**GAO**

# U.S. Government Accountability Office Work on Election Administration Issues

**Presentation before the**

**National Association of State Election Directors**
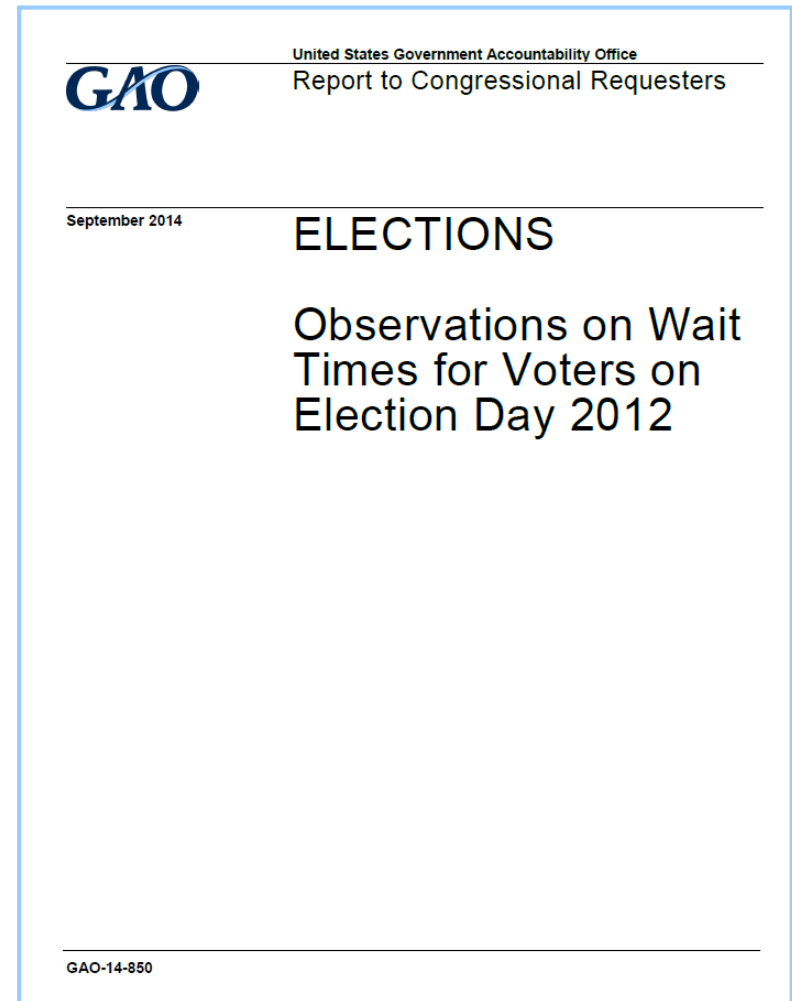
**Saturday, July 16, 2016**

**Nashville, TN**

# Objectives for this Session

- GAO's elections portfolio

- Upcoming GAO elections work

- GAO-16-630: *Elections: Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections*

- GAO contacts

# Background
# U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)

- GAO has issued numerous reports on topics related to election administration, including

  - HAVA implementation

  - Polling place accessibility

  - Bilingual voting assistance

  - Voter registration

  - Weekend voting

  - Voter wait times

- To find our election reports, visit our website: www.gao.gov.

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United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

