



Local Election Officials Report Administering Election Day Registration Without Significant Costs, Administrative Burdens or Fraud

Election Day Registration (EDR) allows eligible citizens to register and vote on Election Day. EDR significantly increases the opportunity to cast a vote and participate in American democracy. The seven states that offered Election Day Registration in the 2006 midterm election boasted an average turnout rate that was 10 percent higher than the rest of the nation.

Demos survey: EDR is currently being considered in a dozen new states this legislative session. Those debates have generated questions about the cost, administration and potential for voter fraud with Election Day Registration. In order to help inform those debates, Demos surveyed twenty-six election officials in six Election Day Registration states (Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) in March 2007. (Montana first implemented EDR in 2006. Given its limited experience, it was not included in this survey.) Targeted jurisdictions ranged in size from 450,000 to fewer than 600 residents; several had significant student populations. We summarize the results below.

Can municipal clerks administer EDR while shouldering other important duties?

With a few exceptions, EDR and election administration was just one duty of the surveyed officials. Municipal clerks are typically also responsible for maintaining government records and city council minutes, licensing, tax collection, and other matters. Estimates of time spent on elections ranged from five to thirty-five percent annually.

Is EDR expensive to implement?

Clerks agreed that the incidental expense of administering EDR is minimal. Incremental costs can include the deployment of an extra poll worker at each precinct to handle registration. Several respondents saw no real cost effect. Smaller jurisdictions may not require any extra poll worker to process voter registrations at the polls on Election Day.

Post-election, many respondents report that Election Day registrations are processed by in-house staff. A few jurisdictions hire temporary workers to input new registrations; a city clerk in New Hampshire estimated that the work amounted to 140 hours of temporary help. A county elections administrator in Idaho projected one or two extra persons working full-time for 1 ½ weeks to process registrations. A Wisconsin clerk in a municipality of about 70,000 people spent about \$5000 on temporary workers to process EDR registrants after the November 2006 election. These trained workers are able to process voter registrations with greater accuracy than during the hectic pre-Election Day period.

In non-EDR states, data entry of new registrations is often done before Election Day by temporary workers or in-house staff working overtime hours. The same work goes on in EDR states, except that it is undertaken after the election and without the time pressures that can cause data entry errors. Several respondents noted that they do not experience a surge of last-minute voter registration applications -- which must be processed before Election Day -- immediately before voter registration deadlines pass in their states. They attributed this lull to the availability of registration on Election Day. One Idaho election administrator whose service predated her state's adoption of EDR in 1993 could not recall any rise in election expenses.

An election administrator in Minnesota observed that EDR may actually be more cost-effective. Election judges who administer voter registrations on Election Day are paid less than the in-house staff that handles voter registration throughout the year.

Does EDR lead to voter fraud?

Demos surveyed election administrators in both large and small jurisdictions, including some with large student populations. The vast majority reported that current fraud-prevention measures are sufficient to protect the integrity of their elections. Security measures may include proof of identity and residency requirements, address confirmation mailings via non-forwardable postcards to EDR registrants after Election Day, criminal penalties for committing voter fraud, and the use of statewide voter registration databases to prevent multiple registrations.

An election administrator in a populous Minnesota jurisdiction noted that he has never seen an organized attempt at mass voter fraud in his 22 years on the job. In his experience, EDR has not increased the potential for voter fraud.

Can EDR be implemented at the polls without confusion?

EDR states appear to handle Election Day registrations efficiently at the polling place. Most such registrants are directed to a separate area for processing voter registration applications, and thereafter join all other voters in line to receive a ballot. One New Hampshire clerk in a town of about 30,000 uses an "express" ballot line for those who have waited to be registered at the polls. Another New Hampshire clerk gives EDR registrants their ballots immediately after registering, without delay. In some smaller jurisdictions, particularly in the context of low-turnout elections, election administrators make do without a separate EDR line or table.

In some jurisdictions, all poll workers are trained to handle registrations on Election Day; others designate specific personnel. Jurisdiction size and projected voter turnout can effect how many poll workers are allocated to conduct voter registrations on Election Day. Many respondents report that EDR required perhaps one extra poll worker per precinct; others said that at least two or three workers per precinct -- and sometimes more in high-turnout presidential elections -- are dedicated to handle new registrations.

Less than half of the surveyed election officials found that administering registrations at the polls can complicate Election Day operations. But most were quick to add that these challenges are more than outweighed by the benefit to voters. One Idaho clerk felt that while EDR may create additional work on Election Day, it makes her job easier; with happier and more cooperative voters, Election Day runs more smoothly. This sentiment was echoed by others, who said that

EDR avoids angry confrontations with disgruntled voters whose names are left off the registration list.

**Does EDR relieve the pressure of processing last-minute voter registration applications?
Does it result in cleaner voter registration records?**

While numerous respondents indicated that their offices do receive a surge of voter registration applications before the voter registration deadline passes, most felt that without EDR this application crunch -- all registrations must be processed before Election Day -- would be much more severe. One New Hampshire clerk in a town of 30,000 guessed that the pre-deadline rush would be comparable with or without EDR, but that without Election Day Registration, "we'd have a lot of unhappy people" at the polls. Another election administrator in New Hampshire noted that the processing of voter registrations applications can be a burden with or without EDR, but that EDR relieves some staff pressure by allowing for much of the work to be completed after Election Day.

One Idaho respondent noted that the accuracy of voter files has improved with Election Day Registration. Before EDR was implemented, her office had to recruit often-untrained staff from another agency to process last-minute voter registrations at a breakneck pace, often with many errors. With EDR, she has trained personnel inputting registrations after the elections, allowing for much cleaner records. Other jurisdictions use existing staff to process registrations, or hire temporary workers who are then trained to do so.