

FREE THE VOTE

A Progressive Agenda to Protect and Expand the Right to Vote



presented at the
2013 Progressive Mass
Policy Conference



National Context – What Happened in 2012?



Action/Reaction

- 2008: record turnout of people of color and young people
- 2010: record number of vote suppression laws introduced in state legislatures

Vote Suppression Laws

- 19 states enacted laws designed to shrink the electorate
 - Photo Id
 - Restrictions on Registration Drives
 - Cutbacks to Early Voting
 - New Barriers to Re-enfranchisement of Ex-Felons
 - Attempts to Eliminate SDR

Did Vote Suppression Work?

- Some bad laws delayed or struck down by DOJ or courts in several states
- Voters fought back against ballot initiatives
 - SDR in Maine, Photo ID in Minnesota
- But, cutbacks to early voting and other problems led to long lines & disenfranchisement
- Retrenchment efforts continue in 2013 – NC, MT, AR, VA

2012 Problems in Massachusetts

- Good news: no new vote suppression measures enacted here
- Bad news: MA voting laws so antiquated that the status quo means vote suppression
- 32 states have early voting; not MA
- 11 states plus DC have SDR; not MA
- 41 states have online tools to look up voter registration status and find current polling place; not MA

2012 Problems in Massachusetts, con't

- Long lines and delays in Boston, Worcester and Springfield: 2-3 hours in some places
- Confusion about where people are supposed to vote; Election Protection received 2500 calls from people needing help to locate their polling place
- In Springfield, 3 polling places ran out of ballots by mid-morning. Boston also had precincts that ran out of ballots.

“We have to fix that”



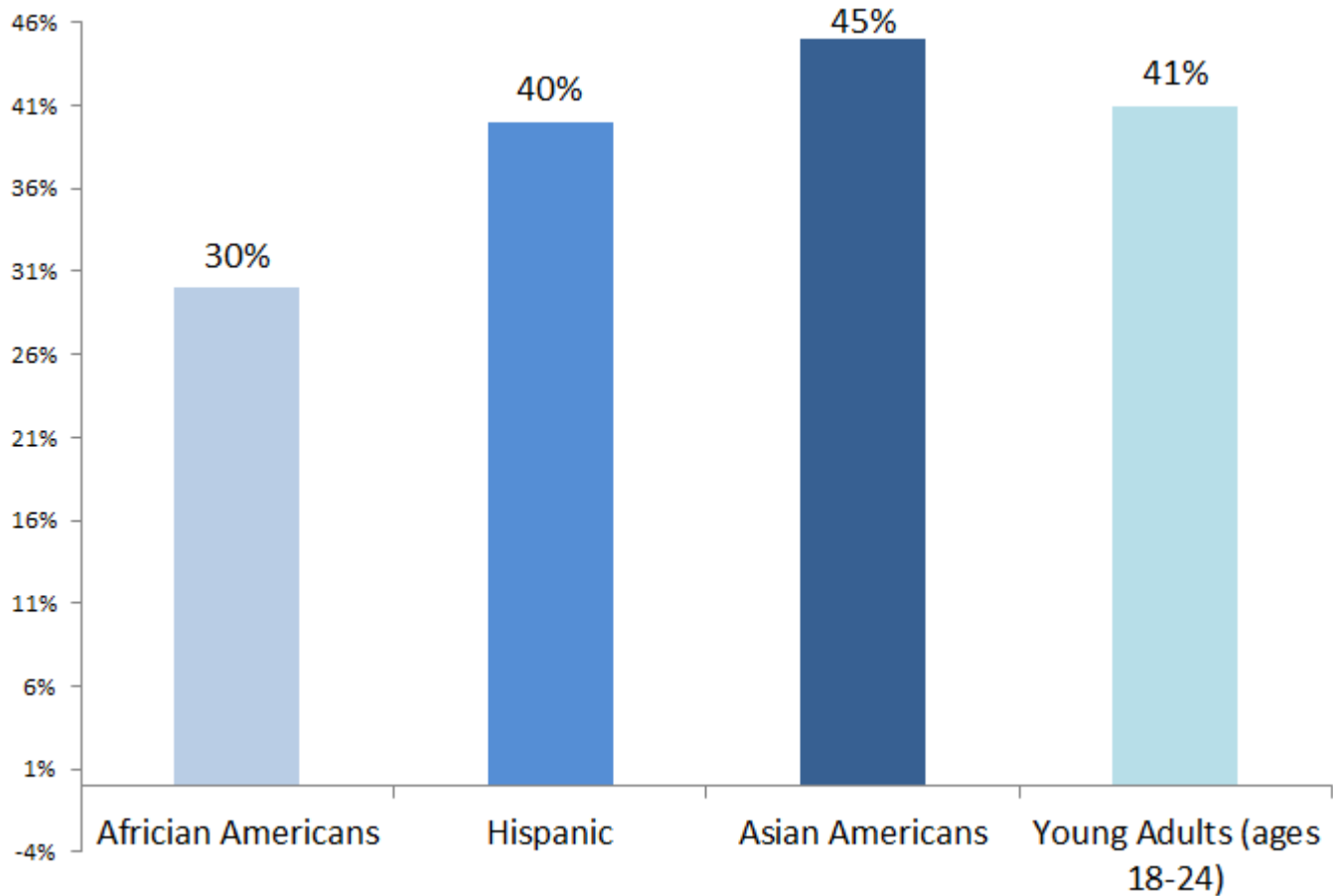
“We have to fix – [what?]”

