EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF ELECTION DAY VOTER REGISTRATION IN MISSISSIPPI

by
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ABSTRACT
ADAM BLACKWELL: Exploring the Potential Effects of Election Day Voter Registration in Mississippi (Under the direction of Dr. Melissa Bass)

With recent Supreme Court decisions and state legislative initiatives, policymakers and scholars heatedly debate voting rights in America. The debate typically centers on policies that seek to affect the accessibility of voting. Election Day Registration (EDR) is one voting policy being discussed. Allowing voters to register on Election Day is a policy currently used in eleven states and the District of Columbia, and states with EDR rank highest in the nation’s voter turnout rates. In this thesis, I analyze the voter turnout effects and Election Day Registration policies in North Carolina and Minnesota, as well as the political environments surrounding the implementation and political sustainability of these policies. I compare voter turnout effects prior to and after the implementation of Election Day Registration and research how many voters actually take advantage of EDR in each state, drawing on US Census information on voter turnout for the general population, as well as young voters and racial minorities. I then apply my finding to Mississippi. I conclude that an EDR policy in Mississippi would increase overall turnout, especially among African Americans, Hispanics, and young voters. EDR in Mississippi would also dramatically increase turnout in midterm elections. While there would be substantial voter turnout effects from EDR, the implementation of the policy is not possible in Mississippi’s current political climate. Passage of EDR will require a grassroots movement, opinion change, and a strong outreach effort involving a variety of people and institutions.
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*  The figure is statistically insignificant and therefore not reported
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the 2012 Presidential Election, only 53.6 percent of the voting age population turned out to vote in the United States (McDonald). America is supposed to be the world’s beacon of freedom, and free elections and voting are supposed to be America’s most prized freedom. How are we to sell free elections to other countries if we can only show mediocre participation rates? Furthermore, how do we remain the beacon of free elections and the beacon of strong, participatory democracy when other countries outshine us in voter participation? America is supposed to be the model nation for representation and government responsiveness - two areas driven by voting. How do we continue to have a strong representative democracy and a responsible government, when voters do not turn out? According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), countries such as Sweden, Norway, Germany, Brazil, and Italy consistently have voter turnout percentage levels in the high 70s to 90s (IDEA). The United States continues to rank in the middle to lower half of countries in terms of voter turnout (IDEA). If America wants to continue to be the leader in democracy, the leader of the free world, and if Americans want a responsive government, then we must reform our voter registration and elections process. Low voter turnout is a problem with both international and domestic implications.

Voting is an integral part of ensuring a strong democracy and responsive government. Due to our representative democracy, we must vote to show our elected officials how we feel about certain issues. If a group of people does not vote, then
elected officials will not be responsive to them (MassVote, 2013). Further, voting leads to effects on public policy, issue priorities, and the government in general (MassVote, 2013). Representative John Lewis summarizes it well when he says, “the vote is the most powerful, non-violent tool we have in a democratic society” (Lewis). Essentially, voting is the most basic tool citizens have to influence democracy and government. However, voting and elections are not without their challenges.

America’s election process is obsolete and inefficient. The idea of a single Election Day on a Tuesday stems back to the nineteenth century and the highly agricultural society of the time (Simmons-Duffin, 2012). Holding elections on one day a year, in the middle of the workweek, is no longer a logical or effective concept; today, Tuesday is one of the most inconvenient days to vote. Census survey data concludes that, “1 in 4 people says he’s too busy or his schedule doesn’t allow him to get to the polls” (Simmons-Duffin, 2012). Also, digital voting machines are wearing out and becoming antiquated (Moore, 2014). Furthermore, America’s traditional election process is inefficient. In the 2012 election, voters reported waiting in lines as long as four hours in Florida (King, 2012). An analysis by Ohio State University and The Orlando Sentinel “concluded that more than 200,000 voters in Florida ‘gave up in frustration’ without voting” (Peters, 2013). Additionally, the voting process is largely run by inadequately trained volunteers, and it is difficult to ensure the uniformity of the election process on a national level, when “there are 8,000 different jurisdictions that are responsible for putting on some part of our elections” (Page, 2014). We live in a much different society today than our founding fathers, and this society calls for new and innovative solutions to the inconvenience of voting.
One voter put it well, when he said, “[voting] is one of the most sacred rights you have. They should make it as painless as possible” (Peters, 2013). Policymakers and scholars often debate the philosophy of voting as a right versus a privilege and along with that, the difficulty involved in voting. A privilege is defined as “an immunity or benefit enjoyed only by a person beyond the advantaged of most,” while a right is defined as “that which is due to anyone by just claim, legal guarantees, or moral principles” (Searcy, 2011). Voting is often seen as a privilege, because other countries do not have that freedom, and earlier generations fought for and protected our ability to vote (Searcy, 2011). Ron Christie, former Resident Fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard argues that voting is a privilege, because it can be taken away or revoked (Christie, 2012). Furthermore, voting is a privilege because it is limited to a certain group of citizens. Society doesn’t allow children to vote, and many states don’t allow convicted felons to vote (Fehrenbach, 2012). If voting is considered a privilege, then it might be reasonable to require some effort on the part of citizens. George Will argues that voting should not be made easier. He argues that by doing so, “the caliber of the electorate must decline,” as you remove all effort from voting and allow uninformed or unmotivated citizens to vote (Will, 2012). Because voting is not an act that every citizen of the United States can legally participate in, it is considered by some to be a privilege, and every effort should be made by citizens to be worthy of that privilege to vote.

Others, myself included, argue that voting is a right, instead of a privilege. The Constitution refers to “the right to vote” five times - more than any other “right” that it guarantees (Epps, 2012). Susan B. Anthony drew upon the Declaration of Independence
in arguing that voting is a right. She argued that, if the “consent of the governed” is to be
given, then voting must be a natural right to all citizens; further, that, “our democratic-
republican government is based on the idea of the natural right of every individual
member thereof to a voice and a vote in making and executing the laws” (Anthony,
1873). Columnists at *The Columbia Daily Tribune* argue that liberty is often taken away
from citizens - for example, liberty is taken away from incarcerated criminals. However,
Americans consider liberty a right, not a privilege. The same logic can be applied to
voting. While it is taken away from some citizens, it is still a right (2012). Furthermore,
the United States holds voting to be a right when it imposes democracy on other nations.
The Constitutions of Iraq and Afghanistan both call for the “right to vote” and the “right
to elect” to be enjoyed by all citizens (Epps, 2012). The constitution imposed on Japan
after World War II also provides that “universal adult suffrage is guaranteed” as a right
(Epps, 2012). The United States imposes the freedom to vote on other countries as a
right, instead of a privilege. Why would we not consider it a right in our own country?

The argument that voting should be a right aligns well with the idea that voting
should be easily accessible. Larry Norden, deputy director of the democracy program at
the Brennan Center for Justice, argues that voting is the one time where all Americans are
equal (NPR Staff, 2012). Further, Norden argues that because of this, “government has a
responsibility also to make voting accessible to all of its citizens” (NPR Staff, 2012).
Because voting is a right that all Americans have, the barriers to voting should be
minimal, if they should exist at all.

Relying on the logic of Susan B. Anthony and *The Columbia Daily Tribune*, I
believe that voting is a right, not a privilege. While I agree with some tenets of the
privilege philosophy, I cannot argue that voting is a privilege. The ideal of voting as a privilege is the same ideal that policymakers used in the past to disenfranchise voters - women don’t have a place in political life, so they shouldn’t have that privilege; non-landowners do not have responsibility or a stake in the community, so they shouldn’t have that privilege. Eric Foner, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University, notes that this philosophy used in the past exemplified the conflict between “voting as a right and voting as something that only the right people should do” (Epps, 2012).

Public officials and academics have suggested many policy reforms to combat the inconvenience and inaccessibility of voting, so that voters can better exercise their right. Some call for Election Day to be a national holiday (Smith & Foster, 2012). Policymakers and advocates have also pushed for online voting, early voting periods, a reform to the absentee process, weekend voting, vote by mail, and others (Keyes, 2012; Orr, 2012). Each of these policy proposals has advantages and disadvantages, and some are more feasible than others. These policies are known as “convenience voting policies,” because they essentially make voting easier. As voting becomes easier, it also becomes more accessible to citizens. Thirty-three states and the District of Columbia have already implemented early voting policies (National Conference of State Legislatures “NCSL,” 2014). Oregon, Colorado, and Washington conduct elections by mail only. However, Colorado and Washington open some voting centers for early voting only. Seventeen states “allow certain elections to be held by mail” (NCSL, 2014). Over twenty-five states have created reforms to the absentee voting process (NCSL,
2014). Clearly, many policy options exist to diminish the inconvenience of voting and make voting more accessible.

In researching policy options, I have found that Election Day registration is the most effective convenience policy at increasing voter turnout. Eleven states and the District of Columbia offer Election Day voter registration (NCSL-SDR, 2013). The first Election Day registration policy was enacted by Maine in 1973, and more states continue to debate implementing this policy today (NCSL-SDR, 2013). Election Day Registration, compared to other convenience voting policies, appears to create the largest increase in turnout, and the policy is slowly gaining traction among more left-leaning supporters and states. According to reports, “data shows an average voter turnout 7 percentage points higher than the average turnout for non-EDR states in November 2008. The top five states in terms of voter turnout were all EDR states” (Guest, 2012). Election Day Registration is especially helpful in our society, “where over 35 million people changed residences in 2011” (Rapoport, 2012). It especially benefits young people, low-income citizens, and racial minorities - groups that also consistently move at higher rates (Rapoport, 2012). It is clear that Election Day voter registration can have a substantial effect on voter turnout; however, the policy has not gained a great deal of popularity among the general electorate and state legislatures, especially as more conservative state legislators push for voter identification laws.

