

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Only slightly more than half of voting-age Ohioans voted in the 2000 presidential election. There were huge problems with this election nationwide, ranging from incorrectly cast votes, to voters being turned away from polls, to hotly contested results. A lawsuit filed by the Ohio ACLU alleges that, in Ohio, more than 94,000 voters had their ballots rejected. In the end, the candidate who won the popular vote was deemed to have lost the electoral vote, decided by an extremely small number of ballots cast in Florida, which had an error-prone voting system. The low voter turnout, high number of people denied the right to vote, high error rate, and close results showed that every American vote carries weight.

This research brief discusses ways to strengthen Ohio's democracy by increasing voter participation. The brief is adapted to Ohio from national research by Demos, a research institute devoted to democracy reform. Among the findings:

- States with registration cut-off dates, or closing dates, closer to election day have higher voter turnout than states with early cut-off dates.
- The six states in the U.S. with election day registration (EDR) have seen increases in voter registration and participation. Typical turnout in these states is eight to 15 percent higher than the national average.
- Ohio had a higher percentage of voter turnout (55.8 percent) than the national average (51.3 percent) in 2000, but still fell roughly four- to 13-percentage points below turnouts in five of the six states with EDR.
- Political scientists estimate that nationwide same-day registration would produce an average seven-percentage point jump in number of voters, increasing voter registration in presidential elections by 8.54 million people.
- Nationwide, the number of poll respondents who report giving “quite a lot” of thought to the election jumps from 59 percent in September to 75 percent by October 30th through November 5th. By this time, voter registration deadlines in Ohio have passed.
- Year 2000 presidential voters in at least 25 states arrived at the polls to find their names absent from voter lists due to delays in registration or illegal and unexpected purging. Ohio did not report significant problems with incorrect voting rolls, but as many as 10,000 votes went uncounted between Cuyahoga and Montgomery counties alone.¹
- Older citizens and those with more schooling, higher incomes, and good jobs are more likely to vote than younger, less educated, and less affluent Americans. Easing registration would diversify participation in elections.

The National Voter Registration Act of 1993, or the “motor voter” act, and the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) were implemented to make voting more accessible to disabled citizens, eliminate error-prone voting systems, and reduce inaccuracies in voter rolls. EDR, or election day registration, would complement these reforms, by boosting voter registration and increasing participation in our democracy. Though implementing EDR in Ohio would require an amendment to Article V (“Elective Franchise”) of the state constitution, the effort could help bring thousands of nonvoting Ohioans to the polls in upcoming elections.

¹ U.S. House of Representatives, Judiciary Committee, “How to Make a Million Votes Disappear: Electoral Sleight of Hand in the 2000 Presidential Election,” p. 89.