

How Do We Fix Low Voter Turnout?

Why Election-Day Registration Policies Can Increase Turnout

Fast Facts:

Voter turnout is dependent on both stimulation and retention. Election Day Registration (EDR) targets the stimulation of voters while early voting targets the retention of voters. (Burden 2013)

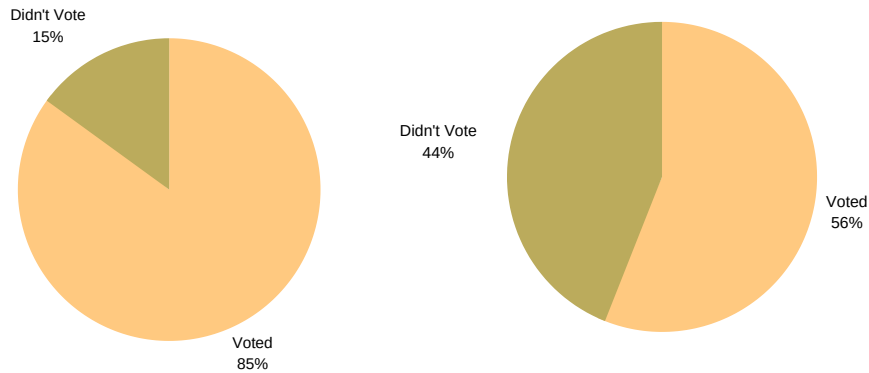
Despite common thinking that early voting is successful, states with higher early voting rates typically have lower turnout overall (Burden, 2013).

There is no significant difference in levels of voter fraud in states with EDR and states that close their registration a month in advance (Hall, 2013).

Often, Voter ID laws can complicate registration, instead of simplifying it primarily due to restrictions on the use of PO boxes and current addresses (Tobias, 2018).



The Difference in Voter Turnout based on Prior Registration in 2016



Turnout of people who were already registered

Turnout of all voting age citizens in the US

Why do people vote?

People vote because they are registered to vote (Erikson, 1981). Voter turnout in the US is one of the lowest of all developed countries. As seen in the pie charts above, the turnout rate of people who were registered before the 2018 election season can be almost 30% higher than those who are not (DeSilver, 2018). According to a study done by the Pew Research Center, only 56% of eligible citizens voted in the 2016 Presidential election (DeSilver, 2018). Increased ease of registration causes more people to register--therefore the most effective voting policy to increase turnout is the policy most effective at increasing registration. The most common policy solutions to ameliorate low turnout is early voting yet

Election Day Registration is a direct effort that has been shown to increase voter turnout more than early voting (Burden, 2013). This is primarily because early voting tends to decrease efforts by activists to mobilize voters as activists and organizers perceive that early voting will make more people vote.

Global Approaches to Voter Turnout



Globally, voting registration and resulting turnout have been addressed very differently. In some countries, it is compulsory to vote, but even in these countries, voter turnout is not 100%. In Belgium, the law requires voting for all who are eligible, yet turnout in 2014 was 87.2% (Hutt, 2018). However, many countries that don't have a compulsory voting system still yield strong turnouts because of the ease of registration. For example, Sweden has automatic registration and had a turnout of 82.6% in 2014. South Korea doesn't have a registration policy and had a high turnout of 77.9% in 2017. All citizens over 19 in the country are allowed to vote demonstrating again how turnout depends on registration (Hutt 2018).

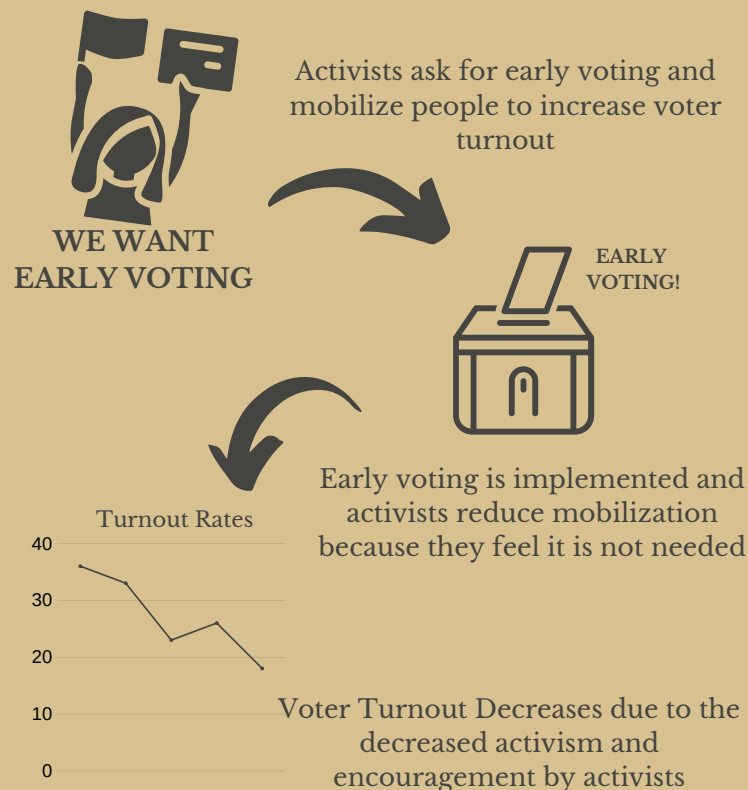
History of Voter Registration

In the US, individual citizens are responsible for registering themselves to vote. Eligible voters have always had to “pay” the costs associated with voting—whether that be poll taxes of the past or the time and bureaucracy of today (Highton, 2004). In the past, voter registration policies were implemented in order to restrict minority populations from voting. After reconstruction, between 1890 and 1904 every confederate state enacted poll taxes in order to restrict black voters in their respective states (Highton, 2004). Additionally, seven confederate states adopted literacy tests. There are clear historic ties between restrictive voter registration policies and the suppression of minorities due to the racism and bigotry of the Jim Crow South (Highton, 2004).

Why Turnout Matters

States with more stringent voting laws are more likely to have a voter turnout population that is primarily upper class. Consequently, these states are more likely to have more restrictions on welfare benefits imposed by lawmakers. The restriction of voting rights and in turn welfare programs decreases the political power of the working class. Less voter registration requirements are correlated with increased welfare eligibility and benefits (Avery and Peffley 2005). To the right, there is a graphic demonstrating again why early voting policies are not as effective as EDR. EDR has not been shown to create the same cycle of decreasing mobilization of activists but has been shown to increase voter turnout more than early voting and other registration policies because of the increased ease of registration it provides (Highton, 2004).

Why Early Voting isn't Effective



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