

Voting Habits of Rhode Island's Young Adults

- Learn about Rhode Island's Voting and Elections Modernization Act.
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Voting and Elections Modernization Act

The *Voting and Elections Modernization Act* would implement online voter registration and in-person early voting in Rhode Island.

Online voter registration would allow Rhode Islanders to register to vote and update their voter registration completely online. The state would verify personal information in the online application by comparing it to existing federal, state, and municipality databases. The online system would also allow Rhode Island to compare voter information with other states, making it easier to keep voter rolls up to date.

In-person early voting would allow Rhode Islanders to vote during the 28 days leading up to a general election or primary and during the 21 days leading up to a special election. Every city or town would have at least one location for early voting where voters could pick up a ballot to cast at their local board of canvassers.

Sources: [Senate version \(PDF\)](#), [House version \(PDF\)](#)

Online Registration

Rhode Island is **one of twenty-two states** that do not offer online voter registration (1).

Online voter registration allows citizens to complete an application to register to vote online, rather than filling out a paper application (2).

Online registration has seen an increase in popularity over the past few years because it is more efficient, convenient, and cost-effective than traditional paper-based voter registration (3). In terms of cost-effectiveness, Arizona, the first state to implement online registration, found that it costs 83 cents to register

a voter on paper but only 3 cents to register a voter online (4). Online registration also makes it easier to keep voter rolls accurate and up to date because voter information can be automatically verified with other state agencies. These verification methods can also decrease voter fraud and the use of provisional ballots at the polls (5, 6, 7). Voters can quickly update their information using online voter registration, making it more likely the state's voter rolls will contain the most current information, especially about college students or other residents who move frequently (8). There is some evidence that online voter registration can boost voter turnout. In 2012, California residents who registered to vote online had a turnout rate that was 8% higher than the rate of residents who registered using a paper application (9).

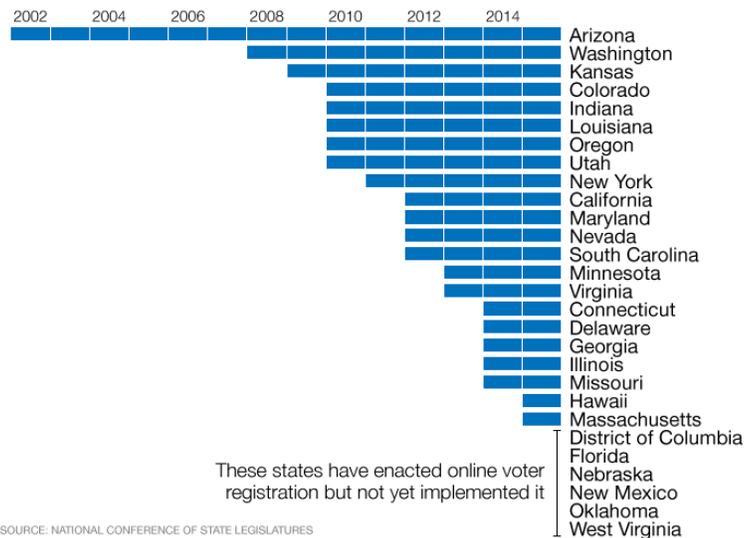
Online registration has had a measurable impact on young voters in many states:

- In Arizona, voter registration rates among 18-24 year olds increased from 28% to 53% during the 8 years after the state implemented online voter registration (10).
- As of 2008, in Washington state, 18-24 year olds made up almost one-third of residents who registered to vote online (11).
- When California first implemented online registration in 2012, 18-24 year olds accounted for 30% of online registrants in the state, boosting voter registration within that age bracket by 8% (12). Research shows that California voters between the ages of 18 and 34 were 2% more likely to turn out to vote if they registered online (13).
- As of 2013, Maryland youth aged 18-29 years old made up 42% of the state's online registrants (14).

There are a few concerns surrounding online voter registration, particularly when it comes to equity. Residents without access to a personal computer or the internet are less likely to take advantage of online registration. Online registration also excludes residents who do not have a valid in-state ID (such as a driver's license) because the program typically requires voters to already have a signature on file with the state. These barriers are likely to disproportionately affect low-income and disabled residents, who are already less represented at the polls. Therefore, online registration may not increase registration rates among these groups (15).