September 2014

ELECTIONS

Observations on Wait Times for Voters on Election Day 2012
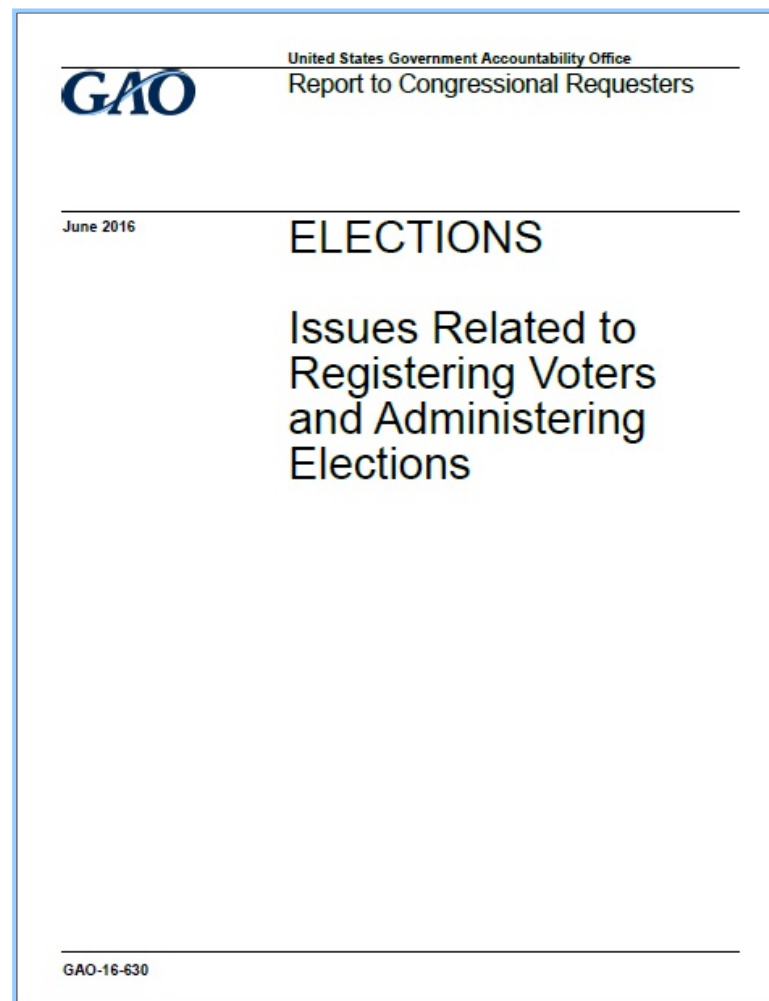
GAO-14-850

# Upcoming Work: Accessibility of Polling Locations and Voting Technology Issues

- Senators Ayotte, Blunt, Casey, and Schumer asked GAO to review the accessibility of polling places on Election Day 2016 and during early voting and state actions to facilitate voting for people with disabilities.

- The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform asked GAO to review the range of voting systems currently in use and associated benefits and challenges, factors affecting decisions to replace technology, and the impact of federal and state standards on development of new voting systems, among other issues.

# Recent Report: *Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections*

- In June 2016, GAO released a report reviewing issues related to voter registration and election administration policies.

- The report, GAO-16-630, is accessible at www.gao.gov.



United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

GAO

June 2016

ELECTIONS

Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections

GAO-16-630

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# *Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections*

- The report addressed:
  - The effect of selected policies on voter turnout
  - What is known about the costs of elections
  - The reported benefits and challenges of efforts to collect and share voter registration information electronically
- Methodology:
  - Reviewed and analyzed relevant literature from 2002 through 2015.
  - Selected 5 states and 2 local jurisdictions in each state to obtain perspectives of election administrators regarding policies, practices, and efforts within the scope of our review.

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## Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections

- Research findings on turnout are only one of many considerations for election officials as they decide whether or not to implement selected policies.

- GAO reviewed research to identify 11 election administration policies that had each been studied multiple times in connection with voter turnout and found varying effects, for example:

  - The majority of studies on same day registration and all vote-by-mail found that these policies increased turnout.

