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Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2022 Elections

Supplemental Analysis of Census Voter Turnout Data

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Key points



Based on Census data, voter turnout increased in 2022 by 1.6 points among citizens with disabilities relative to the 2018 midterm elections, while it decreased among citizens without disabilities by 1.6 points.



This increase helped close but did not eliminate the turnout gap between citizens with and without disabilities, which went from -4.8 points in 2018 to -1.5 points in 2022.



The increased turnout among people with disabilities occurred across all disability types and demographic categories—gender, race/ethnicity, age group, and region—but was especially pronounced among young voters with disabilities.



15.8 million citizens with disabilities reported voting in the November 2022 elections.



States providing easier access to voting by mail between 2018 and 2022 had significantly higher turnout increases among people with disabilities.



Combined with the 2022 post-election survey finding that 14% of voters with disabilities had some type of difficulty voting in 2022, this data indicates a total of 2.2 million voters with disabilities experienced voting difficulties.



Employed people with disabilities were just as likely as those without disabilities to vote, suggesting that employment helps bring people with disabilities into mainstream political life.



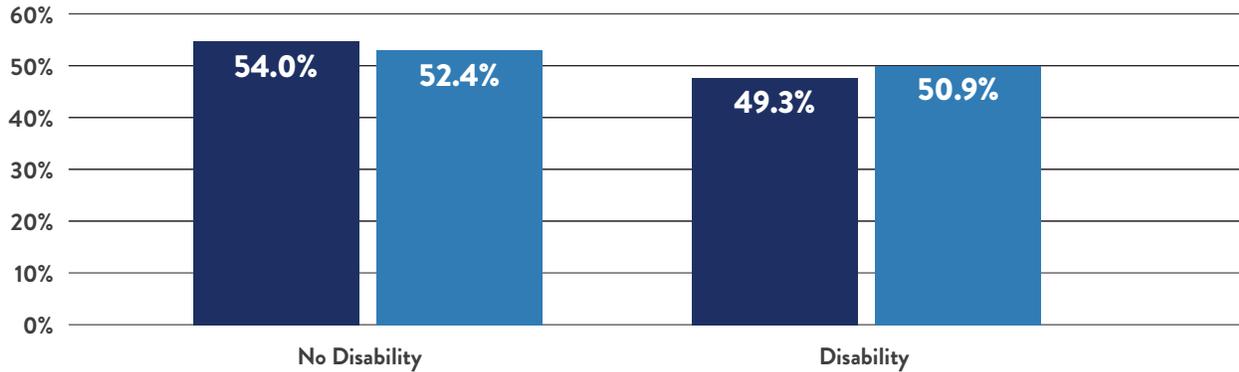
If people with disabilities voted at the same rate as people without disabilities who have the same demographic characteristics, there would be about 2.0 million more voters.

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These figures are based on an analysis of data from the federal government’s Current Population Survey Voting Supplement for November 2022, which has a sample size of 73,083. The computations were made using six disability questions introduced on the Current Population Survey in 2008.

Disability and Voter Turnout in 2018 and 2022

2020 2022



Disability and Voter Turnout in 2018 and 2022

	2018	2022	Change 2018-2022
People without disabilities	54.0%	52.4%	-1.6%
People with disabilities	49.3%	50.8%	1.6%
Disability turnout gap	-4.8%	-1.5%	
Hearing impairment	57.0%	59.4%	2.5%
Visual impairment	49.5%	50.9%	1.4%
Mental or cognitive impairment	37.1%	38.3%	1.2%
Difficulty walking or climbing stairs	49.0%	50.8%	1.8%
Difficulty dressing or bathing	39.4%	37.9%	-1.6%
Difficulty going outside alone	37.9%	39.4%	1.4%

As shown above, among the voting-eligible population (citizens age 18 or older), 50.8% of people with disabilities reported voting in 2022, compared to 52.4% of people without disabilities. Within the disability population, the voting rate among people with hearing impairments (59.4%) was higher than the overall voting rate for people without disabilities, and the lowest rate was among those with difficulty dressing or bathing (37.9%). For each disability group, the difference in turnout from those without disabilities is strong enough to be outside the survey’s margin of error.²

As also seen above, turnout increased from 2018 to 2022 for people with disabilities by 1.6 points but decreased for people without disabilities by 1.6 points. This caused the disability turnout gap to decrease markedly from 4.8 points in 2018 to 1.5 points in 2022.³ These changes are also strong enough to be outside the survey’s margin of error.

²The margins of error are based on a 95% level of confidence.

³Using similar measures, studies of prior elections have also consistently found disability turnout gaps (reviewed in Lisa Schur and Meera Adya, “Sideline or Mainstreamed? Political Participation and Attitudes of People with Disabilities in the United States, *Social Science Quarterly* 94(3), 2013, pp. 811-839).



Based on this survey, an estimated 121.9 million people reported voting, which is slightly higher than the 111.5 million ballots cast in a preliminary estimate.⁴ Any misreporting is unlikely to differ between the disability and non-disability populations, so the estimate of the turnout gap should be unbiased.