America is at a pivotal time in its life regarding civil rights, voting rights, and governmental policy, in general. As our nation grows and modernizes, it is clear that new policies are needed to effectively govern. Election Day registration has the ability to
increase voter turnout across the country, and, specifically, I believe it has the ability to dramatically increase voter turnout in the state of Mississippi.

Methodology

In this thesis, I explore the possible effects of implementing Election Day voter registration in Mississippi. To do that, I study the political environments, state demographics, and voter turnout histories of two EDR states: Minnesota and North Carolina. I chose Minnesota because its Election Day registration policy has endured since first implemented in 1974 (NCSL-SDR, 2013). Minnesota offers insight into possible turnout effects that Mississippi could experience and into how to sustain the policy through years of political contestation. North Carolina has several similar demographic and political characteristics to Mississippi; both have a large African-American population and a conservative state political culture. Thus, North Carolina gives an interesting take on policy formation and sustainability in a southern state. In each state case study, I explain the state’s political environment at the time of passage of Election Day registration, as well as the state’s voter turnout history before and after the enactment of EDR. Using these statistics, I will be able to make predictions regarding the political feasibility of Election Day registration in Mississippi, and I will be able to estimate the possible voter turnout effects of the policy in Mississippi.

Throughout my research, I have analyzed multiple sources of voter turnout statistics, with some sources utilizing the Voting Eligible Population (VEP) and others using Voting Age Population (VAP). Differences between VEP and VAP often result in slightly different statistics reported for the same election. The US Census Bureau’s
Current Population Survey employs VAP, which includes anyone age 18 or above; before 1971, VAP referred to anyone age 21 and up (McDonald). The George Mason University statistics use VEP, which takes into account that some people 18 and up are not eligible to vote, such as felons and non-citizens.

Critics argue that the Census Bureau’s statistics are inflated due to a social desirability bias, as well as intercensal adjustment - the process of adjusting one decade’s population estimates after a new Census occurs (McDonald; Taylor & Lopez, 2013). For example, we will not have completely accurate 2012 voter turnout information until the 2020 Census (McDonald). While this is the case, the United States Census Bureau continues to rely on VAP data, and, in my opinion, the Census Bureau’s Current Population Surveys offer the most comprehensive database on voter turnout. For this reason, and for the sake of consistency, I have chosen to solely rely on VAP statistics in my work.

This work seeks to understand the effects of Election Day registration on voter turnout and to analyze the political environments surrounding the policy’s implementation and sustainability. Along with that, I conclude that by building a strong coalition and outreach organization, supporters could feasibly pass Election Day registration in Mississippi in the future. Further, the policy could have dramatic effects on turnout in the state, as it has had in others. Specifically, based on North Carolina and Minnesota, I think turnout among youth and minority groups, and turnout during midterm elections, would dramatically increase in Mississippi.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to shape policy, it is helpful to understand any history surrounding the general topic of the policy, as well as related policy options and ideals. This gives the policymaker a greater framework on which to base her or his policy opinions and a greater sense of the academic literature surrounding the policy. For that reason, my literature review focuses on the history of voting rights - specifically, how voting rights expanded to become more inclusive throughout U.S. history. Then I give a general analysis of convenience voting policies with a specific emphasis on early voting, which is one of the nation’s most prevalent convenience voting policies. Finally, I end my literature review with a discussion of Election Day registration in general.

History of Voting Rights - From Exclusive to Inclusive

Voting rights have been an evolving concept in the U.S. since before the nation’s founding. Throughout history, groups have slowly gained the right to vote - including non-property owners, African Americans, women, and Native Americans. Voting has moved from an exclusive privilege of the few to an inclusive right of many through policy change. While, at times, the right to vote has also contracted, overall, it has greatly expanded. In order to understand the need for further expansion through Election Day registration, we must first review the history of voting rights in America.
Pre-Civil War

The vote has been an important cornerstone in our nation since the Colonial period. The first election was held immediately upon the arrival of English settlers to Jamestown in 1607 (Crews, 2007). The voting franchise, in its earliest form, was very limited. The typical colonist eligible to vote was a white male property owner over the age of twenty-one (Crews, 2007; Mintz, 2009). Leaders in the colonies believed voters needed to have “a stake in society” in order to vote (Mintz, 2009). Property owners were seen to have this stake and to be committed, independent community members (Mintz, 2009). After the Revolutionary War and even before the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, most states removed their property-owning and religious restrictions to voting (Mintz, 2009). These restrictions were replaced with taxation requirements, reflecting the “no representation without taxation” principle (Mintz, 2009). Once again, if a person paid taxes to the community, he was considered independent and committed enough to the community to vote. Six states allowed free African Americans to vote after the Revolutionary War; however, African Americans were barred from voting in most states by the early to mid-1800s (Mintz, 2009). In fact, “every new state that joined the Union after 1819 explicitly denied blacks the right to vote” (Mintz, 2009).

The mid to late 1800s are known as the “era of universal white manhood suffrage” (Mintz, 2009). This period saw states remove all voting qualifications based on property ownership and taxation (Mintz, 2009). As states began to urbanize and industrialize, the number of residents who were eligible to vote based on property requirements quickly shrank (Mintz, 2009). For example, in 1841, only 11,239 out of 26,000 adult males were eligible to vote in Rhode Island (Mintz, 2009). Pressure to
expand voting rights came from organized “propertyless men; from territories eager to attract settlers; and from political parties seeking to broaden their base” (Mintz, 2009).

As more white men gained the right to vote, others saw their voting rights decrease. More restrictions were placed on African-Americans. Some women property-owners, who had been allowed to vote in New Jersey, lost their right (Mintz, 2009). Many felons were excluded from voting. Some states even implemented literacy tests and long-term residency requirements (Mintz, 2009). Much of this can be attributed to the earlier principle that voters needed to have a stake in the community and an independent nature. African Americans were certainly not considered eligible to vote, as they were not considered independent or having a stake in the community. In fact, they were not even considered full persons; African Americans were counted as three fifths of a person for U.S. Census purposes until 1865 and the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment (African American Registry, 2000). African Americans would not constitutionally gain the right to vote until after Reconstruction.

Voting Rights for African Americans

Following the Civil War, the South, and the United States as a whole, entered a dynamic period regarding voting rights. As part of the South’s Reconstruction, the federal government mandated that each southern state ratify the Fourteenth Amendment before reentering the Union (Constitutional Rights Foundation - CRF). The Fourteenth Amendment strives to provide all citizens “equal protection under the law” (CRF). In 1870, states ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, granting the right to vote to all men, regardless of race (CRF). Ratification of these amendments and reentry into the Union set
the stage for an evolving voting process. Former Confederate states were required to draft new state constitutions and have them ratified by white men, as well as black men (Mintz, 2009). Further, the Republican Party strongly pushed for the expansion of voting rights to African Americans and the Fifteenth Amendment, mostly in hopes of further strengthening their party’s power (Mintz, 2009).

Following Reconstruction and the removal of federal troops, Mississippi and other southern states crafted practices to limit the vote of African Americans. In the South,

Through lengthy residence requirements, poll taxes, literacy tests, property requirements, cumbersome registration procedures, and laws disenfranchising voters for minor criminal offenses, Southern states drastically reduced black voting. In Mississippi, [in 1890] just 9,000 of 147,000 African Americans of voting age were qualified to vote (Mintz, 2009).

(While many of these practices would have barred poor whites from voting, states inserted “grandfather clauses,” which allowed citizens to vote as if their grandfathers had voted [Mintz, 2009; Greenblatt, 2013].) These restrictions ensured that even educated, wealthy “freedmen” would not be able to vote. Congress attempted to prevent black voter suppression through the 1891 Federal Elections bill, but when the legislation was defeated, federal efforts to enforce black voting rights in the South ended (Mintz, 2009).

Along with disenfranchising policies, whites turned to intimidation and violence to keep African Americans from voting. This violence was most extreme in southern states. African Americans were often harassed, verbally abused, or threatened. African Americans faced the threat of losing their jobs, being evicted, or even losing credit just because they were attempting to exercise their constitutional right to vote (CRF). If those
intimidation tactics did not work, African Americans faced violence and terrorism from groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (CRF).

**Civil Rights Era**

By 1940, only three percent of voting-age African Americans were registered to vote in the South (CRF). This, along with segregation and other Jim Crow laws, helped ignite the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and eventually led to the passage of The Voting Rights Act (VRA) in 1965 (“History of Voting Rights”). The Voting Rights Act of 1965 contained many important provisions, however, Section 5 of the VRA is one of its most important. Section 5 mandated that certain areas of the country receive approval from the federal Department of Justice before changing their voting policies and procedures (US Dept. of Justice). For example, certain states and communities have needed to have their redistricting plans pre-approved by the federal government; others have even needed pre-approval to move voting precincts (US Dept. of Justice). Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act was revisited and reapproved by Congress regularly; most recently in 2005 (US Dept. of Justice).

