

Survey Results on Polling Place Accessibility in the 2012 Elections

Presentation to the Election Assistance
Commission, Washington, D.C., May 9, 2013

Lisa Schur, Rutgers University
Douglas Kruse, Rutgers University
Meera Adya, Syracuse University

Voter turnout is generally low among people with disabilities

- Disability turnout gap of 4-21 percentage points in 12 surveys over 1992-2010
 - Lower turnout is only partly explained by standard voting predictors: resources (education and income), recruitment, and feelings of political efficacy
- => Inaccessible polling places may play a role, both by making voting more difficult and possibly sending the message that people with disabilities are not welcome in the political sphere

2012 post-election survey

The Election Assistance Commission provided funds through Research Alliance for Accessible Voting (RAAV) for a nationally representative household survey on voting experiences following 2012 elections

- Total sample of 3,022, stratified to oversample people with disabilities so there are:
 - 2,000 people with disabilities
 - 1,022 people without disabilities
- Survey was conducted by professional survey firm, Survey Technology and Research
- Voting questions based on U.S. Census, with added questions on voting difficulties
- Reported experiences by voters complement the GAO reports on potential barriers in polling places

Disability measure was based on Census Bureau questions

	<u># in sample</u>
Any disability	2000
Hearing impairment	501
Visual impairment	410
Cognitive impairment	742
Mobility impairment	1347
Wheelchair users	289
Cane, crutches, or walker	857
Difficulty inside home	486
Difficulty going outside alone	893
Limited in major life activities	1590

Reported difficulties among those voting at polling place in 2012

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
1. Finding or getting to polling place	6%	2%
2. Getting inside polling place (e.g., steps)	4%	0%
3. Waiting in line	8%	4%
4. Reading or seeing ballot	12%	1%
5. Understanding how to vote or use voting eqt.	10%	1%
6. Communicating with election officials	2%	1%
7. Writing on the ballot	5%	0%
8. Operating the voting machine	1%	1%
9. Other type of difficulty	4%	1%
Any of above	30%	8%

Examples of polling place difficulties from verbatim descriptions

Finding or getting to polling place: hard to get a ride, polling place not well marked, polling place moved

Getting inside polling place: steps, walking distance

Operating voting machine: hard to pull handle, hard to see, machine too high, machine malfunctioned, didn't know how to operate

Polling place difficulties by type of disability

Any type of voting difficulty in 2012

among those with

Hearing impairment	27%
Visual impairment	44%
Cognitive impairment	43%
Mobility impairment	31%
Wheelchair users	41%
Cane, crutches, or walker	28%
Difficulty inside home	49%
Difficulty going outside alone	43%
Limitation in major life activities	34%

=> Difficulties were highest among those with visual, cognitive impairments, and difficulty with activities inside home

Need for assistance at polling place

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
Needed any assistance if voted at polling place in 2012	30%	11%
If yes, who provided assistance		
Election officials	42%	72%
Family member	42%	19%
Friend	9%	2%
Home care aide	1%	0%
Other	4%	5%
Needed but none provided	3%	2%

Use of extra features or devices to vote in 2012

If have disability, used extra features or devices	7%
If yes:	
What features or devices	
Large display	58%
Magnifier or visual aid	33%
Earphones	10%
Seating/lowered machine	2%
Other (special keypad, automark)	1%
Features or devices were set up and ready to use	75%
Election officials knew how to set up and use features or devices	97%

Treatment by election officials

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
Election officials were:		
Very respectful	86%	85%
Somewhat respectful	8%	7%
Neither respectful nor disrespectful	3%	5%
Somewhat or very disrespectful	3%	3%

=> No difference by disability status

Overall ease or difficulty of voting at polling place

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
Very easy	75%	87%
Somewhat easy	18%	11%
Neither easy nor difficult	1%	1%
Somewhat difficult	3%	1%
Very difficult	3%	1%

=> Most people with disabilities report voting was easy, but 6% report it was difficult (higher than among people without disabilities)

Voting by mail

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
If voted in 2012, cast vote by mail	24%	16%
If voted by mail:		
Any difficulty in reading or filling out mail-in ballot	13%	2%
Needed assistance in completing mail-in ballot	11%	0%

If did not vote at polling place in 2012, but did so sometime in past 10 years

- Any type of difficulty in voting at polling place among those with

Disability	29%
No disability	10%
- Pattern of difficulties very similar to those for 2012 voters

If did not vote at polling place in past 10 years, would expect to have difficulties in voting

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
1. Finding polling place	2%	0%
2. Getting to polling place	13%	0%
3. Getting inside polling place (e.g., steps)	7%	0%
4. Waiting in line	3%	0%
4. Reading or seeing ballot	6%	0%
5. Understanding how to vote or use voting eqt.	10%	0%
6. Other difficulty recording vote	4%	1%
7. Any other problem	10%	0%
Any of above	40%	1%

Preference for how to vote

Asked of all respondents (voters and non-voters)

If you wanted to vote in the next election, how would you prefer to cast your vote?

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
In person at polling place	58%	68%
By mail	25%	14%
On the Internet	10%	16%
By telephone	5%	2%
Don't know	2%	1%

=> People with disabilities are less likely to prefer voting at polling place, but still a majority want to do so

Overall:

- Some results are very positive, such as no difference in treatment by election officials between people with and without disabilities,
- Nonetheless people with disabilities are still more likely to report and expect difficulties in exercising the right to vote.

Questions and feedback are welcome!