Voters Win with Same Day Registration

WHAT IS SAME DAY REGISTRATION?

"Same Day Registration" (SDR) allows eligible voters to register and cast a ballot after the close of the official voter registration, in the run-up to each election. "Election Day Registration" (EDR) is a variety of Same Day Registration that allows for registration and voting on Election Day itself. Nine states and the District of Columbia currently have Same Day Registration. Maine, Minnesota and Wisconsin adopted SDR in the 1970s; Idaho, New Hampshire and Wyoming enacted Same Day Registration two decades later. More recently, Montana implemented SDR in 2006, while Iowa and North Carolina enacted Same Day Registration in 2007. The District of Columbia, the newest SDR jurisdiction, will implement Same Day Registration in the 2010 election cycle. DC and eight of the nine states allow registration and voting on Election Day; North Carolina permits registration and voting during the state's extended early voting period.

Voter Turnout in the 2008 Presidential Election

Average for SDR States (ID, IA, ME, MN, MT, NH, NC, WI, WY) **69%**

62%

Average for Non-SDR States

Source: United States Election Project, http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm (calculating presidential ballots cast by voting-eligible population)

*North Dakota, which does not require voter registration, was excluded from these calculations.

By counteracting arbitrary voter registration deadlines, SDR greatly enhances the opportunity for Americans to participate in the electoral process and cast a ballot that will be properly counted. States with SDR have historically boasted turnout rates 10 to 12 percentage points higher than states that do not offer Same Day Registration.



District of Columbia

The District of Colombia enacted Same Day Registration in 2009. $^{\rm 1}$

Idaho

Idaho recorded 116,242 individuals registering to vote on Election Day in November 2008, representing over 17 percent of the total ballots cast in the election.²

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Same Day Registration went into effect in Iowa in January 2008. Almost 46,000 Iowans used SDR to vote in the November election.³

Maine

Turnout among eligible voters topped 71 percent of Maine's presidential vote in 2008 significantly higher than the 62 percent average for non-SDR states.⁴

Minnesota

541,876 people registered using EDR in Minnesota in the November 2008 election. Their ballots accounted for more than 18 percent of the votes cast in that election.⁵

Montana

In the 2008 general election, 18,357 Montana citizens registered and voted during the state's "late registration" period, which runs from the close of the regular registration period up to and including Election Day. Of those, 7,419 registered on Election Day itself.⁶

New Hampshire

76,755 New Hampshire residents registered and voted on Election Day in November 2008. Of the 719,403 ballots cast in the state, 10.7 percent were from individuals registering on Election Day.⁷

North Carolina

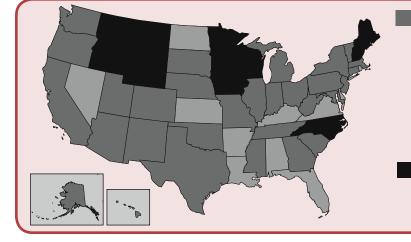
Same Day Registration went into effect in North Carolina in October 2007. The state subsequently saw a steep rise in voter turnout in the November 2008 presidential election. Voting rose 8 percentage points over the 2004 vote, the greatest presidential vote increase in the nation.⁸ 253,000 individuals used SDR in the run-up to the November 4, 2008 election. 105,000 were first-time voters in their counties; the balance used SDR to update their voter registration records and avoid the need to vote by provisional ballot.⁹

Wisconsin

Wisconsin reported 436,347 registrations on Election Day in 2008. This figure accounts for over 14 percent of the total turnout for the state.¹⁰

Wyoming

40,426 Wyoming residents used SDR to participate in the November 2008 general election. They represented 16 percent of those who voted.¹¹



SDR Legislative Activity, 2008-2009

(Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Georgia., Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington State, West Virginia)

SDR States, 2010

(District of Columbia, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Wyoming)

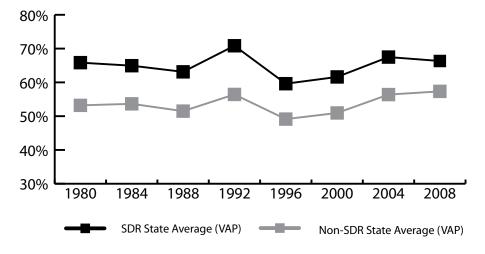
SDR in the 2008 Election

The 2008 presidential election was marked by a tremendous surge in voter interest and participation. Over 1 million Americans used Same Day Registration to vote on or before November 4, 2008.

