

Election Day Registration

Helps America Vote

In the 2000 and 2004 elections, EDR states had significantly higher voter participation rates than the national average.

VOTER TURNOUT 2004



National Average for Non-EDR States



Average for EDR States (ID, ME, MN, NH, WI, WY)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004

VOTER TURNOUT 2000



National Average for Non-EDR States



Average for EDR States (ID, ME, MN, NH, WI, WY)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000



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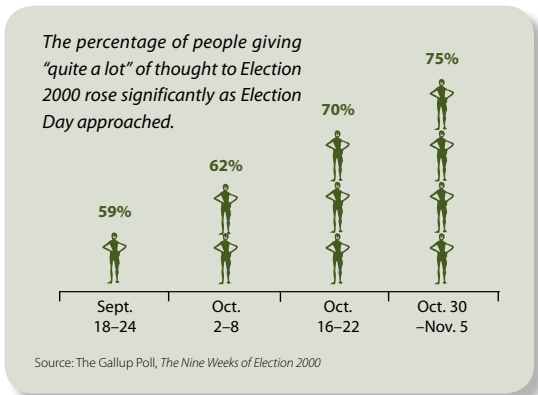
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Election Day Registration (EDR), also known as “same-day voter registration,” permits eligible citizens to register and vote on Election Day. EDR significantly increases the opportunity to cast a vote and participate in American democracy. Six states—Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming—offered EDR in the 2004 presidential election. These states boasted, on average, voter turnout that was 12 percentage points higher than in non-EDR states, and reported few problems with fraud, costs, or administrative complexity. Inspired by their example, Montana will implement a form of EDR in 2006.¹

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, nearly 3 million people across the country had registration problems that prevented them from voting. Reports indicate that registration-related problems were also widespread during the 2004 election—problems that could have been prevented by EDR.

To counteract arbitrary registration deadlines. Twenty-seven states cut off voter registration 25 or more days before Election Day, well before many would-be voters focus on election candidates and campaign issues.

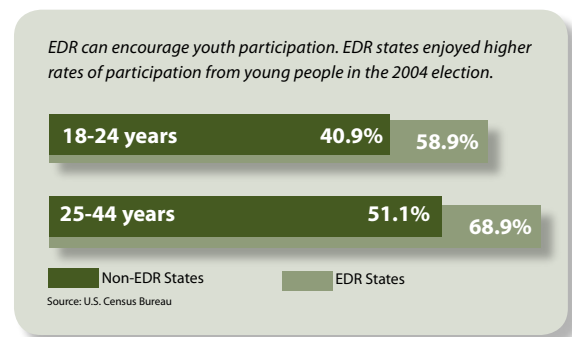


States with EDR have higher turnout. Census data shows that the average voter turnout in the six states with EDR — Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming — was 75.1% of voting age citizens in 2004, nearly 12 percentage points higher than the average voter turnout of states that did not have EDR.

Because voters want it. According to a May 2001 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.²

Who Benefits from EDR?

Everyone. EDR allows people who become engaged by heated election debates during the final weeks of a campaign to register to vote and participate in the democratic process. According to political scientists, EDR could bring millions of new voters into the system.³



Young people. Young Americans move frequently—for school, for jobs—making it harder for them to stay registered. They register to vote at lower rates than the general population. With EDR, these highly mobile Americans can register at the last moment and vote. EDR could increase youth turnout in presidential elections by as much as fourteen percentage points.⁴

People with disabilities. Transportation and other access issues often prevent people with disabilities from registering to vote prior to Election Day. Being able to register and vote on the day of the election reduces the burdens on Americans with disabilities and allows them to participate fully in the electoral process.

The geographically mobile. Census data shows that 40.1 million Americans moved between 2002 and 2003.⁵ Many individuals who move lose their chance to vote by missing the registration deadline in their new election districts. With EDR, they can re-register on Election Day and cast a ballot.

Historically disfranchised voters. New citizens, people of color, young people, and low-income individuals are more likely to have registration problems that could be solved by Election Day Registration.

