

DEMOS

About Election Day Registration

Election Day Registration (EDR), also known as "same-day voter registration," permits eligible citizens to register and vote on Election Day. EDR significantly increases the opportunity for all citizens to cast a vote and participate in American democracy.

In the 2000 election, the six EDR states had considerably higher voter participation and registration rates than the national average.

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EDR Helps America Vote!

Beginning in January 2004, states will have to make a number of changes to their election systems, as required by a new federal law -- the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). Many of these changes will make Election Day Registration easier to implement. Now is the time for reform!

- **Computerized systems ease registration at the polls.**HAVA requires that all states implement a centralized, interactive, computerized statewide registration system by January 1, 2006. Efforts to adopt EDR are typically rebuffed by concerns about multiple registrations in several jurisdictions. With computerized statewide registration systems -- particularly those that are online and capable of "real time" updates like the systems in Kentucky and Michigan -- states can avoid duplicate registrations in different voting precincts. Access to computerized registration lists at the polls would ease verification of a voter's eligibility.
- **HAVA provides funding for EDR implementation.**HAVA authorizes almost \$4 billion for state election changes. States can use federal HAVA dollars to purchase or rent laptop computers for polling places, train poll workers and educate voters. All would make EDR easier to administer at the polls on election day.
- **EDR offers benefits beyond provisional voting.**HAVA requires all states to offer provisional ballots to voters who claim to be registered but whose names do not appear on the registration list. After the election, officials check the voter rolls to see if a provisional voter is registered and eligible to vote, and if so, count her ballot. If not, the provisional vote is discarded -- and the voter stays unregistered. EDR is preferable. A voter whose name does not appear on the voter rolls simply re-registers on the spot -- and the vote counts! Some election officials prefer EDR over provisional ballots because they can avoid spending the extra time and effort after the election verifying a voter's eligibility.

Why Do We Need EDR?

- **To help Americans vote.** With EDR, all eligible citizens who arrive at the polls have an opportunity to vote, even if their names have been incorrectly removed from voter lists or were not added in time for the election. In the 2000 presidential election alone, nearly 3 million people across

the country had registration problems that prevented them from voting -- problems that could have been avoided with EDR.

- **To counteract arbitrary registration deadlines.** Thirty-seven states cut off voter registration 20 to 30 days before election day, well before most voters become interested in the campaigns.
- **To replicate the higher turnout of states with EDR.** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the six states with EDR -- Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming -- had an average turnout of 68 percent in the 2000 election, nearly 10 points higher than the national average.
- **Because voters want it.** According to a May 2001 Medill School of Journalism poll, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of all non-voters said that allowing people to register and vote on election day would make them more likely to vote.

"The fact that in Nevada people must register to vote at least 30 days before an election serves as a stumbling block for increasing participation."
- Secretary of State Dean Heller (R-NV), supporting state EDR bill

Who Benefits from EDR?

- **Everyone.** Voter turnout in U.S. elections is at a record low and declining. Only 59 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot in the 2000 election and over 56 million eligible Americans were not even registered to vote. According to political scientists, EDR could bring millions of new voters into the system.
- **Young people.** Young Americans move frequently -- for school, for jobs -- making it harder for them to be registered. Partly for this reason, they rarely vote. EDR will make voting easier for young Americans by allowing them to register on election day.
- **Geographically mobile.** Census data shows that over 43.4 million Americans, or 16 percent of the population, moved between March 1999 and March 2000. Many individuals who move lose their chance to vote by failing to re-register in their new election districts before voter registration deadlines pass. With EDR, they can re-register on election day, and vote.
- **Historically disenfranchised voters.** New citizens, people of color, young people, and low-income individuals are more likely to move and more likely to have registration problems that could be solved by election day registration.

Myths and Realities about EDR

MYTH: EDR leads to voter fraud.

REALITY: EDR can actually prevent voter fraud.

EDR allows election officials, rather than workers at the Department of Motor Vehicles or other agencies, to control registration. According to experts, it is better to have poll workers who are trained and overseen by the election office process registrations. Registration information is also more likely to be accurately recorded when overseen by an election official than when submitted in the mail. EDR states report few problems with fraud. Election officials in EDR states are as vigilant about safeguarding against fraud as election officials elsewhere. Few, if any, documented instances of fraud have been confirmed in EDR states. In fact, the few voter fraud reports that received widespread media coverage after the 2000 election were found to be groundless. The individuals involved were prosecuted for making false statements.

MYTH: EDR is costly.

REALITY: Election officials in EDR states run elections efficiently.

The cost of implementing EDR in new locations in 2000 ranged from zero to a maximum of \$250 per precinct. According to election officials in EDR states, the cost of registering people on election day does not exceed the cost of registering the same number of applicants in a registration office.

MYTH: EDR leads to partisan advantage.

REALITY: EDR will help voters, not parties.

It is a common misconception that EDR will disproportionately advantage the Democratic Party. Party control in the six EDR states is split between Republicans and Democrats.

Related Publications

- [Election Day Registration in California](#)
- Expanding the Vote: The Promise and Practice of Election Day Registration
- [Securing the Vote: An Analysis of Election Fraud](#)

"The final weeks before an election - when the pressure is high, the campaign is in full swing, and the newspaper endorsements are flowing - often motivate new or undecided voters to cast their ballot if they have the opportunity to register at the polls."

- Gwendolyn Moore, *fmr. State Senator, (now-U.S. Congresswoman, (D-WI))*