

**Public Assistance
Databases and
Automatic Voter
Registration:
*A Survey***

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ABOUT DĚMOS

Dēmos is a non-partisan public policy research and advocacy organization. Headquartered in New York City, Dēmos works with advocates and policymakers around the country in pursuit of four overarching goals: a more equitable economy; a vibrant and inclusive democracy; an empowered public sector that works for the common good; and responsible U.S. engagement in an interdependent world.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to calls for voter registration modernization, proposals have been advanced to use client and applicant lists from government agencies to automatically register eligible citizens to vote.¹ A central goal of any automatic voter registration proposal should be a representative electorate in which all eligible citizens, including those from historically underrepresented communities, are effectively registered and able to cast a ballot on Election Day. State databases of individuals receiving public assistance benefits—including SNAP (formerly Food Stamps), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid—can be an important source for registering low-income citizens—one of the most under-registered segments of the population.

To better understand the nature of public assistance agencies' computerized eligibility databases and their ability to facilitate automatic voter registration, Dēmos conducted telephone interviews with public assistance agencies in 41 out of 51 states (including the District of Columbia). A subsequent follow-up survey focusing on several issues discovered during the initial interviews was received from 29 of the 41 states. The respondents were primarily state-level program and policy directors who were both familiar with the benefits application process and the use of eligibility databases.

Key Findings

- » Our research shows that public assistance agencies are generally well-positioned for voter registration modernization. Much of the information necessary for registering individuals to vote is being captured, maintained, and updated in agency databases. Nevertheless, some states will be required to adjust their systems or alter their procedures in order to capture and seamlessly transmit the necessary data in the most voter-protective way.
- » The majority of the information required to register to vote—full name, date of birth, and Social Security number—is collected and stored for every household member receiving benefits in virtually all public assistance databases. Citizenship status must be provided by all applicants for SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid and is a required field in the vast majority of databases we surveyed. While some states are able to upload a digital image of an applicant's signature, many others do not currently have this capability.
- » All public assistance records require entry of first and last name for every client in the database. However, not all states require a “formal legal name.” Some states will instead allow the use of nicknames or aliases (e.g., Ted rather than Edward). Special attention will need to be paid in attempting to identify duplicates and to ensure that no eligible voter is kept off the rolls or prevented from voting because they prefer to use a nickname.
- » Some states reported that they do not require all clients to provide a residential address, allowing a mailing address to be used instead. This is a potential problem as all states require a residential address for voter registration. All states surveyed with the exception of two, however, have a field for residential addresses in their database, even if not required.
- » While some states use USPS-certified software to standardize and improve the accuracy of the addresses in their databases, others do not, potentially complicating the already difficult processes of eliminating duplicate registrations and maintaining accurate voter lists.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy works best when everyone in a society is able to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. America prides itself on its commitment to fair and open democratic elections. Indeed, we have made enormous progress in the course of our nation's history in opening up our democratic system, expanding the vote and increasing the effectiveness of our electoral machinery.

Nevertheless, a consensus is building among policy makers, community leaders and elections experts that the current system of voter registration must be modernized. Despite passage of the Help America Vote Act in 2002 and substantial improvements in the administration of elections, voter participation in America continues to lag far behind that of most other modern democracies.² Almost 60 million citizens remained unregistered to vote in the 2008 election.³ Registration rates were particularly low among lower - income citizens, skewing upwards the wealth and income bias of the electorate. And millions of Americans who had timely applied for voter registration in advance of the 2008 presidential election were prevented from voting because of problems with voter registration systems⁴—even as hundreds of millions of scarce public dollars had been allocated to election administration each year.⁵

These problems can be corrected. Dēmos has advanced various policy reforms to help expand opportunities for voter registration, particularly among citizens historically underrepresented in the electorate. One such innovation is Same-Day Registration. The unnecessarily early voter registration deadlines adopted by most states serve to cut off the vote to many otherwise eligible voters - particularly young people, low-income individuals and others with higher rates of geographic mobility - who miss the chance to register before the close of the registration period.⁶ A workable alternative is available. The nine states with Same-Day Registration allow citizens to register and cast a ballot just before elections, if not on Election Day itself. Voter participation there exceeds the turnout rates of states that close off voter registration in the weeks before an election.⁷

Another effective innovation for expanding voter registration and narrowing the class and race bias of the electorate was mandated by the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA). State public assistance offices that administer benefits such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Food Stamps program, Medicaid and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) programs were to provide voter registration opportunities to the lower-income individuals who apply for or receive program benefits.⁸ Regrettably, state compliance with the federal law has fallen off precipitously since the law first went into effect.⁹ Through research, advocacy, technical assistance and litigation, Dēmos' Public Agency Voter Registration Project has helped bring targeted states back into compliance with the law, with dramatic results. Missouri's public assistance agencies reported a nearly 20-fold increase in voter registration applications in the first 12 month period that following a July 2008 court order.¹⁰

Same-Day Registration and full compliance with the NVRA are two proven means for expanding the registration of eligible voters. But the universal registration of every citizen - and a reliable, polling place remedy for deficient voter rolls - will requires a new system of automatic registration, as generally practiced in other industrialized democracies.

