

Projecting the Number of Eligible Voters with Disabilities in the November 2016 Elections

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The number of eligible voters with disabilities is growing with the aging of the population and advances in medical technology. This brief report summarizes projections of how many people with disabilities will be eligible to vote in the November 2016 elections, based on analysis of data from the Census Bureau's 2010-2014 American Community Survey combined with Census Bureau population projections. The methodology is described at the end of the report.

The key findings, as shown in Table 1 and pictured in Figure 1, are:

- A projected 35.4 million people with disabilities will be eligible to vote in the November 2016 elections, representing close to one-sixth of the total electorate.
- The number of eligible voters with disabilities has increased 10.8% since 2008, compared to an increase of 8.5% among eligible voters without disabilities.
- There will be 62.7 million eligible voters who either have a disability or have a household member with a disability, more than one-fourth of the total electorate.

Table 2 provides a breakdown by major type of disability. These figures show that

- Mobility impairment will be the most common disability in November 2016. A projected 20.2 million eligible voters will have mobility impairments, 12.2 million will have cognitive impairments, 10.6 million will have hearing impairments, and 6.3 million will have visual impairments. (Note that these groups overlap since a person may have more than one type of disability.)

A breakdown by age, sex, and race/ethnicity in Table 3 shows that:

- Despite senior citizens having a higher likelihood of disability, there will be more eligible voters with disabilities under age 65 (19.3 million) than there are age 65 or older (16.0 million).
- There will be slightly more women (18.5 million) than men (16.8 million) among eligible voters with disabilities.
- The eligible voters with disabilities will include 25.2 million non-Hispanic whites, 5.1 million blacks, and 2.6 million Hispanics/Latinos.
- The total number of eligible voters with disabilities (35.4 million) exceeds the total number of eligible voters who are black (28.7 million) or Hispanic/Latino (29.5 million).

These figures show that people with disabilities constitute a sizeable share of the electorate, so their votes could influence election outcomes. A key question of course is how many of them will actually vote. Despite the barriers often faced by people with disabilities in exercising the right to vote,¹ estimates from another government data source show that a majority

¹ Among those who voted in a polling place in 2012, 30% of voters with disabilities reported some type of difficulty in voting, compared to 8% of voters without disabilities (Lisa Schur, Meera Adya, and Douglas Kruse, [Disability, Voter Turnout, and Voting Difficulties in the 2012 Elections](#), report to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, June 2013, at <http://smlr.rutgers.edu/research-centers/disability-and-voter-turnout>). See the U.S. Government

of people with disabilities reported voting in 2012, and their reported voter turnout was only 5.7 percentage points lower than among citizens without disabilities.² Based on this other government data source, 15.6 million people with disabilities voted in 2012, and 16.4 million are projected to vote in 2016, but how many will actually vote depends on the dynamics of the 2016 campaign, get-out-the-vote efforts, and extent of voting barriers facing people with disabilities.³ Regarding political preferences, the limited prior evidence indicates that people with disabilities are similar to those without disabilities in patterns of party identification and placement on a conservative-liberal scale, but are more likely to favor a greater government role in health care and creating employment opportunities.⁴

Methodology

These projections account for trends in age, sex, and race/ethnicity by using Census Bureau population projections broken down by these characteristics, combined with disability information from the American Community Survey.⁵ Four race/ethnicity groups were created (white non-Hispanic, Black, Hispanic, and other), and the full set of permutations with sex and single years of age (18-85, with 85+ combined into one category) created population projections for 544 demographic groups. The 2010-2014 American Community Survey, which has a total of

Accountability Office (GAO) report at <http://gao.gov/products/GAO-13-538SP>, and the White Paper prepared by Schur for the 2013 Presidential Commission on Election Administration at <https://www.supportthevoter.gov/files/2013/08/Disability-and-Voting-White-Paper-for-Presidential-Commission-Schur.docx> .pdf.

² See Table 6 at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2012/tables.html>. The rate of reported voter turnout in the cited survey cannot be simply applied to the figures presented here from the American Community Survey, due to differences in survey method and context as noted in the methodology section.

³ See Table 6 at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2012/tables.html>. The projected rate for 2016 assumes the same turnout rate for people with disabilities as in 2012, applied to the projected number of eligible voters based on trends from the November 2008 to November 2015 Current Population Surveys.

⁴ Lisa Schur and Meera Adya, "Sideline or Mainstreamed? Political Participation and Attitudes of People with Disabilities in the United States," *Social Science Quarterly*, Vol. 94, No. 3, 2013, pp. 811-839.

⁵ <https://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2014.html>

more than 12 million observations for individuals age 18 or older, was then used to calculate the percent of non-citizens, institutionalized people, and people with disabilities among non-institutionalized citizens, in each of these demographic groups. The Census projections for each group were adjusted for the estimated number of non-citizens and institutionalized people in order to estimate projected number of eligible voters in the total population. Within each group, the disability rate was multiplied by the projected number of eligible voters to derive projections for eligible voters with and without disabilities in 2016 and 2017. Since the Census Bureau provides projections for July 1 of each year, we estimated the November 2016 population by adding one third of the difference between the 2016 and 2017 projections (representing 4 months) to the 2016 projection.

