

Election Day Holiday

2014 POLICY GUIDE



State and Federal Policy

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Making Election Day a holiday can make voting more convenient, increase voter turnout, and create a larger pool of poll workers and election volunteers.

The Problem: In mid-term congressional elections, voter turnout in recent years has average just 40% of eligible voters. Turnout was better in 2012, a presidential election year, but was still under 58%, making it far lower than in many other well-established democracies. One reason is voter access. A Society of Human Resource Management survey found that 45% of employers do not give employees time off to vote, and only 31% offer paid time off. A patchwork of state laws govern voting and workers, but it is largely up to the employees themselves to fit in a trip to the polls before work, during lunch, or after the daily grind – even as states like Kentucky close the polls as early as 6 pm.

Many states offer early voting or no-fault absentee voting, but for maximizing interest in an election among all voters, not just the most reliable ones, the best approach is to make Election Day itself as accessible as possible.

The Solution: Federal and state law should mandate that our most important Election Days – general elections for Congress and top state offices – be observed as a national or statewide holiday. Doing so would allow people to vote at any point in the day, not just before or after work. This would increase access to voting and decrease voting lines at often crowded times at the start or end of an Election Day. An Election Day holiday also would greatly increase the number and diversity of pollworkers able to help our polling places run efficiently and create the potential to open additional local polling places. Most fundamentally, Election Day holidays would highlight elections as a fundamental part of our democracy, thus fostering more respect for the responsibility of voting.

Success story: Election Day is a holiday in the U.S. Territory of Puerto Rico; its turnout is far higher than in most states.

Key Facts

Many nations that vote on non-work days have voting rates more than 20% higher than in the United States. After a 2001 commission led by former presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter recommended it, then-Senators Hillary Clinton and John Kerry introduced legislation to make Election Day a holiday in the 109th Congress.

Fiscal Impact

Little to no fiscal impact. There is no initial cost to implementing the plan. However, granting a new holiday could lead to a loss of revenue. In the event of a combination of an existing holiday and Election Day, this could cut down on any loss that might be experienced.

Related Reforms

- Early Voting
- Preregistration
- Poll Worker Training
- Democracy Index

Part Two Resources

- Model Statutory Language