What is Voter Registration Modernization?

A truly modernized voter registration system would relieve the individual of the responsibility for voter registration by taking advantage of public structures that already serve citizens in myriad ways. Departments of motor vehicles, public assistance agencies, and other governmental offices would collect basic information from their client databases and transmit to state election officials all the data necessary—and only that which is necessary—for adding citizens to the voter rolls. Agencies would forward notice of address changes to election officials so that voter records would always be current. Individuals preferring not to register to vote could exercise an opt-out option. Any eligible voter who was missed by automatic voter registration procedures would have an opportunity to add herself to the voter rolls and cast a regular ballot on Election Day.¹¹

Automatic voter registration is the norm in a number of industrialized nations. Governments in Argentina, Australia, Canada, France and elsewhere register their citizens to vote.¹² Virtually all of these countries boast voter registration rates between 90 and 100 percent while maintaining highly accurate rolls. The U.S. lags far behind with a registration rate of only 68 percent.¹³

In the U.S., political leaders and election authorities from both major parties are now pressing for just such a modern and effective voter registration system. A Committee to Modernize Voter Registration, comprised of election experts and state and national leaders from both major parties, has been formed to encourage the modernization of our voter registration system.¹⁴ In addition, some states are beginning to experiment with automatic voter registration systems. Delaware is one state in the forefront of reform. As of 2009, data on individuals served by the state Department of Motor Vehicles are transmitted electronically to county election officials for voter registration and updating of voter records. For more information on Delaware's eSignature system, see the box on page 3.

eSignature: Delaware's Electronic Voter Registration System

Delaware launched eSignature, its electronic voter registration system in early 2009. Developed by the Department of Elections (DOE), the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), and the Department of Technology and Information, eSignature generates an electronic voter registration application for DMV customers wishing to register to vote. A specially-designed electronic keypad allows customers to verify the accuracy of each data field inputted from the DMV database—dramatically reducing errors and incomplete applications—and provide an electronic signature. Social Security information is matched by the DMV against the Federal Social Security On-Line Verification System to verify identity. The applicant's completed registration application is then transmitted electronically to county DOE offices. Elections staff there compare applicant data and state criminal records to verify the individual's eligibility to vote. Once the match is successfully completed, county elections officials finalize the individual's voter registration. Delaware developed eSignature with \$600,000 in federal Help America Vote Act funds.

According to State Elections Commissioner Elaine Manlove, eSignature has produced tremendous results, reducing costs and time spent on voter registration while significantly increasing the number of accurate transactions. The DMV recently reported saving \$250,000 to \$500,000 thus far with the switch to eSignature. It expects to save close to \$1 million annually from decreased paper and printing costs and the elimination of antiquated equipment. Neither the DMV nor DOE report problems with eSignature usage.

Delaware is now looking to expand the eSignature program to other statewide agencies like the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Labor. Policy makers, elections administrators and voting reformers from around the country are closely studying eSignature as a prototype for a fully functional automatic voter registration system of the future.

Why Public Assistance Agencies?

Voter registration rates are stubbornly stratified along class lines. Registration among low-income Americans in the November 2008 presidential election was 19 percentage points lower than among higher-income citizens, despite state and federal attempts to close the income gap.¹⁵ Congress' most recent effort to boost registration rates among low-income citizens came in 1993 with passage of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). Americans who applied for or received public assistance benefits including Food Stamps (now SNAP), Medicaid, AFDC (now TANF), and WIC would be offered an opportunity to register to vote, as would citizens served at state departments of motor vehicles.

Regrettably, state compliance with the NVRA's public agency registration provisions has fallen off precipitously in recent years. Voter registration applications from those agencies fell by 63 percent from 1995-1996 to 2007-2008.¹⁶ While close oversight of agency compliance and strict enforcement of the law can affect a dramatic reversal of these declines—as shown by Dēmos' Public Agency Voter Registration Project in several target states—only a complete modernization of voter registration can achieve universal registration of the eligible electorate.¹⁷ Public assistance agencies would play a vital roll in ensuring that low-income citizens are automatically registered under any such system of universal registration.

