NORTH CAROLINA STATE
BOARD OF ELECTIONS:
REPORT ON SAME DAY
REGISTRATION

Experiences in the 2008 Primary &
General Election

A Report to the North Carolina General Assembly to detail the
experiences with Same Day Registration and how it impacted
the 2008 General Election.

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North Carolina State Board of Elections: Report on Same Day Registration

EXPERIENCES IN THE 2008 PRIMARY & GENERAL ELECTION

AN OVERVIEW

Same Day Registration (SDR) was enacted in 2007 and utilized for the first time in the 2007 municipal elections; however, the 2008 election season was the first real test of SDR in North Carolina. During the 2008 election season many people took advantage of the opportunity to register to vote during the one-stop early voting periods for the primary, 2nd primary, and the general election. The ability to register in-person was a key factor in why the 2008 post-election season was essentially "uneventful." There were no election challenges and voters for the most part were pleased with the process, irrespective of outcome of election contests. With consideration to the total 478,519 people who voted during the one-stop voting period for the May Primary and the 2.4 million who voted at a one-stop site during the general election, a substantial increase from the previous presidential-election year, SDR was a success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2004-Primary</th>
<th>2004-General</th>
<th>2008-Primary</th>
<th>2008-General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-Stop Voters</td>
<td>17,810</td>
<td>707,636</td>
<td>478,519</td>
<td>2,411,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Day</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>21,212</td>
<td>103,535</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Raw Numbers

In order to appreciate the success of SDR, it is helpful to review the 2008 election season statistically.

- In total, there were over 295,000 registration applications processed at 368 one-stop absentee voting sites, accounting for almost 125,000 new registrations and almost 171,000 changes of name or address.
- There were 21,212 SDRs during the 1st and 2nd primary; there were 103,535 SDRs during the one-stop period for the general election.
- The total 124,747 new same day registrations added to the overall total of 967,804 new registrations that
were processed in North Carolina last year, or 13% of all new registrations.

- 29,035 voters updated their name or address at one-stop sites during the primaries and a total of 141,651 one-stop voters updated their information at one-stop sites during the general election.
- More people utilized SDR during the general election than during the primaries.
- There was a 242% increase in one-stop voting when the 2004 general election (707,636 one-stop voters) is compared to the 2008 general election (2.4 million one-stop voters).
- In the 2008 general election, the 2.4 million one-stop voters made up 55% of the total votes cast in the election.

2008 General Election
Votes Cast by Source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Votes Cast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ONE-STOP</td>
<td>2,411,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIVILIAN ABSENTEE</td>
<td>21,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILITARY ABSENTEE</td>
<td>8,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERSEAS ABSENTEE</td>
<td>4,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELECTION DAY</td>
<td>1,714,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL VOTES CAST</td>
<td>4,353,739</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 10% of the 2.4 million general election one-stop voters utilized SDR either to newly register or change their name or address.
One-stop Sites
The 268 additional one stop sites cost the state $2.75 million in one-stop grants provided by the General Assembly. The State Board of Elections provided an additional $3 million in HAVA grants. Out of the 368 one stop sites, 100 were sites at the county board office or a site in lieu of the county board; the remaining 268 sites were additional one-stop sites approved by the county boards and the State Board of Elections.

SAME DAY REGISTRATION WAS SUCCESSFUL
SDR had a positive impact on the election process in a number of key ways: people were generally satisfied with the elections process and had fewer complaints than in years past; more people were successfully able to vote – voter turnout for the general election was a record breaking 70%; and there was a relative decrease in the number of provisional ballots.

Voter Satisfaction
Voters expressed their satisfaction and gratitude that North Carolina had a process that afforded citizens with more opportunities to register and vote. More people were able to successfully vote because they had the chance to take care of registration issues during the one-stop voting periods. Voters who missed the registration deadline or who were unaware that they were not properly registered were able to rectify these problems with SDR. Due to the availability of SDR, 70% of all registered voters turned out to successfully vote in the 2008 general election. Not only was this the highest turnout in state history, but more people than ever were registered to vote – over one-half million more people were registered in the 2008 general election versus the 2004 general election.