Focus:
The Voter Registration Barrier

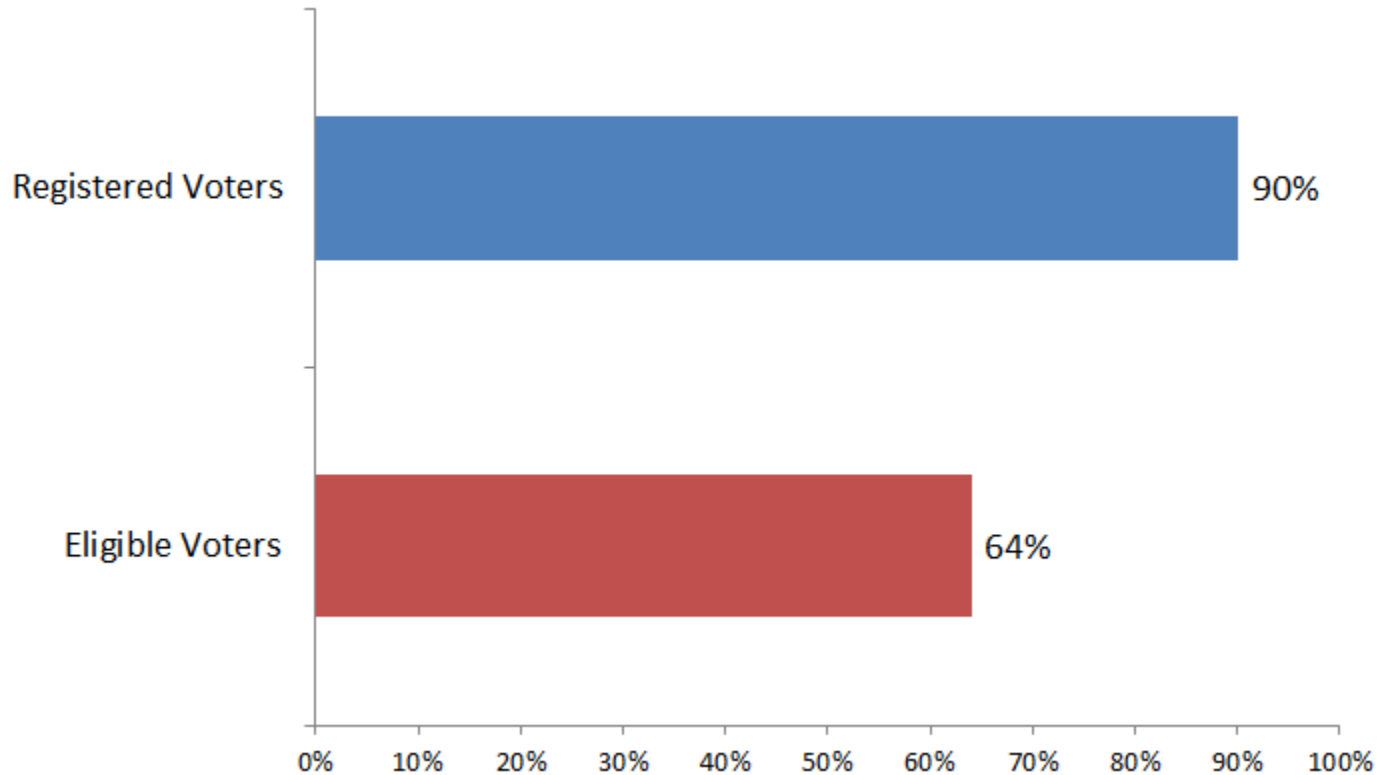
Eligible but Unregistered: 51 Million

- One in four eligible persons
- Disproportionately low income, people of color and young voters

Eligible Unregistered Voters in the 2008 Election



Turnout of Voting Age Population in 2008 election



Massachusetts figures

- MA voter registration rate: slightly higher than national rate: 68.6% in 2010, compared to national rate of 65.1%
- But just looking at the overall registration rate is misleading, because there may be huge gaps in voter registration rates of specific groups.