ARE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AGENCIES READY FOR VRM? A SURVEY

Dēmos conducted initial exploratory interviews with personnel at public assistance agencies in 41 states over two months in 2009 in order to gain a general understanding of the agencies' databases systems, how they are used, and the information stored within them.¹⁸ A subsequent follow-up survey focusing on several issues discovered during the initial interviews was received from 29 of the 41 states.¹⁹ The source of our specific findings, whether the 41 initial interviews or 29 follow-up surveys, is noted throughout. Most interviewees and survey respondents were policy specialists or program directors for one or more public assistance programs. Questions focused specifically on the SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid programs, three of the largest public assistance programs that already have years of experience facilitating voter registration under the National Voter Registration Act.²⁰

In assessing readiness, we focused on the extent to which agencies are able to provide the data necessary to register their clients to vote—full name, residential address, date of birth, Social Security number, citizenship status, and signature—in a format that ensures that no eligible voter is kept off the rolls or required to overcome additional obstacles to registration.²¹ See Appendix for a state-by-state summary of responses from the initial interviews and follow-up surveys.

Findings

Our research shows that public assistance agencies are generally well-positioned for voter registration modernization. Much of the information necessary for registering individuals to vote is being captured, maintained and updated in agency databases. Nevertheless, some states will be required to adjust their systems or alter their procedures in order to capture and seamlessly transmit the necessary data. Not all states capture each data element required for voter registration and many are currently unable to transmit digital signatures. Finally, some state agencies may need to amend their data formatting practices for client names and addresses. These are small changes that could largely reduce the problems—widespread

in our current system—of duplicate voter registration records and the unintentional removal of eligible voters from the registration rolls.

How Public Assistance Agencies Collect Client Data

The initial public assistance application process typically begins when an individual completes a paper application for benefits, either at home or in the agency office. On-line applications are also available in some states.²² The head of the household will usually complete one application for all members in her household. In most cases, an interview with a caseworker follows.²³ During the interview, the caseworker typically enters the information from the application into the eligibility database while asking follow-up questions to ensure the information is correct and to collect any information that may be missing.

DATA ELEMENTS

Name

The most elementary information required for voter registration is an individual’s name. Public assistance agencies in all of the 41 states interviewed require the collection of the first and last names of persons applying for or receiving public benefits. Yet even the simple collection of such data by public assistance agencies can create challenges for election officials and voters alike if uniform standards are not adopted across government agencies.

The National Mail Voter Registration Form promulgated by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, a form that each state is required to “accept and use,” directs that applicants for voter registration not use aliases or nicknames.²⁴ At least 20 of 29 states surveyed reported requiring that public assistance agencies record a client’s formal legal name—i.e., the name that appears on her birth or marriage certificate or Social Security card.²⁵ Other states accept nicknames or aliases (e.g., “Ted” rather than “Edward;” a middle name used as a first name) as the client’s primary name for agency records. For example, Alabama “prefers” to use a formal legal name for each client, but will accept any name that appears on an official document, even if it is a nickname.²⁶ And even among states that indicated that they require a legal name, agency staff admitted it may not be possible to secure that information in every instance. For example, agency staff in Maryland will log a client’s nickname into their database if it is the only name on record for the individual.²⁷

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) requires that states attempt to “match” information provided on voter registration forms to that in other government databases. The matching criteria and consequences of a failed match vary considerably by state.²⁸ While stringent matching standards are problematic even in our current system, automatically providing election officials with something other than a legal name increases the risk that eligible voters will not be added to the list.

When using multiple government lists to populate the voter rolls, it is inevitable that individuals will appear on more than one list. In addition to the matching procedures required by HAVA, election officials may need to cross reference names forwarded to them by various government agencies to avoid creating duplicate registrations. The more accurate and standardized the data are across agencies, the more efficient and accurate this duplicate matching process is likely to be. Usage of aliases or nicknames can com-

plicate the effort. Data entry and matching protocol will need to be fine-tuned in automatic registration systems in order to weed out true duplicate registrations without omitting from the voter rolls individuals who share similar names.

Problems can also arise at the polls on Election Day if names listed on the voter rolls do not precisely match the names that appear on voter ID documents that may be required under state law. A situation could arise in which an individual becomes registered to vote under a nickname from a public assistance database that is different from the legal name on her ID documents. While it seems that most states do not require an exact match, requirements are unclear in others.²⁹ For example, Indiana law requires that the name on the voter's ID "conform" to that listed on the voter rolls. While the Indiana Secretary of State's website indicates that "conform does not mean identical," final discretion seems to be left up to the hundreds of poll workers across the state.³⁰ Despite good intentions, the risk remains that eligible voters may be turned away from the polls or forced to vote a provisional ballot because of perceived mismatches.

