

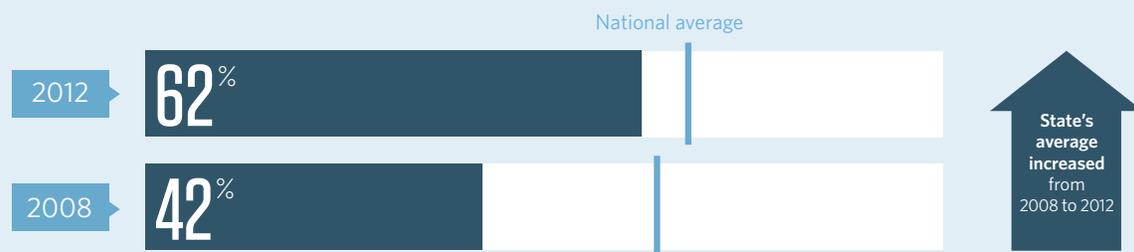


District of Columbia

Elections Performance Index

This profile reports important trends for the District of Columbia that emerged from the 2012 update to The Pew Charitable Trusts' Elections Performance Index, or EPI. The EPI analyzes 17 key indicators of election administration and scores each state's performance by indicator and overall. For more information and to view the full interactive index, visit www.pewstates.org/epi.

Overall EPI Average*



Key indicators	2008	2012
Data completeness	78%	100%
Provisional ballots cast out of all ballots	6.5%	13.1%
Provisional ballots rejected out of all ballots cast	1.8%	1.1%
Residual vote rate	0.4%	0.2%
Voting wait time	No data	34 minutes

*The overall EPI average is a simple average of all 17 indicators.

Beyond the numbers

The District of Columbia, while still among the lower-performing jurisdictions overall in 2012, saw its EPI average rise 20 percentage points, more than any of the 50 states. This was due to improvement on several indicators—the residual vote rate and the percentage of nonvoting because of disability and illness—and to substantive policy changes.

The district's residual vote rate—the discrepancy between the number of ballots cast and the number of votes counted for an office—which was already low in 2008 at 0.4 percent, decreased even further, to less than 0.2 percent in 2012, the lowest in the nation.

The district also submitted 100 percent of the data considered in the index to the federal Election Assistance Commission, a significant increase from 2008.

Additionally, the provisional ballot rejection rate, although still one of the highest, decreased more than any state's, improving from second-highest in the nation in 2008—behind only Arizona—to fifth-highest in 2012.

On the other hand, the district had the largest increase in unreturned mail ballots, jumping from less than 4 percent in 2008 to more than 28 percent in 2012, the second-highest in that year behind California.

The district's election policy changes between 2008 and 2012 included allowing permanent absentee (mail) voting. With this change, the number of unreturned mail ballots increased substantially, to a rate similar to those in states that allow permanent absentee voting. In contrast, the mail ballot rejection rate dropped from the nation's highest—1 percent of all ballots cast in 2008—to about 0.1 percent in 2012.

Room for improvement

Some of the areas in which the District of Columbia did not perform well in 2012, including issuing a large number of provisional ballots and long wait times at the polls, stem from challenges with the voter registration system.

Although the district's provisional ballot rejection rate declined in 2012, the rate of provisional ballots out of all ballots cast more than doubled, to 13.1 percent, the highest in the nation. In 2012, the district allowed same-day registration for the first time in a presidential election, but those voters were given provisional ballots, which were counted after the voters' registrations had been verified. This is the main reason for the dramatic increase in the number of provisional ballots. The vast majority of these ballots were counted, while the number rejected decreased.

The city also had one of the longest average wait times to vote in 2012 at 34 minutes. The [Presidential Commission on Election Administration](#) suggests that "long wait times at select polling places result from a combination of mismanagement, limited or misallocated resources, and long ballots" and that "jurisdictions can solve the problem of long lines through a combination of planning ... and the efficient allocation of resources."¹

Officials in the district cited the increase in provisional ballots, which can take more time to issue and process, as a cause of the long waits.²

Upgrading voter registration lists by participating in data-sharing agreements such as the Electronic Registration Information Center, or ERIC, can help address these issues. Such efforts allow states to better track voters who move, helping create a more efficient and accurate voter registration system, and reducing the need for provisional ballots. In January 2014, the district joined ERIC, which also includes eight states.

The district could add online voter registration, which would not only improve its performance on the online registration indicator, but could also improve other indicators, including provisional ballots cast. Adding online voter registration is also one of the recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration.

District voters who needed to update their registration addresses accounted for 13,688 provisional ballots cast on Election Day. Many of those voters had tried to change their addresses through the Department of Motor Vehicles or the Board of Elections website but failed because a hard copy of the change was not received or entered into the voter registration database, or the electronic transmission from the DMV was not completed due to an error in the voter registration database.

The district's own after-action report on the election notes that online voter registration could help. "A modernized voter registration system, complete with a beginning-to-end online voter registration update feature and compatible with DMV electronic data, will significantly reduce special [provisional] ballots for this reason," the report states.³

Endnotes

- 1 Presidential Commission on Election Administration, *The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration* (January 2014), <https://www.supportthevoter.gov/files/2014/01/Amer-Voting-Exper-final-draft-01-09-14-508.pdf>.
- 2 District of Columbia Board of Elections, *After-Action Report on the November 6, 2012 General and Special Elections* (Feb. 4, 2013), http://www.dcboee.org/popup.asp?url=/pdf_files/nr_1108.pdf.
- 3 District of Columbia Board of Elections, *After-Action Report*.

For further information, please visit:

pewstates.org/epi

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