

# Online Voter Registration in Massachusetts

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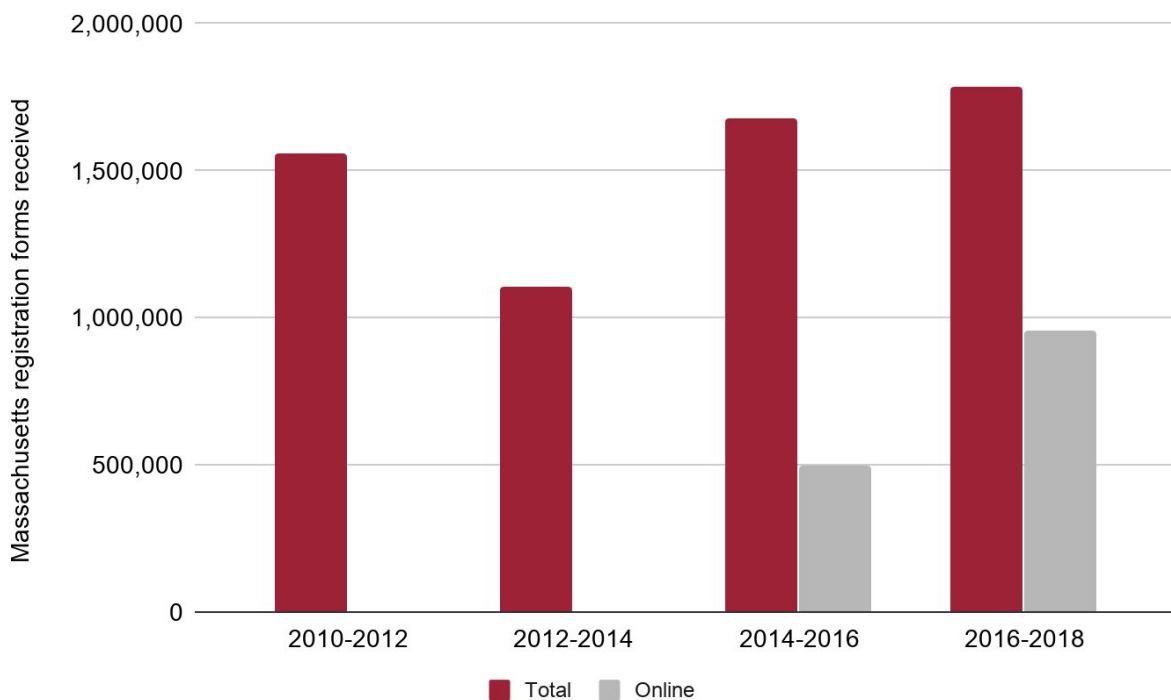
# Online Voter Registration in Massachusetts

## Bay Staters have rapidly adopted online voter registration

Signed into law in May of 2014 and first available in 2015, online voter registration (OVR) has now been in effect for four years.<sup>1</sup> In an age where so much of our life is lived online for speed, convenience and accuracy, it seemed only logical that we should be able to register to vote online. Since Massachusetts OVR is a reform that MASSPIRG worked for, we wanted to see how it has fared.

A review of voter registration data shows that, since its introduction, Bay Staters have adopted OVR in large numbers. **From 2016 to 2018, OVR was the most popular method for voter registration in Massachusetts, accounting for more than half of voter registration forms the state received.**

Figure 1. Online voter registration has seen rapid adoption in Massachusetts



The usage of OVR over these four years can be analyzed with the data gathered by the

<sup>1</sup> The National Conference of State Legislators, "Online Voter Registration " Available from: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx>

U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). The EAC collects data from all 50 states, and breaks down voter registration by the method used (in person, written, electronic, etc.). The data is gathered in two-year periods, from one federal election to the next.<sup>2</sup>

Massachusetts registration data reveals that Massachusetts voters have rapidly adopted OVR. (See Table A-1.) There were nearly 500,000 forms filed online in the first election cycle it was introduced, 2014-2016, and that number almost doubled to 957,662 in the most recent election cycle, 2016-2018. This means that nearly a third of all registration forms from 2014-2016, and more than half of registration forms from 2016-2018, were submitted online.