Voter registration modernization systems will likely require that name usage standards be synchronized between public assistance and other government agencies and election offices—or states will need flexible name-matching guidelines that recognize aliases and nicknames. In no instance should one agency's acceptance of aliases and nicknames jeopardize an eligible citizen's vote through heightened proof of identity requirements or omission from the voter rolls.

Address

The accuracy of the addresses stored in public assistance databases is vital to producing clean, accurate, up-to-date voter registration records and to identifying voters' legislative districts and assigned polling places. That imperative is particularly significant as regards the lower-income clients served by public assistance agencies. Persons of lower income are among the most mobile sectors of the electorate. Indeed, 23 percent of those with incomes below the poverty line changed addresses between 2007 and 2008, as compared to only 10 percent of those above the line.³¹

Dēmos' research shows that public assistance agencies are generally well positioned to transmit reliable address data to election officials. Maintenance of accurate, up-to-date client addresses is regarded as an essential record-keeping function at such agencies. Clients of public assistance agencies have a strong incentive to keep their address information up-to-date so as not to interrupt their benefits. Nevertheless, practices and systems at some public assistance agencies will need to be revised for a smooth transition to automatic registration. All agencies will need to collect residential addresses from their clients. Where multiple client addresses are accepted, agencies will need to develop a system that allows clients to designate their proper addresses for purposes of voter registration. And uniform data entry standards may need to be promulgated so that differing means of recording client address data (e.g., abbreviation of common words like "Street" and "Apartment") are easily recognized. An accurate address is also essential for advising registrants of their designated polling places.

One particularly important problem uncovered in our research concerns the fact that 11 of the 12-nine states that returned Dēmos' survey do not always require that clients provide residential addresses.³² Instead, a client need only provide a mailing address. This could be a P.O. Box or any other address at which the client can receive mail, regardless of whether she physically resides there.³³

An agency's failure to provide election officials with a residential address for each client creates obvious problems. States generally do not allow registrants to provide a P.O. Box or mailing address as their sole

address for voter registration purposes.³⁴ While it may be possible for election officials to obtain missing residential addresses for agency clients through follow-up mailings, postage delivery can be sub par in urban and low-income communities.³⁵ To ensure eligible public assistance recipients are properly registered, some states will need to adjust agency practices such that residential addresses compliant with state election law requirements can be captured and transmitted to election authorities.

Relatedly, agencies will also need to ensure that homeless individuals receiving public assistance benefits are automatically registered. Homeless people, including those living on the street, have the right to register and vote in all states.³⁶ If an individual does not have a home address, she can list a street corner, a shelter, or any other location where she stays at night. While our experience suggests that many public assistance agencies also allow homeless individuals to list a street corner or shelter as a residential address for the purpose of receiving benefits, additional research will need to be conducted into current state practices. Steps may need to be taken to ensure these individuals are properly registered.

A second challenge for automatic registration concerns the fact that client records in upwards of 19 of the 41 state agencies interviewed may contain multiple residential addresses.³⁷ Individuals might live part of the year in one location and part of the year in another. Persons might also maintain separate home and school addresses.³⁸ Where multiple addresses are accepted, agencies will need to allow clients to note which residential address is to be used for purposes of voter registration. States that cannot accommodate multiple addresses will need to ensure that the one address on file is the one intended by the client to be used for voter registration purposes. Without such accommodation, registrants may be unfairly subjected to disparate proof of residency requirements based upon imprecise address data provided by public assistance agencies.

A third issue to be resolved before adoption of automatic voter registration concerns data entry standards for client addresses. Sixteen of the 41 states reported having no mandatory, uniform statewide standard for abbreviating or formatting integral address data like city names or apartment numbers.³⁹ One study found as many as 40 different spelling variations for the city of “Fort Lauderdale” in a Florida social services database.⁴⁰ Such inconsistencies, when combined with other minor typographical errors, can compound election officials’ ongoing struggle to eliminate duplicate registrations and maintain accurate voter lists. While the use of abbreviations can be problematic even with our current paper-based system, the complications will likely be amplified when inconsistent data are automatically transmitted to election officials.

State agencies that prioritize address standardization use various means of maintaining clean address records. Some have adopted a uniform set of address abbreviations. Others use drop-down menus or computer software that automatically formats addresses to comply with standards in use by the United States Postal Service.

The most basic method for standardization among the states surveyed is an agency policy requiring that a specific format be used for abbreviations when entering data. Problems can still develop. A few surveyed states admitted that their policies may not be consistently followed. One state with such a policy described the resulting inconsistencies as “chaotic.”⁴¹ A better approach is the use of drop-down menus for certain data fields that present the caseworker with several predetermined and properly-formatted choices. Drop-down menus significantly hedge the risks of human error and provide for standardized formatting and spelling.

