



Research Memo

August 4, 2008

To: Interested Parties

From: Erin Ferns

Re: Youth Voting Legislation

Introduction

Although youth voter participation is on the rise, young people are still underrepresented in the electorate. In 2006, voters between the ages of 18 and 29 comprised about 20 percent of the eligible voting population, but only half actually voted. Among young minority citizens, voter registration and turnout is even lower, lagging behind White rates by ten and five percent, respectively. The stratification in the youth electorate is reinforced by current methods of voter mobilization efforts, which concentrate on college campuses where the student body is overwhelmingly White.

This legislative session saw multiple approaches toward increasing youth participation in the electoral process, including voter registration and voter education measures and more ambitious efforts to extend voting rights to citizens younger than 18. The majority of these measures failed to pass, resulting in few improvements in the ways in which American youths interact in the election system.

In this memorandum, we provide information on the status of youth voting state legislation in 2008, related current election law, and issues involved in youth voter mobilization and participation.

Youth Voter Registration

A recent examination of the youth electorate suggests that efforts to engage young Americans in the democratic process focuses on college campuses, missing about half of young voters ages 18-29 who are not in college, including a disproportionate number of African-American and Latino voters.¹

While most bills this year were designed to provide voter registration opportunities at universities, others found inventive ways to reach the majority of young people. For example, a failed Florida bill (S 436) would have provided a voter registration form with every high school diploma, allowing the recipient to register or preregister to vote.

Other states proposed to designate public secondary schools as voter registration agencies.

Currently, 10 states permit schools to serve as voter registration agencies or facilitate drives on campus. A more common method of registering youth is through preregistration. Twenty-six states currently allow citizens under age 18 to preregister to vote so that they are automatically registered once they turn 18.

¹ Nunley, Ian and Erin Ferns. "Registration and Voting Among Americans Ages 18-19." Project Vote. June 2008.



Table 1: Youth Voter Registration Opportunities by State

Pre-Registration		
Alaska	Iowa	Pennsylvania
Arizona	Louisiana	South Dakota
Arkansas	Massachusetts	Tennessee
California	Minnesota	Texas
Connecticut	Nebraska	Utah
Florida*	Nevada	West Virginia
Georgia	New York	Wisconsin
Hawaii	Ohio	Wyoming
Indiana	Oregon	
Voter Registration		
Alabama	Louisiana	Rhode Island
California	Minnesota	Washington
Florida	North Carolina	
Georgia	Ohio	

**Legislation adopted in 2008. Permits 16-year-olds to register to vote*

Five states have introduced bills relating to voter registration. Likewise, five states introduced bills to permit preregistration among under-age citizens. Among these states, Florida passed an omnibus election bill permitting preregistration for 16-year-old citizens. (See the appendix for current legislation.)

Civic Engagement

Several states proposed to engage young voters by instilling the value of democracy through education and incorporation in the democratic process, including civic education Web sites and student poll worker programs.

Currently, seven states allow young people under age 18 or certain high school and college students to serve as poll workers. Three states provide voter education programs for students.

Table 2: Civic Engagement Opportunities By State

Student Poll Workers		
Arizona	Minnesota	Ohio
California	Nebraska	Wisconsin
Colorado		
Voter Education		
Missouri	Nebraska	Rhode Island

Two states passed bills relating to student poll worker programs this year. Four states introduced legislation relating to voter education, three of which failed upon adjournment. (See appendix for current legislation.)

Lowering the Voting Age

Expanding access to the democratic process and thereby increasing voter participation has also been

attempted through extending voting rights to citizens younger than 18. Youth voter advocates argue that citizens who become politically engaged at a young age become lifelong voters.²

This election year, primary voting rights for 17-year-olds created waves in several states, particularly in Connecticut, which now joins eight other states in permitting such voting rights through constitutional amendment (HJR 210). Similarly, a Maryland student successfully moved the Maryland State Board of Elections to restore primary voting rights for 17-year-olds, which had been suspended in 2006.³ The Maryland legislature also introduced two bills that went beyond the current interpretation of the law, one extending primary voting rights to 16-year-olds and the other proposing to amend the constitution specifying the right to vote in primaries for certain 17-year-olds. Both bills failed.