Source: 2011 Massachusetts Civic Health Index

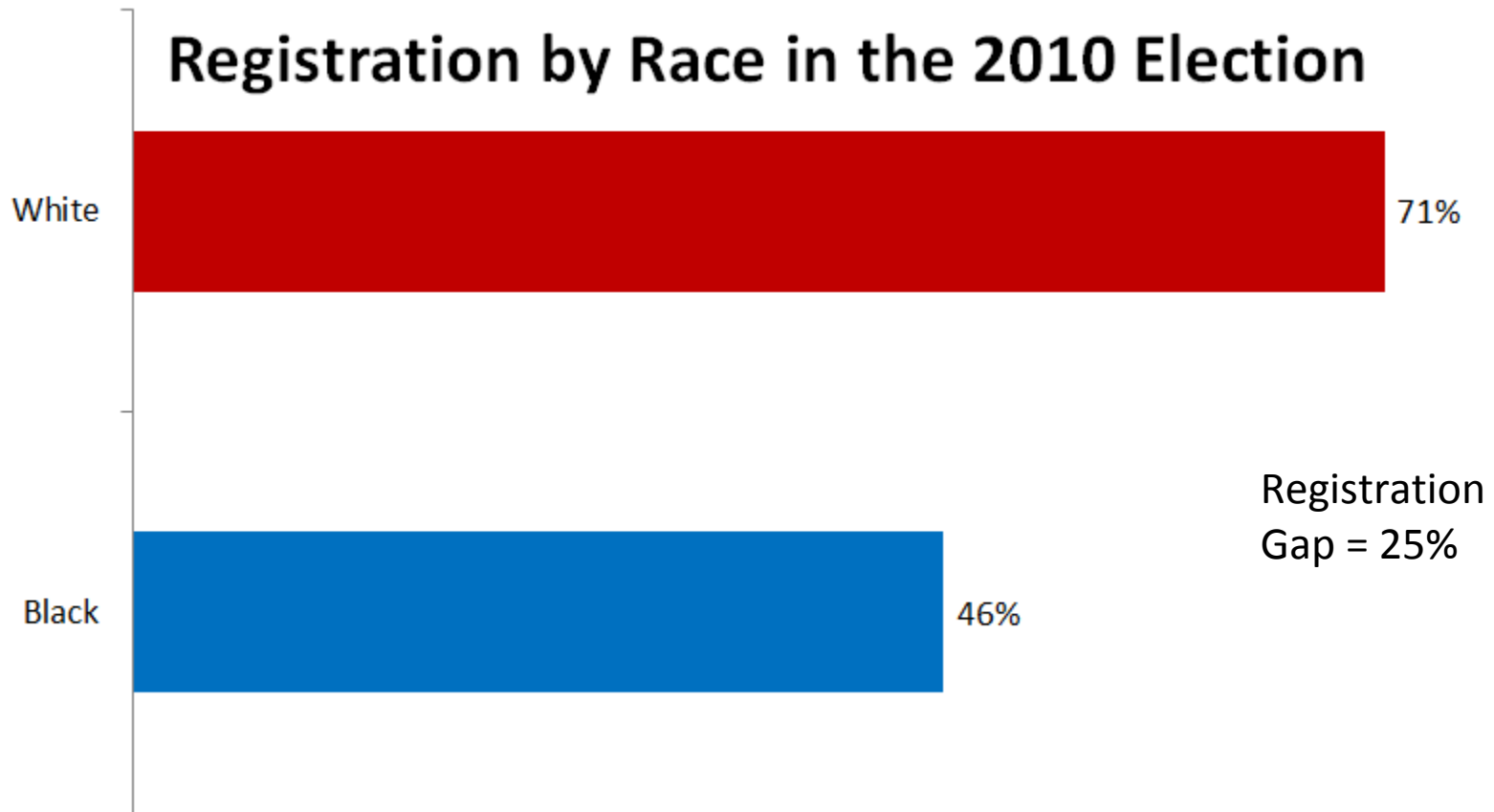
Massachusetts Registration Gaps

Registration by Income in the 2010 Election



Source: U.S. Census Current Population Survey 2010. Subgroup figures may have large margin of error

Massachusetts Registration Gaps



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Modernizing Voter Registration

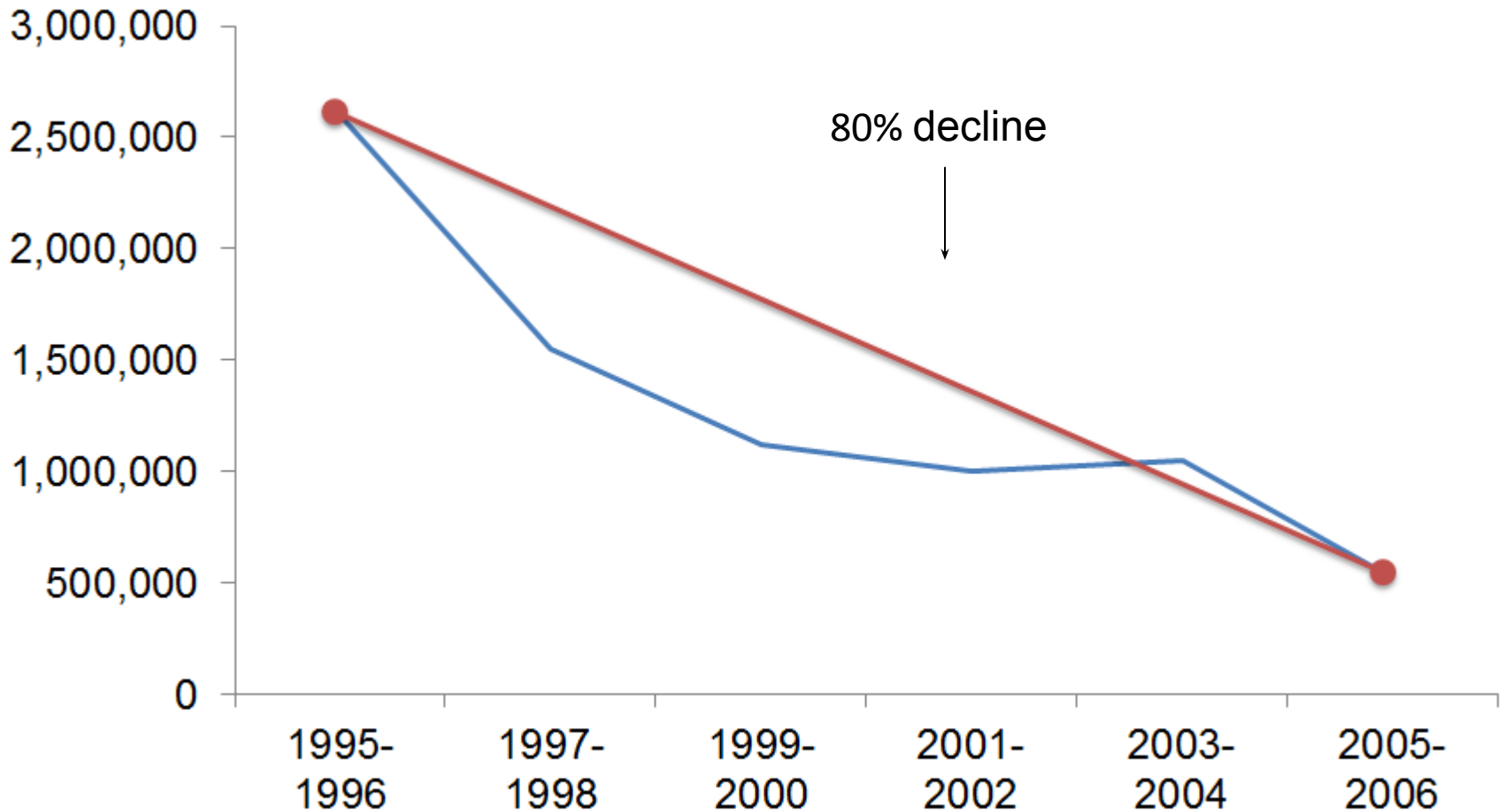
- Gov't takes active role to ensure eligible persons get registered to vote, instead of placing entire burden on individuals to overcome hurdles to registration
- Once a voter is registered, a change of address does not require the voter to start over again; the new address is updated automatically for the voter rolls
- If an eligible person cannot be found on the voter roll on Election Day, or simply did not register in advance, he/she can register at polling place and cast a regular ballot
- These opportunities are available to all eligible voters, not only to those with a pre-existing drivers' license and signature on file with RMV

