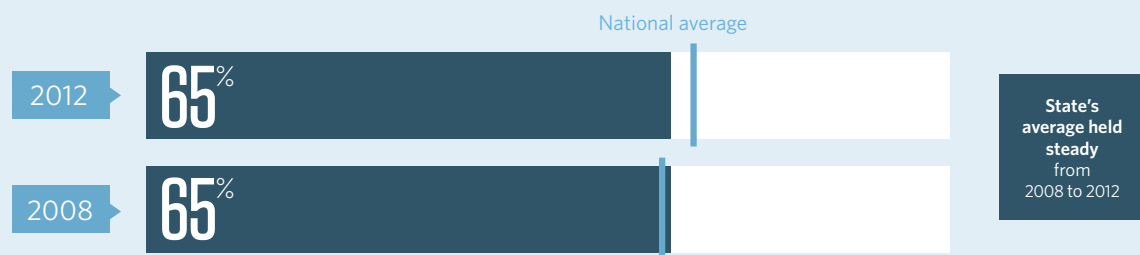# Rhode Island

Elections Performance Index

This profile reports important trends for Rhode Island 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*

National average

| 2012 | **65**% |
| 2008 | **65**% |

State's average held steady from 2008 to 2012

Key indicators	2008	2012
Data completeness	50%	94.6%
Mail ballots unreturned	2.8%	9.9%
Provisional ballots cast out of all ballots	0.2%	0.5%
Voting information lookup tools	2 of 2	5 of 5
Voting wait time	5.2 minutes	11.7 minutes

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

Beyond the numbers

Rhode Island's overall EPI average essentially remained the same from 2008 to 2012, not keeping up with the average improvement of 4.4 percent across states. Although the state improved in data completeness and had high performance numbers on a series of indicators, it actually performed marginally worse on many of the metrics, including mail ballots rejected and unreturned, provisional ballots cast and rejected, and average wait time.

The state was, however, one of only seven that had all voting information lookup tools in both 2008 and 2012. Although Rhode Island did not report complete data for rejected military and overseas ballots in 2008, its rejection rate in 2012 was the nation's lowest.

Room for improvement

Although the state had the lowest rate of rejected military and overseas ballots, Rhode Island had a high rate—33 percent—of these ballots unreturned in 2012. This was a stark change from 2008 when the state's rate was 21 percent, the second-largest increase in the country. Many factors, including voter choice or problems with the mail system, can influence unreturned ballots, but research is needed to understand why this number jumped so much and to find possible solutions.

The state could further improve its overall performance by adding online voter registration. This step would not only raise the state's score for the online registration indicator, but it could have a positive impact on other metrics as well, including the voter registration rate, wait time, nonvoting due to registration and absentee ballot problems, and provisional ballots cast.

Upgrading voter registration lists by participating in data-sharing agreements such as the Electronic Registration Information Center can also help address these issues, allowing states to get more accurate and up-to-date information on voters who move or die and to reduce the rate of provisional ballot use.[1]

Adding online voter registration and participating in data-sharing agreements are recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration.

Endnote

1   Gary Bland and Barry C. Burden, "Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC): Stage 1 Evaluation Report to the Pew Charitable Trusts" (Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International), http://www.rti.org/pubs/eric_stage1report_pewfinal_12-3-13.pdf.

For further information, please visit:

pewstates.org/epi

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