

Democracy North Carolina

105 W Main St Carrboro, NC 27510 919-967-9942 www.democracy-nc.org

**Embargoed Until
Thursday, July 21, 2005**

Contact: Peter Walz, 919-824-7802
or Amanda Smith, 252-217-5925

Survey Reveals Problems & Potential of Youth Participation in N.C. Elections

18-24 year olds of all political stripes believe Same Day Voter Registration will increase the number of young people registering to vote in North Carolina

When North Carolinians aged 18-24 were asked to identify the state's voter registration deadline, less than 2% knew that a person must register 25 days before Election Day. That may explain why North Carolina's voter turnout among 18-24 year-olds in the much-anticipated 2004 election was 38.4%, falling below the national average of 41.9% voter turnout for 18-24 year-olds.

Democracy North Carolina, a non-partisan and non-profit group, conducted the 10 question survey with the help of young people themselves. Ten college students from a variety of North Carolina universities are working in the organization's annual "Democracy Summer" program. These students conducted face-to-face interviews with 529 North Carolinians who were 18-24 years-old during the November 2004 election.

"In conducting this voting related survey and questionnaire we found that even the young people who were registered and voted struggled with the questions about registration, such as the registration deadline," says Amanda Smith, a rising senior at Meredith College. Smith is one of the ten students who helped conduct the survey. "We believe that by simplifying the voter registration process the state would see an increase in the number of young people who register and vote."

While many people are lamenting the lack of young people in the voting booth, some states seem to have found an answer. Six states have what is known as same day voter registration, in which there is essentially no voter registration deadline. Voters with appropriate identification can register up to and on Election Day. These states (Minnesota, Maine, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Wyoming, and Idaho) averaged a 56.1% youth voter turnout in the November election, a 17.7% higher youth turnout than in North Carolina.

The survey found that:

- 67.9% of those surveyed who were *not registered* for the November 2004 elections said that they would have been more likely to register if they'd been able to register up to and on Election Day.

(continued)

- 80.5% of those polled said that they would support same day registration, including a majority of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.
- Only 1.9% correctly answered that there is a 25 day deadline to register before an election.
- More than 1 out of 3 respondents, 34%, agreed that the process of registering to vote is inconvenient.

According to U.S. Census data released in May 2005, there were 310,000 18-24 year-olds in North Carolina who were not registered to vote in the November election. If the N.C. General Assembly enacted same day voter registration, the possibility stands for a substantial increase in youth registration and turnout rates. If Democracy North Carolina's survey results hold true for those 310,000 unregistered youth, then there would be over 210,000 young people who are more likely to register to vote in the state. If only a small percentage did register, the state would see tens of thousands of newly registered young voters.

“Young people want to be involved but as first time voters the process can often be intimidating and confusing,” says Keith Roberson, a student at East Carolina University who also helped conduct the survey. “We need to streamline the voting process so that it's as hassle free as possible. Same day registration is already working in six states and there's no reason that North Carolina can't make this a reality as well.”

The N.C. General Assembly is currently considering legislation (HB 851) that would allow registration throughout the early voting process and would fund a study of the feasibility of Election Day registration. This bill passed the House Election Law Committee by a 9-7 vote on Wednesday.

##