By making the process of voter registration faster and more convenient, OVR has helped modernize Massachusetts elections, but there is still room for improvement. Important election reforms are currently before our legislators in the State House, including a bill that would allow residents to register to vote up until, and on, election day.<sup>3</sup> Such proposals could build off of the improvements that OVR has made to our democracy.

## Conclusion

Online voter registration is good for Massachusetts' democracy. It makes registering to vote easier and more convenient, and has been rapidly adopted by Massachusetts voters since its launch in 2015.

Still, there is room for improvement in our elections. Every year, there are about half a million eligible voters who are not enrolled to vote.<sup>4</sup> To help more Massachusetts residents register to vote, state policymakers should increase public education and outreach for OVR, and should implement new policies to modernize Massachusetts elections, including election day registration.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, policymakers should seek solutions to increase voter turnout. In some recent elections, 90 percent of those registered to vote did not turn out.<sup>6</sup> Structural improvements, like no-excuse absentee voting, expanded early voting, and election day registration, must continue to be made to ensure our democracy accessible to all.

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<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Elections Assistance Committee, "Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) Comprehensive Report," available from: <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/studies-and-reports/>

<sup>3</sup> The Office of Senator Cynthia S. Creem, Bill S.396, available from: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/S396>

<sup>4</sup> See Table 1.

<sup>5</sup> NonprofitVOTE, "American Goes to the Polls," page 11, Available from: <https://www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2017/03/america-goes-polls-2016.pdf/>

<sup>6</sup> The Office of the Secretary of Massachusetts, "Voter Turnout Statistics," available from: <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/elevoterturnoutstats/voterturnoutstats.htm>

## Appendix

Table A-1. Massachusetts registration data, 2010-2018<sup>7</sup>

	2010-2012	2012-2014	2014-2016	2016-2018
<b>Total eligible voters</b>	4,809,675	4,896,296	4,948,028	5,042,403
<b>Total registered voters</b>	4,342,841	4,301,118	4,534,974	4,574,967
<b>Percentage of eligible voters registered</b>	90.2%	87.6%	91.7%	90.7%
<b>Registration forms received</b>	1,557,538	1,103,500	1,678,290	1,784,724
<b>Registration forms received (Online)</b>	No OVR	No OVR	499,618	957,662

<sup>7</sup> Total eligible voters: United States Elections Project, "Voter Turnout," available from: <http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/voter-turnout-data>; excepting 2012 registered voter data, registered voters and registration forms received: U.S. Elections Assistance Committee, "Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) Datasets, Codebooks, and Survey Instruments," available from: <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys/>; 2012 registered voter data is from the state of Massachusetts, which found that 2012 registered voter data published by EAC is in error: Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Voter Turnout Statistics*, available from <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/elevoterturnoutstats/voterturnoutstats.htm>.

**Table A-2. Massachusetts Compared to Other States in 2016-2018<sup>8</sup>**

	MA	CA	CO	PA	MD
Total registered voters	4,574,967	25,167,218	3,953,613	8607748	3,954,027
Registration forms received	1,784,724	8,572,410	1,434,349	2,860,609	1,675,979
Registration forms received online	957,662	3,530,619	351,629	356,421	181,949
Percentage of voters who register online	53.66%	41.19%	24.51%	12.46%	10.86%
New voters registered	327,104	2,481,206	378,688	445,277	339,607
New voters registered online	108,119	1,156,687	51,072	127,001	36,035
Percentage of new voters who registered online	33.1%	46.6%	13.49%	28.52%	10.61%

Table A-2 provides a look at five of the 37 states with OVR as of October 2018, including Massachusetts.<sup>9</sup> States were selected to represent a breadth of location and population size.

With thanks to Gideon Weissman, Frontier Group for expert review

<sup>8</sup> Based on 2016-2018 data and survey reports downloaded from the U.S. Elections Assistance Committee. In cases where discrepancies between data and reports, numbers were reported from the survey report. Data: U.S. Elections Assistance Committee, *2018 EAVS Dataset*, available from: <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys/>; survey report: U.S. Elections Assistance Committee, *2018 Election Administration and Voting Survey Report*, June 2019, available from [https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/2018\\_EAVS\\_Report.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/2018_EAVS_Report.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> National Conference of State Legislators, "Online Voter Registration," available from: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx>