

SMALL INVESTMENTS, HIGH YIELDS: A Cost Study of Same Day Registration in Iowa and North Carolina

Laura Rokoff, Emma Stokking
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SAME DAY REGISTRATION

Nine states (Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) and the District of Columbia allow eligible voters to register to vote and cast a ballot after the close of the regular voter registration period, on Election Day and/or during the early voting period. Same Day Registration (SDR) (also known as Election Day Registration) states have historically led the nation in voter turnout, with average turnout rates 10 to 12 percentage points higher than non-SDR states. In the high-turnout 2008 presidential election, SDR states led the nation in turnout by 7 percentage points¹ and by nearly 6 percentage points in the 2010 midterm elections.²

While the benefits to voter turnout are well-documented, information on the cost of administering SDR is less readily available. Dēmos therefore conducted a telephone and email survey of county election officials in Iowa and North Carolina over a seven month period in 2011-2012 to collect specific cost data associated with Same Day Registration. Information was also gathered on provisional balloting, an issue that is commonly raised in policy debates about Same Day Registration.

Iowa and North Carolina were chosen because their recent adoption of Same Day Registration allowed for the most current and reliable analysis of pre- and post-SDR election expenses. Responses were received from 42 of the 99 counties in Iowa, and 55 of the 100 counties in North Carolina. We expect that these findings will help inform future policy debates on Same Day Registration.

SAME DAY REGISTRATION IN IOWA AND NORTH CAROLINA

Iowa and North Carolina both enacted Same Day Registration in 2007. Iowa voters may register to vote and cast a ballot at their home precincts on Election Day. SDR is only available in North Carolina during the state's early voting period (third Thursday before an election until the Saturday prior to Election Day) at the offices of county elections officials and at satellite early voting sites ("one-stop sites").

With SDR in effect, both Iowa and North Carolina saw a tremendous increase in voter participation in the November 2008 presidential election. North Carolina reported the greatest increase in voting among all states since the 2004 presidential election.³ Almost 253,000 citizens were able to use SDR to cast a ballot.⁴ In Iowa, nearly 46,000 citizens used SDR to vote in the 2008 presidential election.⁵

KEY FINDINGS

- A large majority of respondent counties in Iowa reported little to no additional costs associated with Same Day Registration. Most did not require additional staffing at the polls. Any new expenses were generally associated with additional printing and mailing of SDR related forms.
- North Carolina respondents most frequently cited additional staffing at one-stop sites as the most notable cost associated with Same Day Registration. This need tended to increase among smaller-sized counties.
- The increased expenses cited in North Carolina may not be entirely attributable to Same Day Registration. Most counties that reported adding staff for SDR were unable to disaggregate Same Day Registration costs from overall early voting expenses. Many county officials surveyed in both states do not report itemized election costs.

COST

IOWA

Nearly half of the Iowa respondents reported no direct costs, or only minimal costs associated with Same Day Registration. An overwhelming majority of respondent counties were able to offer Same Day Registration with existing staff. About 70 percent reported no staff increases to handle SDR at polling locations. Over 80 percent reported no increased staffing needs at the county office.

“We really don’t have any extra costs. We don’t hire extra office help for any of it and I have the same number of poll workers I would have even if we did not have EDR.”

– **MARSHA CARTER, SHELBY COUNTY**

(8,983 registered voters)

“There are none [costs] directly associated, as EDRs are processed along with regular voters.”

– **JILL TITCOMB, CHEROKEE COUNTY**

(8,892 registered voters)

OF THOSE COUNTIES THAT DID CITE SPECIFIC COSTS, THE MAJORITY REFERENCED PRINTING AND SUPPLIES.

“... [SDR costs were for] printing of election day registration forms and sending notices to election day registrants after the election”

– **JACK BEESON, DALLAS COUNTY**

(46,295 registered voters)

“Minimal cost, added expense for forms only.”

– **DENNIS PARROT, JASPER COUNTY**

(26,779 registered voters)

“Very minimal [SDR costs]-- extra forms, about 10 forms for the last election”

– **PAM BENJERDES, ALLAMAKEE COUNTY**

(10,029 registered voters)

NORTH CAROLINA

Over 30 percent of respondents in North Carolina were unable to identify costs that were specifically associated with SDR, or reported no significant costs.⁶

Additional staffing was the most common expense reported in those counties that experienced cost increases. Nearly half of the respondent counties added staff at one-stop sites to handle Same Day Registration and voting during the early voting period. Less than a third of the counties required additional staff at county election offices.