**Women’s Suffrage Movement**

Just as African Americans faced a fight to gain the right to vote, so did women of all races. Separate sphere ideology held that there were certain areas of life that men belonged in and certain areas where only women belonged (Lorber, 2009). These gender boundaries held the foundation for many who sought to refuse women the right to vote. The woman’s role was seen as one of maternal virtue or “republican motherhood” - “as a
moral beacon, a restorative heaven from the anxieties and adversities of public life and commerce, comforting the hardworking husband and provider for the family and furnishing a nursery of spiritual and civic values for the children” (Cott, 1997). This ideal of republican motherhood coincided with the separate sphere ideology and contributed to the omission of women from politics and public life (Ritter, 2008).

The first gathering of women’s rights activists was held in Seneca Falls in 1848 and was hosted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott (U.S. House). The gathering, while set to address the inequalities faced by women in every aspect of life, led to The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions (UML). Stanton included a resolution calling for the “sacred right of franchise” to be extended to women, igniting the beginnings of the women’s suffrage movement (U.S. House). In 1869, Susan B. Anthony and Stanton founded the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) to gain female suffrage and oppose the 15th Amendment, because it excluded women (U.S. House). However, some female suffragists supported the 15th Amendment, including Lucy Stone and the American Women Suffrage Association (AWSA) (National Women’s History Museum). In the late 1800’s, the two groups chose to combine their resources and power to form the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA) (US. House). The groups organized and lobbied for the next two decades.

Wyoming was the first state to grant women the right to vote in 1869, quickly followed by Colorado, Utah, and Idaho (US House). In 1920, states ratified the 19th Amendment, granting women the constitutional right to vote nation-wide (History of Voting Rights). While women now could vote, increasing women’s voter turnout was a slow process. African American women, while having the constitutional right to vote,
did not effectively gain enfranchisement until after the Civil Rights Movement (National Women’s History Museum). Further, women’s proportional voter turnout did not equal men’s proportional turnout until 1980 (Center for American Women & Politics).

*Other Voting Policy Changes*

Other groups were also limited in their right to vote until the mid to late 1900s. Native Americans did not gain the right to vote in all states until 1948 (History of Voting Rights). Furthermore, the minimum voting age was not decreased to eighteen until 1971, through ratification of the 26th Amendment (History of Voting Rights). Not until 1990 did Congress pass the Americans with Disabilities Act, which ensured “election workers and polling sites provide a variety of services designed to ensure the possibility of persons with disabilities to vote” (History of Voting Rights).

In 2013, the Supreme Court “effectively struck down” key parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), ending the preclearance requirement (Liptak, 2013). Specifically, the court’s decision struck down Section 4 of the VRA, which undermines the significance of preclearance mandate in Section 5 (Liptak, 2013). The Supreme Court held that the preclearance formula found in Section 4 was outdated and based on inaccurate data and was, therefore, unconstitutional (Liptak, 2013). While it is still illegal for states to discriminate, states that historically fell under the preclearance requirement will no longer be subjected to that federal government approval (Mears & Botelho, 2013). Instead, election laws and policies will “now be subject only to after-the-fact litigation” (Liptak, 2013). At this point, Congress must revisit the formula for preclearance; however, it does not seem likely that the current Republican-controlled
House of Representatives would approve any type of new formula (Brandeisky, 2014).

The effect this will have on voting rights and opportunities is not yet clear.

The vote is an ever-evolving concept in American culture. The vote began as a very limited privilege in colonial America and is now, in comparison, an expanded right to many. Understanding the history of voting rights in America and the fluidity of voting rights is important to my work. Historically, the fight for voting rights not only involved changing laws that denied rights but also involved changing laws to increase the accessibility of voting for minority groups and disabled voters. Voter accessibility is at the center of the debate surrounding Election Day Registration, and accessibility was a main point of debate for many in the suffrage battles throughout history. Recent decisions in the Supreme Court make it clear that voting rights will continue to be fluid and change with society. While states continue to set new limits and restrictions to the vote, such as voter identification requirements, early registration deadlines, and limited early voting periods, they are also working to implement many policies that increase the opportunity to vote, such as early voting, Election Day registration, and online voting. These convenience-voting policies seek to increase the accessibility of voting and are discussed in the next section.

**Politics of Voter Convenience Laws**

Voter convenience laws are election laws that seek to make voting easier and more accessible, with the goal of increasing voter turnout (Burden & Mayer, 2010). In recent years, voter convenience laws have gained support and grown in popularity across the country, with over two-thirds of states now offering some sort of voter convenience
policies (NCSL, 2014). Researchers claim voter convenience laws “have gone from being a novelty in the United States to being virtually ubiquitous” (Alvarez, et al., 2012). However, as more states discuss methods to increase the convenience of voting, many states are also debating restrictive laws, such as voter identification. Currently, Americans are growingly more supportive of voter identification and other restrictive policies, as compared to convenience voting policies (Alvarez, et al., 2010).

The most prevalent convenience voting policies across the country are early voting and no excuse absentee voting. As of 2012, thirty-two states and the District of Columbia have early voting policies, while twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia offer no-excuse absentee voting (Keyes, 2012). States have also implemented other convenience voting laws, such as vote by mail, Election Day voter registration, and online voter registration. (NCSL, 2014).

Supporters of voter convenience policies cite research stating that these laws increase voter turnout, especially among underrepresented groups. According to the Center for American Progress, early voting “has been a major boon for minority turnout” (Keyes, 2012). Early voting makes voting more accessible to the working-class voter or the voter working multiple jobs, and these voters are often minority voters (Froomkin, 2012). Further, African American churches instituted “Souls to the Polls” voting drives in early voting states on the Sunday before Election Day, leading to increased turnout (Froomkin, 2012; Keyes, 2012). A study of 2008 voters showed that 34 percent of African American voters utilized early voting or voting by mail, and over 43 percent of Hispanic voters used early voting or voting by mail to cast a ballot, compared to 36 percent of non-Hispanic whites (Alvarez, et al., 2012). It is important to acknowledge
that white voters actually used these voter convenience policies more than African Americans. While this is the case, voter convenience policies still increase minority turnout. The policy is important to increasing accessibility for current voters but also to increasing the likelihood that someone will vote at all. Policymakers wanting to increase minority turnout might be more likely to support voter convenience laws.

Conversely, a recent study shows that restrictive policies are more likely to be supported in states with high minority populations. A study from the University of Massachusetts at Boston concludes that states where minority turnout and low-income turnout increased in recent elections were more likely to propose restrictive voting policies, such as voter identification (Bentele & O’Brien, 2013; Shen, 2013). Further, these states were also likely to have “larger African-American and non-citizen populations” (Bentele & O’Brien, 2013). 83 percent of voter identification policies were also passed by Republican-controlled state legislatures, showing the partisan implications of convenience voting policy.

Convenience policy supporters also point out that voter convenience laws can increase youth voter turnout. Seven of the top ten “youth turnout states had some of the more ambitious [convenience voting] measures, including Election Day registration” (Kawashima-Ginsberg, et al., 2009). Lastly, supporters often argue that convenience voting policies decrease wait times and long lines on Election Day, making it more likely that voters of all backgrounds will vote. Prior to the 2014 election, Florida governor Rick Scott reinstated the state’s more expansive early voting period in an effort to combat long lines and other 2012 voting woes, when more than 200,000 Floridians did not vote due to wait times and long lines (Johnson, 2013).
Opponents of convenience voting laws often argue that there is no relationship between these policies and increasing turnout (Fitzgerald, 2005; Burden & Mayer, 2010). With respect to early voting specifically, one study found that it did not increase youth turnout: “individuals living in states that allowed early in-person voting were [not] more likely to vote than others” (Kawashima-Ginsberg, et al., 2009). One study even goes as far as to say, “there may be good reasons to adopt early voting…but boosting turnout is not one of them” (Gronke, et al., 2007). Multiple studies concur that while early voting does provide greater access to voting, the policy does not significantly increase voter turnout (Fitzgerald, 2005). The effects of other convenience voting policies are less clear.

Lastly, convenience voting policies are often seen as significantly advantaging one political party, usually the Democratic Party. Supporters of convenience voting policies tend to be more liberal and identify with the Democratic Party, while opponents tend to be more conservative and identify with the Republican Party. According to a survey of 2008 voters, citizens who identify with the Democratic Party and as ideologically liberal are more likely to take advantage of convenience voting policies like early voting and vote by mail (Alvarez, et al., 2012). However, the survey also points out that Democratic or liberal voters are less likely to vote in person on Election Day (Alvarez, et al., 2012). So, instead of boosting Democratic turnout, it shifts Democratic turnout to earlier in the voting cycle. Because of this, the study concludes that convenience voting policies do not have “partisan implications” (Alvarez, et al., 2012). Other studies also argue that convenience voting does not have partisan effects (Gronke, et al, 2008). Gronke et al. even argues that convenience voting policies do not help or
hurt particular parties, but rather the policies benefit the party that is better organized (2008). It is clear that conflicting studies exist to support both sides (Neiheisel & Burden, 2012; Stein, Owens, & Leighley, 2005), and no conclusive agreement has been reached among researchers on the partisan implications of convenience voting.

