Survey Results on Polling Place Accessibility in the 2012 Elections

Presentation to NIST/EAC Accessible Voting workshop, April 1, 2013

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Voter turnout is generally low among people with disabilities

- Disability turnout gap of 4-21 percentage points in 10 surveys over 1992-2004
- Disability turnout gap of 12 percentage points in 2008 and 2010, when comparing people of same age, sex, and race
- 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

EAC 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th># in sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any disability</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing impairment</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual impairment</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive impairment</td>
<td>742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility impairment</td>
<td>1347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair users</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cane, crutches, or walker</td>
<td>857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty inside home</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty going outside alone</td>
<td>893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited in major life activities</td>
<td>1590</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Reported difficulties among those voting at polling place in 2012

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>No disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Election officials were:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very respectful</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat respectful</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither respectful nor disrespectful</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat or very disrespectful</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

=> No difference by disability status
**Overall ease or difficulty of voting at polling place**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>No disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very easy</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat easy</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither easy nor difficult</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat difficult</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very difficult</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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

**Any of above**  
Disability: 40%  
No disability: 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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Disability (%)</th>
<th>No disability (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In person at polling place</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By mail</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Internet</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By telephone</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

• Almost one-third (30%) of voters with disabilities reported difficulty in voting at a polling place in 2012, compared to 8% of voters without disabilities

• Most common problems were reading or seeing ballot, or understanding how to vote or use voting equipment.

• Almost one-third of voters with disabilities required assistance in voting, most commonly given by election officials or family members.

• Only 7% of voters with disabilities used extra features or devices in voting, most commonly large displays or magnifiers.
Summary of key points (cont.)

- People with disabilities were just as likely as those without disabilities to perceive respectful treatment from election officials.
- While three-fourths of voters with disabilities said it was very easy to vote at a polling place, this is lower than for voters without disabilities, and 6% of voters with disabilities said it was somewhat or very difficult to vote.
- Most people with disabilities prefer voting at a polling place.

These are just initial results—more analysis to be done. Ideas and feedback are welcome!