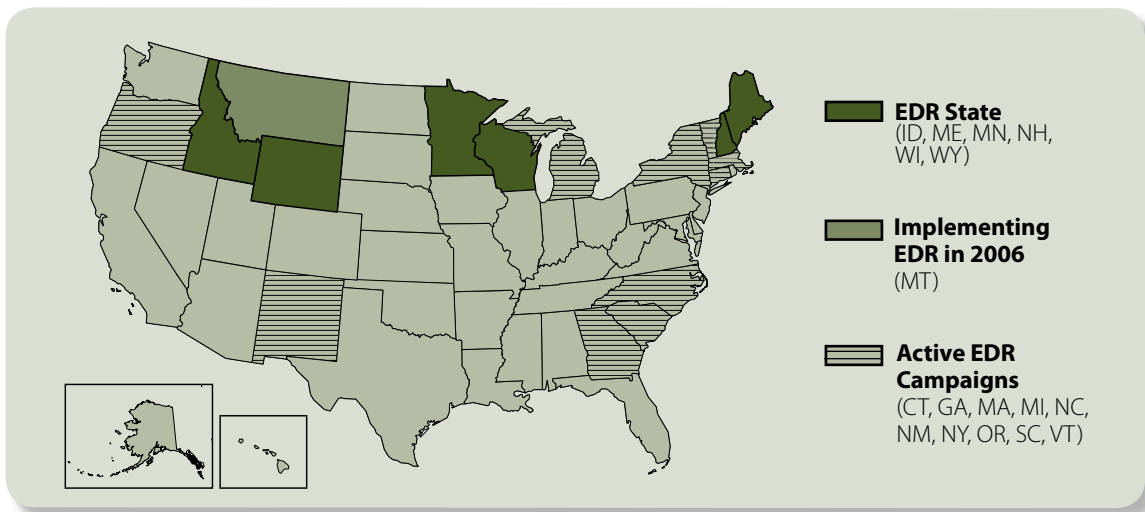
¹ Montana’s EDR bill allows voters to register and vote at the county courthouse.

² Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, “America’s No-Shows,” www.yvoteline.org/noshows2000.shtml

³ Demos, *Expanding the Vote: The Practice and Promise of Election Day Registration*, January 2002, p.10

⁴ <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP01Fitzgerald.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p20-549.pdf>



EDR Offers Benefits Beyond Provisional Ballots

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) requires all states to offer provisional ballots to voters who claim to be registered but whose names do not appear on registration lists. However, many election officials prefer EDR to provisional ballots. After an election, officials must spend extra time and effort to 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 in most states the voter stays unregistered. With EDR, a person whose name does not appear on the voter rolls simply re-registers on the spot and casts a valid ballot.

Also, HAVA left it up to the states to determine when provisional ballots should count. Consequently, many provisional voters were disfranchised during the 2004 election. Thirty-one states automatically invalidated ballots cast in the wrong precinct. Ten other states invalidated the votes of all new registrants who failed to present identification to election officials. EDR virtually eliminates the confusion caused by provisional ballots and allows eligible citizens to cast regular ballots that are counted just the same as ballots of pre-registered voters.

Myths and Realities about EDR

MYTH: EDR encourages voter fraud.

REALITY: EDR has safeguards in place to prevent voter fraud. Election officials in EDR states are as vigilant about safeguarding against fraud as election officials elsewhere.

MYTH: EDR is costly.

REALITY: Election officials in EDR states run elections efficiently. The incremental cost of implementing EDR in new locations in 2004 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.

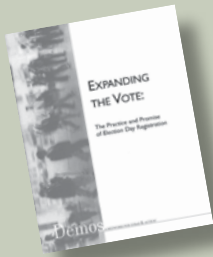
REALITY: EDR will help voters, not parties. It is a common misconception that EDR will disproportionately advantage the Democratic Party. EDR benefits all citizens and encourages everyone to be actively involved in the electoral process. Moreover, both Democratic and Republican election officials support EDR.

“Nevada has consistently been near the bottom in terms of the number of registered voters and those who actually cast their ballot. There are several factors that contribute to this poor showing, but certainly 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

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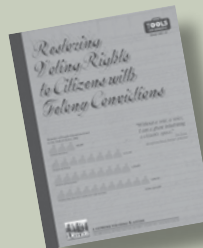
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Democracy reform in the United States has taken on a renewed, urgent focus as presidential, congressional and state elections become increasingly hard-fought and closely decided. From basic concerns about election procedures to fundamental questions about full and equal representation, political leaders and the American people are engaged in a national dialogue about the health of American democracy not seen in a generation or more. At the same time that new opportunities to restore fairness and integrity to our elections emerge, partisans on the federal and state levels are promoting regressive policies that will erode voting rights and suppress electoral participation for decades to come.

Dēmos is a national, non-partisan public policy organization that works to strengthen democracy in the United States for the 21st century. The Democracy Program at Dēmos undertakes timely research and supports advocacy campaigns to advance a diverse and inclusive democracy reform movement across the U.S. We focus primarily on state-level reforms, where opportunities for policy change are most pronounced. Dēmos supports reform efforts by developing and advancing a broad agenda for pro-voter policy; conducting research on current and long-range issues; providing advocates and policymakers with technical support; and working to strengthen reform networks.