PUBLIC AGENCY REGISTRATION

National Voter Registration Act

- Enacted in 1993; goal of increasing number of eligible persons registered to vote
- State agencies that serve the public – RMV, public assistance offices, disability offices – must provide voter registration services
- RMV registration got institutionalized fairly well, but registration at public assistance offices dropped off dramatically after initial implementation.

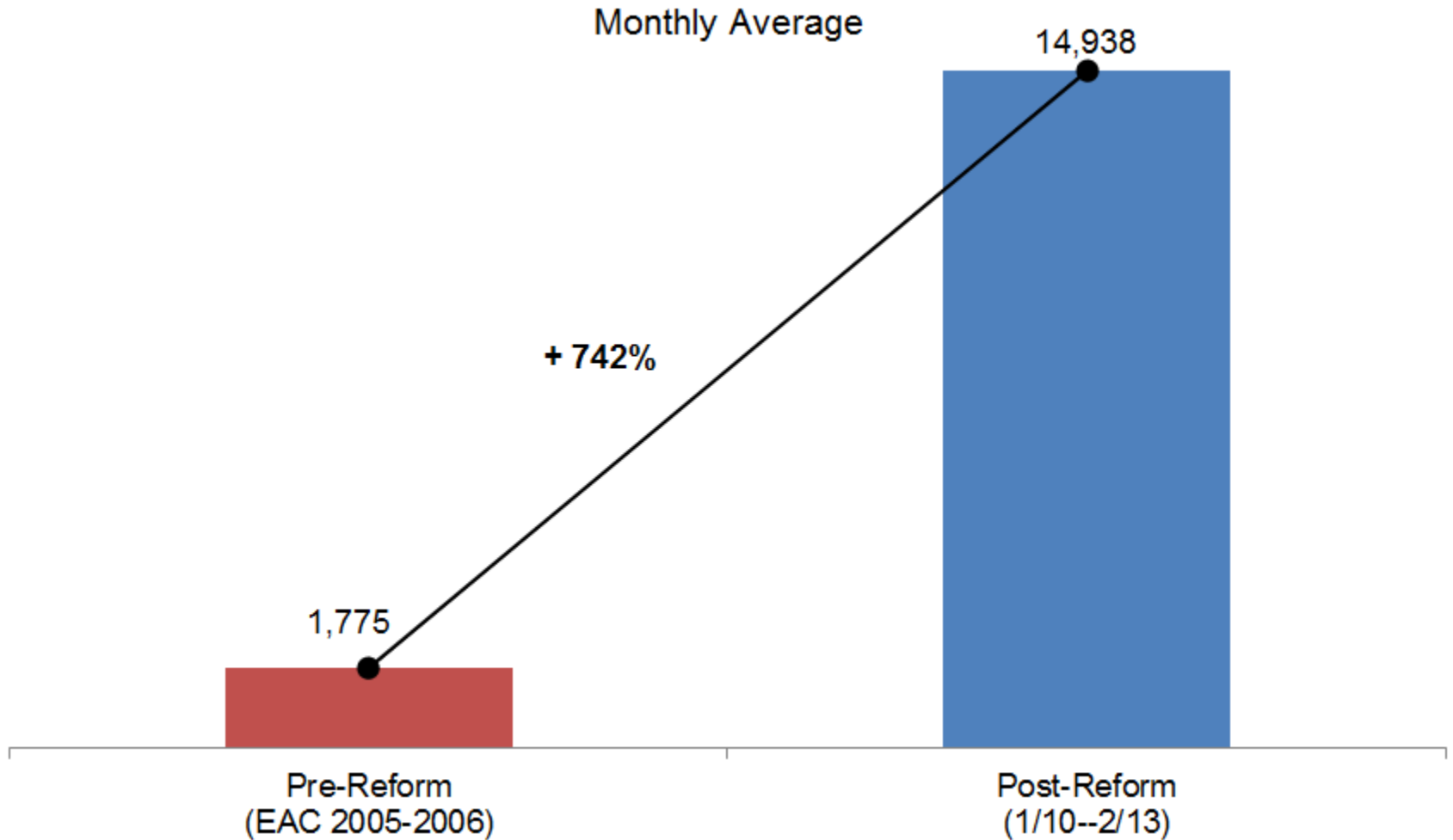
Decline in Public Agency Registrations



Public Assistance Agency Registrations in MA

- Only 2,000 registration applications at public assistance offices 2009-2010
- 94% of clients had not received voter registration services
- Lawsuit filed May 2012; DTA agreed to mail postage-paid voter registration applications to past clients
- 31,500 low-income people sent in voter registration applications prior to election
- Lawsuit still pending