More research on convenience voting methods is still needed. Many studies offer inconclusive results, particularly because convenience voting policies are often recently implemented. For example, one study notes that research on “unrestricted absentee voting is inconclusive” and does not tend to focus on the overall effect on turnout (Fitzgerald, 2005). Furthermore, it is clear that convenience voting policies are highly politicized and usually divisive based on party identification. At the very least, we can conclude that convenience voting policies make voting easier and more accessible to the public. Voting policies should not only be concerned with the ease of voting, but should also be concerned with increasing voter turnout. Election Day registration is one of the most effective policies at accomplishing this.

**Election Day Registration**

According to NonProfit Vote, “in 2008, more than eight million eligible and interested voters did not or could not vote due to outmoded voting practices, avoidable errors or confusing procedures that vary in all 50 states” (NonProfit Vote). Furthermore, in 2008, approximately three million people had trouble voting or did not vote because of voter registration problems, specifically (NonProfit Vote). Millions of Americans have experienced barriers to voting directly because of the country’s voter registration laws and confusing voting policies. Election Day registration seeks to eliminate those barriers
and increase turnout. For example, Election Day Registration allowed for nearly 640,000 Americans “to register and vote in the November 2, 2010 [midterm] election” (Kim & Carbo, 2011). Multiple studies show Election Day registration states leading non-EDR states in turnout by six to seven percentage points (Rokoff & Stokking, 2012; Burden & Mayer, 2010; Kim & Carbo, 2011). As shown in Table 1.1, Election Day Registration is a policy that has steadily grown in popularity over the years and has particularly received attention in the 2000s. Currently, eleven states and the District of Columbia offer Election Day voter registration (NCSL, 2013). Maine was the first state to enact Election Day registration in 1973, and Colorado is the most recent state to enact the policy in 2013 (NCSL, 2013). Even more state legislatures are considering adopting Election Day registration, with legislators in twenty-five states introducing Election Day registration bills in 2013 (Zhou, 2013).

Table 2.1: Election Day Registration States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Enacted</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>2012 Voter Turnout</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Election Day Registration is effective in increasing voter turnout among underrepresented groups. By studying turnout rates among different demographic groups between 1990 and 1994, Knack and White were able to find that Election Day Registration “disproportionately helps electorally disadvantaged groups” (2000). In particular, Knack and White find that Election Day registration policies are most likely to improve turnout rates among the young and mobile (2000). For example, “in 2008, on average, 59% of young Americans whose home state offered Election Day Registration voted; that’s nine percentage points higher than those who did not live in EDR states” (CIRCLE, 2013). States that have implemented Election Day registration have seen the turnout gap between younger and older voters drop tremendously. Wyoming, after instituting Election Day registration, moved from having the thirty-ninth smallest turnout gap to having the seventh (Kawashima-Ginsberg, et al., 2009).

Furthermore, Election Day registration can also lead to a larger and more diverse electorate, by eliminating the barrier of early registration deadlines. Early registration deadlines discourage registration by twice as much for the working poor and lower educated samples than for the upper class and highly educated (Knack & White, 2000). However, later registration deadlines and Election Day registration increase voter turnout for groups that are typically underrepresented at the polls, such as the less educated (Knack & White, 2000). “By removing barriers that require potential voters to register weeks before a campaign reaches its height, less-engaged citizens can enter the voting process late - and political campaigns can respond by maintaining the intensity of their efforts through Election Day” and empower even more citizens to vote (Burden & Mayer, 2010).
Election Day Registration has also shown to be less costly than providing voters with questioned registration status provisional ballots (Rokoff & Stokking, 2012). However, Election Day registration adds costs as more staffing is needed on Election Day, more training is required, and more government oversight is needed. There is also the potential cost of error and fraud that many opponents point out (Schrader, 2013). While a survey of local-level politicians noted that EDR had increased their workload and costs, the policy had decreased the “pre-deadline surge of registrations,” shifting the workload instead of simply increasing it (DEMOS). The survey respondents also noted that EDR does place more financial burdens on Election Day; however, it does so by shifting financial burden away from the pre-Election Day registration process and onto Election Day and also decreasing the financial burden incurred by provisional ballots (DEMOS). Lastly, the majority of the respondents to the survey noted that their jurisdictions’ current fraud-prevention measures were effective at protecting EDR from abuse (DEMOS).

Critics argue that Election Day registration leads to increased turnout among Democratic voters and is therefore a partisan policy. However, multiple studies point out that this is not necessarily the case. According to one study, Election Day registration and convenience voting do not necessarily disproportionately favor Democrats (Knack and White, 2000). Another study looked at the implementation of Election Day registration in Wisconsin, and the authors found that the implementation of EDR actually decreased the percentage of Democratic voters, and increase in Republican share of the vote (Neiheisel & Burden, 2012).
Awareness of Election Day registration is still low. In a March 2013 poll by the Harvard Institute of Politics, respondents, a national sample of youth age 18 - 29, were given a brief description of same day registration and then asked, “based on what you know now, do you support or oppose same-day registration?” (“Young Americans,” 2013). Of those sampled, 44 percent were not sure if they supported or opposed the policy; 35 percent supported the policy and 21 percent opposed (“Young Americans,” 2013). A large portion of young voters are unsure in their support of Election Day registration, suggesting that the policy is not well known throughout the entire country by a group poised to benefit, and that more awareness and education is needed.

While Election Day registration has been in place in some states since the 1970s, it is beginning to gain greater attention from the general public and state legislators; however, more education and study of the policy is still needed. Election Day registration is shown to have positive effects on voter turnout, especially among underrepresented groups. Election Day registration is an effective convenience voting policy that more states should consider to increase voter turnout.
CHAPTER THREE: NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina’s journey to Election Day Registration offers insight into a potential political path for Mississippi, as the states are both politically and demographically similar. Following the implementation of EDR in the state, “North Carolina reported the greatest increase in voting among all states since the 2004 presidential election” (Rokoff & Stokking, 2012). While the policy did not sustain itself in the state, the political story and voter turnout effects are pertinent to studying the potential effects of EDR in Mississippi.

Political Environment

In 2007, the North Carolina General Assembly voted to implement a form of Election Day Registration, becoming the first and only southern state to implement any type of EDR (NCSL, 2013). The law allowed “voters to register and vote on the same day at early voting locations that were open from 19 days before the election to 3 days before the election” (NCSL, 2013). The early voting sites closed on the Saturday prior to Election Day (Carbo & Kirschner). Because this policy is not a true form of Election Day Registration, most studies and articles refer to it as Same Day Registration (SDR). For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to it as SDR. The policy allowed for voter registration during the early voting period, in contrast to the previous, more traditional registration policy, which closed voter registration altogether 25 days before the election
(Alvarez & Nagler, 2007). The General Assembly repealed the policy in 2013, reducing the early voting period and eliminating same day registration.

The political environment surrounding the passage of SDR in North Carolina had some important and unique characteristics. A study from Demos identified three reasons for SDR’s successful passage in the General Assembly: 1). “New political leadership in the North Carolina General Assembly,” 2). “the support of influential election officials;” 3). “a strong, unified coalition of advocates and organizers” (Carbo & Kirschner).

Representative Deborah Ross was the political leader behind the effort; Representative Ross first began the effort to implement SDR in 2003 (Carbo & Kirschner). Along with Representative Ross’s leadership, the study notes that a key part of SDR’s passage was the transition from conservative Democratic leadership to a more progressive leadership in the General Assembly (Carbo & Kirschner).

Combined with new political leadership, Representative Ross recruited the opinion and endorsement of an influential group of elected state leaders. She worked with the Executive Director of the North Carolina State Board of Elections, the state’s largest counties, and trade organizations representing county elections administrators to craft SDR legislation that all groups could support (Carbo & Kirschner). In essence, Representative Ross built a coalition in support of SDR that included the endorsement of multiple well-known elected officials and stakeholders.

Beyond official support, the work of a diverse, organized coalition was required to pass SDR. The coalition of supporters included labor unions, the faith community, League of Women Voters, NAACP, and a progressive organization known as Democracy North Carolina (Carbo & Kirschner). The coalition also included North Carolina Young
Democrats, North Carolina’s Student Government Associations, North Carolina Fair Share, and other community organizers and leaders, as well as the work of a paid lobbyist (Carbo & Kirschner). Coalition leaders also gained the support of moderate Republicans by emphasizing the security of SDR and the lack of voter fraud cases in Election Day Registration states (Carbo & Kirschner). The coalition utilized multiple traditional forms of outreach and pressure: public events and demonstrations, phone banks, canvassing, and media outreach (Carbo & Kirschner).

The study from Demos pointedly concludes, “passage of Same Day Registration into law in North Carolina required highly-organized community engagement and pressure applied from the streets to the state capitol. This effort, organized by seasoned advocates, organizers and lobbyists, and underpinned by research and expert testimony, ensured that Same Day Registration would be considered and then adopted by the General Assembly in 2007” (Carbo & Kirschner). It is clear that the effort to pass SDR in a southern state requires a strong, concerted effort involving many different groups. However, the efforts did not prove strong enough to sustain the policy in North Carolina.