2008 SDR Overview

- » More than 1 million individuals used SDR to register and vote in the 2008 general election. This bloc of voters is larger than the populations of Detroit, Michigan; Jacksonville, Florida; Indianapolis, Indiana; and San Francisco, California. In fact, this number is larger than the entire populations of Rhode Island.
- » Voter turnout in the nine states that allowed people to register and vote on the same day in the 2008 election was, on average, over seven percentage points higher than states without SDR.¹²
- » The top five voter turnout states were all SDR states (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Maine, New Hampshire and Iowa).

Turnout Rates in SDR vs. Non-SDR States from 1980 to 2008, Presidential Election Years



Source: United States Election Project, http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm, using Voting Age Population

SDR allows eligible voters who may have been mistakenly purged from the voting rolls to cast a meaningful ballot.

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 required states to offer provisional ballots at the polls to voters whose names did not appear on the voter rolls. These provisional ballots are counted if election officials subsequently determine that the individuals were eligible to vote. ¹³

Nearly one-third of the 1.7 million provisional ballots cast in the 2008 presidential election were ultimately discounted.¹⁴ Over 20 percent of provisional ballots cast in the 2006 midterm election were rejected.¹⁵ Much like patients sent home with a placebo, many provisional voters mistakenly believed that they were given a genuine opportunity to vote. SDR allows voters who have been purged or mistakenly left off the rolls to re-register and cast a ballot that will be counted.

SDR states consistently boast higher turnout than non-SDR states.

States with Same-Day Registration have boasted higher voter turnout than those without EDR for over 25 years. Data show an average voter turnout seven percentage points higher than the average turnout for non-SDR states in November 2008. The SDR turnout advantage reached 12 percentage points in the 2004 presidential race. While higher voting rates in Election Day Registration states may not be solely attributable to EDR, research shows that at least three to six percentage points of historical increases were directly related to EDR.

SDR counteracts arbitrary voter registration deadlines.

Voter registration deadlines vary widely across the nation. The experience of SDR states shows that these cut-off dates bear little relevance to a state's ability to run smooth elections. Nevertheless, 28 states close off voter registration 25 or more days before the election—well before many would-be voters have been fully apprised of candidates and campaign issues.

Voter registration deadlines close before the media and the public fully focus on elections.

The University of Wisconsin's NewsLab found that over 40 percent of election news stories were aired in the final week before the 2006 election in seven Midwest media markets.¹⁶ A 2000 election poll found that the percentage of people giving "quite a lot" of thought to the

election rose significantly as Election Day approached, from 59 percent in September to 75 percent in the first week of November.¹⁷ An unregistered voter who had decided to participate in the historic 2008 presidential and congressional elections in the final week of the campaign would have been ineligible to vote in 40 states.

"In Minnesota, we not only believe citizenship is an American right, it is also an American responsibility. We go out of our way to make sure every single Minnesotan exercises his or her duty and is allowed to vote. For the past 34 years, Election Day Registration has guaranteed them that right—fairly and freely. It's a right that all Americans should share."

U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN)(2007)

SDR assists young voters.

Young Americans move frequently—for school, for jobs, for family—making it harder for them to keep their voter registrations current. Although voter turnout among 18-29 year olds reached 51 percent in the 2008 presidential election, the third-highest rate since the vote was extended to 18 year-olds in 1972, it still lagged behind the overall turnout rate in that election.¹⁸ SDR is a powerful tool that can be used to ensure that young people are able to register and vote.

