

I. In Focus This Week

Online government services may benefit voters and simplify elections

Using multiple platforms may help expand online usage

By [Matthew Morse](#)

In every facet of their lives, Americans are increasingly relying on the Internet as a way to interact with their government and engage in civic life. Although election services have in some cases lagged behind others due to security and privacy concerns, technology has caught up in some ways and allowed some election services to join the suite of online government resources.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project recently published [a report entitled "Government Online"](#) detailing the use of online government services and information by Americans. The report was based on a survey of Americans that took place in December 2009 and analyzed cross-sections including demographic data like gender, race, and income as well as online activity including type of activity, amount of use, and the technology used.

The [Pew Internet & American Life Project](#) is part of the Pew Research Center, an independent subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, which does not take a position on policy issues.

Among the findings of the report were that 48 percent of Internet users have looked for information about a public policy, while 46 percent have searched to find what services a government agency provides.

Within the field of elections, online resources are especially important given the highly variable, personalized, and time sensitive nature of elections. For example, machine malfunctions at a single polling place on Election Day may warrant a sudden, last minute change of location for the precinct. Such situations would be greatly eased by the use of modern information technology, election officials and the voters they serve.

Motivating much of this research is an [Executive Order](#) from President Barack Obama that has been driving an expansion of online government services at the federal level. Included in that Order were three primary goals directed towards the newly appointed Chief Federal Technology Officer: that government and its online services should be transparent, participatory, and collaborative.

Providing Services that Appeal to All Americans

In offering election services, however the report suggests governments must ensure that they offer a wide array of platforms in order to appeal to the broadest possible base. Indeed, "Government Online" found that although whites, blacks, and Latinos are equally likely to access online government information in general, that the platform and technologies used vary by race, income, and other measures.

For example, African Americans and Latinos are more likely to find social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter helpful and informative when viewing government information (31-33 percent for African Americans and Latinos, compared to 17 percent for whites). Additionally, high-income Americans are far more likely to watch a video on a government website compared to other groups (37 percent of those making more than \$50,000 have watched a government website video, compared to 23 percent for those making less than \$50,000).

These figures suggest that agencies and organizations offering election information and services online could appeal to broader demographic groups by supporting multiple platforms for online engagement. For example, the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), the agency tasked with assisting military and

overseas voters, uses both [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) advertise their voter services, including a step-by-step guide on their official website that details the registration and balloting process. FVAP has also [begun the process](#) of building an online voting wizard to help voters complete many steps in the process online.

Outside of the government, organizations are taking advantage of online, open format data to aid voters using official data from the states. For example, the Pew Center on the States' Voting Information Project seeks to develop applications for social media sites like Facebook that will allow voters to access information about their polling place, who is on the ballot, and how to vote absentee without ever leaving the Facebook network. Such tools could then be shared among friends and groups within the website. Combined with similar tools under design for [mobile platforms like smartphones](#), the goal is that voters from different demographic backgrounds could all find information in a way most accessible to them.

Finally, the "Government Online" report also suggests these types of services are likely to appeal to broad existing base of users and become a growth market. According to the survey, 69 percent of online government users utilize electronic government resources for multiple activities, rather than simply completing one task. As the number of online election platforms increases, it is reasonable to predict that these users would quickly adopt the Internet as a way to obtain important voting information about the elections process.

II. Election Reform News This Week

- **Update on the News:** As *electionlineWeekly* was going to press last week with a story about the [difficulties being faced by five counties in California](#) force to hold a special election, two residents filed a lawsuit in an effort to stop the special election. This week, a judge has issued a [temporary restraining order](#) against the special election to fill former Sen. Abel Maldonado's Senate seat and has set a hearing for next week before a special three-judge panel in federal court. U.S. District Judge Jeremy Fogel also ordered elections officials in Monterey County, who are required to get federal clearance before proceeding with the election, to suspend the processing of ballots. Whether Fogel's order will affect the already tight elections schedule remained unclear. Democrats have called for postponing the race and want to consolidate it with the election in November to increase voter participation and save money. They've accused Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger of scheduling the election in June so his party can benefit from low turnout. Monterey County's registrar of voters was unsure Wednesday night if the court order would prevent her from being ready by June 22. "It's going to be difficult," Linda Tulett told the *San Jose Mercury News*. Her plan was to begin mailing ballots for the special election to military and overseas voters on Tuesday, something she can't do now until at least next Thursday, the date of the court hearing. "Every day counts now," she said.
- The Tennessee House and Senate both approved legislation this week that requires [proof-of-citizenship to register to vote](#). While the current registration form requires a resident to check a box stating that they are a citizen, they are not required to show proof of said citizenship. The House approved the legislation Wednesday on a 92-1 vote but will have to reconsider the bill after the Senate adopted several amendments that were not in the measure that passed the House. Senators approved the legislation on a 20-12 vote after nearly two hours of debate. Supporters said the bill helps keep the integrity of the state's election process, but opponents argued it could lead to profiling and be seen by minorities and legal immigrants as a way to keep them from the polls. Sen. Doug Jackson told *The Tennessean* [some of the language in the proposal is vague](#), particularly the part that reads, "the administrator of elections may reject any application for registration that is not accompanied by satisfactory evidence of United States citizenship," which includes showing a driver's license or birth certificate. "My concerns is in the mechanics of this. This is written in such a way that ... registrars are going to be applying different standards in different ways."
- West Virginia held its primary this week and [few problems](#) were reported throughout the Mountain State. State elections manager Dave Nichols told the *Charleston Gazette* that only four precincts

