

# Same-Day Registration in Hawaii

*How ‘Late Registration’ Strengthens Hawaii’s Democracy  
by Increasing Voter Turnout and Participation*

**F**ar too many Hawaiians are excluded from voting—our most important democratic process—due to arbitrary voter registration deadlines. As a result, voter turnout in the state is lower than the national average. There is a simple solution to ensure all eligible voters in Hawaii can participate in our elections. Same-Day Registration (SDR) (also known as Late Registration in the current Hawaii legislative proposal) allows eligible voters to register to vote and cast their ballots on the same day, at the same time. Late Registration reduces voting bureaucracy by eliminating registration deadlines, allows registration issues to be fixed on-site, and modernizes the registration process to better serve the needs of a busy and mobile society.

One of the chief impediments to full voter participation is the unnecessarily cumbersome system of voter registration. Barriers are in place from the very beginning of the process, including requiring citizens to actively register to vote and to continually update their registration each time they move. Beyond the requirement to register, most states, including Hawaii, cut off registration to potential voters in the month just before Election Day. Even those who do register in advance can find themselves left off the voter rolls on Election Day because of mistakes in processing or flawed voter purges. Late Registration is a practical, time-tested fix to these issues.

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Moreover, adopting Late Registration in Hawaii would help boost voter turnout without imposing a cost burden on the state or local municipalities. Any increase in costs would likely be offset by a decrease in the expenses associated with provisional ballots and the potential increase in voter turnout, making the adoption of Late Registration a worthwhile investment.

### **Same-Day Registration: Big Benefits, Little to No Costs**

Same-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. **Hawaii, in particular, would benefit from the increased turnout seen in SDR states. In 2012, the state's voter turnout rate in was 47.3 percent, nearly 10 percentage points below the national turnout rate.** In the 2012 election, nine states (Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) and the District of Columbia allowed eligible voters to register to vote and cast a ballot after the close of the regular voter registration period.

Past experience shows that SDR administration adds little to no additional expenses to elections. In a survey of county election officials in North Carolina and Iowa, two states that recently adopted SDR, respondents said administering SDR was not a cost burden.<sup>1</sup> In Iowa, a large majority of respondent counties reported little additional costs associated with SDR; new expenses were generally limited to additional printing and mailing of SDR related forms.<sup>2</sup> These costs were potentially offset by the decrease in printing and processing provisional ballots.<sup>3</sup>

Over 30 percent of respondent counties in North Carolina either saw no significant increase in costs or could not identify additional expenses specifically associated with SDR. Clerks in North Carolina found that the decrease in provisional ballot use and processing likely offset any costs from SDR.<sup>4</sup> When there were expenses, they most occurred from additional staffing; however, because North Carolina offered SDR at their one-stop early voting centers, the increased staffing need may have been in response to the sharp rise in early voting.<sup>5</sup> The state saw a 100 percent increase between 2004 and 2008 in early voting.<sup>6</sup> While there may have been an increase in costs, the increase in early voting is also an indication of heightened voter engagement.<sup>7</sup>

The cost effectiveness of SDR is apparent not just in recent states, but historically, states have seen few costs associated with administering SDR. Maine, Minnesota and Wisconsin have offered SDR since the 1970s.<sup>8</sup> Recent research shows that their elections are no more