On July 25, 2013, the General Assembly passed a bill to eliminate SDR, along with many other convenience voting measures, and included a new voter identification requirement (Berman, 2013). In January 2013, Pat McCrory was installed as Governor of North Carolina, and the Republican Party controlled the “executive and legislative branches for the first time since Reconstruction” (New York Times, 2013). The New York Times Editorial Board writes of the Republican takeover, “North Carolina was once considered a beacon of farsightedness in the South, an exception in a region of poor education, intolerance and tightfistedness. In a few short months, Republicans have
begun to dismantle a reputation that took years to build” (New York Times, 2013). While the political environment to pass SDR required diligence and a great deal of bipartisanship, a complete and quick turn of power in the state government quickly led to its dismantling.

Republicans who newly controlled the state’s political institutions called for an end to SDR as a means to increase the security and integrity of elections (Johnson, 2013). These were also the concerns that opponents voiced when SDR was originally passed. Governor McRory even noted in one interview that although the instances of voter fraud may be low, the benefits still outweigh the costs in eliminating SDR (Johnson, 2013). Governor McRory called the reversal a “common sense reform” to elections law (McCallister, 2013).

**Demographic Background: North Carolina**

As of the 2010 U.S. Census, North Carolina’s population was 9.5 million. The 2013 population is estimated to increase by 3.3% (Census-NC, 2014). 13.8 percent of North Carolina’s population is 65 years old or older, and 7 percent of the population is ages 20 to 24 (Census-NC, 2014). Furthermore, 22 percent of the population is African-American in North Carolina, compared to 37.4 percent of the population in Mississippi (Census-NC, 2014). Among EDR/SDR states, North Carolina has the closest African-American population to that of Mississippi’s (Census-NC, 2014). The Hispanic population composes 8.7 percent of the total North Carolinian population (Census-NC, 2014). The median household income in North Carolina is $46,450, and 16.8 percent of
the population lives below the poverty level (Census-NC, 2014). Lastly, 84.5 percent of North Carolinians have a high school degree or higher (Census-NC, 2014).

**Voter Turnout History**

Due to the quick implementation and then repeal of SDR in North Carolina, we can only study the effects of the policy based on the 2010 midterm election and the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections. However, a prospective study conducted in 2007 offers some additional data.

The authors of the study predicted overall voter turnout in North Carolina could increase by up to 5.4 percent; they further hypothesized that turnout among voters ages 18 to 25 could increase by as much as 10.8 percent (Alvarez & Nagler). African-American turnout, according to the study, could increase by 5.9 percent (Alvarez & Nagler). When implemented, African-Americans made up thirty to forty percent of voters who used SDR in North Carolina (Berman, 2013; Kennedy, 2013). While the authors predicted turnout increases for the poorest voters, they also hypothesized that turnout amongst the wealthiest voters would also increase (Alvarez & Nagler). The predictions made by Alvarez & Nagler are reflected in Tables 3.1 and 3.2; many of their predictions were accurate when comparing turnout of immediate past elections with the most recent SDR elections.

The authors also make an interesting point that SDR in North Carolina would strengthen the “civic culture,” which could indirectly increase voter turnout even more in the future (Alvarez & Nagler). According to a Letter to the Editor in the *New York Times* from Liz Kennedy, counsel at Demos, after implementing SDR, North Carolina’s “voter
participation rate rose eight percent - the largest increase in voter participation in the country in 2008” (Kennedy, 2013).

**Midterm Elections**

From 1990 to 2010, average voter turnout for midterm elections in North Carolina was 41.2 percent (Census-CPS). The state’s turnout for the 2010 midterm election alone was 43 percent; the 2010 midterms saw an increase of just over two percent, compared to average turnout from 1990 to 2006 (Census-CPS). According to Table 3.1, overall state turnout in 2010 surpassed national turnout in midterm elections for the first time since 1990.

As seen in Table 3.1, the 2010 midterm election also saw a major increase in minority turnout. African-American turnout in North Carolina in 2010 was 40.5 percent; this was an increase of 8.7 percent from the 2006 midterm election (Census-CPS). The state’s recorded Hispanic midterm turnout was highest in 2010, at 17 percent, compared to recorded turnout numbers from 1990 to 2012 (Census-CPS). Furthermore, the youth vote, ages 18 to 24, also saw dramatic increases in the 2010 midterms. Youth turnout in North Carolina in 2010 was 20.8 percent, almost doubling from 11.1 percent in 2002 and 13.8 percent in 1994 (Census-CPS). Even white voter turnout saw slight increases in 2010. Average white turnout for recorded midterm elections from 1990 to 2006 was 43.5 percent (Census-CPS). White turnout in the 2010 midterm election increased to 44.1 percent (Census-CPS).
Table 3.1: North Carolina, Midterm Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Overall Turnout</th>
<th>National Turnout</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Youth, 18-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Presidential Election Years

Based on Table 3.2, North Carolina’s overall turnout in 2008 and 2012 consistently topped national turnout trends; African American, Hispanic, and youth turnout were all higher than any Presidential election in the state since 1992. From 1992 to 2004, average state voter turnout during Presidential elections was 56.4 percent (Census-CPS). In 2008, the first Presidential election with SDR, North Carolina’s voter turnout increased to 63.8 percent; in 2012, voter turnout held steady at 63.7 percent (Census-CPS). Average African-American state turnout in Presidential elections from 1992 to 2004 was 53.4 percent (Census-CPS). African-American turnout dramatically increased to 67.2 percent in 2008 and then to 78.7 percent in 2012 (Census-CPS). Average Hispanic turnout in North Carolina in Presidential elections from 1996 to 2004 was around eight percent (Census-CPS). Hispanic turnout increased to 20.7 percent in 2008 and then fell to 15.7 percent in 2012 (Census-CPS). Average youth turnout in the state in the 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections was 32.8 percent (Census-CPS). Youth turnout jumped to 48 percent in 2008 and then slightly dropped to 45.1 percent in 2012.
(Census-CPS). In 2008, 253,000 North Carolinians used SDR to vote, and in 2012, 96,000 North Carolinians used SDR (Rokoff & Stokking, 2012; Berman, 2013).

Table 3.2: North Carolina, Presidential Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Overall Turnout</th>
<th>National Turnout</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Youth, 18-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While North Carolina was a heavily contested battleground state in 2008, and African-Americans increased their voter turnout across the country, much of the increase in North Carolina’s voter turnout can also be attributed to the implementation of SDR (CNN, 2008; AP, 2008). We can study this potential correlation by comparing voter turnout in North Carolina to that of other battleground states in 2008 and 2012.

In 2008 and 2012, multiple media sources considered North Carolina a battleground state (Battleground States, 2008; Politico’s Swing State Map, 2008; Election Guide, 2008; Election Guide, 2012; Swing States, 2012; Cillizza, 2012). By comparing voter turnout in North Carolina to turnout in other battleground states, we gain a better understanding of Same Day Registration’s effect on the 2008 and 2012 elections. As seen in Table 3.3, of the eleven battleground states in 2008, North Carolina’s overall turnout ranks fourth highest at 63.8 percent (Census-CPS). Further, North Carolina’s African American and youth turnout rank high, in comparison to the other battlegrounds. The state’s Hispanic turnout, however, falls below many of the other battleground states
(Census-CPS). As Table 3.4 shows, in 2012, North Carolina’s voter turnout again ranked fifth out of nine battleground states (Census-CPS). African American turnout, though, was highest in North Carolina in 2012, and youth turnout also ranked high (Census-CPS). In 2012, however, Hispanic turnout in North Carolina ranked lowest of all battlegrounds.\(^1\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.3: Battleground States vs. North Carolina: 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North Carolina</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.4: Battleground States vs. North Carolina: 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North Carolina</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^1\) New Hampshire’s Hispanic turnout is not listed, as the number is below 75,000 and statistically insignificant.

\(^2\) The * denotes that the data is statistically insignificant and therefore not reported.
Conclusion

The elections following the implementation of SDR in North Carolina saw drastic increases in general population voter turnout and turnout among racial minorities and young people. While this can be partially attributed to mobilization efforts that led to national increases among minorities and young people in 2008 and 2012, it can also be attributed to Same Day Registration. Comparison of battleground states in 2008 and 2012 further shows that SDR had direct positive effects on voter turnout. With limited elections to study post-SDR, the study and accurate predictions from Alvarez and Nagler are helpful in further understanding the effects and potential effects of SDR. The political environment to pass SDR included a diverse coalition, organized efforts, and years of legislative effort. North Carolina’s success in passing SDR shows that a more open voter registration process, and Election Day Registration, is politically feasible in the South and could lead to major increases in voter participation, but it is clear that a sustained effort and coalition needed to be continued, in order to ensure the implementation of SDR into the future.
CHAPTER FOUR: MINNESOTA

Minnesota has consistently led the nation in voter turnout, and much of that can be attributed to EDR (Sturdevant, 2012). EDR has sustained itself for forty years and is a staple in Minnesota voting policy. While the state is not demographically similar to Mississippi, it is significant to understanding the implementation and sustainability of Election Day registration.

