



Federal Agency Voter Registration Estimates of Annual Impact

On March 7, 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 14019 Promoting Access to Voting (Voting Access EO), a groundbreaking EO that should to make registration and voting more accessible for millions of Americans, including many communities historically excluded from the political process. In it, President Biden directed federal agencies to “consider ways to expand citizens’ opportunities to register to vote and to obtain information about, and participate in, the electoral process.”¹

The potential impact of effective implementation of the EO is significant. In this fact sheet, we estimate the number of new or updated voter registrations that could be generated each year, *if* several key federal agencies make the most of the directive in this EO and create high-quality voter registration opportunities for the eligible people they serve.

We find that effective implementation of the Voting Access EO could result in approximately **3.5 million new or updated voter registrations per year**. These findings argue for robust implementation of the Voting Access EO by these key agencies (and others). This can be achieved if agencies that have already made strong public commitments related to voter registration and voting access follow through on their commitments, and those who have not yet committed to high-impact activities make and swiftly follow through on such pledges.

Federal Agency Voter Registration Estimates

Federal agency*	Type of transactions and likely rate of return on voter registration offering	Potential yearly number of voter registrations generated
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)	In-person – 75%	602,351
Department of Education (ED)	Passive remote – 3%	424,476
Department of Interior (DOI)	In-person – 15%	160
Indian Health Service (IHS)	In-person – 15%	270,000
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	In-person – 10% and remote – 5%	1,209,950
Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)	In-person – 10%	626,766
Internal Revenue Service Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA)	In-person – 10%	355,454
Total		3,489,157

¹ The White House, *Executive Order 14019 Promoting Access to Voting*, March 7, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/03/07/executive-order-on-promoting-access-to-voting/>.

* Recommendations from advocates for improving implementation of the Voting Access EO include expanding voter registration opportunities by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and the United States Marshals Service (USMS). The impact of providing voter registration at those agencies is not included here because reliable data about the numbers of potentially impacted individuals is not available. Data limitations notwithstanding, ensuring access to registration and voting among eligible people in federal custody is essential.

General Methodology

To estimate the potential impact of strong implementation of the Voting Access EO, we start with observations of registration rates when state government agencies, such as state public assistance agencies, provide voter registration opportunities to their clients during transactions, as required by the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). For our purposes, “registration rates” means completed voter registration applications and updates submitted by clients during transactions.

These data show that when state government agencies provide NVRA voter registration opportunities during in-person transactions, the registration rate is typically up to 10 percent. When state government agencies provide NVRA voter registration opportunities during remote transactions, the registration rate is typically up to 5 percent. “Remote transaction” means an interaction that mostly occurs online, with no direct human interaction. Unless otherwise noted below, we assume 10 percent for in-person transactions and 5 percent for remote transactions.

We apply these typical registration rates to federal agencies and programs of interest that have interactions with their clients similar to those at state agencies. Using publicly-available data on annual transactions among these federal agencies and programs, we apply these anticipated registration rates to determine how many possible new or updated voter registrations may result from NVRA-like voter registration opportunities.

The NVRA Model: “NVRA-like voter registration opportunities” means those modeled after the NVRA. The NVRA model is highly effective because it includes distributing actual voter registration applications directly to clients and providing clients with assistance in completing those applications, and it requires that agency officials collect completed voter registration applications from clients and deliver them to state election officials, who review the applications for eligibility and complete the registration process.

Eligibility: The programs required by the NVRA to offer voter registration to public assistance clients provide benefits to some individuals who are not eligible to vote because they are not 18 or are not U.S. citizens. The voter registration rates from state agencies used here come from observations of total participations numbers, so they already account for the fact that not all the participants in the program can actually register to vote.

Types of Registration: These registration rates include both new voter registrations and updates because it is difficult to distinguish between the two in the data. Updates to voter registration are just as important as new registrations: In many states, an individual registered to vote at an out-of-date address cannot vote, and in most states, having an updated voter registration makes it much easier to vote by mail.

Agency Specifics

- *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)*: USCIS is unique because the naturalization ceremonies are in-person, individuals at the ceremonies are over 18, and, having been newly naturalized, are not currently registered to vote. Further, these individuals are often very interested in registration and voting, given their new citizenship status. Nonpartisan volunteer groups that currently provide voter registration opportunities at some ceremonies typically have voter registration rates of 70 and 80 percent. Here we assume a 75 percent registration rate.
- *Dept. of Education (ED)*: This estimate is for voter registration rates based on the provision of voter registration information within the report provided to all individuals after they submit a federal student aid application (FAFSA), called the Student Aid Report. In this case, the NVRA model is not applicable, because voter registration is not part of the actual application and no assistance with the voter registration process is provided. Without these extra steps, this registration opportunity is not likely to be as effective. Here we assume a 3 percent registration rate.
- *Dept. of Interior (DOI) and Indian Health Service (IHS)*: DOI and IHS are also somewhat unique, in that the Native American population presently experiences some of the lowest registration rates of any community. Given the significant need, the number of Tribal Colleges and Universities students and IHS clients who choose to register to vote is likely to be higher than the rates during other public assistance transactions. Here we assume a 15 percent registration rate.
- *Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS)*: Applications for health insurance via Healthcare.gov come through both remote and in-person transactions. Some are completely remote transactions, but robust assistance is provided to many clients through a number of sources, including in-person transactions with navigators and telephone calls with customer service representatives. When assisters are trained to provide voter registration assistance, registration rates significantly increase. Here we assume that this training for robust assistance would be provided and reflect a higher voter registration rate (10 percent) for the approximately 60 percent of Healthcare.gov applications that occur with some assistance, and a 5 percent registration rate for the remaining transactions. Note that this estimate is based on the number of applications submitted through Healthcare.gov, not the total number of beneficiaries.
- *Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA)*: We assume the standard 10 percent registration rate.
- *Internal Revenue Service Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA)*: We assume that clients required to file tax returns are almost always 18 years or older, and therefore of legal voting age.

Data Sources for the Program Participation

Federal Agency	Data Source
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)	Office of Immigration Statistics, Department of State, Department of Justice, and U.S. Census Bureau, e.g., https://www.dhs.gov/profiles-naturalized-citizens-2021-country . Data is for 2021
Department of Education (ED)	Department of Education, https://studentaid.gov/data-center/student/application-volume/fafsa-school-state . Data is for the 2020-2021 application cycle.
Department of Interior (DOI)	Haskell Indian Nations University, https://www.haskell.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Fall-2021-Enrollment-Summary.pdf . Data is from fall 2021.
Indian Health Service (IHS)	The Indian Health Service, https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/factsheets/ihsprofile/ ; National Congress of American Indians, https://www.ncai.org/about-tribes/demographics . Data is for the 2020 fiscal year.
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, https://www.cms.gov/research-statistics-data-systems/marketplace-products/2022-marketplace-open-enrollment-period-public-use-files . Data is for the 2022 fiscal year.
Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)	Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, Expenditure Tables, https://www.va.gov/vetdata/expenditures.asp . Data is for the 2021 fiscal year and represents the number of unique patients served in each state for the year.
Internal Revenue Service Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA)	New America, <i>Improving Public Programs for Low-Income Tax Filers</i> , https://www.newamerica.org/new-practice-lab/reports/improving-public-assistance-for-low-income-tax-filers/iii-irs-data-on-vita-programs/ . Data is from the 2019 fiscal year (2020 numbers were impacted by COVID-19 and did not reflect the typical yearly use).