Address consistency and accuracy can be achieved with use of computer software products recommended and certified by the United States Postal Service (USPS).⁴² USPS describes the Address Element Cor-

rection (AEC) software as able to correct “address element deficiencies such as misspellings, nonstandard abbreviations, incorrectly joined elements, improperly ordered elements, address lines containing data other than the actual address, and missing elements.”⁴³ At least 11 of the 29 states that returned the survey report using such software to verify client addresses at some point.⁴⁴

Finally, our 41 initial interviews indicate that many public assistance agencies can provide election officials with a client’s prior address. This information is often requested of a voter who moves so that election officials can ensure the voter is taken off the registration rolls in her previous jurisdiction. In most states, once a client applies for benefits with a public assistance agency her data are permanently maintained in the database, allowing agencies to include a client’s prior address along with the other data transmitted to election officials.

Citizenship

SNAP, TANF and Medicaid benefits are available only to citizens and certain classes of non-citizens with legal status. According to federal law, applicants must disclose their citizenship status in order to qualify.⁴⁵ Furthermore, applicants for Medicaid must provide documentary proof of citizenship.⁴⁶ At least 38 of the 41 states interviewed reported that citizenship status was a required field in their databases for the programs covered in this report.⁴⁷ In states that do not currently store citizenship information in their databases, additional steps must be taken to ensure that non-citizens do not inadvertently end up on the voter rolls. Under no circumstances, however, should these steps prevent an eligible citizen from being registered to vote.

Signature

Public assistance agencies lag in their ability to capture and transmit digital client signatures to elections authorities—the most efficient mode of forwarding signatures for automatic voter registration.

Most states capture client signatures on paper applications, and are generally stored in paper files. At present, seven of the 29 states surveyed reported having the capability to scan and upload images of client signatures into their databases.⁴⁸ Systems are not yet available in the other states to facilitate electronic signature storage and transmission—although **technology upgrades now in progress in five states will allow for such imaging.**⁴⁹ And while some states offer online applications for public assistance benefits, the digital or electronic “signatures” captured are a misnomer. The “signature” fields on benefit application screens often take the form of check boxes, clicks of the “submit” button, or a typed name or initials.⁵⁰

The inability to collect digitized signatures for all public assistance clients should not be a deterrent to implementing an effective automatic registration system. In cases where an individual’s signature cannot be obtained through the agency or through a follow-up mailing, voters registered through these agencies should be allowed the option of providing their signature at the polls on Election Day.

Separating Household and Individual Records

Public assistance benefits such as SNAP and TANF are typically applied for on behalf of the entire household or family unit. As such, individual client files are often organized under or “linked” to a single head of household or case file. Virtually all states surveyed maintain data necessary for voter registration

for each individual within a household or family unit. All states require Social Security numbers, where available, for each client receiving SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid.⁵¹ In many states, address information is not included in the files of non-heads of household, but rather is linked with the head-of-household file to which the individual belongs. Regardless, addresses for all individuals receiving benefits are accessible.

One particular benefit of collecting data from all individuals in a household, including those below the voting age, is that it allows for the pre-registration of young potential voters or the automatic registration of those individuals when they reach 18 years of age.⁵² The registration of lower-income youth in SNAP and TANF households serves a particularly important public policy goal, as this segment of the electorate traditionally votes at lower rates than most other groups of citizens.⁵³

CONCLUSION

Much of the information necessary for a voter to become registered is contained within public assistance databases. Names, addresses, dates of birth, Social Security numbers, and citizenship information are routinely collected and stored for individuals receiving public assistance benefits such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid in most states. Much of this information is independently verified by the agency, providing a strong degree of confidence in its accuracy. Provided that solutions can be found to shortcomings like missing residential addresses, variation in how names and addresses are collected and stored, and lack of digitized signatures—problems also afflicting our current registration system—the data maintained by public assistance agencies provide a solid foundation for implementing an automatic voter registration system.

