

Election Day Registration

Election Day and Same Day Registration

Election Day registration (EDR) and same day registration (SDR) are systems allowing a citizen to register and vote on the same day. The single greatest benefit of such a system is simply that citizens are allowed to participate in the process who would otherwise be prevented from doing so.

EDR is not a new idea, but it has regained momentum in recent years. Currently, most states require voters to submit registration forms at fixed deadlines, as far out as 30 days from Election Day. Many prospective voters are unaware of these deadlines and are disenfranchised as a result. Registration problems alone kept approximately three million eligible Americans from voting in 2008.¹

Twelve states (Connecticut, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) and the District of Columbia currently have EDR systems.² In late 2014, Illinois passed EDR, following the pilot program in the November midterm election. Also in 2014, Hawaii passed EDR, but the new law will not take effect until 2018.³ Maryland passed legislation in 2013 to allow Same Day Registration during that state's early vote period starting in 2016.⁴ Utah is running a pilot program including EDR through 2016.⁵

In a report expressing the importance of EDR to the state of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Municipal Clerks Association Board of Directors wrote:

Election Day Registration was established in 1976 as part of a comprehensive legislative package by the Wisconsin Legislature that found voting was the single most critical act in our democratic system of government; that voter registration was not intended to and should not prevent voting; that registration should simply be a remedy against fraud and its burden should be placed upon administrators, not the electorate.⁶

Increased Voter Turnout/Participation

In 2008, the top five voter turnout states were all EDR states (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Maine, New Hampshire and Iowa).⁷ In 2012, four of the top five voter turnout states were EDR states (Wisconsin, Minnesota, New Hampshire and Iowa). Additionally, turnout in the nine states that allowed people to register and vote on the same day in the 2012 election was, on average, over eight percent higher than states without EDR.⁸ In the 2014 general election, 7 of the top 10 turnout states had EDR.⁹

Creates Rules That Are Fair For All Americans

Voter registration deadlines disproportionately impact people who move. U.S. citizens are very mobile with 12.5% of households moving every year. Movers include college students, job seekers, members of the military, and foreclosure victims. Yet many of the basic rules governing our voting processes do not recognize this reality. In fact, frequent movers are much more likely than other citizens to be prevented from voting by our outdated voter registration system.

- *Census data shows that 68 percent of the 27 million people in America over 15 years old who moved between 2010 and 2011 had incomes of less than \$30,000.¹⁰*
- *Research indicates that allowing young people to register to vote on Election Day could increase youth turnout in presidential elections by as much as 14 percent.¹¹*

Election Day and Same Day Registration (continued)

Real People, Real Problems

Randy Spencer, a Maine resident who divides his time between rural Grand Lake Stream and Holden, near Bangor, says same-day registration saved him on more than one occasion.

When he moved his primary residence to Holden in 2006, “I promptly registered to vote,” Spencer said. But when Election Day rolled around, his name didn’t appear on the rolls, so he was allowed to re-register in the town office. In the next November election, the same thing happened.

“I didn’t blame anyone, as mistakes like this can surely happen,” Spencer said. “On the other hand, I’d feel very differently if a mere clerical error like this had cost me my right to vote – twice.”¹²

Fraud Concerns Unfounded

Opponents of EDR and SDR often use fear of fraud as a tactic to attack legislation that would expand citizen access to the ballot box. The integrity of our election system is crucial to the success of our democracy. However, election officials from states that have had EDR/SDR systems for decades find that abuse of such laws is rare and that EDR/SDR can actually increase integrity in the system.

In an op-ed for the New York Times, then Maine Secretary of State Matt Dunlap and Idaho Secretary of State Ben Yursa said:

*While opponents are concerned that this option might encourage voter fraud, such crime is exceedingly rare or nonexistent in states that offer Election Day registration. Citizens of Maine, for instance, have benefited from same-day registration since the early 1970s and no case of voter fraud has ever been attributed to the policy. With simple, fair and safe methods to verify voters, and by relying on effective poll-worker training and sophisticated election administration, our states have ensured the integrity of the process while allowing every eligible citizen to cast a ballot.*¹³

Additionally, former Minnesota Secretary of State Mark Ritchie said, “EDR is much more secure because you have the person right in front of you -- not a postcard in the mail... We have 35 years of experience with this.”¹⁴ It is hard to argue with decades of experience. States like Minnesota have shown us that EDR has the ability to protect the integrity of our election system while significantly increasing citizen participation.

Sources and Additional Reading

¹http://vote.caltech.edu/sites/default/files/03112009Ansolabehere_Testimony.pdf

²<http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/elections/same-day-registration.aspx>

³<http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/elections/same-day-registration.aspx>

⁴<http://www.demos.org/press-release/demos-applauds-gov-omalley-new-maryland-same-day-registration-law> AND http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2013RS/chapters_noln/Ch_157_sb0279E.pdf

⁵ <http://le.utah.gov/~2014/bills/hbillenr/hb0156.pdf>

⁶December 2012 resolution by the Wisconsin Municipal Clerks Association Board of Directors in support of Election Day registration available at <http://wisclerks.org/stuff/uploads/general/ElectionsReportPacket.pdf>

⁷See Voters Win With Same Day Registration, Page 3 available at http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/VotersWinSDR_2010_Demos.pdf

⁸http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2012G.html

⁹Page 7 of this report: <http://www.nonprofitvote.org/america-goes-to-the-polls-2014>

¹⁰US Census: Current Population Survey Data on Geographical Mobility/Migration; Data Tables, Products and Reports, Geographical Mobility: 2010 to 2011 Detailed Tables, Table 5.

¹¹See Voters Win With Same Day Registration, Page 5 available at http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/VotersWinSDR_2010_Demos.pdf

¹²<http://bangordailynews.com/2011/10/09/politics/does-same-day-registration-encourage-voter-participation-or-open-door-to-fraud/>

¹³Maine Secretary of State Matt Dunlap and Idaho Secretary of State Ben Yursa in NY Times 05/11/07 available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/11/opinion/11dunlap.html?pagewanted=print&r=0>

¹⁴Former Senator Russ Feingold and Representative Keith Ellison in Huffington Post 11/03/09 available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sen-russ-feingold/dc-takes-up-same-day-regi_b_343765.html

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