

# 0 Connecticut Citizen Election Audit

## Do Connecticut's Municipal Websites Provide Information Voters Need?

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### An Evaluation of Connecticut's Municipal Websites Prior to the November 2015 Election

**Chief finding: Websites have inadequate and incorrect voter information which may significantly depress voter registration and voter turnout**

**April 6, 2016**

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Concerned that voters in every municipality in Connecticut should be able to easily obtain information necessary to participate in our Democracy, the Citizen Audit initiated this study of Connecticut's municipalities and the voting information they provide on the Internet.

The Citizen Audit found many municipal websites with minimal election information, or even outdated and misleading election information. In recent years the General Assembly has heard calls to exempt municipalities from web posting requirements, yet studies indicate that voters go first to municipal webs for election information.

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# Executive Summary

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## Motivation

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After every election there is disappointment in voter turnout in Connecticut and across the United States. Turnout varies among municipalities, elections, and primaries.<sup>1</sup> The reasons voters do not vote in a particular election are many, varied, and subject to unending debate.

One factor that can encourage or discourage voting is the information available on municipal websites. Connecticut citizens not yet registered to vote may turn to the municipal website with questions about voter registration. All citizens may look to that same website to seek details about voting and the upcoming election.

A recent national study<sup>2</sup> evaluated county websites for the 2012 elections across the country and interviewed voters about county websites. The study “*sought to learn about what local election jurisdictions were offering for content, what terminology they used to describe it, and how useful and usable that content was to voters.*” The study found that most voters use local government websites rather than state sites to seek information. The study determined the top five questions asked by voters:

- *What’s on the ballot?*
- *What’s the deadline to apply for an absentee ballot?*
- *What do I have to do to get an absentee ballot?*
- *When is my absentee ballot due?*
- *Where do I go to vote?*

**Concerned that voters in every municipality in Connecticut should be able to easily obtain information necessary to participate in our Democracy, in 2014 we initiated this study of Connecticut’s 169 municipalities and the voting information they provide on the Internet.<sup>3</sup>**

**In 2015, we repeated our study to see if any progress had been made. We included more specific questions we wished we had asked in 2014.**

**As we wrote in our previous report: *Our motivation is not to single out municipalities or election officials, but to provide information on the opportunity for improvement and how frequently sought, quality information could be provided to Connecticut voters at low cost with moderate effort.***

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<sup>1</sup> The Secretary of the State publishes turnout statistics of registered voters after every election:

<http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/cwp/view.asp?a=3179&q=392194>

<sup>2</sup> Usability of County Election Websites: <http://civicdesigning.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/371a.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://ctelectionaudit.org/citizen-audit-study-shows-low-cost-way-to-improve-turnout/>

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## Findings

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**The Citizen Audit found many municipal websites with minimal election information, and some with outdated and misleading election information. In recent years the Connecticut General Assembly has heard calls to exempt municipalities from web posting requirements<sup>4</sup> and to require municipalities to provide email access for registrars.<sup>5</sup>**

**A critical function of registrars of voters is registration, yet many municipal websites fail to mention Online Registration and most do not mention Election Day Registration. Of the information most sought by voters, only 33% answer “What is on the ballot,” while nearly half do not mention “Where do I vote” and “What is the date of the next election.” Some municipal websites even provided an incorrect election date.**

Reviewing Connecticut’s 169 municipal websites:

- ▲ We were easily able to locate websites for 100% of Connecticut municipalities, using a standard web search.
- ▲ For 89% of municipalities we were easily able to locate a page on voting, most supplying registrars’ names, phone numbers, and election and voting information.

Considering the information most sought by voters:

- ▼ Only 33% of municipal websites answered “What is on the ballot,” usually by providing an image of the ballot(s).
- ▼ 44% of registrars’ pages failed to answer “Where do I vote” with maps, street lists, or links to the Secretary of the State’s online lookup tool. The 64% that did answer include municipalities with a single polling place.
- ▼ 49% of Registrars’ Pages do not provide Absentee Voting information or mention it is a function of the municipal clerk.
- ▼ 57% do not provide Absentee Voting Eligibility Criteria.
- ▼ In 30% of municipalities neither the Registrars’ Page nor the Municipal Clerk’s Page point to a Mail-In Absentee Ballot Application.
- ▼ 42% of municipal webs did not provide “Date of the next election.”
- ▼ Five (3%) of municipalities provided the wrong election date, which may well have led citizens to show up at the polls on the wrong day or miss critical registration deadlines.