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 percentage points.¹⁹ Iowans between the ages of 18 and 24 comprised almost 35 percent of the voters who used Same-Day Registration to cast a ballot in the 2008 presidential election.²⁰

As the Center for Information and Research and Civic Learning and Engagement concluded in its recent report on the youth voting in the 2008 presidential election, "Of all the election law reforms to facilitate youth voting, Election Day Registration seems to have the greatest and most widespread impact on youth turnout, affecting almost all demographic groups."

> Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Amanda Nover, Emily Hoban, Kirby, Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (2009)

SDR enfranchises geographically mobile and lower-income citizens.

Census data show that over 35 million people in America moved between 2007 and 2008. Approximately 45 percent of those moving during this period had incomes of less than \$25,000.²¹ With early voter registration deadlines, many Americans who have recently moved are unable to fulfill their duty as citizens to vote in elections. With SDR, they can re-register on Election Day and cast a ballot.

"Nevada has consistently been near the bottom in terms of the number of registered voters and those who actually cast their ballots. There are several factors that contribute to this poor showing, but certainly the fact that in Nevada people must register to vote atleast 30 days before an election serves as a stumbling block for increasing participation."

> U.S. Rep. and former Nevada Secretary of State Dean Heller (R-NV), supporting state EDR bill (2003)

SDR is cost-effective and easier for elections officials to administer than provisional ballots.

An authoritative study indicates that elections are no more expensive to administer in SDR states than elsewhere.²² Most respondents to a 2007 telephone survey of local election officials in the SDR states of Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Wyoming described the incremental cost of SDR as minimal.²³

Non-SDR states are also far more likely to distribute large numbers of provisional ballots. According to Wisconsin's elections director, his state's ability to avoid provisional balloting "alone makes SDR worthwhile."²⁴ After an election, officials must spend extra time and effort to comb through voter registration records and determine whether a provisional voter had actually registered and whether her ballot should be counted. This process can take days or weeks. SDR spares election officials from these efforts, and ensures that voters can cast ballots that will be counted.

Provisional balloting dropped off sharply in Iowa and North Carolina in the 2008 presidential elections, the first in which Same Day Registration was available in these two states. Two-thirds fewer provisional ballots were cast in Iowa in 2008 than in 2004. North Carolina saw provisional balloting fall by more than 23,000 between the 2008 and 2004 presidential elections. "As an election official, I seek to facilitate the highest possible vote turnout through a secure process. Election Day Registration is a big part of our success in achieving those goals. EDR ensures that all eligible voters can cast their ballots, without jumping through unnecessary hoops. And EDR keeps voter turnout in our state very high. It's good for democracy and good for Wyoming."

> Max Maxfield Wyoming Secretary of State (2008)

SDR does not encourage voter fraud.

A bi-partisan team of consultants to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission reported widespread agreement that very little evidence existed of voter impersonation at the polls.²⁵ A recent analysis of 2002-2005 data from EDR states also found very little evidence of voter fraud.²⁶ The great majority of local elections officials participating in a 2007 survey in Same Day Registration states rated current fraud-prevention measures sufficient to protect the integrity of elections.²⁷

SDR: A POLICY THAT BENEFITS MILLIONS

Same Day Registration has assisted millions of voters in casting valid ballots and participating in the democratic process. The 2008 presidential election was another illustration of SDR's potential.

Momentum around SDR continues to grow. Three states (Iowa, Montana and North Carolina) and the District of Columbia have enacted Same-Day Registration since 2005. Thirty other states saw SDR activity in 2008-2009: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia., Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington State, and West Virginia.

By adopting SDR, states can reduce unnecessary barriers to participation and empower their residents.

"Election Day Registration increases voter participation by allowing all eligible voters to cast a ballot. Election Day Registrations are processed by trained election officials at their polling location. When successfully registered by the election official, the voter is allowed to cast their ballot and have their voice heard. EDR provides an alternative method for individuals to register and vote, providing the services that citizens want and need to fully participate in their government."