Political Environment

The state of Minnesota experienced political shifts in the 1970s, while being controlled by the Democratic Party. The Minnesota Legislature enacted Election Day Registration (EDR) in 1974, making it the second state to implement the policy\(^3\) (NCSL, 2013). At the same time, Democrat Joan Growe was elected Secretary of State in 1974, becoming the first “woman to be elected to a Minnesota statewide office, without having been appointed” (Growe). While there is little information regarding the process of passing EDR in 1974, it is clear that Minnesota was controlled by progressive ideologies during this era.

Liberals and the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) party\(^4\) controlled both houses of the state legislature when EDR was enacted. In 1973, liberals and the DFL party held

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\(^3\) Maine implemented EDR in 1973 (NCSL, 2013)

\(^4\) The DFL party formed from the merger of the Farmer-Labor Party and the Minnesota Democratic party in 1944. The DFL party is “effectively the state chapter of the US Democratic Party” (Minnesota DFL Party, 2014).
control of the 134-member state House with a margin of twenty representatives and controlled the 67-member Minnesota Senate by a small margin of seven in 1973 and five in 1974 (“Party Control in the Minnesota Senate;” “Party Control”). Furthermore, the state’s governor, Wendell Anderson, was also a Democrat (“Governors of Minnesota”). Governor Anderson can be considered a strong national Democrat, as he served on the Democratic National Committee’s Executive Committee and chaired the Democratic Governors’ Conference (“Governors of Minnesota”). Secretary of State Growe worked to pass EDR as a member of the state legislature before being elected to her statewide office (Grove). During her tenure as Secretary of State (1975 - 1999), in addition to expanding voting rights through the implementation of EDR, Growe also “simplified absentee voting procedures and helped secure mail-in balloting;” “oversaw Minnesota’s pioneering motor-voter law…and testified before Congress when the federal equivalent was being” considered (Donovan, 1998).

Liberal and Democratic officials not only controlled statewide offices, but many federal positions, further reflecting the dominance of the DFL party at the time. During the passage of EDR, both of Minnesota’s United States Senators were members of the DFL party, and half of its U.S. Representatives were members of the DFL party (“United States congressional delegations”). By all accounts, while liberal Democrats did not completely dominate Minnesota politics, progressives certainly held a strong control of state politics. One can argue that Democratic and liberal control of Minnesota politics led to the passage and implementation of EDR.

While Democratic control of state politics is a reasonable explanation for the passage of EDR, it also appears that there was a sense of bipartisanship and lack of party
polarization that contributed to the policy’s passage. Arlen Erdahl, a Republican state official during EDR’s passage, said, “we had a pretty bipartisan attitude about making the system open, accessible and easy. The system we created is a remarkable one” (Sturdevant, 2012). Erdahl’s quote shows that even Republican officials were interested in passing EDR in the 1970s in Minnesota, and the parties were certainly not nearly as polarized as they are today.

There were, however, some Republican state officials who voiced opposition to EDR, and their numbers have grown. Republican Mary Kiffmeyer served as Minnesota’s Secretary of State from 1999 to 2007 and currently serves in the state Senate. Kiffmeyer often voices her discontent with EDR. In her 2006 Secretary of State reelection campaign, Kiffmeyer suggested that EDR is not a safe policy and has the potential to create insecure elections (Sturdevant, 2012). Kiffmeyer has also expressed her frustration with other problems surrounding EDR; she notes that EDR causes delays in voting, long lines at the polls, and even causes some people to become frustrated and leave before voting (Frantz, 2005). While she opposes EDR, the policy stayed intact during her tenure, possibly because the DFL party controlled the state Senate during her entire tenure (“Party control”).

**Opposition Groups**

In recent years, both sides of the political spectrum have debated the effectiveness and security of EDR in Minnesota. Anoka County Clerk Rachel Smith had this to say about EDR’s security and integrity: “it provides us with the most up-to-date information on the voter…it assures that individuals are voting for offices and districts where they
live on Election Day and it eliminates the need for provisional ballots because we resolve any voter registration issues that day” (Young, 2007). More recently, a number of groups have mobilized in opposition to EDR, including Minnesota Majority and the Minnesota Voters Alliance. The Minnesota Majority is a group advocating for “traditional values,” such as “limited government, lower taxes, parental rights, free markets, protecting our borders and a strong national defense” (Minnesota Majority”). The Minnesota Voters Alliance appears to be an organization with similar ideological beliefs and values, although, their focus is solely on “expanding liberty through legal action” (Minnesota Voters).

The Minnesota Voters Alliance argues that EDR makes the elections process more vulnerable to fraud (“Stopping”). The group asserts that over 500,000 voters registered on Election Day in 2008, and over 48,000 of those voters “could not be confirmed as eligible” (“Stopping”). They also go on to claim that “at least 1,000 ineligible felons voted in 2008” because of EDR policies (“Stopping”). In 2012, the Voters Alliance filed a lawsuit against Secretary of State Mark Ritchie, challenging EDR (“Minnesota Voters”). The Eighth Circuit eventually “refused to rule on the merits” of the Voter Alliance’s complaint (“Stopping”). The Minnesota Majority also asserts rampant voter fraud and “voter irregularities” in Minnesota elections (“Election Issues”). The group has called for the elimination of EDR and for a more traditional 30-day voter registration deadline (“Election Issues”).

While debating its security, Republicans have also worked to decrease EDR’s effectiveness or eliminate it altogether. In 2011, the Republican-controlled state legislature attempted to implement one of the strictest voter ID laws, but the Democratic
governor quickly vetoed the bill (Berman, 2012). The Minnesota Majority also backed a constitutional amendment in 2012 that would have required voter identification (Ragsdale, 2012). The amendment was touted as a way to increase security of elections and had widespread support early on (Melillo, 2012). However, opposition to the amendment quickly increased as groups revealed that, among other things, the amendment would effectively end EDR in the state (Melillo 2012). While the state legislature approved the amendment, voters rejected it in November 2012 (Berman, 2012).

**Current Political Environment**

Currently, Governor Mark Dayton is a member of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Party (mn.gov). Secretary of State Mark Ritchie, the chief administrator of elections in the state, is also a member of the DFL Party (sos.mn.gov). The DFL Party controls the 132-member House by a margin of 12 representatives and the 67-member state Senate by a margin of 11 senators (“Party Control”). The DFL Party lost control of the state legislature in 2010 for the first time since 1972 (Salisbury, 2012). The Republican majority led to the formation of many of the opposition groups discussed later in this chapter. In 2012, however, the DFL party regained control of the legislature and controlled both the legislature and the governor’s office for the first time in twenty-two years (Salisbury, 2012). While the DFL party controls major state offices and the Minnesota Legislature, the party is experiencing internal struggles between more liberal and conservative factions (Grow, 2012). It is important for the party to continue to compromise and find moderate solutions to its problems in order to maintain control.
The current political environment holds many similarities to the political environment surrounding the passage of and implementation of Election Day Registration.

**Demographic Background: Minnesota**

As of the 2010 U.S. Census, Minnesota’s population included nearly 5.5 million people, and it is estimated to increase by 2.2 percent (Census-MN, 2014). 13.6 percent of the population is aged 65 years or older, and 6.7 percent is 20 to 24 years old; seven percent of the population is 25 to 29 years old (Census-MN, 2014). Over 85 percent of the Minnesota population is white; 5.5 percent is African-American; and, 4.9 percent of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino (Census-MN, 2014). The median household income in the state is $59,126, above the national median household income of $53,046 (Census-MN, 2014). Furthermore, 11 percent of the population lives below the poverty level (Census-MN, 2014). About 32 percent of the population holds a Bachelor’s degree or a more advanced degree (Census-MN, 2014).

**Voter Turnout Analysis**

According to a report from *The Billings Gazette*, Election Day registrants have accounted for 13 percent of voters on off-year elections and 19 percent of voters during Presidential elections (Young, 2007). “Anoka County, the fourth-most populous of Minnesota’s 87 counties, registered approximately 17,000 voters on Election Day in November 2006” (Young, 2007). Over 540,000 voters utilized EDR in Minnesota in the 2008 presidential election, which was nearly 19 percent of voters (Ragsdale, 2008;  

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5 The article references Minnesota, while Montana’s state legislature considered ending its own Election Day Registration policy.
Since its implementation in 1974, EDR has led to the registration of millions of voters. Table 4.1 shows how many voters have utilized EDR in every general election since 1974. “Minnesota’s spot at or near the top in voter turnout is largely due to the four-decades-old system of election day registration” (Ragsdale, 2008). Former Secretary of State Jane Growe also argues that EDR is the prime reason Minnesota has consistently led the nation in voter turnout (Sturdevant, 2012). According to the Star Tribune, in the 2004 presidential election, over 78% of eligible voters cast ballots (Diaz, 2007). According to CNN, “some districts of Minnesota turn out more than 90% of the eligible population” (Sutter, 2012). The 2004 Presidential election appears to be the highest recorded turnout for all states I studied. Voter turnout among African-Americans was fairly consistent between the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections.
Table 4.1: Minnesota, Election Day Registrants 1974-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of EDR Registrants</th>
<th>Percent of Voters Registering on Election Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>280,812</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>454,147</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>208,985</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>433,567</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>238,979</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>344,157</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>137,864</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>364,625</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>208,625</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>427,639</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>179,360</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>337,297</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>332,540</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>464,155</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>342,978</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>581,904</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>292,168</td>
<td>13.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>542,257</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>227,857</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>527,867</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Midterm Elections

In the 1994 midterm election, 26 percent of African Americans turned out to vote in Minnesota (Census-CPS). That number steadily increased to 32.2 percent in the 2010 midterm election (Census-CPS). Further, since 1978, Minnesota’s voter turnout in midterm elections has consistently ranked much higher than national turnout (Census-CPS). 24.7 percent of voters age 18 to 24 voted in the 1994 midterm election in Minnesota (Census-CPS). That number increased to 42.6 percent in 2002, but saw a major decline to 26.6 percent in 2010 (Census-CPS). Table 4.2 shows Minnesota’s above-average turnout numbers in midterm elections over the years.