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<sup>4</sup> PA 10-171 passed in 2010: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2010/ACT/Pa/pdf/2010PA-00171-R00HB-05255-PA.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> SB 213 did not pass in 2013: <http://cga.ct.gov/2012/TOB/s/pdf/2012SB-00213-R00-SB.pdf>

Voter registration is a critical function of registrars of voters, yet:

- ▼ 28% did not provide a link to Online Registration or to a Mail-In Registration Form.
- ▼ 51% did not provide a link to Online Registration. Encouraging Online Registration would increase accuracy and be a convenience to voters, while saving work and expense for municipalities (the reverse of an unfunded mandate).
- ▼ 62% did not provide registration deadlines.
- ▼ 53% did not provide eligibility criteria for registration.
- ▼ Only 22% mentioned Election Day Registration, a convenience for voters intended to increase turnout.
- ▼ Only 11% provided information specific to military and overseas voters, who presumably would find the web much more convenient than phoning or visiting in person (although many officials support risky and expensive Internet voting as a means to increase military voting).

We also found many websites with broken links and obviously outdated information, such as:

- ▼ Only 17% of websites with results of the November 2014 election.
- ▼ Only 15% of websites with Voter ID information, which would be useful to voters before they go to the polls.
- ▼ Only 58% of municipalities with notification of Election Day on the Home Page or Registrars' Page, even though 79% of Municipal Home Pages provide a Calendar listing community events around Election Day.
- ▼ **Overall, the quality of local websites neither improved nor degraded over the last year.**

# Recommendations

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## Recommendations for Registrars of Voters

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We recommend that all websites have a single main Elections Page, and that each registrar of voters take responsibility to work with other municipal officials to provide municipal website information that is accurate, up-to-date, and complete. Each municipality's Election Page would:

- ✓ Answer clearly, or provide links to answer, the top three voter questions; registration information; and registrars' names, phone numbers, and office hours - including information on how to get assistance at other times, when registrars have limited scheduled office hours.
- ✓ Answer clearly or provide links to information at the Secretary of the State's website for ballot images, Online Registration, registration requirements, registration deadlines, Voter ID requirements, and information specifically for military and overseas voters.
- ✓ Include voting information on all lists of services, including "How do I," calendars, bulletins, etc.

To this end, we have created a sample, whimsical municipal website to demonstrate how elections information can be highlighted on a Home Page with a clear set of sample pages for voters information. We used the open source product Wordpress and its free service for developing and deploying websites.<sup>6</sup> Our sample site is <http://NutmegtonCT.wordpress.com>. Certainly others could easily design even more effective, comprehensive, and appealing websites.

We also recommend Civic Design's *Field Guide: Designing Election Department Websites*,<sup>7</sup> which we used to review and improve our NutmegtonCT sample.

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<sup>6</sup> Available to anyone at <http://wordpress.org>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://civicdesigning.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Field-Guide-Vol-07-20130628.pdf>

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## Recommendations for the Secretary of the State

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- ✓ The Secretary of the State has a single web page with links to the information most sought by voters.<sup>8</sup> It could have a permanent link<sup>9</sup> set to that page for registrars to link from their Municipal Elections Page.
- ✓ The Secretary of the State could work with municipal officials to create and post an official list of municipal websites for citizens and other interested parties to find those sites.
- ✓ The Secretary of the State could review other states' websites for best practices and consider offerings of third parties such as the U.S. Vote Foundation/Overseas Vote Foundation for web and voter help desk services.

Much of the information at our sample NutmegtonCT links to various pages within the Secretary of the State's website, <http://SOTS.cga.ct.gov>. Yet that official site could be improved by:

- ✓ More voter-friendly pages with high-level, clear, attractive descriptions, followed by more detailed information and references to the law where appropriate.
- ✓ A single page with links and descriptions similar to the common information shown at NutmegtonCT, that local officials could link to that page, as well as copy some of its contents.<sup>10</sup>
- ✓ Unchanging, permanent links to specific information that can be linked from municipal websites, with link addresses that will not change.