Mark Ritchie, Minnesota Secretary of State (2008)

Never Too Late to Vote

Ben Ysursa and Matthew Dunlap

Originally published in *The New York Times*, May 11, 2007

Last month, Gov. Chet Culver of Iowa signed a bill authorizing Election Day registration, which allows previously unregistered voters with proper ID the opportunity to cast a ballot that day. This is a powerful tool to promote voting and, as secretaries of state of two states that already have this policy in place, we welcome Iowa in joining our ranks.

With Election Day registration, all qualified voters can participate in the vital American tradition of voting without finding themselves hampered by arbitrary registration deadlines. Seven states—ours, as well as Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Wyoming—now use E.D.R., and the evidence is convincing: voter turnout in these states is on average 10 to 12 percentage points higher than in other states.

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 sameday 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.

We also reject the oft-used argument that voters not registered in advance should be effectively barred from voting as punishment for not heeding existing deadlines. While it's true even E.D.R. states have deadlines in place for registration by mail, we firmly believe that missing a deadline should not prevent interested and engaged parties from being able to register in person on Election Day. We are committed to leaving no voter behind, including first-time voters, newly naturalized citizens and those who may have recently changed addresses.

When it comes especially to voters ages 18 to 25—a demographic often absent at the polls—a recent study by Dēmos projected that in Iowa, Election Day registration could result in a 10.7 percent increase in voting among that group.

Other beneficiaries are registered voters inadvertently removed from the rolls, newlyweds who just changed their names and people who, because of whatever mix-up, are asked to cast a provisional ballot instead. In same-day registration states, these folks don't leave the voting booth wondering if their ballots will count equally alongside their neighbors'.

Legislatures from Hawaii to Massachusetts to North Carolina are taking serious steps toward putting Election Day registration into effect. And the need for this critical reform did not escape the notice of Congressional leaders who recently introduced a proposed Count Every Vote act, with an added provision for Election Day registration nationwide.

Though one of us is a Republican and one is a Democrat, we can attest that political affiliation isn't relevant here: this is a policy that is good for voters, regardless of party, and good for our democracy. When it comes to elections, America is best served when all eligible voters cast their ballots—even those who missed the registration deadline.

Ben Ysursa and Matthew Dunlap are the Secretaries of State for Idaho and Maine, respectively.

D.C. Takes Up Same Day Registration, So Should Congress

Sen. Russ Feingold and Rep. Keith Ellison | Huffington Post November 3, 2009 11:43 AM

Today, Virginians will turn out to elect their new governor. Unfortunately, Virginians who are eligible to vote but missed the October 5th registration deadline will not be able to play a role in this important process.

It would be a different story if these Virginians lived in our states, Wisconsin and Minnesota, or any of the seven other states that allow citizens to register and vote on the same day. If they did, merely missing a deadline some 30 days before Election Day -- deadlines that vary widely from state to state -- would not prevent them from exercising their constitutional right to vote.

In 2007, two states, Iowa and North Carolina, adopted Same Day Registration (SDR) proposals. Both states experienced their highest level of voter turnout in decades. Today the DC City Council is scheduled to vote on an omnibus election reform bill that will allow SDR in our nation's capital.

As the Council prepares to vote on this measure, we want to share our experience with Same Day Registration in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Both states have allowed Same Day Registration since the 1970's and since then both states have consistently ranked among the top states in the nation in voter turnout. In fact, in the 2008 election, Minnesota and Wisconsin joined three other SDR states -- Maine, New Hampshire and Iowa -- on the top five list. That's not a coincidence.

Numerous studies by Demos, a non-partisan public policy group, have shown that SDR is especially effective in boosting voter turnout among groups with historically low participation. For this reason, SDR may very well yield a meaningful increase in voting in the District. In 2008, only 60.7 percent of eligible voters in D.C. cast a ballot -- 35 states had higher turnout rates. About 11,000 eligible but unregistered DC residents did not participate in the historic 2008 election. SDR could have made a big difference for many of these citizens.