Provisional Experience
One of the obvious benefits gained from SDR is the relative decrease in the number of provisional ballots that were submitted on election day in the 2008 general election versus the 2004 general election. In 2004, the percentage of provisional ballots to the total number of ballots cast was 1.49%, whereas in 2008, the percentage dropped to 1.24%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Voters</th>
<th>2004 Primary</th>
<th>2008 Primary</th>
<th>2004 General</th>
<th>2008 General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Provisionals</td>
<td>5400</td>
<td>31,381</td>
<td>52,905</td>
<td>53,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison of Provisionals to No. of Voters</td>
<td>0.638%</td>
<td>1.477%</td>
<td>1.490%</td>
<td>1.240%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This reduction is significant when considering that 22.6% more people voted in the 2008 general election than in the 2004 general election. Provisional ballots must be researched by county board staff following an election to determine whether the ballots were cast by qualified voters to be approved or disapproved. This process can be time-intensive. If the 2008 percentage of provisional ballots to total votes cast were comparable to the 2004 level, more than 10,000 additional provisons would have need to be researched. Instead, in 2008, elections boards found that they had fewer provisional research requirements, attributable to the fact that the majority of 2008 general election voters voted during one-stop. If they had voter
registration issues, these issues were easily resolved utilizing the SDR process. For instance, the majority of provisional voters in the 2004 general election were required to vote provisionally because they failed to provide their county board with their change of address within the county. When these voters went to their new precinct, they were required to vote a provisional ballot. Although the ballot was approved, it added to the county boards’ post-election duties. In contrast, the 2008 one-stop voters with in-county address changes were processed with the SDR software, and were subsequently given the appropriate ballot based on their address and were allowed to vote without any further delay.

Another example accounting for the difference in the relative number of provisionals, is the opportunity provided by SDR for those voters who submitted new applications for voter registration that were missing required elements (e.g., signature, date of birth, or residential address) and they failed to provide this information to the county board prior to the voter registration deadline. In the past, when these voters appeared on election day to vote and their names did not appear in the precinct poll book, they were given the opportunity to vote a provisional ballot. Since most 2008 voters voted at a one-stop site rather than on election day, if they presented themselves to vote at a one-stop site and their name did not appear on the poll book, they were allowed to register at the one-stop site after completing a voter registration application, and could then vote.

Consequently, the percentage of provisionals that were fully or partially counted in 2004 is greater than the percentage of fully or partially counted provisionals in 2008. Again, since so many people voted during one-stop in the 2008 general and were able to take care of any voter registration issues at that time, there were a greater percentage of 2008 election day provisional voters who were simply not eligible to vote. Their votes were not counted because they were not registered in the county in which they presented themselves to vote.

![Comparison of Provisional Ballots](chart)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fully Counted</th>
<th>Partial Count</th>
<th>Not Counted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of Provisional Ballots
THE ISSUES

Despite the success, some issues arose with SDR in the 2008 election.

Administrative Delays

There is no guarantee we will see the level of registration activity that was experienced in the 2008 election; however, due to the volume of one-stop registrations, county boards of elections could not meet the 48-hour deadline that is required by GS 163-82.6A. This statute sets out:

> [w]ithin two business days of the person’s registration under this section, the county board of elections in conjunction with the State Board of Elections shall verify the North Carolina drivers license or Social Security number in accordance with G.S. 163-82.12, update the statewide registration database and search for possible duplicate registrations, and proceed under G.S. 163-82.7 to verify the person’s address.

County boards, especially large counties, had to hire additional staff to process these new registrations. County board staff worked long hours and workweeks in order to meet this two-business day requirement. Although staff worked as efficiently as they could, generally, it was not possible to process the number of voter registration applications received during one-stop within this two-day period.

Other administrative issues include:

- County boards were pressed for time in printing precinct poll books due to the need to complete the processing of same day registrations, although they were all able to have the poll books in time for the opening of polls on election day.
- County boards found that it was important to manage the logistics of transmitting the SDR paperwork from one-stop sites to the county boards of elections. Some counties had to pay extra one-stop workers to transport the SDRs to the county board office.
- Due to volume issues, county boards of elections experienced minor in DMV validations, especially during the last few days of one-stop voting.

Returned Verification Mailings

Some same day registrations did not complete the mail verification cycle prior to the certification date. County boards received verification mailings that were returned as undeliverable after the election had been canvassed and certified. In essence, county boards found that there was not enough time between the end of one-stop voting (and SDRs) and the canvass date to ensure that verification mailings completed the mail verification process. 2.4 percent of registrations were subsequently denied due to the inability of the county boards to verify the applicant’s address through the mail. There are various factors that inherently complicate the mail verification process. Mailings may be returned due to postal error, administrative errors, lack of a valid mailing address due to homelessness, or the transient nature of our population. College and university students were one of the main groups of same day registrants with returned verification mailings. The issue arose with students who legally registered in their college community during one-stop, but who left town or moved away before the verification cycle could be completed. Once these students left town, their verification cards were returned back to the county board of elections as undeliverable. Members of the military also accounted for some of the undeliverable mailings because military personnel registered to vote
in North Carolina during one-stop, but shortly thereafter left town after being deployed elsewhere. Whatever
the problematic factor, undeliverable verification mailings are not born out of SDR. As long as the second
notice is returned prior to canvass, then the one-stop registrant’s registration can be denied and their in-
person absentee ballot appropriately disapproved. SDR laws need to be revised to provide county boards
of elections guidance on processing same day registrations that are legally permissible at time of the
registration, but cannot be verified through the mail because the applicant has moved within 30 days of the
election.