The Overseas Vote Foundation<sup>11</sup> and the related The U.S. Vote Foundation<sup>12</sup> provide “*Nonpartisan voter services for U.S. citizens overseas and uniformed service members*” and “*Absentee ballot request and voter registration services for all U.S. voters in all states at home and abroad.*” We encourage readers of this report to review the information and note the ease of use they provide voters, as an example what can be accomplished. Six states actually outsource partial support of their elections website to the foundation, which then also provides official help desk support to voters of those states: <https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/initiatives-shs-program-states>.

We recommend the elections website of the State of Minnesota as an example of an attractive single source for statewide information: <http://mnvotesinfo.sos.state.mn.us/>.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/cwp/view.asp?a=3172&q=525432>

<sup>9</sup> Permanent links are used to reference information over time, even if the underlying web technology changes. Instead of the technical URL in the previous footnote, a permalink might be <http://voters.ct.gov>. This is similar to the permanent link now used for Online Registration: <http://voterregistration.ct.gov>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://nutmegtonct.wordpress.com/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/vote/home.htm>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.usvotefoundation.org/>

# Background

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## Motivation

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After every election there is disappointment in voter turnout in Connecticut and across the United States. Turnout varies among municipalities, elections, and primaries.<sup>13</sup> The reasons voters do not vote in a particular election are many, varied, and subject to unending debate.

One factor that can encourage or discourage voting is the information available on municipal websites. Connecticut citizens not yet registered to vote are likely to turn first to the municipal website with questions about voter registration. All citizens are likely to look first to that same website to seek details about voting and the upcoming election.

A recent national study<sup>14</sup> evaluated county websites across the country<sup>15</sup> for the 2012 elections and interviewed voters about county websites. The study “*sought to learn about what local election jurisdictions were offering for content, what terminology they used to describe it, and how useful and usable that content was to voters.*” The study found that most voters use local government websites rather than state sites to seek information. The study determined the top five questions asked by voters:

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- *What do I have to do to get an absentee ballot?*
- *When is my absentee ballot due?*
- *Where do I go to vote?*

In gathering information for elections, the Citizen Audit found many municipal websites with minimal election information, outdated election information, or no election information. In recent years the Connecticut General Assembly has headed calls to exempt municipalities from web posting requirements<sup>16</sup> and to require municipalities to provide email access for registrars.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The Connecticut Secretary of the State publishes turnout statistics of registered voters after every election:

<http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/cwp/view.asp?a=3179&q=392194>

<sup>14</sup> Usability of County Election Websites: <http://civicdesigning.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/371a.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Unlike New England, most states elections are administered by county officials rather than municipal officials.

<sup>16</sup> PA 10-171 passed in 2010: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2010/ACT/Pa/pdf/2010PA-00171-R00HB-05255-PA.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> SB 213 did not pass in 2013: <http://cga.ct.gov/2012/TOB/s/pdf/2012SB-00213-R00-SB.pdf>



Concerned that voters in every municipality in Connecticut should be able to easily obtain information necessary to participate in our Democracy, in 2014 we initiated this study of Connecticut's 169 municipalities and the voting information they provide on the Internet.<sup>18</sup>

In 2015, we repeated our study to see if any progress had been made. We included more specific questions we wished we had asked in 2014.

As we wrote last year: *Our motivation is not to single out municipalities or election officials, but to provide information on the opportunity for improvement and how frequently sought, quality information could be provided to Connecticut voters at low cost with moderate effort.*

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## Methodology

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The following activities were performed in the course of data collection and analysis for this report.

- We developed a SurveyMonkey<sup>19,20</sup> survey for assessing municipal websites. This year we improved the survey questions based on the results and lessons learned from last year's web study. We made the questions more objective and asked some questions we wished we had asked last year.
- We recruited volunteer evaluators from the ranks of experienced post-election audit observers, who all agreed to a Code of Conduct/Confidentiality Agreement.
- We used the web tool developed last year to automate the website review. The tool:
  - a) Randomly assigned one municipality at a time to an evaluator (who could pass on evaluating a municipality if he/she had a conflict of interest, such as residency in the municipality).
  - b) Automatically provided links for Google searches for each assigned municipality.
  - c) Allowed evaluators, upon recording completion of an evaluation of a municipality, to be randomly assigned another.
  - d) Began additional rounds of evaluation for all municipalities, once one was complete. (In subsequent rounds the tool assigned evaluators only to municipalities they had not previously evaluated.)