The need for additional staff was inversely related to county size – the smaller the county, the more likely the need for additional personnel. Only a fifth of counties with over 100,000 registered voters reported requiring additional staff to facilitate SDR. On the other hand, nearly three-fifths of very small counties (25,000 registered voters or less) increased staff to handle Same Day Registration. Some counties hired up to eight additional workers per election; others added between one to three extra workers per polling location.

The majority of the counties that reported an increase in staffing needs for Same Day Registration were unable to provide specific, SDR-related costs separate from those associated with the operation of one-stop, early voting locations. Increased staffing may in fact be attributed to the sharp rise in early voting, as opposed to the administration of Same Day Registration. Over 60 percent (almost 1.5 million) of North Carolinian votes in the 2008 presidential election were cast during the state's early voting period – a 100 percent increase since the 2004 presidential election.⁷

LARGE COUNTIES (OVER 100,000 REGISTERED VOTERS):

- Unable to estimate due to lack of specific cost information attributable to SDR in survey responses.

MEDIUM COUNTIES (51,000 – 99,999 REGISTERED VOTERS):

- Alamance County (89,841) reported additional staffing costs of \$5,528 for one additional one-stop worker per site (at three sites) and one additional worker in the clerk's office.

“For larger counties the cost is probably minuscule for SDR. But for smaller counties, with much tighter operating budgets, I believe it is a more noticeable cost.”

– **LINDA PAGE, PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NC**
(27,255 registered voters)

“We did add additional workers at OS [one-stop] sites but I could not in good conscience say it was due to SDR. Our additional staff was put into place because of increased use of the one-stop process in general.”

– **KELLIE HOPKINS, BEAUFORT COUNTY, NC**
(32,147 registered voters)

“[Additional staffing] depends on the scope of the Election. No additional staff is needed for smaller (lower turnout) elections. In larger (higher turnout) elections we will bring [two] additional people into the Elections Office site but not the additional sites.”

– **KIMBERLY WILSON, STANLY COUNTY, NC**
(38,746 registered voters)

“For the 2008 general election the cost of staffers administering the registering/voting process [amounted to] \$700 -\$1000 [cost incurred at two additional one-stop sites]. One-stop at county board office does not have added cost.”

– **JASON PERRY, STOKES COUNTY, NC**
(29,931 registered voters)

SMALL COUNTIES (25,000 – 50,999 REGISTERED VOTERS):

- Stanly County (38,746) reported hiring two additional staff members in the elections office for larger elections, at a total cost of approximately \$1,375 for the entire early voting period.⁸
- Duplin County (28,326) estimated they hired three additional staff for smaller elections and roughly 14 for larger elections due to SDR. Local officials estimated \$1,000-\$2,000 in added training and pay for the extra positions, per election.
- Lincoln County (50,073) reported hiring eight additional staff for their two one-stop locations. Compensation for these poll workers totaled \$10,240.⁹

VERY SMALL COUNTIES (LESS THAN 24,999 REGISTERED VOTERS):

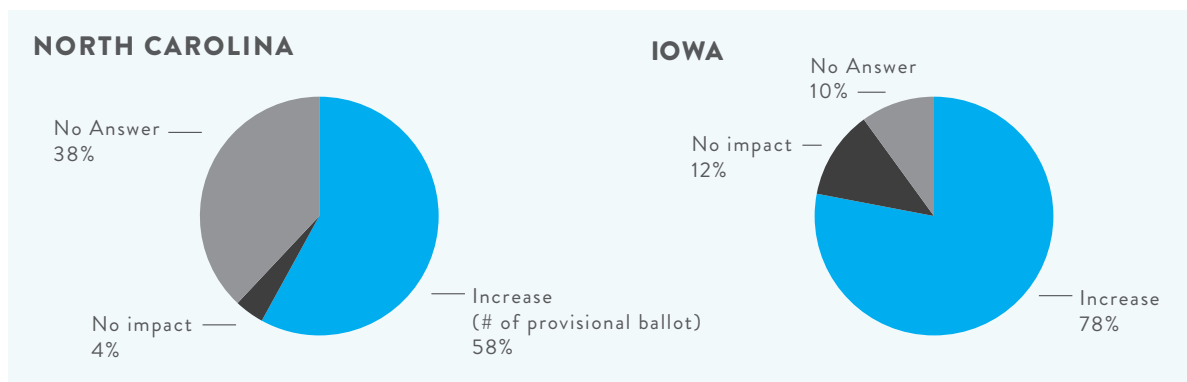
- Hyde County (3,575) reported spending \$2,000 for two additional workers at the county elections office.
- Alleghany County (7,226) reported hiring one to two additional one-stop workers at approximately seven hours per day being paid \$7.25 per hour. We can estimate that one additional worker would cost \$812 and two workers \$1,624.