ENDNOTES

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3. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008, Table 1, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2008/tables.html>. Other sources using different data sets have produced different estimates. For example, Professor Stephen Ansolabehere’s research indicates that 44 million eligible Americans were unregistered in 2008. See Stephen Ansolabehere, Testimony Before the Senate Rules Committee, March 11, 2009, available at http://rules.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=CommitteeSchedule.Testimony&Hearing_ID=c33b5ae8-ae8-413e-85db-a256ce6169f6&Witness_ID=e394ba39-8bf4-441c-8ed3-6e8c68cf4b23.
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7. *Ibid.*, Dēmos, *Voters Win with Election Day Registration*.
8. 42 U.S.C. Sec. 1973gg-5.
9. Douglas R. Hess and Scott Novakowski, *Unequal Access: Neglecting the National Voter Registration Act, 1995-2007* (Project Vote, Dēmos, February 2008), available at <http://www.Dēmos.org/pubs/UnequalAccessReport-web.pdf>.
10. Data on file with Dēmos, www.Dēmos.org.
11. See Wendy Weiser, Michael Waldman, and Renee Paradis, *Voter Registration Modernization Policy Summary*, (Brennan Center for Justice, June 2009), available at http://brennan.3cdn.net/b75f13413388b2fcc_ynm6bn112.pdf; and Laura Seago, *Government Lists: How Ready Are They For Automatic Registration?*, (Brennan Center For Justice, 2009), available at http://brennan.3cdn.net/0b0a3b5d767ae932b5_bam6be5np.pdf.
12. Jennifer S. Rosenberg with Margaret Chen, *Expanding Democracy: Voter Registration Around the World*, (Brennan Center for Justice, 2009), available at http://www.brennancenter.org/content/resource/expanding_democracy_voter_registration_around_the_world/.
13. *Ibid.*
14. The Committee to Modernize Voter Registration, www.modernizeregistration.org.
15. Dēmos Fact Sheet: *National Voter Registration Act*, June 2009, available at http://www.Dēmos.org/pubs/nvra_factsheet.pdf.
16. U.S. Federal Election Commission and U.S. Election Assistance Commission, *The Impact of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 on the Administration of Elections for Federal Office, 1995-1996 and 2000-2008*, available at <http://www.eac.gov/program-areas/research-resources-and-reports/completed-research-and-reports/national-voter-registration-act-studies>. See also Douglas R. Hess and Scott Novakowski, *Unequal Access: Neglecting the National Voter Registration Act, 1995-2007*, (February 2008), available at <http://Dēmos.org/publication.cfm?currentpublicationID=37548967-3FF4-6C82-589C05D9F087EBEF>.

17. Dēmos Fact Sheet: *National Voter Registration Act*, (June 2009), available at http://www.Dēmos.org/pubs/nvra_factsheet.pdf.
18. The 41 states interviewed were Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The District of Columbia will be considered a state for our purposes.
19. The 29 states that returned the follow-up survey are Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.
20. SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid are administered by a single agency in all but three of the states we interviewed. In Alabama, Louisiana, and South Carolina, the Medicaid program is administered by a separate agency. Our findings in these states are thus limited to the SNAP and TANF programs. Further, respondents in North Carolina and North Dakota could not speak to programs other than SNAP. Thus our findings in those states may not be applicable to TANF and Medicaid.
21. This study builds upon research by the Brennan Center for Justice on the architecture and data-sharing capabilities of various state agency databases. See Laura Seago, *Government Lists: How Ready Are They For Automatic Registration?*, (Brennan Center For Justice, 2009), available at http://brennan.3cdn.net/0b0a3b5d767ae932b5_bam6be5np.pdf. The Brennan Center study relied on a comprehensive review of state laws and regulations to describe the architecture and data-sharing capabilities of agency databases. In our research, we use interviews and surveys of agency employees to gain insight into the format and quality of various data elements stored in public assistance databases.
22. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Food Stamps On-Line: A Review of State Government Food Stamp Websites*, Updated July 8, 2009, available at <http://www.cbpp.org/files/8-25-03fa.pdf>.
23. See, e.g., 7 CFR 273.2(e)(1).
24. § 1973gg-4(a)(1). See also http://www.eac.gov/files/voter/nvra_update.pdf.
25. The 20 states are Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Several additional states provided confusing information (e.g., saying the state does not allow the use of nicknames unless the nickname matches the name on the Social Security card—the very definition of “legal name.”).
26. Johnnie Cox, Director, Office of EBT, Alabama Department of Human Resources, telephone interview, May 19, 2009.
27. Survey returned by Kay Finegan, Maryland Department of Human Resources, September 9, 2009.
28. Justin Levitt, Wendy R. Weiser, and Ana Muñoz, *Making the List: Database Matching and Verification Processes for Voter Registration*, (Brennan Center for Justice, March 24, 2006), available at http://brennan.3cdn.net/96ee05284dfb6a6d5d_j4m6b1cjs.pdf.
29. See <http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/voterID.laws.6.08.pdf>.
30. See <http://in.gov/sos/elections/2401.htm>.
31. Scott Novakowski, *Democracy In A Mobile America*, (Dēmos, July 2009), available at http://www.Dēmos.org/pubs/democracy_mobile.pdf.
32. The 11 states that reported that they may not always require a client to provide a residential address are Alaska, Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and West Virginia. This number does not include states that exclude homeless individuals from the requirement to provide a traditional residential address. In most states, homeless individuals can provide a street corner, shelter, or other place where they spend their evenings. Our initial interviews suggest that there may be additional states that did not respond to the follow-up survey that may also not require a residential address.
33. All state public assistance databases, with the exception of two (Illinois and North Carolina), at least provide a data field for residential addresses, even if they are not required