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<sup>18</sup> <http://ctelectionaudit.org/citizen-audit-study-shows-low-cost-way-to-improve-turnout/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.surveymonkey.com/>

<sup>20</sup> Printable version of our online survey: <http://ctelectionaudit.org/WebStudySurvey2015.pdf>

- We conducted several group and individual web-based training sessions. We provided access to the survey and municipal assignment web tool in test mode for evaluators. Based on feedback we refined the survey and clarified question texts.
- Between early October and just prior to Election Day we performed two rounds of evaluations, by different evaluators, of the 169 municipal websites. Because several questions relate to the availability of election-specific information, it was critical that all websites be reviewed in the period close to the election. Special consideration was given to the small number of towns conducting elections in May rather than November.
- By Election Day evening two referee evaluators had reviewed each survey response, consolidated results for each municipality, and referenced municipal websites to resolve differences between the two rounds of evaluations of each municipality.

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### Citizen Evaluation: Challenges and Limitations

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Data collection and verification were necessarily accomplished in the thirty-day period before the November 3, 2015 election, so that we could get an accurate and uniform picture of information available to voters in the period before Election Day.

**Without Connecticut Citizen Election Audit volunteers willing to invest hours and days of their time under very tight deadlines, this report would not have been possible. Our volunteers care about democracy and ensuring that information is available to voters in Connecticut.<sup>21</sup>**

We recognize there may be occasional errors in our raw data derived from variations in subjective and objective evaluation. With tight deadlines, there is a level of ambiguity and subjectivity in the assessment of some questions. Yet the overall results and the totality of the statistics paint a clear picture of an opportunity for election officials to provide more complete information for voters and would-be voters in Connecticut.

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<sup>21</sup> Upon request of any registrar of voters, we would be pleased to provide specific feedback applicable to his or her municipality.

# Findings - Statistics and Discussion

## Locating Municipal Websites

Survey Question	Sub Question	% Yes 2015	2014
Based on searching for "[Municipality] Connecticut Official Website," or by other searches, did you find an official website for the Municipality?		100%	100% <sup>22</sup>

The survey began with locating a municipal website and registrar of voters' site with formalized Google searches. We were pleased that we were able to locate websites for every municipality. Most citizens should be able to find the website for their municipality of residence.

**Web Study Note:** In every case we used the Google web search tool. There are other search tools that voters use that might provide somewhat different results. For uniformity, every evaluator used the same search tool and query text for every municipality.

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<sup>22</sup> In cases where question text in 2015 varied from 2014, in this report we use the 2015 text and compare to 2014 where appropriate.

Locating Election Information from the Home Page

Survey Question	Sub Question	% Yes 2015	2014
Is there a link to Voting Information from the Municipal Home Page?		89%	92%
Does the Official Municipal Home Page have a:	Link to a "Department list" link to "Registrars," "Elections," or "Voting"?	89%	88%
	List of "Services for residents," "Knowledge base," "I want to..."? etc.	59%	
	Link from "Services for residents," or "I want to..." etc. to "Register to Vote"?	37%	
	Link from "Services for residents," or "I want to..." etc. to "Absentee Voting"?	24%	
	Link to "Register to Vote" or "Absentee Voting"?	41%	
	Link to "Registering a Dog" or "Building Permits" or both?	44%	

Almost 90% of municipalities had website homepage links to voting information. Most had access through a Departments list or dropdown.

Is Registering Your Dog Easier Than Registering to Vote?

Many, but far from all, municipal webs have a list of "Services"<sup>23</sup> and/or "How do I." In 2014, we were surprised that many of those lists did not have links to items such as "Elections," "Voting," "Registration," or "How do I vote absentee," etc., while they had links for "Registering a Dog" and "Building Permits."

This year we checked exactly how many had links to "Registering a Dog" or "Building Permits." The frequency of these links were comparable to the frequency of references for "Registering to Vote" or "Absentee Voting." We conclude that many municipalities do not have comprehensive and consistent lists of services.

<sup>23</sup> When we say "Services," "How do I," "Department List," etc., our evaluators included any similar terms used by a municipal web.

### Some Citizens May Not Relate to “Registrars of Voters”

We also note that many municipalities, like many of us in Connecticut, refer to “Registrars of Voters,” while many prospective voters new to Connecticut may be unfamiliar with that term and might better be served with additional links to “Elections,” “Voting,” or “Voter registration,” etc.