PROVISIONAL BALLOTING

One significant benefit of Same Day Registration is that it reduces the need for provisional ballots. Provisional balloting can be a frustrating experience for elections officials and voters alike. Elections workers are often hard-pressed to comb their voter registration records in the hectic days after each election looking for evidence of prior registration of provisional voters whose names could not be found on the voter rolls on Election Day. Voters are upset and bridle at casting provisional ballots. Many may be disillusioned by learning that their provisional ballots were ultimately rejected, and never vote again.

Same Day Registration offers a ready solution to these problems. Eligible voters whose names do not appear on poll books merely complete a new voter registration application on Election Day or during the early voting period, and vote a regular ballot.

Statewide data show that provisional balloting declined in Iowa and North Carolina after they introduced SDR. About 10,000 fewer provisional ballots were cast in Iowa in the 2008 presidential election than in 2004, before SDR was enacted. North Carolina saw 23,000 fewer provisional ballots in 2008 than in 2004.¹⁰ This trend also held in mid-term elections. Provisional balloting declined in both states by nearly 50 percent between the 2006 and 2010 election.¹¹



In our survey, 58 percent of North Carolina respondents and 78 percent of Iowa respondents anticipated an increase in the number of provisional ballots if SDR was eliminated.

“[Eliminating EDR] would raise [provisional balloting] tremendously.”

-PAM BENJERDES, ALLAMAKEE COUNTY, IA
(10,029 registered voters)

County elections officials who participated in this survey confirmed the decreased need for provisional ballots with SDR. An overwhelming majority of respondents in both Iowa and North Carolina predicted an increase in provisional balloting if Same Day Registration was no longer available.

Respondents also noted the elimination of SDR could increase costs associated with provisional balloting. In fact, the need to process fewer provisional ballots can offset any increased expense occasioned by Same Day Registration.

CONCLUSION

Voter turnout substantially increased in Iowa and North Carolina after the enactment of Same Day Registration in 2007. Those results were achieved with little to no additional costs for local elections officials. Where new expenditures were incurred, they were for additional staffing at some poll sites or additional printing and mailing of SDR-related forms. Some costs were likely offset by fewer provisional ballots needing to be processed after Election Day. Same Day Registration stands as an effective, cost-efficient means to increase voter participation.

“Eliminating EDR would add numerous provisional ballots costing more money in the printing of packets and more money for workers to research whether they should be counted.”

- TARAH GATES, CEDAR COUNTY, IA
(12,468 registered voters)

“SDR’s are processed during a time when regular staff is focused solely on SDR and other OS [one-stop] activities while provisionals are done post-election, when all other canvass-related actions are occurring. Having said that, SDR probably saves rather than costs ... There are no specific supplies required for SDR, unlike provisional [ballot] envelopes, instructions and pin labels.”

- MICHAEL PERRY, DURHAM COUNTY, NC
(183,389 registered voters)

“Using early voting/SDR has decreased provisional ballots so the cost of working PB’s after the election would easily offset any additional cost of same day registrants.”

- MICHAEL DICKERSON, MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NC
(605,878 registered voters)

METHODOLOGY

Dēmos conducted a telephone and email survey of local election officials in Iowa and North Carolina. Counties were grouped into size subcategories by number of registered voters. The interviews took place from August 2011 through 2012. Most of the officials surveyed were county election directors and auditors. Data on registered voters were collected as of September 2011 from the Office of the Iowa Secretary of State and the North Carolina State Board of Election.