Other states looked beyond primary voting and proposed to extend full voting rights to 16-year-old citizens. To date no states permit 16-year-olds to vote in any election.

Table 3: Voting Age by State

Primary Voting Rights for Certain 17-Year-Olds		
Connecticut*	Nebraska	Maine
Indiana	Ohio	North Carolina
Kentucky	Iowa	Virginia

Voting Rights for 16-Year-Olds
No state permits citizens under age 18 to vote in any election other than primary elections in select states.

** Legislation adopted in 2008.*

Seven states introduced legislation providing primary election voting rights to 17-year-olds if they will be 18 the following general election. Four states introduced bills to lower the voting age to 16. (See appendix for current legislation.)

Conclusion

While youth-targeted voter registration, civic engagement, and lowered voting age are all viable methods of fostering the next generation of engaged Americans, these methods failed to catch on with state legislatures in 2008. Other reforms, such as Election Day Registration, which appear to benefit young voters, have also not made significant gains in 2008.⁴

ElectionLegislation.org

Project Vote is monitoring election legislation on critical issues - including convenience voting, provisional voting, voter ID, proof of citizenship, Election Day Registration, felon voting, youth voting, among others - in all states with legislative sessions in 2008. In addition, we are monitoring approximately 300 election bills that fall within a broad range of important election issues in 21 targeted states as part of our ElectionLegislation.org project. In 2007, we monitored 485 election-related bills in 24 states. This project is funded by the Open Society Institute and others.

² "Partisanship: A Lifelong Loyalty that Develops Early." Young Voter Strategies. February 2007.

³ De Vise, Daniel. "One Teen's Campaign To Restore Voting Rights." Washington Post. January 21, 2008.

⁴ One of the simplest and most accessible election reform measure that addresses some youth voting issues is Election Day Registration. EDR is an effective way to boost participation not only among young people, but all voters and currently exists in proven models that can be rapidly adopted in those states where it does not exist.



Appendix: Youth Voting Bills

State	Bill Number	Status	Type
Arizona	HCR 2010	Failed -Adjourned	Lower Voting Age
California	A 1819	Pending	Preregistration
	ACA 15	Pending	Primary Voting Rights
	S 854	Enacted	Voter Registration
Connecticut	HJR 21	Enacted	Primary Voting Rights
Florida	H 309	Failed-Adjourned	Voter Education
	H 1201	Failed-Adjourned	Preregistration
	S 112	Failed-Adjourned	Voter Education
	S 1628	Failed-Adjourned	Voter Registration
	S 436	Failed-Adjourned	Voter Registration
	S 866	Enacted	Preregistration
Kentucky	H 560	Failed-Adjourned	Voter Education
	HR 267	Failed-Adjourned	Voter Education
Louisiana	H 990	Failed -Adjourned	Voter Registration
	S 428	Failed -Adjourned	Voter Registration
Maryland	H 310	Failed-Adjourned	Primary Voting Rights/ Voter Registration
	H 1616	Failed-Adjourned	Voter Education
	S 201	Failed-Adjourned	Primary Voting Rights
Michigan	H 5792	Pending	Preregistration
	SJR 14	Pending	Lower Voting Age
Minnesota	H630	Failed-Adjourned	Lower Voting Age
New Hampshire	S 436	Failed -Adjourned	Primary Voting Rights
New Jersey	A 2752	Pending	Voter Registration
	A 556	Pending	Voter Registration*
New York	A 1168	Pending	Voter Registration
	S 6169	Pending	Voter Registration
	A 1588	Pending	Voter Education
	A 11167	Pending	Preregistration
	A 5389	Pending	Voter Registration
	A 11167	Pending	Voter Registration
Ohio	H 350	Enacted	Student Poll Workers
Rhode Island	H 7106	Failed -Adjourned	Preregistration
	H 7833	Enacted	Student Poll Workers
	S 2731	Failed -Adjourned	Primary Voting Rights
Washington	H 2662	Failed-Adjourned	Lower Voting Age
	H 2663	Failed-Adjourned	Primary Voting Rights
Wisconsin	S 6	Failed -Adjourned	Primary Voting Rights

*Allows for permanent absentee status.