In addition to increasing voter participation, SDR reduces provisional ballots. When voters who believe they are registered show up at the polls only to find out they are not listed on the voter rolls, they are usually provided a provisional ballot. Provisional ballots are rejected and discarded if it turns out the voter was not properly registered. SDR will allow voters to register on the spot, if they are qualified to vote.

Wisconsin recorded only 211 provisional ballots in the 2008 presidential election compared to 4,575 provisional ballots in Virginia (about half went uncounted) and 14,713 provisional ballots in the District (close to 30% were not counted). Same Day Registration virtually eliminates the need for provisional voting, simplifying and putting certainty back into the process.

Opponents of Same Day Registration argue that SDR will open the floodgates to voter fraud. They are wrong. There is no evidence that SDR harms the integrity of elections in our states. In fact, the opposite is true. In the words of Minnesota Secretary of State Mark Ritchie, "EDR [Election Day Registration] 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." It is worth noting that in the highly scrutinized 2008 Senate election in Minnesota, there were no allegations of fraud caused by SDR.

Some opponents warn that Same Day Registration could cause administrative problems. But our election officials say otherwise. They run election after election without significant complications related to SDR. SDR both improves participation and eliminates many difficulties experienced at the polls across the nation. It's a win-win for voters and election officials. That is why we have introduced the Same Day Registration Act in Congress to require every state to allow SDR for federal elections.

Today is the DC Council's chance to make it easier for citizens to fulfill their greatest civic duty and make their voices heard. SDR is an important reform that has worked in our states. We commend the DC Council for considering it, and we believe Congress should do the same.

Update: The DC Council today unanimously passed an election reform bill that includes Same Day Registration. The bill now goes to Mayor Adrian Fenty for his signature and will become law after the standard 30-day congressional review period. We congratulate the Council and the citizens of DC.

Endnotes

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- Idaho Secretary of State, http://www.idsos.state.id.us/elect/RESULTS/2008/general/tot_stwd. htm.
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- 4. The United States Election Project, http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html.
- Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State, http://www.sos.state.mn.us/docs/election_result_ stats.pdf.
- Email from Terri L. Knapp, Communications Director, Montana Secretary of State Linda Mc-Culloch (Jan. 26, 2009) (on file with Dēmos).
- 7. New Hampshire Secretary of State, http://www.sos.nh.gov/general2008/sumballots08.htm, http://www.sos.nh.gov/general2008/summarynames08.htm.
- 8. See United States Elections Project, http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2004G.html, http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html.
- 9. North Carolina State Board of Elections, ftp://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/ENRS/20081104_ Changed_OneStop_registrations.xls, ftp: //www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/ENRS/20081104_New_OneStop_registrations.xls.
- 10. Email from Kevin Kennedy, Director and General Counsel, Wisconsin Government Accountability Board (Nov. 14, 2009) (on file with Dēmos).
- 11. Peggy Nighswonger, State Elections Director, Office of Wyoming Secretary of State. Telephone interview by Yoijin Kim, Dēmos, April 21, 2009; Wyoming Secretary of State, Wyoming Voter Registration and Voter Turnout Statistics, http://soswy.state.wy.us/Elections/Docs/profile.pdf.
- 12. Voter turnout figures were derived from the number of voted cast for the highest office and the voting-eligible population (VEP), as reported by the United States Election Project, http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html.
- 13. 42 U.S.C. § 15482.
- 14. U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2008 Election Administration and Voting Survey, at 12-13, available at http://www.eac.gov/program-areas/research-resources-and-reports/completed-research-and-reports/program-areas/research-resources-and-reports/copy_of_docs/2008_election-administrationvotingsurvey_508/attachment_download/file.U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2006 Election Administration and Voting Survey, at 20.
- 15. Ibid.
- University of Wisconsin NewsLab, http://www.mni.wisc.edu/pdfs/MNI%202%20Release%20FI-NAL.pdf.
- 17. The Gallup Poll, The Nine Weeks of Election 2000, http://www.galluppoll.com.
- 18. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/State_law_and_youth_turnout_Final.pdf.
- 19. See Mary Fitzgerald, "Easier Voting Methods Boost Youth Turnout," February 2003, available at http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP01Fitzgerald.pdf.

