



## EARLY VOTING

“Government of the people, by the people, and for the people” is a fundamental principle of the United States. However, many citizens who are registered and want to vote find it difficult or impossible to wait in line for hours at their polling place on Election Day. Expanding voters’ options by allowing early voting, particularly if that includes “instant voter registration,” will enable more citizens to participate in the political decision-making process, letting them fulfill the important civic responsibility of voting and strengthening our democracy.

### Why is early voting needed to increase voter participation?

- **Voters are busy.** Over 1/3 of registered voters who do not vote attribute their inaction to being out of town, away from home, too busy, or having conflicting obligations on Election Day. Other Americans complain of transportation problems or inconvenient polling place locations. More of our citizens will vote when we allow them to choose where and when they will vote. In addition, offering instant voter registration at early voting sites further empowers voters who may have missed restrictive registration deadlines. These voters can simply go to early voting locations, re-register, and vote on the spot.
- **Employment, child and other dependent care, or other obligations prevent voters from waiting in long lines on Election Day.** The distressing scenes of people waiting hours to vote in the 2004 general elections are detrimental to would-be voters who do not have hours to spend on line. Adding an early voting period will spread out voting over a longer period of time, leading to shorter lines for everyone.

### How does early voting affect election administration?

- **Local election officials like early voting.** Early voting “helps take the pressure off the polls on Election Day,” according to a deputy elections administrator in Florida.
- **Less strain on Election Day resources.** With an early voting period, fewer voters will wait until Election Day to vote. The administrative work will be spread out over a period of time.

- **Earlier resolution of problems.** If a significant number of people vote early, many problems can be detected and resolved before Election Day. With instant voter registration, any voter who is not on the rolls can re-register at early voting centers, be entered into the statewide voter database, and cast a regular ballot at that early voting center.
- **Better resolution of problems.** Problems and questions will be identified prior to Election Day, when permanent election workers can address them thoughtfully, rather than leaving them to the temporary volunteer election workers struggling with throngs of Election Day voters.

### What is the popularity of early voting?

- **Many states allow it.** The number of states allowing early voting has increased from 2 in 1963 to 25 in 2005.
- **Many people took advantage of early voting in the 2004 general elections.** In some counties in Georgia, more than 1/3 of the voters used early voting. In Texas, more people voted early than voted on Election Day. Forty percent of Nevada voters voted early. Almost 1/5 of those voting in Florida used early voting.
- **The push for early voting continues to grow.** In North Carolina, a bill to implement early voting with instant voter registration has been introduced in the state legislature. And starting in the March 2006 primary, voters in Illinois will be able to cast their ballots beginning 22 days before Election Day until the Thursday before the election, and have a roughly week-long window during that period to register and vote.