

electionline Weekly – March 27, 2008

electionline.org

I. In Focus This Week

Report: Mass. election-day registration would boost youth, minority turnout

If approved, proposal would take effect in time for 2008 for November vote

By [Dan Seligson](#)

electionline.org

As Massachusetts lawmakers consider a bill that would allow residents to register and vote on election day, a new report suggests that allowing the option could boost turnout by more than 200,000 in the Bay State.

The [report](#), released by [Demos](#) and prepared by two academics, Jonathan Nagler, of New York University and R.Michael Alvarez of the California Institute of Technology, predicts turnout could increase by as much as 5 percent generally and more among young voters ages 18-24, those who have recently relocated, minorities and the state's poorest citizens.

Findings follow the state legislature's Committee on Election Law recommended passage of the bill, [S. 2514](#). The legislation is awaiting consideration in the state senate.

Eight states – Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Wyoming – offer EDR. If approved, Massachusetts would be the ninth state in the country – and third in New England to offer it.

The state would also be by far the most populous to do so. With nearly 6.5 million residents, Massachusetts has a million more people than Minnesota, the next most populous of the eight states that offer same-day registration and voting.

North Carolina offers [same-day voting](#), which allows voters to register and cast in-person absentee ballots, but does not allow the practice on election day.

Without a history of convenience voting (the state offers neither no-excuse absentee voting nor in-person early voting) or support from a number of local election officials, the fate of the initiative in Massachusetts is uncertain.

Clerks in a number of cities and towns have expressed concern, with one telling a local [newspaper](#) that he thought EDR would lead “more confusion, more problems and more work for my office.”

Bob Shea, town clerk for the town of Hanover, told [The Hanover Mariner](#) that he envisioned voters registering in multiple towns and casting multiple votes. The town's registrar of voters said it would “a disaster.”

Opposition is not universal, however. Some clerks – and the association representing them – have opted to see what develops in the legislature.

Sally Hayden, town clerk for Rutland and president of the Massachusetts Town Clerks' Association, said she and others had to see what shape the final proposal would take.

“Hopefully if this is something that the legislature thinks Massachusetts needs, the town clerks would be behind it as long as the regulations are there to help us to implement it,” she said. “A

number of clerks in small communities have just one-person offices. [Offering EDR] at the polls would be a help to them rather than to hold registration at the town hall.”

A [report](#) by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology published in 2003 found that nearly 10 percent of 1.3 million registered voters in the state who did not cast ballots in 2000 reported “registration problems at the precinct” as their reason for not voting.

Demos reported that Massachusetts ranks 21st nationally in voter turnout, a position that would almost certainly improve with the implementation of EDR.

“Moving to EDR would lower [the] hurdle for thousands of citizens in Massachusetts and bring more participants into the democratic process,” the report stated.

According to a staffer for state Sen. Edward M. Augustus Jr., D-Worcester, chair of the Election Laws Committee, the legislation would allow registration at polling places rather than exclusively at town offices, addressing at least some of the concerns raised by town clerks. Newly registered voters would have their names entered into the statewide voter registration database after the election.

If approved, the measure would take effect for the November 2008 vote and again in the 2010 general election.

Unlike previous bills in the state that would have allowed no-excuse absentee voting, the EDR proposal does not require the approval of a constitutional amendment, boosting its hopes in the legislature dominated by Democratic lawmakers. Both the governor and secretary of state support EDR, as does [The Boston Globe](#), the state’s largest newspaper, which endorsed the idea just before February’s primary election.

Massachusetts was not the only New England state debating EDR this month.

Vermont lawmakers were [poised](#) to act on an EDR bill in mid-March. The state, which allows voters to register as late as six days before an election, faced similar resistance from some town clerks. This year’s efforts appear to have been unsuccessful.

While the state senate discussed the issue and took testimony, EDR will not advance in 2008, said Kathy DeWolfe, the state’s election director.

“We don’t expect there to be any additional action this year,” she said.

Correction: Due to an editing error, last week’s newsletter story, “As Supreme Court mulls photo ID, states consider similar bills”, should have listed Tova Wang as the co-author of a draft report submitted to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission on voter fraud and voter intimidation.

II. Election Reform News This Week

Voter rolls in Pennsylvania closed Monday evening and election officials statewide were swamped with voters registering for the first time and changing party affiliation. [Westmoreland County](#) officials said that more than 500 registration applications were filed at the courthouse Monday. “We’ve been busy for two weeks and it’s been pretty steady today. It’s been our busiest day,” Jim Montini, election bureau director told the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*. Elsewhere in the state, some voters in [Monroe County](#) forgot to mark party affiliation on their forms making them unable to vote in the April primary. In [Luzerne County](#), the elections office received 6,000 new registrations or party switches. “We’re just bombarded,” Leonard Piazza told the *Times-Leader*. “Folks here decided at the last minute to rush the place, and that’s what happened yesterday.”

[North Carolina is also busy preparing for the state's May 6 primary.](#) Clerks throughout the state are preparing to send out absentee ballots. Becky Galliher, director of the Iredell County Board of Elections, told the *Statesville Record & Landmark* that this year's primary is going to be one to remember. "I think [turnout] could be the heaviest we've ever had," she said. Ensuring that the right voter gets the right ballot is a complicated process. "It's something only we know how to do," she said. "And it can get confusing."

A recently released study by the Brookings Institute indicates that [most Americans are comfortable with some models of electronic voting machines](#), although the technology does have problems, including a 3 percent error rate for some of the machines tested. Some of the study's results were surprising, co-author Richard Niemi, a political science professor at the University of Rochester in New York told *PCWorld*. Niemi expected the volunteers would find paper ballots easiest to use because of the familiarity, he said. Yet the top-rated DREs came out ahead of paper when voters were asked about ease of use and confidence that their ballots would be recorded as cast, he said. A related [survey](#) also released this week by InfoSentry, an information technology consulting firm, reported that there "is no widespread, growing crisis of public confidence in voting systems that some interest groups have proclaimed." The report indicates 68 percent of those interviewed indicated high or very high trust in the voting process.

A bill currently before the South Carolina state legislature [would reverse a decades old law that prevents the sale of alcohol on election day](#). Sen. Greg Gregory, R-Lancaster, told a local television station that the law was on the books because polling places in the past were in the same places that sold liquor. Now, Gregory says, restaurants and bars are open on voting day and can sell liquor. He says the change will also mean more money for the state.

III. Opinion This Week

National: [Internet voting](#); [Justice Department](#); [Voting systems](#); [Voter registration](#)

Arizona: [Test ballots](#)

California: [Vote-by-mail, II](#)

Colorado: [Paper ballots, II](#); [Voting system](#)

Connecticut: [Poll privacy](#)

Florida: [Voter registration](#)

Indiana: [Special election](#); [Vote centers](#)

Massachusetts: [Voter ID](#); [Same-day registration](#); [Sex offenders](#)

Mississippi: [New voters](#); [Voter fraud](#); [Voter ID](#)

Missouri: [Ballot summary language](#)

New Jersey: [Voting machines, II](#)

North Carolina: [Early voting](#)

Ohio: [Jennifer Brunner, II](#); [Crossover voters, II, III](#)

Oregon: [Vote-by-mail](#); [Homeless voters](#)

Pennsylvania: [Online voter registration](#); [Special election](#); [17-year-olds](#)

Vermont: [Instant-runoff voting, II](#)

Some sites require registration

IV. Job Postings

All job listings must be received by 12 p.m. Eastern on Wednesday for publication in our Thursday newsletter. Job listings are free but may be edited for length. Whenever possible, include Internet information. Please email job postings to mmoretti@electionline.org