- 20. Email from Linda Langenberg, Iowa Deputy Secretary of State, (Jan. 15, 2010) (on file with Dēmos).
- 21. See U.S. Census Bureau, *Geographical Mobility 2007-2008*, Tables 1 and 5, available at http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/migrate/cps2008.html." Income data reported by the Census Bureau is for persons 15 years of age and older.
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- 26. Lorraine C. Minnite, *Election Day Registration: A Study of Voter Fraud and Findings on Voter Roll Security*, Dēmos (2007), available at www.demos.org/pubs/EDRVF.pdf.
- 27. Depending on the jurisdiction, the measures already in force included proof of identity and residency requirements, address confirmation mailings via non-forwardable postcards, criminal penalties, and reliance on statewide voter registration databases to prevent multiple registrations. Dēmos, *Election Day Registration: A Ground Level View* (November 2007), available at http://www.demos.org/pubs/EDR_Clerks.pdf.

Related Resources from Dēmos

Election Day Registration

- ▷ Election Day Registration: Best Practices
- "The Promise and Practice of Election Day Registration," from America Votes!
- ▷ Requiring Provisional Ballots for Same Day Registration: Few Benefits, Additional Costs
- How Same Day Registration Became Law in North Carolina
- ▷ Election Day Voter Registration in:
 - ▷ New Mexico
 - ⊳ Nebraska
 - ⊳ Vermont
 - ▷ Massachusetts
 - ▷ West Virginia
- ▷ Election Day Registration in 2007: State Legislative Activity
- Anatomy of a Successful Campaign for EDR in Iowa
- Election Day Registration: A Ground-Level View (A Survey of Election Clerks)
- Election Day Registration: A Study of Voter Fraud Allegations and Findings on Voter Roll Security
- ▷ Democracy in a Mobile America

Election Integrity

- ▷ An Analysis of Voter Fraud in the U.S.
- "Is Everyone Else Doing It? Indiana's Voter Identification Law in International Perspective"

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- ▷ A Fallible 'Fail-Safe': An Analysis of Provisional Balloting Problems in the 2006 Election

National Voter Registration Act

- ▷ National Voter Registration Act Fact Sheet
- ▷ Toward an Equal Electorate: Five States' Gains Under the National Voter Registration Act
- Expanding Voter Registration for Low-Income Virginians: The Impact of the National Voter Registration Act
- Unequal Access: Neglecting the National Voter Registration Act, 1995-2007
- Expanding Voter Registration for Low-Income Citizens: How North Carolina is Realizing the Promise of the NVRA
- Declining Public Assistance Voter Registration and Welfare Reform: A Response"

Voter Registration Modernization

 Public Assistance Databases and Automatic Voter Registration: A Survey

Civic Engagement

 Working Together to Strengthen Our Nation's Democracy: Ten Recommendations

Books

- Keeping Down the Black Vote: Race and the Demobilization of American Voters, Frances Fox Piven, Margaret Groarke & Lorraine C. Minnite
- ▷ Thinking Big: Progressive Ideas for a New Era, James Lardner & Nathaniel Loewentheil (eds.)
- ▷ Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age, Allison Fine
- Stealing Democracy: The New Politics of Voter Suppression, Spencer Overton
- ▷ Conned: How Millions of Americans Went to Prison and Lost the Vote, Sasha Abramsky



Dēmos is a non-partisan public policy research and advocacy organization. Headquartered in New York City, Dēmos works with advocates and policymakers around the country in pursuit of four overarching goals: a more equitable economy, a vibrant and inclusive democracy, an empowered public sector that works for the common good, and responsible U.S. engagement in an interdependent world.

Dēmos was founded in 2000.

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