

## LWV Pro-Voter Reform: Early Voting

**Early voting is becoming a more popular way for people to cast their ballot**, especially during presidential election years. The number of people taking advantage of early voting is likely to increase in subsequent elections as more states adopt early voting and more voters become comfortable with the practice.

In person early voting helps ensure that every citizen in this country has the opportunity to cast a ballot and participate in our democracy. Early voting can provide citizens an opportunity to fit the important act of voting into the busy demands of work, school, and life. By reducing the crush of voters on Election Day, early voting makes the entire voting process more efficient. **The League of Women Voters in each state should support early voting proposals that meet the needs of our democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that include provisions that expand early voting to weekends and hours that are outside of a normal workday.**

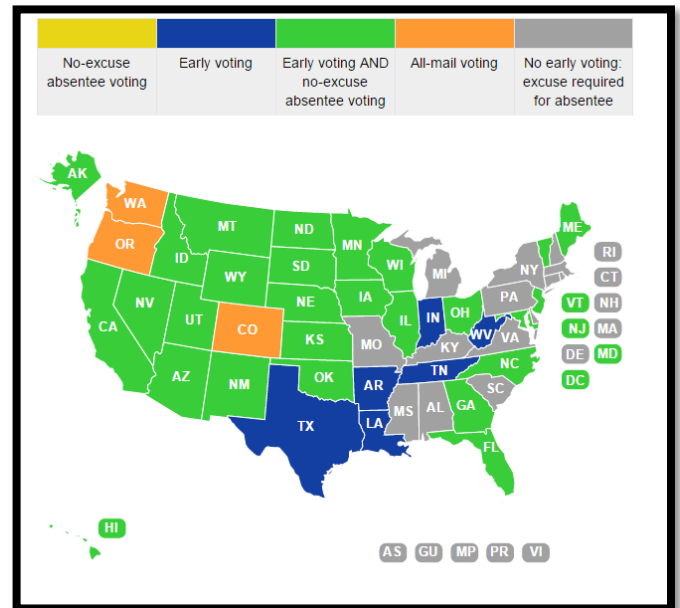
### \*Key Benefits of Early Voting:

- Greater access to voting and increased voter satisfaction
- Early identification and correction of registration errors and voting system glitches
- Improved poll worker performance
- Shorter lines on Election Day

[\\*Research from the Brennan Center](#)

### Fast Facts on Early Voting (As of March 2015)

- ✓ In 2012, approximately **31% of all votes were cast prior to Election Day**, compared to 29% on November 4, 2008. This is a significant increase from 20% in 2004 and part of the upward trend experienced since 1992, when only 7% of all votes were cast early.
- ✓ In 2012, the **nine states with the highest percentage of early voting** were Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah.
- ✓ **33 states** allow Election Day in-person voting
- ✓ In 2012 in North Carolina, the first weekend of early voting saw nearly **17,000 voters**. For the final Saturday of early voting, the daily turnout was almost 21,000 voters — the single highest turnout in 17 days of early voting.
- ✓ **18 states** plus DC allow Saturday voting, while only **4 states allow for Sunday** voting (with 5 states leaving it up to local county clerks to decide).





## What does *good* early voting legislation look like?

It is important that any proposed legislation is written in a way that not only helps those people who are already showing up at the polls on a regular basis but will also help enfranchise citizens and potential new voters who may have difficulty voting on Election Day and/or during regular business hours. The League is especially interested in ensuring that pro-voter reforms fairly enfranchise underrepresented communities of voters such as racial and ethnic minorities. Ideally, the League would like to support only the best versions of early voting legislation.

### EARLY VOTING IMPACT: FLORIDA 2012

- *In 2008, African Americans in FL took advantage of early voting at a much higher rate than whites in FL.*
- *Prior to the election in 2012, the Florida legislature cut early voting, and completely eliminated voting on the Sunday before Election Day.*
- *In Miami-Dade County, some people stood in line for up to 6 hours on Election Day.*
- *One analysis estimated at least 200,000 eligible voters in Florida did not cast a ballot because of long lines in 2012 – a result of these cuts.*
- *Additionally, they found that slightly more than 18% of those who voted on the last Sunday of early voting in 2008 — the popular “Souls to the Polls” day, eliminated in the 2012 cut— did not vote at all despite still being registered.*
- *So many of Florida’s 2012 voting problems clearly came from the cuts to early voting, that 6 months after the election the legislator voted to once again expand early voting.*

Based on [research done by the Brennan Center for Justice in 2013](#) on early voting, there are seven key elements of good, pro-voter early voting legislation:

- 1. *Distribute early voting places fairly and equitably.*** Early voting locations need to be available in rural, urban, and in areas that have high populations of minorities equally to ensure that every voter has equal access to vote early if they choose.
- 2. *Set minimum daily hours for early voting and provide extended hours outside standard business hours.*** Again, this allows voters to cast a ballot before or after work, increasing the number of individuals using the system.
- 3. *Provide weekend voting, including the weekend before Election Day.*** Studies have shown that weekends are the most popular times for early voting, and providing voting on Sundays in addition to Saturday has been very successful in other states (where congregations organize “Souls to the Polls” events after services). Weekend voting also lessens the stress on Election Day since most people who could only vote early on a weekend would otherwise show up on Election Day (rather than, say, on an alternative early voting weekday).
- 4. *Allow use of both private and public facilities.*** Allowing for private and/or commercial buildings to be used helps with capacity, visibility, and availability issues.
- 5. *Begin early in person voting a full two weeks or more prior to Election Day,*** allowing voters the flexibility and opportunities to vote when their schedules allow.
- 6. *Update poll books daily.*** Doing so will help polling officials keep track of who is voting as well as when and where they vote. Additionally, updating the poll books daily means officials don’t have to rush to update the poll books the day before Election Day.
- 7. *Educate the electorate about early voting.*** With any new legislation involving voting, it is important for states to think about how they will inform the public. Voters will only take advantage of early voting if they know that it exists in their state, as well as the times, locations, and dates.

It is worth noting that many states also have expanded absentee/mail in options for voters in recent years. While all states are required to provide absentee ballots, many states require an excuse of the voter before they can have a ballot mailed to them. Only a few states are mail-only, where a ballot is automatically mailed to every eligible voter (no request or application is necessary), and the state does not use traditional precinct poll sites that offer in-person voting prior to or Election Day.

### **Additional Resources**

1. [Project Vote Policy Paper, 2013](#)
2. Brennan Center for Justice study 2013, [Early Voting: What Works](#)
3. [National Conference of State Legislatures overview of states with early voting](#)
4. Credit Map (pg. 2): [The National Conference of State Legislators](#)



*Is your League hoping to implement or expand/improve early voting in your state?*

Please contact Tim O'Brien ([TOBrien@lww.org](mailto:TOBrien@lww.org)) or Cynthia Sebian-Lander ([CSebianLander@lww.org](mailto:CSebianLander@lww.org)) for additional LWVEF resources and support.