

Election Day Registration

Helps America Vote

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

VOTER TURNOUT 2004



National average



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

Source: United States Election Project, 2004

VOTER TURNOUT 2000



National average



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

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000



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 voter turnout that was, on average, 13 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 EDR in 2006.

“EDR will significantly increase the opportunity for all Montanans to cast a vote and will revive voter participation in Montana elections.”

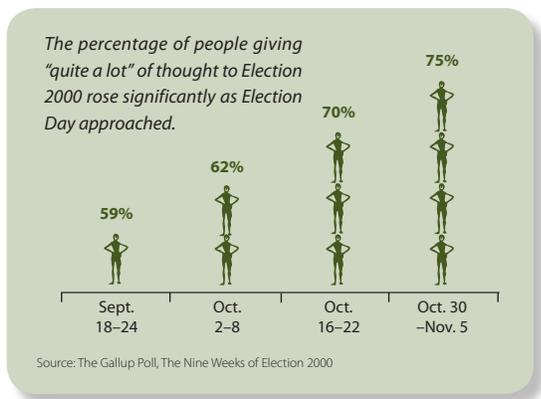
*Montana State Senator Mike Cooney (D-Helena),
former Montana Secretary of State*

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.

Thirty-five states cut off voter registration 20 or more days before Election Day, well before many would-be voters focus on election candidates and campaign issues.



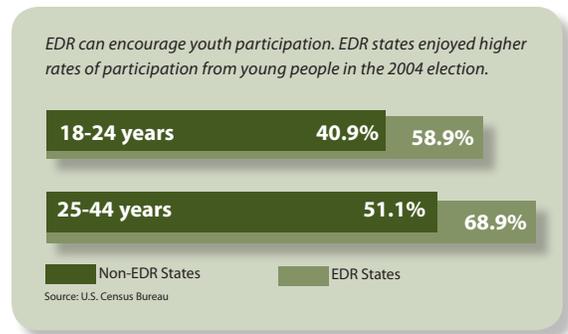
States with EDR have higher turnout.

According to the United States Election Project at George Mason University, the six states with EDR—Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming—had an average turnout of 73.8% of eligible voters in the 2004 election, over 13 percentage points higher than the national average of 60.2%.¹

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 be registered. They vote at lower rates than the general population. With EDR, these highly mobile Americans can register at the last moment and vote. This could increase youth turnout in presidential elections by as much as 14%.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.

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 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.

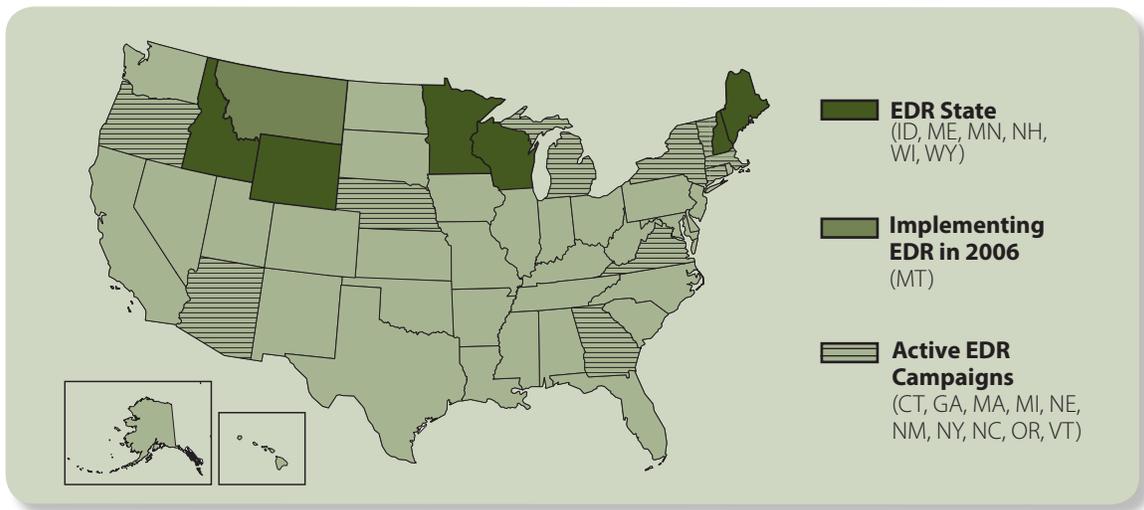
1 <http://elections.gmu.edu/>

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

3 Dēmos, *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 expend 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 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 prior to Election Day. By contrast, with EDR, ballots cast by all eligible citizens count.

Myths and Realities about EDR

MYTH: EDR leads to voter fraud.

REALITY: EDR can actually prevent voter fraud.

EDR allows election officials to control registration. Election officials in EDR states are as vigilant about safeguarding against fraud as election officials elsewhere. Very few documented instances of fraud have ever been confirmed in EDR states.

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.

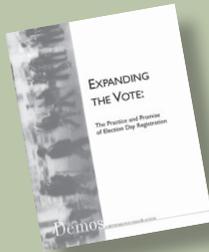
It is a common misconception that EDR will disproportionately advantage the Democratic Party. EDR benefits all citizens and encourages everyone to be actively involved in the electoral process. Moreover, both Democratic and Republican election officials support EDR.

“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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Expanding the Vote:
The Practice and Promise of Election Day Registration



Democracy Dispatches



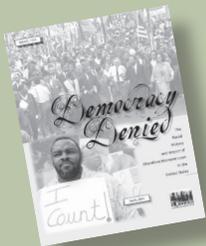
Continuing Failures in "Fail-Safe" Voting:
A Preliminary Analysis of Provisional Voting Problems



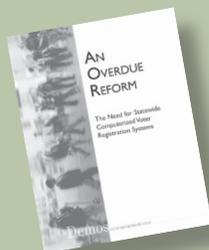
Restoring Voting Rights to Citizens with Felony Convictions



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Democracy Denied:
The Racial History and Impact of Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States



An Overdue Reform:
The Need for Statewide Computerized Voter Registration Systems



Purged!
How a patchwork of flawed and inconsistent voting systems could deprive millions of Americans of the right to vote

For more information, please contact Steven Carbó, Director of the Democracy Program or Ludovic Blain and Lucy Mayo, Associate Directors of the Democracy Program.



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Democracy reform in the United States has taken on new urgency since the 2000 election. From basic concerns about the mechanics of elections to fundamental questions of representation and enfranchisement, the debate about the health of American democracy has engaged political leaders and the public to an extent not seen in a generation or more. At the same time that new opportunities have developed for advancing progressive policy change, conservative partisans are promoting regressive policy that will erode voting rights and suppress electoral participation.

Dēmos is seizing this moment to work collaboratively to advance a diverse and inclusive pro-democracy movement across the U.S. We focus primarily on state-level reforms, where the opportunities for policy change are most pronounced. Dēmos supports state efforts by developing and advancing a broad agenda for pro-voter reform; undertaking timely research on key issues; providing advocates and policymakers with practical technical support; and working to strengthen reform networks.