### Evaluator Comments<sup>24</sup>

*On the Services list were several ways to find the info: "Elections and Voting," "ROV," "Absentee Ballot," "Voter Registration," and the reversed words "Voting and Elections."*

*"Connect with [Municipality]" tab includes "How do I, but there is a "Search" field which is Excellent! First search result is "Registrar of Voters."*

*Very nice, complete list of "Where do I go for" arranged alphabetically.*

*Tricky. Heading is "Department and Services" and each department then has a subset of services. So you cannot start off with a service and find a department - you have to know the department beforehand to find answers to questions.*

*Takes 2 clicks: Civic Government. Town Offices. Then you have to scroll way down -- not very efficient. Also, on quick navigation links you see town offices, but they require too much scrolling to find registrars.*

*Department and Services doesn't have link. You have to go to "Town Office Building."*

*"Voting" is under the Header "Teens" in Town Services and leads to ROV page.*

*Seem to be different page links from "Residents" and "Menu" Only one is comprehensive.*

*Both "Department" and "Services" say Select from list on left, yet no ROV or anything related there.*

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<sup>24</sup> All evaluator comments are edited for clarity.

## Visiting, Calling, or Emailing Registrars

Survey Question	Sub Question	% Yes 2015	2014
Does the Municipal Website or Elections Page have:	Registrars' Names?	91%	93%
	Registrars' Phone(s)?	92%	94%
	Registrars' Email(s)?	65%	68%
	Registrars Email(s) Clearly Indicated as such?	47%	50%

Here, as one would expect, we found most municipalities with the names of registrars and their phone numbers. Some were found on municipal contact lists where there was no specific Elections Webpage. We found many websites lacking email contact information. Email contact is important for voters, especially where registrars have infrequent office hours, inconvenient office hours, or do not maintain regular hours.

**We judge that the quality of local websites neither improved nor degraded over the year.** For the remainder of this report we will focus on the 2015 results.

**Web Study Note:** In 2014 we asked about posting of registrars’ office hours and providing information to voters for receiving help at other times. The results were disappointing. In the interests of a clearer more focused survey, we did not repeat those questions this year.

**Web Study Note:** Differences between 2014 and 2015 survey results are likely attributable to clarification of questions and more uniform training of our evaluators. In several cases our questions for 2015 varied slightly from 2014 and several were intentionally less subjective.

### Evaluator Comments

*Link to email of each registrar does not work.*

*Info in the Department List has no Registrar’s Page.*

*Registrars’ names are not given, just a generic email address.*

*The email is available on the department directory but not on the ROV page.*

*Account needed to access. I believe you could email them, but it would not be easy to create an account. Computer dummies such as myself would give up.*

### Three Important Pieces of Information, Often Missing

Survey Question	Sub Question	% Yes/2015
Does the Main Registrars/Voting Page have links or sections covering:	What is on the ballot?	17%
	Next election dates?	58%
	Where do I vote?	56%
Does the Official Municipal Home Page have:	What is on the ballot?	20%
	Next election dates?	38%
Does the Registrars Page or Official Municipal Home Page have:	What is on the ballot?	33%
	Next election dates?	56%

These three items are very important to voters, yet often are not provided on municipal websites across Connecticut. It's generally believed that turnout can be increased by providing registration, absentee voting, and other election information. Yet these basic items of information sought by all voters were often overlooked.

These items change for each election, sometimes multiple times in a year. It takes effort to provide and keep them up-to-date for voters. Perhaps this helps explain why frequently they are not provided.

"What is on the ballot" is the most sought information by voters, perhaps because every voter wants to know what he or she will be asked, and because it changes for each election.

In Connecticut, "Where do I vote" can be provided by:

- An address of a polling place, clearly identified as the only one in the municipality.
- A street listing showing the polling place associated with each street.
- A map showing streets and their associated polling places.
- A clearly identified link to the Secretary of the State's voter look-up web application which provides look-up for voters to confirm they are registered and their polling place.

Polling place is important even to experienced voters, since polling places may change frequently, due to redistricting, facility relocation, and type of election (Municipal,

State/Federal, Primaries and Referendum), and because occasional voters sometimes forget where they went.

**Web Study Note:** Frequently we found a link to the Secretary of the State’s registration look-up titled “Check your Registration,” etc. Unless it was clearly labeled “Find Your Polling Place,” etc., we did not rate it as satisfying the “Where do I vote” survey question.