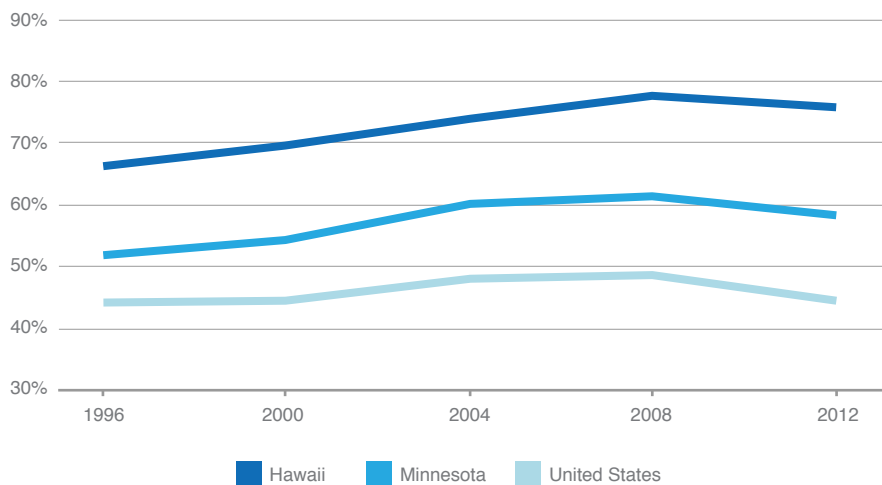
costly than states without SDR.<sup>9</sup> This research is supplemented with first-hand experience from county clerks. Idaho adopted SDR in 1993 and an election administrator from the state said she could not recall any rise in election expenses when SDR was implemented.<sup>10</sup> Other clerks from New Hampshire and Maine said there were costs associated with training and adding staff but the overall effect was not to increase expenses but just to shift them.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, the Late Registration legislation in Hawaii, HB 2590, appropriates federal funds from the Help American Vote Act to help implement the Act,<sup>12</sup> which helps offset any costs to the state and localities.

### Late Registration Could Boost Voter Turnout in Hawaii

The reasons why SDR boosts voter turnout are simple. SDR provides the opportunity to correct any issues with registration on the spot. Voters who move between elections, for example, can use SDR to update their registrations, rather than showing up at the polling place only to be turned away for an outdated registration record.

### Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections



Young people are particularly geographically mobile and research shows that SDR can help boost turnout among 18- to 25-year-olds by over 9 percent.<sup>13</sup>

Many voters also do not get engaged with elections until the final few weeks before Election Day. Hawaii's voter registration deadline is 30 days before the election.<sup>14</sup> This early deadline means that those that get inspired to vote in the days leading up to Election Day cannot vote because they have missed the voter registration cutoff date. SDR

would allow these eligible voters to engage in civic life by voting and, in turn, bring more voices into the electoral system.

Hawaii would benefit from the increased voter turnout. Voter turnout in the state consistently lags behind the national turnout rate and is substantially below the turnout rate in states with SDR, like Minnesota.

## **Conclusion**

Hawaii's Late Registration proposal would expand the opportunity to vote by extending the registration deadline and allowing eligible voters to register and vote on Election Day. Increasing voter turnout will strengthen Hawaii's democracy by bringing more residents into the political process. ■

## Endnotes

1. Laura Rokoff, Emma Stokking, *Small Investments, High Yields: A Cost Study of Same Day Registration in Iowa and North Carolina*, (Feb 2012), available at <http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/SDR-CostStudy-Final.pdf>.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. North Carolina has since repealed SDR despite the increased voter turnout and high usage rate.
8. *Election Day Registration: A Ground Level View*, available at <http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/EDR%20-%20A%20Ground%20Level%20View.pdf>.
9. R. Michael Alvarez and Stephen Ansolabehere, *Same-Day Registration in the United States: How One Stop Voting Can Change the Composition of the American Electorate*, (June 2002), available at [http://vote.caltech.edu/sites/default/files/vtp\\_wp5.pdf](http://vote.caltech.edu/sites/default/files/vtp_wp5.pdf).
10. *Election Day Registration: A Ground Level View*.
11. *Ibid.*
12. HB 2590 H.D.1, available at [http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2014/bills/HB2590\\_HD1\\_HTM](http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2014/bills/HB2590_HD1_HTM).
13. Steven Carbo, *Same Day Registration Testimony in Maryland House and Senate*, (Feb. 21, 2013), available at <http://www.demos.org/publication/same-day-registration-testimony-maryland-house-and-senate>.
14. *Voter Registration in Hawaii*, available at <http://www.dmv.org/hi-hawaii/voter-registration.php>.