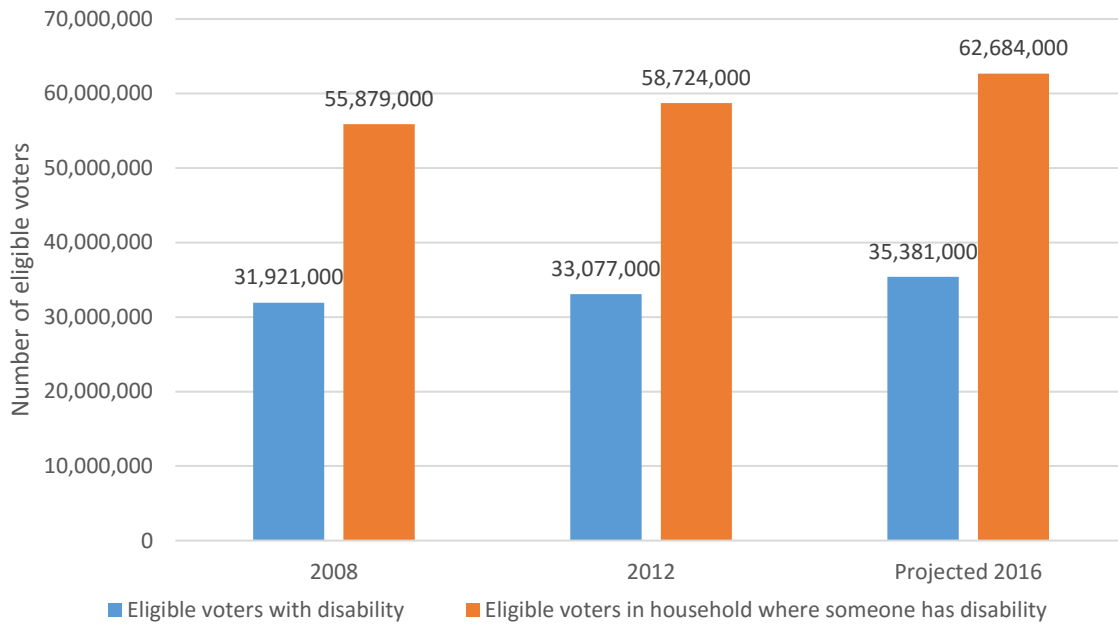
Estimates of disability vary by survey, depending on the questions used to identify disability, the defined population, and the survey method and context. Using more extensive questions, the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) yielded a 2010 total estimate of 56.7 million people with disabilities, of which 51.5 million were age 15 or older but an unknown number were eligible to vote.⁶ The Current Population Survey (CPS) uses the same questions as the American Community Survey but has a different survey method and context, and yielded a 2012 estimate of 27.5 million citizens with disabilities age 18 or older.⁷ The 2010-2014 American Community Survey, which yields a disability prevalence between the SIPP and CPS numbers, was chosen for this report because it has more recent data than SIPP and a far larger sample than either the SIPP or CPS for generating reliable numbers to apply to Census population projections as described above.⁸

⁶ <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p70-131.pdf>

⁷ Table 6 at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2012/tables.html>

⁸ Further details on methodology are available on request.

Figure 1: Disability in the Electorate, 2008-2016



Based on analysis of American Community Survey combined with Census Bureau demographic projections

Table 1: Disability and the Electorate, 2008-2012 and Projected 2016

Figures represent number of people eligible to vote.

	2008	2012	Projected 2016	Percent increase 2008-2016
Disability status of eligible voters				
Have disability	31,921,000	33,077,000	35,381,000	10.84%
No disability	174,893,000	183,162,000	189,766,000	8.50%
Percent with disability	15.43%	15.30%	15.71%	
Disability in households of eligible voters				
Any household member has disability	55,879,000	58,724,000	62,684,000	12.18%
No household member has disability	150,934,000	157,515,000	162,463,000	7.64%
Percent in disability household	27.02%	27.16%	27.84%	

Based on analysis of American Community Survey combined with Census projections from <https://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2014.html>.

Table 2: Disability in the Electorate by Type of Disability, 2008-2012 and Projected 2016

Figures represent number of people eligible to vote.

	2008	2012	Projected 2016	Percent increase 2008-2016
Any disability	31,921,000	33,077,000	35,381,000	10.84%
Mobility impairment	18,129,000	18,866,000	20,153,000	11.16%
Difficulty going outside alone	12,394,000	12,939,000	13,600,000	9.73%
Cognitive impairment	10,960,000	11,605,000	12,230,000	11.59%
Hearing impairment	9,599,000	9,718,000	10,563,000	10.04%
Difficulty with self-care	6,458,000	6,850,000	7,420,000	14.90%
Visual impairment	5,930,000	5,739,000	6,289,000	6.05%

Based on analysis of American Community Survey combined with Census projections from <https://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2014.html>.

Table 3: Demographic Breakdown of Projected Electorate by Disability Status, 2016

Figures represent number of people eligible to vote.

	Have disability	No disability	Total	Percent with disability
Age 18-64	19,350,000	160,786,000	180,136,000	10.74%
Age 65+	16,030,000	28,980,000	45,010,000	35.61%
Age 18-34	4,247,000	64,712,000	68,959,000	6.16%
Age 35-49	4,984,000	48,647,000	53,631,000	9.29%
Age 50-64	10,119,000	47,427,000	57,546,000	17.58%
Age 65-74	6,832,000	19,864,000	26,696,000	25.59%
Age 75+	9,198,000	9,116,000	18,314,000	50.22%
Female	18,540,000	97,560,000	116,100,000	15.97%
Male	16,840,000	92,206,000	109,046,000	15.44%
White non-Hispanic	25,160,000	129,593,000	154,753,000	16.26%
Black	5,124,000	23,540,000	28,664,000	17.88%
Hispanic/Latino	3,622,000	25,884,000	29,506,000	12.28%
Other race/ethnicity	1,475,000	10,749,000	12,224,000	12.07%

Based on analysis of American Community Survey combined with Census projections from <https://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2014.html>.