



March 14, 2016

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FVAP Research: FVAP.gov Enhancements Positively Impacted Overseas Military Absentee Voter Behavior

Alexandria, Va. — A new research note recently released by the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) indicates its website redesign had a positive effect on absentee voter registration. FVAP's 2012 Post-Election Report to Congress stated a relationship between the use of the FVAP website and the likelihood of a military member registering and voting absentee. However, because website users may differ from non-users in ways that are relevant to voting – which could not be accounted for given the limited information in the 2012 post-election data – FVAP's 2012 report did not claim that website use actually caused the higher rate of voting.

FVAP has since examined aspects of this relationship in its new research note and discusses the impact that the FVAP website redesign – which occurred between the 2008 and 2012 elections – had on overseas active duty military (ADM) voter participation. During that time, FVAP redesigned its website to make it more informative with respect to State-specific laws and deadlines, and added a new interactive online assistant for completing the registration and absentee ballot request form (Federal Post Card Application, or FPCA) and the backup Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB).

The note provides a review of the previous research and details the data, methodology and results of the new study.

Key findings from this research:

- The changes to the FVAP website increased the probability that website users requested an absentee ballot or voted, compared with a projected outcome had the changes never been implemented. While other factors do affect voting behavior, the research was specifically isolated to changes based on website usage.
- Website use was associated with a larger increase in the probability of casting a ballot in the 2012 election relative to the 2008 election. This suggests an increase in the effectiveness of the website in facilitating voting between those two elections:

MODEL-PREDICTED OVERSEAS ADM VOTING RATES, BY WEBSITE USE AND ELECTION YEAR

	Website Non-Users	Website Users
2008	51%	73%
2012	34%	73%



- Website changes facilitated the use of the FPCA.
 - The percentage of overseas ADM using FPCAs declined from 2008 to 2012. However, for overseas ADM who did not use the website, the decline in FPCA use was substantial compared to 2008. In both 2008 and 2012, FVAP website users were much more likely to request an FPCA than non-website users.

MODEL-PREDICTED OVERSEAS ADM USE OF FPCA, BY WEBSITE USE AND ELECTION YEAR

	Website Non-Users	Website Users
2008	37%	59%
2012	12%	49%

Website use was associated with a larger increase in 2012 than in 2008 in the probability of requesting an FPCA and registering to vote. Further, large fractions of the population who used the FVAP website to request an FPCA or backup ballot in 2012 did so through the online assistant, consistent with the estimated increase in the effectiveness of the website due to these new features. FVAP will leverage these research findings to inform its outreach efforts and continue to expand its communication and marketing approach to publicize the website and its improved functionality. Based on the estimated increase in the effectiveness of the website between 2008 and 2012, one could expect ADM participation to increase if FVAP raised awareness of its website's features.

The research note is available at

https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Reports/FVAP_RN5_20160107.pdf.

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