

SAME DAY VOTER REGISTRATION

Fixed advance registration deadlines are among the largest legal barriers to voting.

Advance deadlines that cut off the ability of eligible voters to vote weeks before the election had a purpose when everything was done on paper. The now 19 states that have allowed for Same-Day Voter Registration, dating back to the 1970's, show the justification for fixed cut off is no longer applicable. Today, there is no reason a state should let a registration issue prevent a citizen of voting age from voting.

Today nineteen states and the District of Columbia have Same-Day Registration (SDR) policies and at least three more are set to adopt it. (See Map). SDR allows voters to register and vote on Election Day or during early voting periods. In some states it's only on Election Day. The policies allow voters to register or fix a registration issue when they vote. In contrast, states that cut off registration weeks in advance of the election do not have this opportunity. For more than 40 years, SDR has proven to be an effective, secure, and cost-efficient policy that allows any eligible voter who goes to vote to do so successfully. This increases voter participation in every state that has it.

Preamble of Wisconsin law enabling Election Day registration, 1975

“The (Wisconsin) legislature finds that the vote is the single most critical act in our democratic system of government; that voter registration was not intended to and should not prevent voting.”

How It Works

Voters with valid ID and proof of residency can register or update their registration when they vote on Election Day or during the early voting period. States differ in how it's implemented. Most offer SDR at the polls. Others, including the vote-by-mail states that don't have traditional polls, do so at a voter service center and local election offices.

Impact on Turnout

- Over time, voter turnout in states with SDR has consistently averaged 7-12 points higher than states without SDR policies and cut off registration in advance.
- Research cited by the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) shows that when a state adopts SDR, even after controlling for other factors, it will see an increase in voter turnout by three to seven points.
- Its impact is higher among young voters (18-35) who move more frequently.¹

Benefits and Attributes

- Ensures that any eligible voter, regardless of registration status, can vote.
- Increases voter confidence among all voters, especially first-time voters, when they make the effort to vote early or on Election Day they can have their vote count and their voice heard.
- Allows voters to fix any and all errors made by third party registration drives, election officials, government agencies, or by themselves – including when their name has been removed from the rolls.
- Eliminates the cost and need for provisional ballots.
- Increases accuracy of registration rolls since all SDR registrations are overseen by election officials.

Recommended Practices

SDR works best when:

- It is available at the polls or a vote center rather than only at an election office.
- It does not require a second trip to another site, often not feasible for voters due to work or transportation issues.
- Election workers are trained to carry out and expedite the process.
- There is public education in advance on the availability and opportunity to register.

Resources

National Conference of State Legislatures, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/same-day-registration.aspx>

SEE STATE MAP for a list of states that offer SDR and first year used in a national election.

