



Estimated Cost of Voter Registration in Hawaii

Introduction

More states and local jurisdictions are using technology to help voters register or update their voter information without using paper forms. More than two-thirds of states have implemented online voter registration (OVR), and 17 states and the District of Columbia have implemented or authorized the implementation of automatic or automated voter registration (AVR), where eligible citizens are automatically added to voter rolls based on motor vehicle or other government data unless they decline and that information is electronically transmitted to elections officials.¹

Hawaii, which implemented OVR in 2015 and phased in same day registration starting in 2016, does not yet allow automatic voter registration.

Based on numbers from states that have implemented it so far, AVR has improved the integrity and accuracy of the voter rolls. However, also important are the cost-savings if Hawaii moves away from what is still a mostly paper-based voter registration system.

Estimated Cost of Voter Registration in Hawaii

Processing paper voter registration applications is labor intensive. This includes data entry, following up with applicants on missing information or errors on forms, and paying overtime and additional temporary staff to help process applications in a timely fashion before Election Day. Previous research shows that these labor costs are significant.² In Hawaii we estimate the labor costs of processing paper forms during the 2016 election cycle amounted to nearly \$575,000.

Estimated Labor Cost Paper-Based Registration in Hawaii, 2016 Election Cycle

County Name	Total Registered	Paper-based forms processed	Estimated Average Labor Cost per Form	Estimated Total Labor Cost
Honolulu	498,590	88,653	\$3.45	\$ 305,852.85
Hawaii	114,649	24,581	\$5.94	\$ 146,011.14
Maui	93,912	16,904	\$5.94	\$ 100,409.76
Kauai	44,332	4,119	\$5.33	\$ 21,954.27
Total	751,483	134,257		\$574,228.02

Notes: Average labor cost estimates are the sum of three component estimates from previous research by Doug Chapin and David Keunen: the average cost of full-time staff processing applications, the average cost of following up with applicants about missing or erroneous information, and the average cost of temporary staff processing applications. This does not include

¹ See the National Conference of State Legislatures “Online Voter Registration,” <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx>, and “Automatic Voter Registration,” <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/automatic-voter-registration.aspx>.

² See Chapin, Doug, and Keunen, David. “The Cost (Savings) of Reform: An Analysis of Local Registration-Related Costs and Potential Savings Through Automatic Voter Registration,” March 2017, https://www.vote.org/wp-content/uploads/registration-related-costs_030817.pdf.



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the 55,904 applications the state reported came through its online voter registration system, representing 25 percent of all applications. This does include the 72,992 forms categorized as “Other” which we assume to be paper-based for the purposes of this analysis. It does not include 33,090 applications that were not categorized by the state and excluded from this analysis. See the methodology section for more detail.

Additionally, it should be noted what costs this estimate *does not include*: the printing of voter registration forms, mailings related to duplicate registration entries, and the postage of forwarding registration forms to the proper recipient. It also does not include more than 33,000 applications submitted during the 2016 election cycle that the state did not categorize when reporting the data. This means that the costs demonstrated here are likely at the low end of what Hawaii is spending on processing voter registration.

Estimating the costs of voter registration and potential savings created by moving away from paper-based registration is challenging due to many factors including the wide variation in accounting and data collection across jurisdictions.³ Further research is needed. However, this data and previous research demonstrates how shifting away from paper-based registration could eliminate or at the very least greatly reduce registration-related costs at the state and local level.

While there are short-term costs to AVR implementation, they are minimal in comparison to the long-term savings which could well surpass this initial outlay. AVR allows for the electronic transfer of voter registration information from state agencies such as motor vehicle offices to election agencies. This would eliminate a great deal of data entry, printing, and mailing costs. And as can be seen from the estimated \$575,000 spent on processing paper registration forms Hawaii in the 2016 election cycle, the potential for savings is significant.

Methodology

The methodology and labor cost estimates from this report are taken directly from, “The Cost (Savings) of Reform: An Analysis of Local Registration-Related Costs and Potential Savings Through Automatic Voter Registration,” by Doug Chapin and David Kuennen. The report by Chapin and Kuennen surveyed election officials in local jurisdictions about the labor (as well as other) costs of processing voter registration applications. The pool of jurisdictions surveyed was created using Election Assistance Commission data from the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) focusing on the three largest, median, and smallest number of registered voters in each state.⁴

For this report, the average labor costs per registration form processed for each sized jurisdiction were then applied to the largest, median, and smallest jurisdictions in Hawaii. In Hawaii there are five counties and one of these counties – Kalawao County – reports its data in the EAVS with Maui County’s data which means for the purposes of this report data from four counties was analyzed. Jurisdictions in Hawaii were not surveyed for this report. The largest jurisdiction is Honolulu County, the two median jurisdictions are Hawaii and Maui counties, and the small jurisdiction is Kauai County.

³ Several points on the limitations of this data. It is not based on cost data from Hawaii election officials. It is based on survey responses from a previous report on voter registration costs. In that report 66 jurisdictions of varying sizes from across the country responded to questions related to voter registration costs, and those estimates were applied to the above Hawaii jurisdictions. For more detail see the methodology section.

⁴ This did not include North Dakota because the state does not have voter registration.



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Total registrations and the number of applications processed data is from section A of the 2016 EAVS related to voter registration including:

- Question A1, total number of persons registered.
- Question A5a, the total number of registration forms jurisdiction received from all sources during the 2016 election cycle.
- Questions A6a – A6o, breaking down the forms received by the source of those forms.

The EAVS provides ten categories of sources of forms: Mail/fax/email; In person at the election/registrars' office; Internet (Online voter registration); Motor vehicle agencies; Public assistance agencies; Disability agencies; Armed forces recruitment offices; Other state agencies; Registration drives; and Other. In 2016 Hawaii reported data for Internet (Online voter registration), Motor vehicle agencies, Public assistance agencies, Disability agencies; Armed forces recruitment offices, Other, and as well as more than 33,000 forms that were not categorized. For the purposes of this report we categorized all of the above except Internet and not categorized as paper-based forms. We made the assumption that those categorized as "other" are paper-based forms.⁵

⁵ See information about the 2016 EAVS dataset, codebook, and survey instrument here: <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/2016-election-administration-voting-survey/>.