States with online voter registration

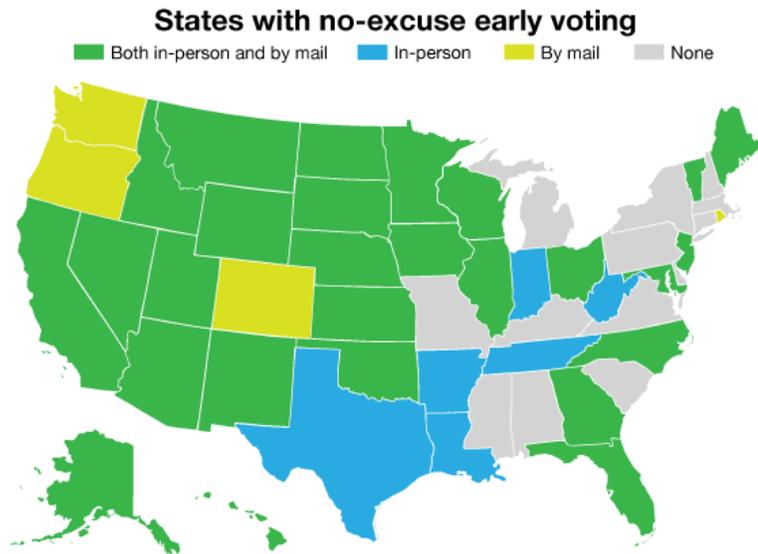
Listed by year of implementation



SOURCE: NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

Early Voting

Early voting allows a registered voter to cast their ballot before Election Day. Each state or county defines their own time frame for when voters can submit their ballots. Early voting can be done in-person or by mail. As shown in the map at right, a number of states allow in-person early voting, with some of them also permitting early voting by mail; this second option is known as "no-excuse" absentee voting to distinguish it from traditional mail-in absentee voting, which requires an excuse for why an elector will be unable to vote in person ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)).



Colorado, Oregon, and Washington have a "vote-by-mail" system in which all voting is done by mail instead of at polling places; because of this, all voters have access to early voting. Excluding these three states, there are 14 that do not offer in-person early voting, including Rhode Island. In 2011, Rhode Island passed a law amending absentee ballot regulations to allow no-excuse early voting by mail. "An elector who may not be able to vote at his or her polling place in his or her city or town on the day of the election," is eligible for a mail-in ballot, according to [the law](#). It is unclear how much awareness the public has of this rule change.

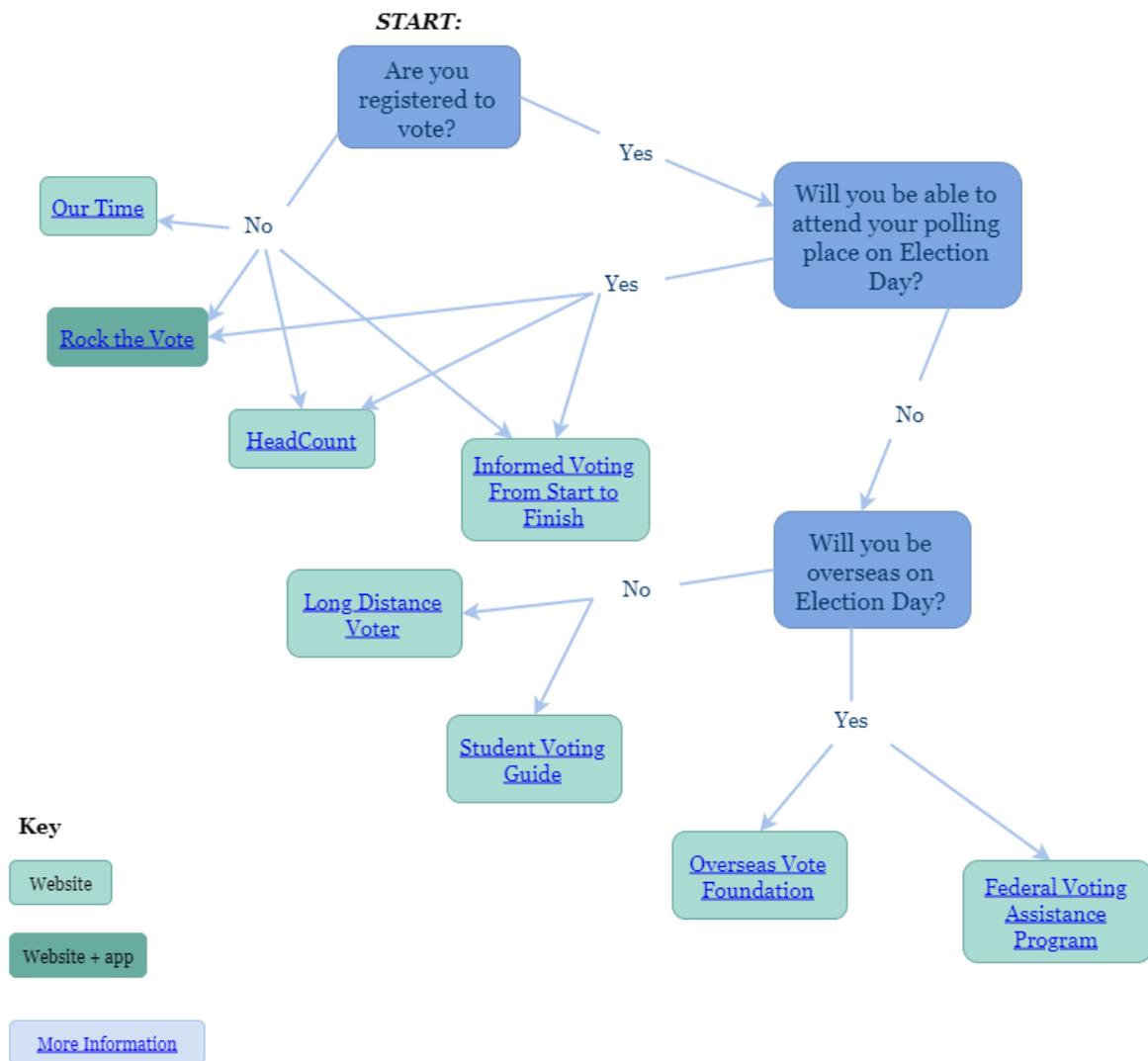
Studies have shown that early voting generally does not increase, and in some cases may even decrease, voter turnout ([4](#), [5](#), [6](#)). Some research indicates that residents who take advantage of early voting are the same people who would have voted on Election Day if early voting wasn't available ([7](#)). However, other studies show that when voters are able to register to vote and cast their ballot on the same day, the negative effects of early voting on turnout disappear ([8](#)).

Early voting has increased in popularity over the past 20 years. In the 2014 congressional election, almost one-third of voters across the United States reported voting early: either in person or by mail. This is three times the amount of people who used early voting methods in 1996; the first year the US Census Bureau collected data about early voting ([9](#)).

It is difficult to measure the effects of in-person early voting on youth voters because so few young adults are registered to vote ([10](#)). Of the young adults who are registered to vote, only about 80% cast ballots during presidential elections, with that number dropping below 60% during midterm years ([11](#)). However, one study has found that other methods that make voting more convenient - no-excuse absentee balloting, same-day registration, and vote-by-mail - all increased youth voter turnout ([12](#)). A national survey found that almost 35% of voters under the age of 30 who skipped voting in the 2010 midterm elections, said that they did not vote because they were "too busy" or had a conflicting work schedule ([13](#)). If this is true, early voting could provide a solution to the problem ([14](#)).

[Image source](#)

When, where, and how to vote



Where to learn more



Sources and download

Download a PDF of the quiz:

[English version](#)

Sources for quiz information:

Q1: [26th Amendment](#), [FairVote](#), [FairVote](#)

Q2: [US Census Bureau](#) (Table 4c)

Q3: RI Voter Information Database, [US Census Bureau](#)

Q4: [CIRCLE](#)

Q5: RI Voter Information Database

Q6: RI Voter Information Database, [US Census Bureau](#)

Q7: [CIRCLE](#)

Q8: [State of Rhode Island](#), [Paul Gronke](#), [US Census Bureau](#), [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), RI Voter Information Database

Q9: [Brennan Center for Justice](#), [Governing Magazine](#), [UC Davis](#)

Q10: [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), [State of Rhode Island](#)

Source for background image:

Modified version of a photo by [Kenneth C. Zirkel](#)