT Voting Project (2004): 13-14, 16.

[3] "Automatic Voter Registration and Modernization in the States," Brennan Center for Justice. July 12, 2016, July 23, 2016.
 http://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/voter-registration-modernization-states

[4] Adam Gitlin and Daniel Nesbit, "Oregon Leading Nation in Voter Registration," Brennan Center for Justice. July 8, 2016, July 21, 2016. https://www.brennancenter.org/blog/oregon-leading-nation-voter-registration

[5] Liz Kennedy, "Oregon's Success Shows Way Forward for Automatic Voter Registration," Center for American Progress. May 16th, 2016, July 22nd, 2016. https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/progressive-movement/report/2016/05/16/137492/oregons-success-shows-way-forward-for-automatic-voter-registration/

[6] United States. Census Bureau. *U.S. Mover Rate Remains Stable at About 12 Percent Since 2008, Census Bureau Reports*, (Washington: Census Bureau, 2015).

Harvard professor estimated that one third of unregistered voters slipped off the voter rolls after moving.[7]

That reality not only bars millions of voters who never realized they had to update their registration from voting, but also opens up American elections to fraud. Failure to update registrations is one major reason that nearly 24 million voter registrations, or 13% of all voter registrations, are considered invalid or contain significantly inaccurate information.[8] Voters who are inadvertently allowed to vote with an outdated address can potentially vote in the wrong district or even state, and with just below 3 million Americans registered to vote in more than one state, individuals with more than one registration can potentially vote multiple times. When the electoral system is tainted by voter fraud, the credibility of the nation's elections is severely weakened. The value of the votes that millions of Americans cast plummets when a handful of voters sway the election against the voice of the majority through fraud. A system that makes voter fraud too easy is not a system that works for America.

An automatic voter registration system could not only register everyone whose name comes into a government database through the DMV or another agency to vote, but could also automatically update voter registrations, matching any changes of address that are reported to the DMV or other government agencies. That revolution would transform our elections into ones with higher turnout and far less inaccuracy. The benefits could, in fact, extend even farther, helping to alleviate states' budget crises. An automatic voter registration system would dramatically cut down the labor involved in voter registration. Rather than having an individual worker help each voter fill out the registration form, an automated, likely electronic system would swiftly facilitate each registration with little extra human labor. The automatic registration would require no paper forms and no extra questions, thus freeing up resources and funding for other areas. When Delaware eliminated the use of paper forms in favor of an automated registration system, the state saved $250,000 annually and was able to use those savings to meet other budget priorities.[9] Similarly, switching to electronic voter registration saved Maricopa County, which includes Arizona's capital, Phoenix, $1 million over five years.[10] With a national automatic voter registration system, those budget savings would be seen nationwide.

---

[7] Thomas E. Patterson, *The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty.* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2002) 178.

[8] *Inaccurate, Costly, and Inefficient: Evidence that America's Voter Registration System Needs an Upgrade.* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Center on the States, 2012) 4-5.

[9] Steven Rosenfield, *Paperless Voter Registration: Innovation in Three States.* (Washington, D.C.: Project Vote, 2010) 7.

[10] Matt Barreto, et al, *Online Voter Registration (OLVR) Systems in Arizona and Washington: Evaluating Public Usage, Public Confidence, and Implementation Processes.* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Center on the States, 2010) 93.

Apart from automatic voter registration, another simple reform to registration that could revolutionize turnout is same-day voter registration. The American proclivity for procrastination extends to voter registration, and many put off registering to vote until it is too late. If voters were allowed to register right up until elections and even on Election Day itself, no longer would the voices of thousands be lost simply because they did not fill out a registration form in time. As of July 2016, 17 states have passed some version of same-day voter registration.[11] Already, those measures have seen success in increasing turnout, and states that allow voters to register on Election Day have been shown to have 5-7% higher rates of voter turnout than states without same-day registration.[12] Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barnett believes that Wisconsin's same-day registration provision has allowed it to have "among the highest democratic participation in the nation."[13] Even laws that merely make registration deadlines later have been shown to marginally increase turnout. Laws lessening voter registration deadlines have been shown to, on average, increase voter turnout by 5 to 10 percentage points.[14] That means that millions more Americans make their voices heard on Election Day.

Voter registration requirements have consistently shown a direct correlation with voter turnout. The greater the requirements, the lower the turnout. When registering to vote becomes a burden, millions of Americans never journey to their polling places. When missing a deadline means losing a voice in the election, millions of Americans are silenced, and the outcomes of elections no longer represent the views of the electorate. Policies that make voting easier, such as automatic registration and same-day registration, can help reverse trends towards record-low civic engagement and voter turnout. In short, they can breathe new life into our democracy.

---

[11] "Same Day Voter Registration," National Conference of State Legislatures. May 25, 2016, July 24, 2016. http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/same-day-registration.aspx
[12] Sam Wang, "How Behavioral Science Could Get More Americans to Vote," Washington Post. June 15th, 2016, July 21st, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/15/how-behavioral-science-could-get-more-americans-to-vote/
[13] Green, Zachary, and Andrew Mach, "Interactive Map: Does Same-Day Registration Affect Voter Turnout in the US?" PBS. October 4th, 2015, July 24th, 2016. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/day-registration-affects-voter-turnout-u-s/
[14] Konisky, 16.

References

"Automatic Voter Registration and Modernization in the States." Brennan Center for Justice. July 12, 2016. July 23, 2016. http://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/voter-registration-modernization-states

Barreto, Matt, et al, *Online Voter Registration (OLVR) Systems in Arizona and Washington: Evaluating Public Usage, Public Confidence, and Implementation Processes.* Washington, D.C.: Pew Center on the States, 2010.

Gitlin, Adam and Daniel Nesbit. "Oregon Leading Nation in Voter Registration." Brennan Center for Justice. July 8, 2016. July 21, 2016. https://www.brennancenter.org/blog/oregon-leading-nation-voter-registration

Green, Zachary, and Andrew Mach. "Interactive Map: Does Same-Day Registration Affect Voter Turnout in the US?" PBS. October 4th, 2015. July 24th, 2016. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/day-registration-affects-voter-turnout-u-s/

Inaccurate, Costly, and Inefficient: Evidence that America's Voter Registration System Needs an Upgrade. Washington, D.C.: Pew Center on the States, 2012.

Kennedy, Liz. "Oregon's Success Shows Way Forward for Automatic Voter Registration." Center for American Progress. May 16th, 2016. July 22nd, 2016. https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/progressive-movement/report/2016/05/16/137492/oregons-success-shows-way-forward-for-automatic-voter-registration/

Konisky, David M. and Stephen Ansolabehere. *The Introduction of Voter Registration and its Effect on Turnout.* Working Paper no. 14. Caltech/MIT Voting Project, 2004.

Patterson, Thomas E. *The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty.* New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2002.

Rosenfeld, Stephen. *Paperless Voter Registration: Innovation in Three States*. Washington, D.C.: Project Vote, 2010.

"Same Day Voter Registration." National Conference of State Legislatures. May 25, 2016. July 24, 2016. http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/same-day-registration.aspx

Stewart, Charles III, et al. *2008 Survey of the Performance of American Elections*. Working Paper no. 81. Caltech/MIT Voting Project, 2009.

United States. Census Bureau. *U.S. Mover Rate Remains Stable at About 12 Percent Since 2008, Census Bureau Reports*. Washington, D.C.: Census Bureau, 2015.

Wang, Sam. "How Behavioral Science Could Get More Americans to Vote." <u>Washington Post</u>.
June 15th, 2016. July 21st, 2016.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/15/how-behavioral-
science-could-get-more-americans-to-vote/