**Supporting Questions: Calendars and Bulletins**

We looked for election dates and election information on calendars and bulletins. We often found these sparse on information, or found calendars containing only standard repeating town meetings. Some calendars focused on community events rather than official government meetings.

Certainly it takes considerable effort to maintain calendars and bulletins, yet unlike volatile information, primary and election dates are particularly important to encourage voting and can be set once for an entire year. Of course referendum and special election dates would still need to be added as they are set.

Survey Question	Sub Question	% Yes/ 2015
Does the Municipal Home Page have a:	Calendar or events list?	89%
	Calendar or events list that is up-to-date with voting-related events on or after Election Day?	79%
	Calendar or events list that includes Election Day?	25%
	Up-to-date list of bulletins/notifications?	86%
	Bulletin or other notification of Election Day?	38%
	Bulletin or other indication of Who/What is on the Ballot?	20%

**Evaluator Comments**

- Very nice calendar, sortable by many topics.*
- Municipal election and referendum legal notice for Election Day and sample ballot.*
- The calendar only lists municipal meetings.*



The calendar for November 3 has two entries. One says "Election Day 12 am-12am the Green Room," while the other includes that same info but with a heading "Election Day 6 am-8 pm."

Oblique reference - an Audubon Election Day Fun Event on November 3 from 10am-1 pm.

The "What's New" is a list of web updates, the most recent having to do with a 2008 selectman's letter.

Gives poll hours, says "**no registration required,**" and has links to ROV page.

There was an October 6 referendum election on the October calendar, which is mostly used for senior exercise classes and the like.

**Supporting Questions: Registrars' Page**

Survey Question	Sub Question	% Yes/ 2015
Does the "Registrars/Voting/Elections" Web Page have:	Date of the next election?	32%
	Sample ballot or other indication of Who/What is on the ballot?	17%
	Incorrect Election Date in November?	3%

We found a significant error with an incorrect election date in 3% (5) of municipalities. Most of these indicated November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014 instead of 2015 (most voters might not notice the year). This is a significant problem for two reasons:

- With an incorrect date later than the election, some voters might arrive a day late and be unable to vote in the election.
- Several of those sites also listed a year late list of registration deadlines, also one day after the actual deadline, which might cause many people to be late for the actual registration deadlines.

**Web Study Note:** We did not ask a question about "Incorrect Election Date." We counted the evaluator comments which noted such errors. We did not count those listing only a date of an earlier election in 2015 such as the September primaries, a referendum, or special election, since we assumed that would be obviously outdated information to most November voters.

## Evaluator Comments

*The date of the next election is near the bottom of the page and somewhat obscure.*

*It has info for last year about a relocated polling site. Someone going there this year would have no idea where to vote.*

*It appears that there is only one polling place in town. That information is only on the calendar as "The Green Room," but no address is given.*

*Street listing for polling places for Districts 1 and 3, but not 2.*

*Lists 30 polling locations, with no info on where a particular voter should go!*

*Voting locations for Districts 1, 2, and 3 are given, but no way to figure out which you are in.*

*The date is on the ballot, but is not visible on the Registrar's Home Page.*

*Sample ballot is a link that appears at end of a heading entitled "Registration Requirements."*

*Lists next election as September 2015 primaries.*

*Seems to redirect most questions back to the Town Clerk. One item on this page says you can email the clerk, but no email is provided.*

*"Election Calendar" still pointing to August Primaries [2014?]*

*2014 sample ballot rather than 2015.*

*YouTube shows drawing of the order of the names on the ballot in 2013, not 2015.*

*There is an empty bar on the left side of the screen where that information presumably should be. The sample ballot was available through a link to a pdf on the Town Clerk's page.*

## Voter Registration and Voting Information

Survey Question	Sub Question	% Yes 2015
Does the Main Registrars/Voting page have links or sections covering:	How do I register with a link to a mail-in for or a link to online voter registration?	72%
	How do I register with a link to online voter registration?	49%
	How do I register with a link to a mail-in form?	61%
	How do I register with a link to both a mail-in form or a link to online voter registration?	38%
	Registration deadlines?	38%
	Registration Eligibility Criteria?	47%
	Election Day Registration?	22%
	Information specific for overseas and military voters?	11%
	Voter ID requirements?	15%

For new voters and those moving from other states, information on registering to vote is critical to voting. This seems the natural function of *registrars* of voters, yet we find even this basic function inadequately covered by Connecticut municipal webs:

- 28% do not provide any link to either online registration or a paper registration form.
- Only 38% provide links to both online registration and a paper form, which provides the best service to citizens, giving the choice of methods of registering.
- Only 49% provide links to online registration. This is the most convenient mechanism for many voters, especially those served by registrars with few scheduled office hours. It also provides data entry savings to municipalities, while reducing the chances for transcription errors.

