

EARLY VOTING: BACKGROUND AND KEY MESSAGES

Early voting periods are a crucial opportunity to provide equal access to the ballot for all citizens. Unfortunately, states across the country continue to cut back on early voting. These moves will disenfranchise voters and make voting a headache for everyone by lengthening lines at polling places.

CUTBACKS TO EARLY VOTING: STATES RESTRICTING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Eight states passed laws cutting back on early voting days and hours. These restrictions could exacerbate lines on Election Day and are particularly likely to hurt minority voters. For example, in North Carolina, Department of Justice data show that 7 in 10 African-Americans who cast ballots in 2008 voted during the early voting period, and 23 percent of them did so during the week that was cut. Many states eliminated weekend and evening hours, when minority voters are more likely to cast a ballot. According to a study in Ohio in 2008, 56 percent of weekend voters in Cuyahoga County, the state's most populous, were black.

POSITIVE MOMENTUM: STATES THAT ARE IMPROVING EARLY VOTING PROCEDURES

Three states expanded or created early voting opportunities, which can reduce stress on the voting system, lead to shorter lines on Election Day, and improve poll worker performance, among other benefits. Missouri and Connecticut voters will also consider ballot measures to create early voting periods.

WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS

- **Key Need — Information Is Critical:** More than half of likely voters have not heard about laws that change voting rules and a plurality think they make no difference — positive or negative.
- **Opportunity — Americans Believe in the Core Values behind Voting:** 98 percent of likely voters agree with the statement that “voting should be equally accessible to all citizens regardless of income, race or disability” and 97 percent agree with the statement that “as the leading democracy, the U.S. needs to work to keep our voting system free, fair and accessible.”
- **Opportunity — Americans Support Positive Reforms:** 64 percent of likely 2014 voters support “early voting so that every eligible American citizen, including working parents and disabled Americans, has the opportunity to go to the polls and have their say without waiting in line for hours.”

STATS AND FACTS

When promoting positive reforms to improve access to the ballot, some facts advocates can cite include:

- **Early Voting Is Essential to Providing Equal Access to Voting:**

In North Carolina, Department of Justice data show that 7 in 10 African-Americans who cast ballots in 2008 voted during the early voting period, and 23 percent of them did so during the week that was cut. Many states eliminated weekend and evening hours, when minority voters are more likely to cast a ballot. According to a study in Ohio in 2008, 56 percent of weekend voters in Cuyahoga County, the state's most populous, were black.

- **Early Voting Improves Elections:**

In-depth Brennan Center research indicates that early voting shortens Election Day lines, reduces stress on the system, improves poll worker performance, lowers the risk of error, and improves voter satisfaction. In 2012, more than 30 percent of votes were cast before Election Day.

There was also movement on the national level. The bipartisan Presidential Commission on Election Administration released a widely-praised set of recommendations to fix many of the problems persistently plaguing the voting system. These ideas included modernizing voter registration and increasing early voting opportunities. A few states — Hawaii, Illinois, Nebraska, Massachusetts, and Minnesota — adopted some of these reforms in 2014. Democrats in Congress also introduced a host of bills to modernize the voting system, reduce long lines, and increase access to the polls.

KEY MESSAGES

Those arguing in favor of early voting — or against cutbacks to early voting periods — can draw upon the following messages to reach key audiences:

How to Respond to Early Voting Restrictions

- Voting brings us together as Americans. It's the one time whether you're young or old, rich or poor, that we all have the same say.
 - America is the leading democracy of the world, and voting should be free, fair, and accessible.
 - Some Americans choose to vote early because of job conflicts, travel, or transportation challenges.
 - Early voting gives responsible Americans across the country the ability to have their voice heard, even if they can't make it to the polls on Election Day.
 - Early voting has grown over the past decade. In 2012, over 30 percent of votes were cast before Election Day.
- Some politicians are placing burdensome restrictions on early voting to make it harder for some Americans to participate equally in our democracy. In fact, at least eight states have passed laws to severely limit the availability of early voting.

- It is wrong for politicians to manipulate the election system and deny Americans their right to vote for their own political gain.
- In these tough economic times, all eligible voters should have the opportunity to participate equally in our democracy. Early voting gives more Americans the chance to have their say.

How to Advocate for Early Voting

- In the 2012 election, millions of voters across the country had to stand in line for hours just to cast a ballot and have their voices heard. Worse, some stood in long lines just to learn they had been kicked off the voter rolls. That's unacceptable and we can fix it.
- Elections are the one time all Americans can make their voice heard. By requiring states to expand early voting to a minimum of 10 days, including Saturdays and Sundays, we can give voters more opportunities, reduce the number of people who vote in person on Election Day, and ease the congestion at polling places.
- While dozens of states allow early voting, there are still millions of Americans who don't have this opportunity. More states should invest in democracy by offering early voting so that every eligible American citizen can have their voice heard without waiting in line for hours.
- Early voting gives eligible Americans a choice of when they can cast their ballot. This offers voters the freedom and convenience they need to make their voice heard in our great democracy.

**For more on laws to improve voting access since 2012,
visit: www.brennancenter.org/expandvoting2012**