Ohio

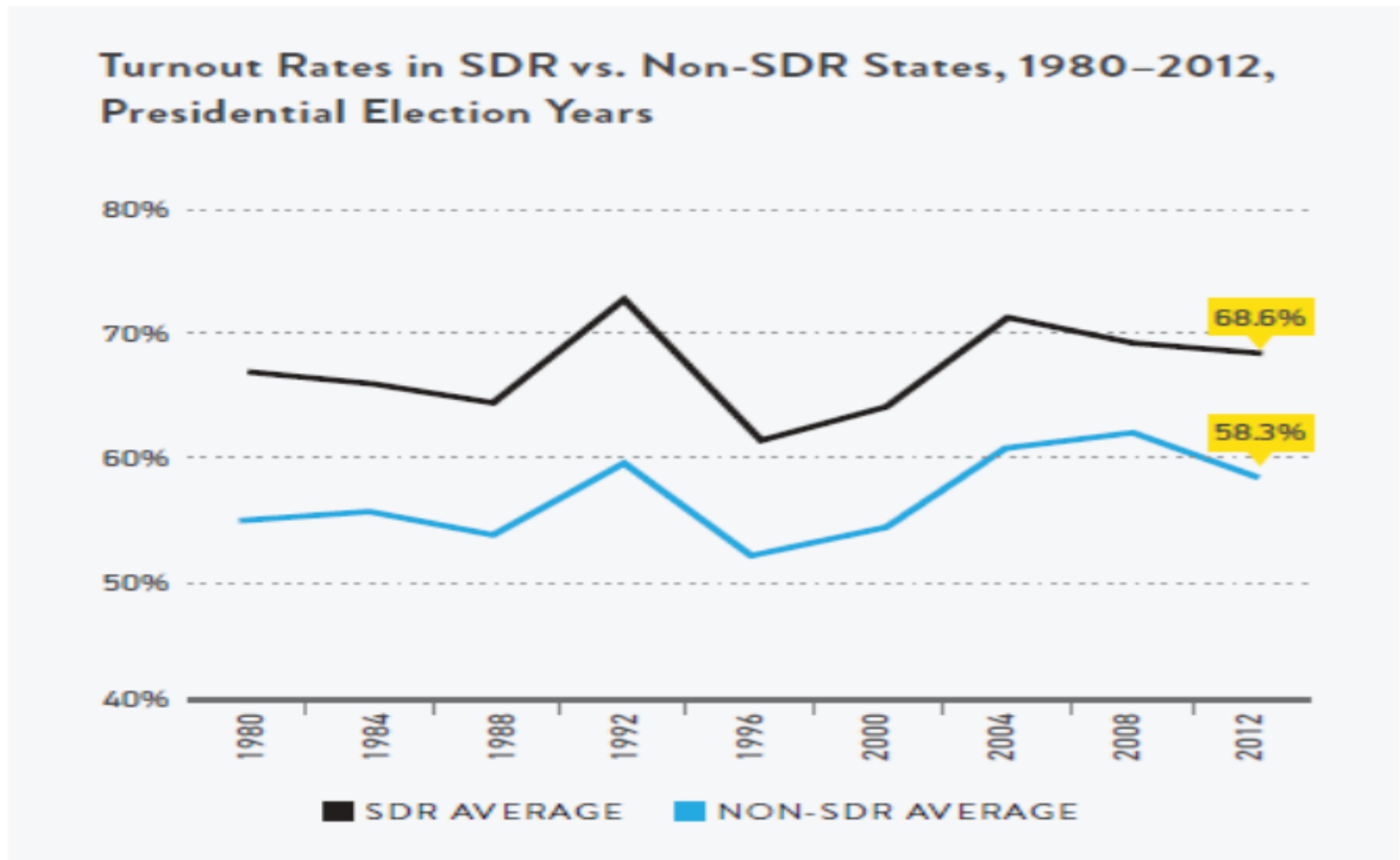


SAME DAY REGISTRATION

States with SDR

- Since the 1970s: Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin
- Since the 1990s: Idaho, New Hampshire, Wyoming
- Since 2006: Iowa, Montana, North Carolina, District of Columbia, Connecticut, California

Turnout & Same Day Registration



SOURCE: U.S. Elections Project, <http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout%201980-2012.xls>

How Many Used Same Day Registration in 2008?

STATE	VOTERS USING SDR	SDR USAGE (% OF VOTERS)
Idaho	117,861	17.69%
Iowa	66,289	4.17%
Maine	58,474	8.07%
Minnesota	527,867	17.89%
Montana	8,053	1.64%
New Hampshire	99,299	13.81%
North Carolina	249,922	5.61%
Wisconsin*	388,157	12.58%
Wyoming*	28,017	11.18%
Washington, DC	3,783	1.29%
TOTAL	1,547,722	10.17%

SOURCE: As reported by state elections officials. Data on file with Dēmos.

* Preliminary 2012 data; further review pending

Same Day Registration Helps Geographically Mobile Populations

- Over 36 million people moved between 2011 and 2012
- Nearly half of those moving had low incomes
- Young adults of all income levels move more frequently
- Allowing young people to register to vote on Election Day could increase youth turnout in presidential elections by as much as 14 percentage points

Source: Demos, Same Day Registration Factsheet, Feb 2013

Same Day Registration Benefits Communities of Color

- In 2008, nearly 250,000 people used SDR in North Carolina
- African Americans comprised 36% of those who used Same Day Registration, although African Americans comprised only 20% of the voting age population