In addition, voters could be well-served by other information that would help them to register and to vote:

- 62% of municipal websites fail to provide registration deadlines. This is critical information for would-be voters as Election Day approaches.
- Only 22% mention Election Day Registration, which provides another alternative for new voters. Only 15% provide information on Voter ID requirements.
- Only 11% provide information specific for military and overseas voters. We note that other than the actual dates applicable to registration, none of this information is volatile. It could easily be updated once and remain accurate from election to election, except for changes in the law which often occur annually.

Polling place Voter ID requirements are often inaccurate, unclear, or easily misunderstood by voters and officials. Voters want this information before they go to the polls. It certainly needs to be accurate before they or others criticize Connecticut's system as either too stringent or too weak.

There are special accommodations and considerations for military and overseas voters. The U.S. Congress, the Connecticut General Assembly, and the Secretary of the State have worked hard to improve tools and information available to overseas voters, especially military voters. In Connecticut we have been quite successful, but further improvement would be likely with clear information.

Lack of information for military voters is especially surprising when officials express concern for them and a willingness to take exceptional, risky, measures<sup>25</sup> to help them vote such as Internet voting.<sup>26</sup> Our study shows municipal websites neglect the basic information which could help them.

Like most of the items in this study, information on deadlines for military and overseas voters and ID requirements could be satisfied by links to the appropriate page on the Secretary of the State's website.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Online voting bill 2013:

[https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which\\_year=2013&bill\\_num=283](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2013&bill_num=283) and associated testimony:

[https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/CommDocTmyBill.asp?comm\\_code=gae&bill=SB-00283&doc\\_year=2013](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/CommDocTmyBill.asp?comm_code=gae&bill=SB-00283&doc_year=2013)

<sup>26</sup> CT Secretary of the State's Online Voting Symposium:

<http://ctvoterscount.org/secretary-of-the-states-online-voting-symposium/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/cwp/view.asp?a=3179&q=563118> and

<http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/cwp/view.asp?a=3179&q=489914>

**Web Study Note:** As noted for polling place lookup, frequently we found information, yet not clearly identified on the municipal site in a way that would likely lead readers seeking that information to pursue a particular link.

For instance, if a municipal website had a link to a web page with absentee voting information and the link was titled “Absentee Voting” or “Voting Information,” it satisfied the Absentee Voting survey question. However, if that same link was titled “Registration Information” and linked to a page with both registration and absentee voting information, it would not satisfy the Absentee Voting information question on the survey.

### Evaluator Comments

*Can't access registration and voting information without a password.*

*Only link from Home Page about elections goes to Clerks Page. Questions for this municipality are answered based on information on the Clerk's Page.*

*The link for the page from the department list did not work. Phone numbers for the ROVs were listed on the department list.*

*The only info beyond Contact is a link to SOTS Home Page: <http://www.sots.ct.gov/>.*

*The page is a Registrar's job description, NOT voter information.*

*Provides registration deadlines and sessions for previous year.*

*Election Forms link broken. Election Calendar for November 4, 2014 rather than November 3, 2015.*

*Incorrect Info: "An elector may also register in any Registrar's Office throughout the United States."*

*Election Day Registration incorrectly says limited to people whose qualifications as to age, citizenship, or residence were attained since October 27. EDR is open to any citizen who is eligible to register.*

## Absentee Voting

Survey Question	Sub Question	% Yes/ Good:
Does the Main Registrars Page:	Have Absentee Voting information or a link to that information on the Town Clerk's page?	51%
Does the Main Registrars page OR Town Clerk's Page:	Point to a Mail-In Absentee Voting Application or a link directly to a SOTS page with a link to that form?	70%

Many voters both new and experienced seek information on absentee voting: How to apply and qualification requirements. One information challenge in Connecticut is that registrars are not responsible for absentee voting – it is the responsibility of municipal clerks – yet many voters don't know that. It is important that absentee voting information be provided on registrars' web pages, or that clear links are provided to that information, which should be maintained by the municipal clerk.