Table 4.2: Minnesota, Midterm Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Minnesota Turnout</th>
<th>National Turnout</th>
<th>African American (MN)</th>
<th>Hispanic (MN)</th>
<th>Youth, 18 - 24 (MN)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presidential Elections

Average voter turnout for presidential elections was nearly 71 percent between 1984 and 2012 in Minnesota (Census-CPS). Prior to that, according to the US Census, average voter turnout among the voting age population in the state was 75.4 in 1976, the first presidential election to offer EDR. (Census).

In the 2000 Presidential election, 44.5 percent of Minnesota voters age 18 to 24 voted (Census-CPS). That percentage increased to 65.8 percent in the 2004 election; it then decreased to 58.6 percent in 2008 and 57 percent in 2012 (Census-CPS). Turnout among Minnesota’s African American population was 45.5 percent in 2008 and 49.2 percent in 2012 (Census-CPS). Turnout among African Americans was highest in the state in 2004, when it reached 64.7 percent (Census-CPS). Table 4.3 shows Minnesota’s consistently high voter turnout in Presidential Elections since 1976.

Table 4.3: Minnesota, Presidential Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Minnesota Turnout</th>
<th>National Turnout</th>
<th>African American (MN)</th>
<th>Hispanic (MN)</th>
<th>Youth, 18-24 (MN)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>68.3⁶</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


⁶ The 1976 Current Population Survey data sets for youth voter turnout in Minnesota were for ages 18-29.
Conclusion

Minnesota has certainly benefited from Election Day Registration, touting one of the highest voter turnout rates in the nation election after election, and registering thousands of voters through EDR. While other factors certainly exist, such as higher rates of civics education and education in general, higher income levels, political engagement, and political obligation, high voter turnout can still be attributed in part to EDR. Minnesota’s political environment hints at the need for strong partisan support and control in order to pass and sustain expansive voting policies such as EDR. While Minnesota’s demographics and political environment are very different from Mississippi’s, I believe the state offers some helpful insight into Mississippi’s chances at effectively implementing EDR and increasing voter turnout.
CHAPTER 5: MISSISSIPPI

Based on the analysis presented so far, it would seem that Mississippi’s chances of passing and implementing Election Day Registration are slim to none. However, with the right organization and time, that possibility increases. Election Day Registration has the potential to dramatically increase voter turnout, especially among youth and racial minorities. As of the 2012 elections, Mississippi ranked 27th in voter turnout (Sullivan, 2013). Mississippi typically ranks first in the negative lists and last in the positive lists, so it is unusual that we would rank nearly in the middle in voter turnout rankings. It is time Mississippi ranked first in something good and led the nation towards progress. Election Day Registration has the potential to be a state policy that would do just that.

Political Environment

Mississippi is considered a Republican stronghold, like much of the southern region of the United States. According to the New York Times,

Despite the many economic and social conditions in Mississippi that would seem to favor Democrats,…Since 1972, Mississippi has voted for Republicans in presidential races every time except 1976, when it cast its seven electoral votes (it now has six) for Jimmy Carter, whose status as a Southerner apparently outweighed his party affiliation (Election Results, 2012).

Currently, Republicans hold every statewide elected position, except for Attorney General (ms.gov). The Ballot-pedia database describes Mississippi as a “Republican state government trifecta,” meaning the Republican Party controls the governorship and
holds a majority in both houses of the state legislature ("State Government Trifectas"). Republicans control the 122-member state House of Representatives by a margin of six and the 52-member state Senate by a margin of twelve (legislature.ms.gov). A recent Gallup poll ranked Mississippi the fourth most conservative state in the nation, with 48.2 percent of citizens identifying as conservative (Newport, 2013; Burns, 2014). By all accounts, the conservative Republican Party solidly controls Mississippi.

While Republicans control most of Mississippi politics, there are a few holes in their power. Like most of the country, Mississippi’s Republican Party is currently experiencing an intra-party battle with the Tea Party. In fact, Republican Senator Thad Cochran, who is currently serving his sixth term in the U.S. Senate, has a serious primary challenger for the first time in Tea-Party backed state Senator Chris McDaniel (thadforms.com). Political analysts argue that Thad Cochran is the “most vulnerable Senate Republican” this year, as most Republican incumbents have fended off their Tea Party challengers (MBJ, 2014; Weisman, 2014). Since 2010, “the Tea Party has largely won the battle for Mississippi’s house delegation” (Weisman, 2014). McDaniel has support from both local Tea Party groups and national conservative groups (Weisman, 2014). The outcome of the Republican primary will be very telling of the future of Mississippi politics and national politics. It will signal how strong the Tea Party’s momentum still is (Weisman, 2014). Furthermore, and more importantly, the outcome will indicate the strength of Mississippi’s current Republican power structure (Weisman, 2014; Davis, 2014).

The 2000s continue to be a definitive time period for Mississippi politics, as Republicans have solidified their dominance. Haley Barbour was elected governor in
2004 and served until 2011. The former Chair of the Republican National Committee, many would say Barbour, along with Thad Cochran and former Sen. Trent Lott, helped secure the Republican majority we see today in state politics (Burns, 2014). In 2011, Republicans took control of the state House for the first time since Reconstruction (AP, 2011). Furthermore, Republican Phil Bryant easily defeated Democrat Johnny DuPree in the 2011 gubernatorial election by more than 15 points (Weiner, 2011).

However, there are counter-trends. In 2011, a “Personhood” Amendment\(^7\) failed, with more than 55 percent of voters rejecting the amendment (Pettus, 2011). Given that, according to The New York Times, 59 percent of Mississippians identified as “very religious,” and “many of them are conservative and fundamental in their beliefs,” it seems that a personhood amendment would have easily passed in the state (Election Results, 2012). However, the grassroots efforts of religious organizations and political groups opposed to the amendment, and a strong information campaign, led to its failure (Sheppard, 2011). Many of the same tactics used to defeat this measure could be leveraged to build support to pass Election Day Registration in the state.

In 2011, over sixty percent of Mississippi voters voted in favor of an amendment to the state Constitution mandating the implementation of voter identification (Chokshi, 2013; Elliott, 2011). At the time of passage, the legislation still had to receive authorization from the United States Department of Justice, through the Voting Rights Act (VRA). However, after the Supreme Court’s landmark decision striking down

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\(^7\) The Personhood Amendment sought to define life beginning at fertilization. The amendment would have prompted “a legal challenge to abortion rights nationwide” and many critics argued could have led to numerous “unforeseen, unintended consequences,” such as the criminalization of birth control and contraceptives (Pettus, 2011; Planned Parenthood, 2012).
portions of the VRA, Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann announced that voter ID’s implementation process would begin immediately (Bergmark, 2013). With that, voters will be required to show identification at Mississippi polling locations beginning with the June 2014 primary elections (msvoterid.ms.gov).

While voter identification is controversial, Mississippi’s identification policy can be considered one of the more lenient policies. Acceptable forms of identification include a driver’s license, other state-issued photo ID, student ID from an accredited Mississippi institution, Mississippi Voter Identification Card, passport, firearms license, US military ID, tribal photo ID, or a federal government-issued ID (msvoterid.ms.gov). Furthermore, local Circuit Clerk’s offices will offer free Voter ID cards to any person who does not have an acceptable form of identification (msvoterid.ms.gov). The Secretary of State’s office is even offering free transportation to the Circuit Clerk’s office for those that are in need of assistance (msvoterid.ms.gov).

Recent Election Results

In the 2008 Presidential election, John McCain garnered 56.4 percent of the vote, and Barack Obama gained 42.8 percent (Election Results, 2008). In the 2008 Senate election, longtime GOP Senator Thad Cochran easily defeated his Democratic opponent with 61.7 percent of the vote (Election Results, 2008). Roger Wicker also defeated former Democratic Governor Ronnie Musgrove in a special Senate election in 2008, with 55.3 percent; Musgrove earned 44.7 percent of the vote (Election Results 2008). In the 2012 Presidential election, Barack Obama’s share of the vote slightly increased to 43.5 percent, while Mitt Romney received 55.5 percent (Election Results, 2012). In the 2012
Senate election, incumbent GOP Senator Roger Wicker handily defeated Democratic nominee Al Gore with over 57 percent of the vote (Election Results, 2012).

The 2012 Mississippi Congressional Representative delegation was markedly different from the 2008 delegation. In 2008, three of Mississippi’s four Congressional districts elected Democrats, each taking over 54 percent of the vote (Election Results, 2008). While Congressman Bennie Thompson can be described as a more liberal Democratic party member, both Congressman Travis Childers and Gene Taylor would be considered Blue Dog Democrats. Only the Third Congressional District was won by a Republican (Election Results, 2008). In 2010, Republicans swept into control of the Congressional Delegation, defeating Childers and Taylor (Election Results, 2010). Congressman Bennie Thompson retained control of the Second Congressional District - a majority-minority district. The 2012 elections saw continued domination by the Republican Party in congressional races (Election Results, 2012).