Source: Demos, Same Day Registration Factsheet, Feb 2013

SDR Reduces the Need for Provisional Ballots

- After SDR was adopted in Iowa, provisional ballots dropped from 15,000 in the 2004 presidential election to less than 5,000 in 2008 – a 67 percent decline.
- North Carolina saw 23,000 fewer provisional ballots after it adopted SDR in 2008.

Source: Demos, Same Day Registration Factsheet, Feb 2013

OTHER REFORMS

- Early Voting
- No Excuse Absentee Voting
- Pre-registration of 16 and 17-year-olds
- Permanent/portable registration
- Polling place and registration look-up and other voter tools
- Online registration
- Ending prison-based gerrymandering

PENDING LEGISLATION

- S.327 (Senator Finegold): Annual training of town clerks and election directors; online registration – using signature from RMV; pre-registration of 16 year olds; on-line registration look-up; early voting – one week, ending day before election; post-election audits
- Does NOT include SDR
- Will be heard in Election Committee April 3

What about SDR?

- S.325 (Senator Eldridge); S.314 (Senator Creem), H.579 (Reps Fox/Benson): all include Election Day Registration
- Will be heard in Election Committee November 20.
- Petition to ask Committee to add SDR to the election reform bill

Prison Gerrymandering

- S.309 (Senator Chang-Diaz); H.3185 (Rep. Forry): Resolution asking Census Bureau to tabulate incarcerated person at their home address
- Will be heard in Election Committee March 27.

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