34. See, e.g., N.Y. Elec. Law § 5-102(5)(k)(ii).
35. See Luke Thomas, “Post Office to the Poor: No Mail for You?,” *Fogcityjournal.com*, March 29, 2009, available at <http://www.fogcityjournal.com/wordpress/2009/03/29/post-office-to-the-poor-no-mail-for-you/>; Cheryl Corley, “Chicago Cited for Failure to Deliver the Mail,” *National Public Radio*, April 17, 2007, available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9615598> ; and Project Vote, *Your Ballot’s in the Mail: Vote By Mail and Absentee Voting*, July 9, 2007, available at http://projectvote.org/images/publications/Policy%20Briefs/PB13-Vote_by_Mail.pdf.
36. See <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/projects/vote/legalissues.html>.
37. These 19 states are Arkansas, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. It seems, however, that several agencies may have been referring to their capacity to accommodate multiple addresses in their database regardless of whether they are labeled as “mailing addresses.” For example, both IL and NC reported being able to accommodate multiple residential addresses, yet they both also reported not having a residential address field.
38. Under a 1979 Supreme Court case, students can register and vote at their campus addresses so long as they establish “residency,” the requirements for which are determined at the state level. See Adam Doster, “One Student, No Vote,” *The American Prospect*, December 6, 2007. For state-by-state information on residency requirements, see the Brennan Center for Justice’s Student Voting Guide, available at <http://www.brennancenter.org/studentvoting>.
39. These 16 states are Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Vermont, and Wyoming.
40. Justin Levitt, Wendy Weiser, and Ana Munoz, *Making the List: Database Matching and Verification Process for Voter Registration*, (Brennan Center for Justice, March 1, 2006), available at http://brennan.3cdn.net/96ee05284dfb6a6d5d_j4m6b1cjs.pdf.
41. Hawaii, New Hampshire, and Vermont reported that their policies may not always be followed and the respondent from TN characterized that states’ data entry standards as “chaotic.”
42. See <http://www.usps.com/business/addressverification/welcome.htm>.
43. <http://www.usps.com/ncsc/addressservices/addressqualityservices/addresscorrection.htm>.
44. Arkansas, California, Florida, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Washington reported using USPS-certified or recommended software to improve the accuracy of addresses maintained in their databases. Another four states—Georgia, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and New Mexico—reported that they did not know if their agencies used such software. Address verification software can also be advantageous to the agency in ways beyond producing accurate data. For example, Minnesota, through verifying their addresses with USPS-certified software immediately upon entering an address into the database, not only standardizes their addresses, but also receives a decreased postage rate for doing so.
45. Depending on state rules, applicants for SNAP or TANF are required to either submit documentary proof of citizenship or sign an affidavit attesting to their citizenship status. 62 Fed. Reg. 61345 (Nov. 17, 1997).
46. Federal law requires applicants for Medicaid to provide documentary proof of citizenship. 42 U.S.C. 1396b(x).
47. See endnote 20. The three states that may not require citizenship status for the programs covered in this report are Iowa, Texas, and Alabama. The respondent from Iowa reported that citizenship status is only a required field for recipients of TANF. The respondent from Texas reported that whether citizenship is a required field depends on the program. The interviewee from Alabama said that citizenship status is not a required field in the database but must be determined by the caseworker during the client interview.
48. The seven states that have the capacity to upload digital images of client signatures are Arkansas, California, Florida, Idaho, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Washington.
49. Those five states are Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Hampshire, and New Jersey.
50. For example, Illinois, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin report accepting electronic signatures in the form of clicking a box or typing the individual’s name on the signature line.

51. Of the 41 states asked whether a Social Security number is required, one was not sure, one did not respond, one said it only requires the last four digits of the Social Security number, and two said they do not require a Social Security number. However, under federal law, all applicants for Food Stamps, TANF, and Medicaid are required to provide their Social Security numbers or, if they do not have one, they are required to apply for one. 42 U.S.C. § 1320b-7(a). We believe there may have been some confusion over the phrasing of the interview question.
52. Nine states—California, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, North Carolina, Oregon, and Texas—allow some form of pre-registration. Rob Richie, “California Joins National Move to Voter Pre-Registration,” *Huffington Post*, October 19, 2009, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rob-richie/california-joins-national_b_317537.html.
53. A system of automatically registering eligible citizens as they turn 18 is a central feature of Canada’s registration system. See Jennifer S. Rosenberg with Margaret Chen, *Expanding Democracy: Voter Registration Around the World*, (Brennan Center for Justice, 2009), available at http://www.brennancenter.org/content/resource/expanding_democracy_voter_registration_around_the_world/.