Accessibility of One-stop Sites
In 2004, there were 226 one-stop sites in the general election. There were 368 one-stop sites available to
voters for the 2008 general election. At least 50 to 75 additional sites would have been helpful, especially in
smaller to mid-sized counties. Some counties only had a few one-stop sites available to its voters and these
sites were not convenient to all the counties’ residents.

Although more one-stop sites are needed during presidential elections, finding additional one-stop sites may
be difficult because existing one-stop sites have worn out their welcome with public and private facilities that
house one-stop absentee voting due to long lines, parking difficulties, and the space and time commitments
required by one-stop voting. One-stop sites need to be large enough to handle lines and the volume of traffic
that may flow into the site during presidential-election years. Inside space is especially needed to handle the
lines for same day registrations.

Lack of Voter Education
One of the easiest obstacles to overcome with SDR is voter education. Generally, county boards were
confronted with the following voter education issues:

• Voters were unaware of the ID requirements for SDR. College students, who were opting to
register in their college communities, often did not have the appropriate ID immediately
available to them that would permit them to verify their address within the county in which
they attend school. Similar issues arose with military personnel in high military population
counties who lived in base housing and did not have North Carolina driver’s licenses or utility
bills.
• Some voters had difficulty understanding that they needed to prove their in-county residential
address.
• During the primary, many existing registered voters who appeared at one-stop sites were
unaware that they could not change their party affiliations after the registration deadline.
• Voters were unaware that if they registered to vote at a one-stop site they could not wait to
vote on Election Day
• Some voters, unaware of the change in the voter registration law that allowed for SDR,
incorrectly alleged that there was election fraud because they incorrectly believed that county
boards were impermissibly allowing people to register to vote after the voter registration
deadline.

These voter education issues can be corrected by providing increased educational materials to the voting
public and utilizing the media, political parties, advocacy groups, etc. to disseminate election information.
Intersecting Registrations

There were issues with some voters who submitted a voter registration application to one county during the last few weeks before the registration deadline and then appeared to vote in another county or actually registered at one-stop in another county and voted. Similarly, there were voters who registered at a one-stop site and voted although they had been issued a mail-in absentee ballot in a previous county of registration. Many of these situations were innocent scenarios where college students were confused about where they should vote or involved well-intentioned parents attempting to help their college-aged children. Unfortunately, these scenarios, no matter how unintended, created administrative difficulties for county boards. When the newest registration was processed, the previous registration was cancelled and the voter was removed. Many mailed-in registrations were processed after one-stop voting had begun. There were situations where a one-stop voter was removed from the county in which his one-stop vote was cast simply because the voter submitted a new registration in another county that was belatedly processed. Counties had to research each of these situations on a case by case basis to ensure that there was no possible fraud being committed. Any situations of potential fraud or duplicate voting are being investigated, and if evidence of fraud is found, the evidence will be turned over to the appropriate county district attorney.

WHAT WE LEARNED

It appears that North Carolina voters has accepted SDR as a useful method of fail-safe voting and expressed their satisfaction with SDR to county and state election officials. Voters and voter registration advocates, both in North Carolina, and throughout the nation lauded North Carolina’s SDR program and noted that the availability of SDR and no-excuse absentee voting at one-stop reduced the need for voters to use provisional ballots on election-day. Most important, it enfranchised eligible citizens to participate in the elections process. Despite individual preferences to the outcome of the election contests in the 2008 general election, North Carolina citizens were assured that the election process in this state was fair and open to all eligible citizens.

There is no way of knowing whether North Carolina will once again have the same volume of voter registration activity in the immediate future. Despite the question of volume, it is clear that county boards can manage SDR better with strategically utilizing county board staff and one-stop workers and focusing on educating its one-stop workers and the general public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SDR has greatly benefited the North Carolina elections process. North Carolina is recognized by other states as a model for the conduct of elections. Other election systems are looking to us for guidance on how to implement its own SDR program. Despite the success of SDR and with respect to the few issues, the following recommendations are made to improve the SDR process.

- Improve and focus on providing more training and education to the public and one-stop workers.
- Develop an equitable plan to allot county one-stop sites that diffuses any claims of partisanship
- Enact legislation to address same day registrants who legally register to vote during one-stop and who subsequently move within 30 days of an election, or shortly thereafter, before the
mail verification process is can be completed, specifically college students and active military families. Provide adequate funding for additional one-stop sites.

- A follow-up report on Same Day Registration will be necessary to address educational and training recommendations and to fully report the outcome of any fraud investigations. The information technology staff is also still analyzing data to report the total number of undeliverable mailings. This follow-up report will be ready by the end of July 2009.