Unfortunately, in only about half of Connecticut municipalities are voters informed by the Registrars' Page that those interested in absentee voting should contact the municipal clerk.

30% fail to point to a mail-in Absentee Voting Application. Once again, this especially ill-serves deployed military voters who may seek information via the web in a rare opportunity they may have for web and printer access.

### Evaluator Comments

*No mention of "Absentee Voting" on either Registrar Page or on Town Clerk Page. But at the bottom of Town Clerk Page is a listing "Town/State Resources," under which is a button "Secretary of State Office" with links to voting info.*

*The only notice of Absentee Voting is on the Bulletins section of the Home Page.*

*Only "On Line Notice of Permanent Absentee Ballot and Application." Nothing about regular Absentee Ballots.*

*At foot of page is a FAQ, "Where do I get an absentee ballot?" The answer is "answer." Looks like the intention to make info available is there but it is not provided providing it.*

*Says that registrars (not clerks) issue all Absentee Ballots.*

*The Town Clerk's Page has no link to AB information or form, but it does have links to registration forms in English and Spanish.*

*Town Clerk's Page has no mention of Absentee Ballots or elections except in Mission: "administering elections."*

## Posting of Election Results

Survey Question	Sub Question	%Yes 2015
Past election results for the previous election - 2014 State Elections:	Results posted for previous November election	17%
	Results posted separately for each district	14%
	Results posted separately for absentee and polling place voting	8%
	Voter turnout	13%

It is very useful to the public, candidates, and parties for municipalities to post election results. We would like to see the results for every contest, every candidate, every district, broken down by polling place voting, absentee, and Election Day registration.

Currently the Secretary of the State does not collect or post information separately for each district. For local elections, only partial municipal results are posted by the Secretary of the State.

### Evaluator Comments

*Past election results were complete and easy to access.*

*Results posted for 2009-2011, yet none since.*

*Complete Elections Results are on the Town Clerk page. But the PDF doesn't show the year! Just multiple dates in November.*

*Only results listed are in a file for November 2008.*

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## Additional General Issues and Evaluator Comments

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*All the info is a year old. That's very misleading and worse than no info.*

*Beyond the calendar indication for Election Day November 3, there is nothing about elections on this website beyond the listing of the Town Clerk's duties related to elections.*

*Listing of voting information is spread out and difficult to locate, which may discourage voters and cause them to give up the search.*

*No info whatsoever found on Absentee Ballots, yet the clerk's page touts: "The [city] was chosen as the midsize city to participate in the Absentee Ballot Pilot Program, which the state viewed as a success."*

*Nice calendar that provides a list of all combined meeting and events calendars by month.*

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## Exemplary Practices and Compliments from Evaluators

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*Clean and easy - with exemplary search function.*

*Nice looking and clean design.*

*A very nice page called Important Information for [Municipality] voters for 2015 has a great deal of information all on one page. It is linked on the Home Page under Town Hall Alerts.*

*"Things to know list" on Home Page starts with sample ballot, then links to online registration and absentee ballot.*

*The ROV page had a special heading called "get involved," which had links to running for office/work on a campaign (led to Republican Town Committee and Democratic Town Committee links), volunteering to help with elections, and being notified of upcoming elections.*



# About

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## The Connecticut Citizen Election Audit ("Citizen Audit")

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Our purpose is to increase integrity and confidence in elections, for the benefit of the voters of Connecticut. We provide independent audit observations, independent audits, and independent reports focusing on the integrity of elections and election administration. We are non-partisan and strive for objectivity and integrity in our work. Organized in 2007, the Citizen Audit has independently observed and reported on all major post-election audits since optical scanners were introduced statewide in that same year.

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/BOARD

Significant decisions and reports are approved by majority vote of the Board. Members of the Board are experienced volunteer observers, with diverse skills, political affiliation, and geographic representation. Current members of the Board are:

- Luther Weeks, Executive Director
- Kathleen Burgweger, Jean de Smet, Aaron Goode, Douglas Lary, Julie Lewin, Tessa Marquis, Douglas Sutherland, and Victoria Usher

### CITIZEN POWERED

The Citizen Audit is an entirely volunteer, citizen-powered organization. We appreciate every Citizen Audit volunteer. Without scores of volunteers spending days and hours on each election objectively observing, auditing, and reporting, the promise of publicly verifiable elections could not be pursued and will never be attained.

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## Acknowledgments

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## Contact/Additional Information

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