  - Most studies of early in-person voting reported no evidence of an effect on turnout or found decreases in turnout, while the remaining studies reported mixed evidence.
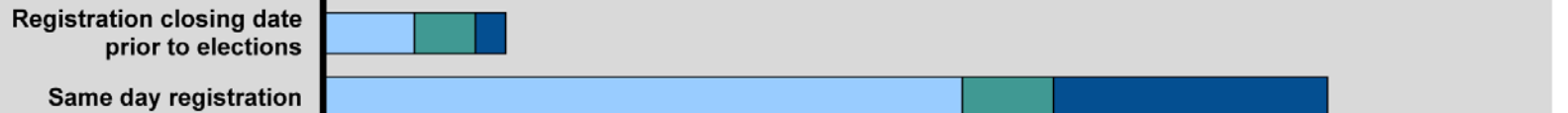
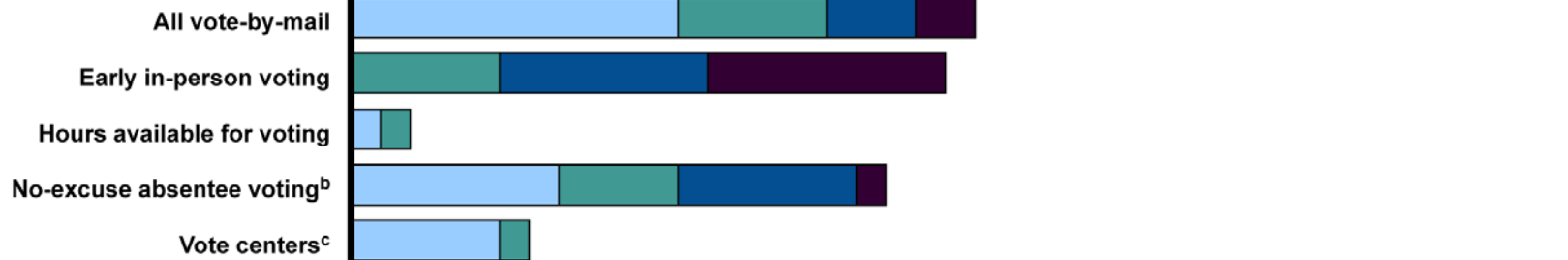# Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections



Source: GAO analysis of studies; GAO (graphics). | GAO-16-630

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## Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections

- States and local election jurisdictions incur a variety of costs to administer elections, and the types and magnitude of costs can vary by state and jurisdiction. Examples include:
  - Differing state requirements for communicating with voters and varying outreach methods across jurisdictions.
  - Use of paper registration forms vs. online registration.
  - Polling place costs vs. costs for printing and mailing ballots.

- Quantifying the total costs for all election activities is difficult.
  - Multiple parties incur costs associated with elections and may track costs differently, or may not track costs specific to elections.
  - Voters' costs vary based on factors such as method of voting, or time required to travel to polling places, among other things.

# *Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections*

- Methods of collecting and sharing voter registration information electronically include:
  - Online voter registration
  - DMV data sharing
  - Interstate data sharing, including data exchanges such as the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC)
- The investments include:
  - Upfront implementation costs
  - Ongoing maintenance
- The benefits of such efforts include efficiencies such as:
  - Improved accuracy
  - Cost savings

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# *Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections*

<u>Online Voter Registration</u>

- 31 states and Washington, D.C., offer online registration.

- Investments and challenges
  - Costs for setting up the technological infrastructure (generally modest)

- Efficiencies and other benefits
  - Improved registration accuracy
  - Administrative efficiencies, such as reducing manual entry
  - Cost savings, such as reduced overtime and fewer mailed applications
  - Convenience for voters

# Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections

DMV Data Sharing

- Investments and challenges
  - Up-front costs associated with technology
  - Challenges in coordinating DMV and elections databases
  - May increase registration rates and workload for processing registrations
- Efficiencies and other benefits
  - Improved registration accuracy
  - Administrative efficiencies, such as eliminating physical transport of applications
  - Cost savings in mailing costs and staff time
  - Convenience for voters

# *Issues Related to Registering Voters and Administering Elections*

Interstate Data Sharing - ERIC

- Partnership of 19 states and Washington, D.C. (as of June 2016)
- Matches data from multiple sources (registration lists, DMV records, Postal Service change of address data, death records)
- Investments and challenges
  - Membership fees
  - Time and resources to process matched data
  - Costs for required mailings
- Efficiencies and other benefits
  - Improved registration accuracy
  - Cost savings, such as fewer ballots mailed to wrong addresses

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