As is clear from recent political history, the Democratic Party has slowly lost control and almost reached non-existence in a region that it once dominated. The last Democrat to hold the governor’s office was Ronnie Musgrove, who served as Governor of Mississippi from 2000 to 2004 (Ronnie Musgrove). During his tenure, Governor Musgrove was often considered a moderate conservative - for example, signing into law a measure that banned homosexuals from adopting children in the state (Barnes, 2013). However, at the same time, Musgrove worked to remove the Confederate symbol from the state flag and worked on the Executive Committee of the National Democratic Governors’ Association (Ronnie Musgrove).
State Demographics

In 2010, the Mississippi population was estimated to be nearly 3 million people, and in 2013, the population was estimated to have slightly risen by 0.8 percent (Census-MS, 2014). In 2012, 13.5 percent of the population was made up of persons 65 years old and older (Census-MS, 2014). Whites make up 59.9 percent of the population, while African Americans compose 37.4 percent of the state’s population, the largest percentage of African-Americans in the nation (“Mississippi;” Census-CPS, 2014). Hispanics or Latinos only compose 2.9 percent of the population (Census-MS, 2014). 81 percent of the population has a high school diploma or higher, while only twenty percent of the population holds a bachelor’s degree or higher (Census-MS, 2014). The median household income in Mississippi is $38,882, and 22.3 percent of the state’s population lives below the poverty level (Census-MS, 2014).

Voter Turnout History

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show voter turnout data for Mississippi in midterm and Presidential elections from 1980 to 2012. The average voter turnout for Presidential elections between 1980 and 2012 is 64.2 percent in Mississippi (Census-CPS). The average voter turnout for midterm elections between 1980 and 2012 in the state is 43.7 percent (Census-CPS). Between 1980 and 2004, white turnout in Mississippi consistently surpassed African-American turnout; however, between 2004 and 2012, African-American turnout surpassed white turnout (Census-CPS). Mississippi’s average white turnout in presidential elections from 1980 - 2012 for which data is available\(^8\) was

\(^8\) Some data is excluded for each group. See Tables 5.1 and 5.2
65.1 percent; state white turnout in midterm elections during that timeframe is 44.4 percent (Census-CPS). Average African American turnout in presidential elections in Mississippi from 1980 to 2012 for which data is available is 63.8 percent; African American turnout in midterm elections during that timeframe is 43.6 percent in the state (Census-CPS). Average turnout among Mississippi’s youth ages 18 to 24 is 51.9 percent for elections from 1980 to 2012 where information is available; turnout among the same group dramatically falls to 26.9 percent during midterm elections (Census-CPS).

Table 5.1: Mississippi, Midterm Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mississippi Turnout</th>
<th>National Turnout</th>
<th>African American (MS)</th>
<th>Hispanic (MS)</th>
<th>Youth, 18-24 (MS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
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<td>41.9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>24.4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Mississippi, Presidential Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mississippi Turnout</th>
<th>National Turnout</th>
<th>African American (MS)</th>
<th>Hispanic (MS)</th>
<th>Youth, 18-24 (MS)</th>
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**EDR in Mississippi**

*Political Feasibility*

As stated above, a conservative Republican Party currently controls Mississippi, and an even more conservative Tea Party has a large following in the state. Furthermore, Mississippi voters recently passed a voter identification law, seen by many critics as a barrier to voting. All of these signs point to EDR being an infeasible policy in Mississippi. However, I believe that while EDR is not likely to be implemented in the near future, the policy could easily and quickly gain popularity to one day become a feasible policy option.

Mississippi’s history of voter suppression even alludes to the infeasibility of EDR. It is common knowledge that Mississippi, like many Southern states, has a long, dark history of creating barriers to voter registration. The Mississippi Constitution, enacted in

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9 The Pew Research Center notes that reported turnout numbers, especially in 2012 Census reports, may be inflated due to social desirability bias; however, it does not “negate the long-term turnout trends” (Taylor & Lopez, 2013).
1890, “froze African Americans out of the political process until more than halfway through the 20th century, and established the legal foundation for one of history’s most brutal, oppressive, and violent regimes whose singular purpose was to maintain white supremacy by controlling the ballot box” (Nave, 2013). Until 1987, Mississippi even had a law requiring voters to register twice - once for municipal elections and once for state elections. Furthermore, the law banned off-site voter registration (Nave, 2013). From the grandfather clause, to the literacy test, to the poll tax, to sheer violence, Mississippi has long suppressed minority voters. Even after the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, remnants of Jim Crow and white supremacy still existed in Mississippi politics and voting, especially through gerrymandering and the redistricting process. Mississippi has long supported conservative, restrictive voting policies.

With the Supreme Court’s recent decisions striking the most important provisions of the Voting Rights Act, feasibility of enacting EDR decreases. As Mississippi now has the power to freely enact a voter identification policy, and conservative states across the country begin to scale back their convenience voting policies, the political feasibility of EDR diminishes even more. In the current political climate, with a conservative Governor, a Republican-led state legislature, and a well-known Republican Secretary of State, the passage of EDR is not feasible. However, if knowledge of EDR increased in the citizenry, and if a community of people are empowered to work for the policy, passage and enactment could become more feasible.

EDR is not a well-known policy in the United States. In a 2013 poll by the Harvard Institute of Politics, respondents were given a brief description of EDR and then asked, “based on what you know now, do you support or oppose same-day registration?”
(“Young Americans”). Of those sampled, 44% were not sure if they supported or opposed the policy (“Young Americans”). It is clear that we need to increase information on EDR throughout the country and the state.

To increase knowledge and awareness of EDR, supporters would first have to build a coalition in the state; they would have to build a public voice. In fact, I propose creating a coalition similar to that used to defeat the Personhood Amendment in 2011. This involved creating a strong, local grassroots organization that “waged an aggressive counter campaign” (James, 2011). That same coalition also included “out-of-state organizers and professional strategists,” as well as religious institutions and leaders, political leaders, local activists and volunteers, and business leaders (Carmon, 2011; Pettus, 2011). I also think proponents of EDR can look to North Carolina as a model of how to create that coalition and organizing group. In North Carolina, state Representative Deborah Ross worked for over four years to pass EDR in the state’s General Assembly, as explained in chapter three (Carbo & Kirschner).

The state Democratic Party has launched its Project 1876 to make the state a battleground in 2016. The community organizing project hopes to build a voter database and “build ongoing relationships” in all of Mississippi’s 1,876 voting precincts in hopes of turning the state blue (Thomas, 2012). The project involves identifying leaders in each county and training them to develop a statewide volunteer database (Thomas, 2012). Further, Project 1876 includes creating a central message and training this volunteer network to disseminate that message (Thomas, 2012; Y’all Politics, 2014). This is another example of the type of community organizing project a coalition would need to build support for EDR in the state.


**Potential Turnout Effects**

I believe implementing EDR in Mississippi would lead to dramatic increases in voter turnout. Based on turnout increases seen in Minnesota and North Carolina, I expect that voter turnout would increase by at least four percentage points. Certainly, midterm elections would see a dramatic increase in turnout. In all elections, youth turnout would likely see the largest increase. All of these trends are reported in Minnesota and North Carolina, as well as other states that have implemented EDR.

In a study to predict potential turnout effects in North Carolina due to same-day registration, Alvarez and Nagler make some accurate predictions that I think could be applied to Mississippi. Among their predictions, Alvarez and Nagler predict turnout post-SDR could increase by 10.8 percent among voters ages 18 to 25, and turnout among African-Americans could increase by 5.9 percent (2007). Also, they predict “almost 90,000 additional poor voters would go to the polls, compared to an additional 43,000 voters in the top of the income range” (Alvarez & Nagler, 2007). While these numbers apply solely to North Carolina, I think we could expect similar results in Mississippi - a state that is both politically and demographically similar to North Carolina. Furthermore, EDR leads to increased turnout, which leads to an increased voter participation. This could easily cause an increase in civic culture (Alvarez & Nagler, 2007), which in turn leads to more political participation. Implementing EDR has the ability to create a self-sustaining cycle that both increases voter turnout and increases civic and political engagement. It is clear that implementing EDR in Mississippi would increase voter turnout, across almost all demographic groups.
Discussion & Conclusion

Certainly, today, EDR is not a politically feasible policy in Mississippi. However, by building a coalition, executing community-organizing projects, and raising awareness of the policy, supporters have the ability to implement EDR in Mississippi one day. Data consistently show that removing the barriers to voter registration leads to dramatic increases in voter turnout. Voter turnout is especially increased among traditionally underrepresented groups, such as racial minorities and youth. The evidence I have shown throughout this paper shows that Election Day Registration has a dramatic, positive effect on voter turnout and that it would have the same effect in Mississippi. I would urge policymakers in Mississippi to begin thinking about what can be done to increase voter turnout in Mississippi. It’s time Mississippi ranked first on something positive, and the state can take a solid step towards that by implementing Election Day Registration.
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