APPENDIX

Public Assistance Databases and Automatic Voter Registration - Initial Interview

	Does the database include a first and last name for every client?	Can the database accommodate multiple residential addresses?	Is there a mandatory, uniform statewide standard for formatting addresses (street and city)?	Is citizenship a required field in the database?
Alabama*	Y	N	N	N
Alaska	Y	N	N	Y
Arkansas	Y	Y	N	Y
Connecticut	Y	N	Y	Y
Delaware	Y	N	Y	Y
District of Columbia	Y	N	Y	Y
Florida	Y	N	N	Y
Georgia	Y	N	Y	Y
Hawaii	Y	Y	Y	Y
Idaho	Y	N	Y	Y
Illinois	Y	Y	N	Y
Iowa	Y	Y	N	TANF only
Kansas	Y	N	Y	Y
Kentucky	Y	N	Y	Y
Louisiana*	Y	N	N	Y
Maryland	Y	Y	Y	Y
Massachusetts	Y	Y	Y	Y
Minnesota	Y	N	Y	Y
Montana	Y	Y	N	Y
Nebraska	Y	N	Y	Y
Nevada	Y	N	Y	Y
New Hampshire	Y	N	Y	Y
New Jersey	Y	N	N	Y
New Mexico	Y	N	N	Y
North Carolina**	Y	Y	N	Y
North Dakota**	Y	Y	Y	Y
Oklahoma	Y	Y	N	Y
Oregon	Y	N	Y	Y
Pennsylvania	Y	Y	N	Y
Rhode Island	Y	Y	Y	Y
South Carolina*	Y	N	Y	Y
South Dakota	Y	N	Y	Y
Tennessee	Y	Y	N	Y
Texas	Y	Y	Y	Not all programs
Utah	Y	Y	Y	Y
Vermont	Y	N	N	Y
Virginia	Y	Y	Y	Y
Washington	Y	Y	Y	Y
West Virginia	Y	N	Y	Y
Wisconsin	Y	Y	Y	Y
Wyoming	Y	Y	N	Y
Total Yes	41	19	25	38
Total No	0	22	16	1

* Findings for Alabama, Louisiana, and South Carolina are limited to the SNAP and TANF programs.

** Findings in North Carolina and North Dakota are limited to the SNAP program.

Public Assistance Databases and Automatic Voter Registration - Follow-Up Survey

	Alabama	Alaska	Arkansas	California	Connecticut	Florida	Georgia	Hawaii	Idaho	Illinois	Kansas	Kentucky	Louisiana	Maryland	Massachusetts	Minnesota	Nebraska	Nevada	New Jersey	New Mexico	North Carolina	North Dakota	Oklahoma	Pennsylvania	Utah	Virginia	Washington	West Virginia	Wyoming	Total Yes	Total No	Total Don't Know
With the exception of homeless individuals, does your agency currently <i>require</i> each client to provide a residential address (as opposed to a post office box, mailing address, etc.) and log it into its database?	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	18	11	0
IF NO, is there at least a field available to enter a residential address?	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	N	NA	NA	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA	Y	NA	NA	N	NA	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	Y	8	2	0	
Does your agency currently have the capacity to scan hard copies of client signatures and store them in its database?	N	N	Y ¹	Y ²	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y ⁵	N	N	N	N	N	Y ⁶	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	9	20	0	
Does your agency <i>require</i> each client to provide her formal legal name (e.g., the name that matches that on their Social Security card, birth, or marriage certificate) for storage in the agency's database?	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y ⁴	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	21	8	0	
Will your agency accept a nickname (e.g., "Ted" rather than "Edward," a middle name used as a first name) as the <i>primary</i> name stored in the agency's database?	Y	Y	N	DK	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	DK	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	11	16	2	
Does your agency use USPS software at any point to correct and standardize the client addresses stored in your database?	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	DK	N	Y ³	Y	N	DK	N	N	DK	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	11	14	4	

Y = Yes | N = No | DK = Don't Know | NA = Not Applicable

1. Document scanning is currently in the pilot stage.
2. Not all counties have document-scanning capability.
3. While Idaho does not currently use this software, it will be included in a forthcoming system upgrade.
4. Maryland reported requiring the formal legal name but noted that the requirement may not be uniformly followed.
5. The ability to scan all hard files into an electronic database is planned to be operational by November 2009.
6. Not all counties have document scanning capability.

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