failed to open by 6:30 a.m., but all 1,889 were open by midmorning. Nichols says early problems ranged from voters unable to find races on a ballot to voting machine paper jams. Early rain kept people away, but afternoon sunshine increased turnout. Several counties piloted an [Internet voting program](#) for military and overseas voters to varying degrees of success. Despite the relative smoothness of the race statewide, allegations of vote-buying continued to swirl in [Lincoln County](#).

- In other special election news, the state of Massachusetts has [agreed to reimburse localities \\$6.3 million for the special election](#) to replace the late Sen. Edward Kennedy. State Auditor Joe DeNucci determined the election was a state mandate it had to pay for under provisions of Proposition 21/2. The tax-levy law established a Division of Local Mandates in the state auditor's office to check on possible unfunded state mandates, according to the state auditor's website. Secretary of State William Galvin announced this week that he would be distributing the money after it was approved in late April in a supplemental budget to cover the costs of the election statewide.

III. Research and Report Summaries

electionline provides brief summaries of recent research and reports in the field of election administration. Please e-mail links to research to sgreene@pewtrusts.org.

[A Voter's Guide to Federal Elections](#) – U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), May 7, 2010: The EAC has [issued](#) federal election voter guides translated into Cherokee, Dakota, Navajo and Yup'ik, the most commonly spoken Native American and Alaska Native languages. The guides are now provided in 11 languages.

[Legislative Action Bulletin](#) – National Conference of State Legislatures, *The Canvass*, May 6, 2010: This most recent summary of elections-related state legislation summarizes a new Oklahoma election fraud law and updates state action on the Military and Overseas Voters Empowerment Act.

IV. Opinion

Kentucky: [Secretary of state](#)
Michigan: [Election dates](#)
North Carolina: [Election changes](#)
Ohio: [Poll workers, II](#)
South Carolina: [Absentee voting](#)
West Virginia: [Vote fraud](#)
Wisconsin: [Voter ID](#)

***some sites require registration*

V. Available Grants

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) announces the availability of up to approximately \$500,000 in funds for a two-year grant focused on research to [improve voting technology and processes for recently injured military personnel](#). Funds will support research to better understand the needs of injured military personnel in major hospital, recovery, and rehabilitation facilities related to election processes, including: 1) documentation of current practices associated with voting activities at these facilities; 2) identification of barriers that may prevent this population from voting privately and independently; and 3) reviews and assessments of new and innovative technologies for assisting military personnel's ability to participate in the electoral process.

VI. Job Opportunities

All job listings must be received by 12 p.m. Eastern on Wednesday for publication in our Thursday newsletter. Job listings are free but may be edited for length. Whenever possible, include Internet information. Please email job postings to mmoretti@electionline.org

Election Technical Consultant, Scytl USA, Washington D.C. area - Scytl USA, subsidiary of Scytl's Secure Electronic Voting, is looking for a technical consultant based in the Washington D.C. area. Under the coordination of a team leader, he/she will be mainly working on pre-sales and project management tasks related to the electoral industry. The candidate must have strong technical background (BSc at least) on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) with more than 5 years of experience in this area, ideally related to elections. Knowledge on IT security and cryptography is a plus. Other languages such as Spanish are a plus. He/she must be able to travel mainly within the US, but also worldwide (including training). We offer a salaried position in a fast-growing company which leads the secure Internet voting market in the public sector. Compensation for this position is based on experience. Interested applicants should respond to scytluca@scytl.com with a cover letter and resume.