IOWA: 42 OF 99 COUNTIES WERE SURVEYED.

COUNTY SIZE (REGISTERED VOTERS)	TOTAL COUNTIES	TOTAL RESPONDED	RESPONSE RATE	RESPONDENT COUNTIES
Large (greater than 45,000)	10	3	30%	Black Hawk, Dallas, Dubuque
Medium (20,000 – 44,999)	12	3	25%	Clinton, Jasper, Wapello
Small (11,000 – 19,999)	34	12	35%	Bueno Vista, Carroll, Cedar, Clay, Floyd, Hamilton, Henry, Iowa, Madison, Plymouth, Washington, Winneshiek
Extra Small (less than 10,999)	43	24	55%	Adair, Adams, Allamakee, Appanoose, Audubon, Cass, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Crawford, Davis, Decatur, Greene, Grundy, Guthrie, Hancock, Howard, Ida, Louisa, Mills, Mitchell, Montgomery, Shelby, Union, Van Buren

NORTH CAROLINA: 55 OF 100 COUNTIES WERE SURVEYED.

COUNTY SIZE (REGISTERED VOTERS)	TOTAL COUNTIES	TOTAL RESPONDED	RESPONSE RATE	RESPONDENT COUNTIES
Large (greater than 100,000)	15	13	86%	Buncombe, Cumberland, Davidson, Durham, Forsyth, Gaston, Guilford, Johnston, Mecklenburg, New Hanover, Orange, Pitt, Wake
Medium (51,000 – 99,999)	19	12	63%	Alamance, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Craven, Harnett, Henderson, Moore, Robeson, Rockingham, Wayne
Small (25,000 – 50,999)	29	13	45%	Beaufort, Columbus, Dare, Davie, Duplin, Franklin, Jackson, Lee, Lincoln, McDowell, Pasquotank, Stanly, Stokes
Extra Small (less than 24,999)	37	17	46%	Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Bertie, Chowan, Clay, Currituck, Greene, Hyde, Macon, Madison, Northampton, Pamlico, Transylvania, Warren, Washington

ENDNOTES

1. Dēmos, Voters Win with Election Day Registration, available at http://www.Dēmos.org/sites/default/files/publications/VotersWinSDR_2010_Dēmos.pdf.
2. Dēmos, Voters Win with Election Day Registration, 2010 Midterm Elections Fact Sheet, available at http://www.Dēmos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Voters_Win_2010_Dēmos.pdf.
3. McDonald, Michael P. 2004 and 2008. "General Election Turnout Rates," United States Elections Project, accessed February 2012. U.S. Elections Project, http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm#.
4. North Carolina State Board of Elections, Statewide One-Stop Registration Changes: 11/4/2008 Election and Statewide One-Stop New Registrations: 11/4/2008 Election, accessed February 2012. ftp://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/ENRS/20081104_Changed_OneStop_registrations.xls and ftp://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/ENRS/20081104_New_OneStop_registrations.xls.
5. [Former] Iowa Secretary of State Michael A. Mauro, "Iowa Secretary of State 2008 Report," on file at Demos.
6. Thirty percent is derived from the aggregate of counties reporting no or minimal costs associated with SDR and those responding they are unable to determine the any costs directly associated with SDR.
7. Data from U.S. Election Assistance Commission Survey and Report; (2004, 2006, 2008, 2010) http://www.eac.gov/research/election_administration_and_voting_survey.aspx and North Carolina Free Enterprise Foundation, "Early Voting Key to Electoral Victory," April 28, 2011, available at http://www.ncfef.org/NCFEF_News/Entries/2011/4/28_Early_Voting_Key_to_Electoral_Victory.html.
8. Staff worked approximately 5.5 hours per day for twelve and a half days at \$10 per hour
9. Staff worked approximately 8 hours per day for 16 days at \$10 per hour
10. McDonald, Michael P. 2004 and 2008. "General Election Turnout Rates," United States Elections Project. February 2012. U.S. Elections Project, http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm#.
11. Data from U.S. Election Assistance Commission Survey and Report (2006, 2010), http://www.eac.gov/research/election_administration_and_voting_survey.aspx.

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MEDIA CONTACT