The estimated 15.8 million voters with disabilities compares with an estimated 13.9 million African-Americans and 11.8 million Hispanics/Latinos who reported voting in 2022, based on analysis of this voting supplement. The total number of non-voters with disabilities was 15.3 million, for a total of 31.1 million voting-eligible citizens with disabilities. It should be noted that the disability total may be understated because these disability measures may not capture several types of disability.⁵

Number of voters and non-voters in 2022

	Millions who reported	
	Voting	Not Voting
Overall	121.9	111.6
People without disabilities	106.1	96.4
People with disabilities	15.8	15.3
Hearing impairment	5.6	3.8
Visual impairment	2.3	2.2
Mental or cognitive impairment	3.8	6.1
Difficulty walking or climbing stairs	8.7	8.4
Difficulty dressing or bathing	1.9	3.1
Difficulty going outside alone	4.2	6.5
People without disabilities in disability households	10.8	10.3
Total in disability households	26.5	25.6

Among the 106.1 million voters without disabilities, 10.8 million lived in a household with a person with a disability. Combined with voters with disabilities, there were 26.5 million voters in disability households, equaling 22% of all voters.

Some of the disability turnout gap may be due to other demographic differences between people with and without disabilities. When adjusted for gender, race, age, education, and state of residence, the estimated gap expands from 1.5 points to 6.4 points. This implies that if people with disabilities voted at the same rate as otherwise-similar people without disabilities, there would be an additional 2.0 million voters.

⁴ *US Elections Project - 2022g* (electproject.org), accessed 5-17-23.

⁵ *The disability questions measure the major sensory, mobility, and cognitive impairments, but may miss some learning disabilities, mental impairments, and physical conditions that do not necessarily limit mobility, such as epilepsy and cancer. It should also be noted that disability estimates from the Current Population Survey are lower than estimates from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, likely due to methodological differences in how the surveys are conducted.*



Some of the lower turnout of people with disabilities is tied to difficulties in voting. A national survey sponsored by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) following the 2022 elections found that 14% of voters with disabilities had some type of difficulty in voting, which is more than three times the rate of 4% among voters without disabilities.⁶ Voting accessibility appears to have improved since 2012, when the likelihood of voting difficulties was 26% among voters with disabilities. In 2022 the rate of difficulties among voters with disabilities was 20% among those voting in a polling place and 6% among those voting with a mail ballot.

Combining the 14% rate of voting difficulties from the EAC study with the 15.8 million voters with disabilities cited above, we estimate that 2.2 million voters with disabilities had some type of difficulty in voting in 2022.

Access to voting information may also constrain some people with disabilities. A 2022 EAC report found that people with disabilities are less likely than people without disabilities to have access to the internet for information on how or where to vote and are more likely to use non-internet sources such as printed mailings from the election office, television, and talking to family members, friends, neighbors, or colleagues.⁷

Apart from demographic differences and voting difficulties, prior research has found that lower disability turnout is partly explained by lower levels of income, lower levels of political recruitment, and lower feelings of political efficacy.⁸

One methodological concern is that reported turnout may be underestimated due to how the Census Bureau treats non-responding households. Using adjustments to account for this possible underestimate, though, still reveals that disability turnout increased in 2022 while non-disability turnout decreased, so that the turnout gap became markedly smaller between 2018 and 2022.¹⁰

⁶ Lisa Schur, Douglas Kruse, and Mason Ameri, "Disability and Voting Accessibility in the 2022 Elections: Final Report on Survey Results Submitted to the Election Assistance Commission," May 2023.

⁷ [Disability, the Voting Process, and the Digital Divide | U.S. Election Assistance Commission \(eac.gov\)](#)

⁸ The prior findings are summarized in Lisa Schur, Todd Shields, and Kay Schriener, "Voting," in Gary Albrecht, ed., *Encyclopedia of Disability* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), and Lisa Schur and Meera Adya, "Sidelined or Mainstreamed? Political Participation and Attitudes of People with Disabilities in the United States," *Social Science Quarterly*, 94(3), 2013, pp. 811-839.

⁹ Hur, A. and Achen, C.H., 2013. Coding voter turnout responses in the Current Population Survey. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 77(4), pp.985-993.

¹⁰ The U.S. Census Bureau counts respondents as not having voted if they decline to respond to the voting questions. If one instead imputes the vote likelihood of non-respondents, reported turnout is 56.2% in 2018 and 58.1% in 2022 for people with disabilities, and 64.9% in 2018 and 62.0% in 2022 for people without disabilities, causing the disability turnout gap to change from -8.8 points in 2018 to -3.9 points in 2022.

State Voting Rules

Several states changed election policies and procedures between the 2018 and 2022 midterms. Five states switched from requiring excuses for mail ballots to a no-excuse system, while four switched from no-excuse to all-vote-by-mail systems. These changes in voting rules provide a useful opportunity to investigate the relationship between voting procedures and turnout.

As can be seen in the table below, turnout among people with disabilities improved significantly between 2018 and 2022 in the states that switched from excuse-required to no-excuse systems (6.9 points) and in those that switched from no-excuse to all-vote-by-mail systems (5.3 points). Their turnout did not change significantly in the states that did not switch systems. Among people without disabilities, turnout declined significantly in states that remained excuse-required (-2.9 points) or no-excuse (-2.5 points) and did not change significantly in states that switched systems.

A similar pattern exists in states implementing new voting laws in 2021 and 2022. This table shows that among states with “mostly improved access” in 2021 and 2022 (according to the [Voting Rights Lab](#)), turnout among people with disabilities improved significantly (4.4 points). Their turnout appeared to decrease by 1.8 points in states that “mostly restricted access,” but this change was within the margin of error, as were the small changes in disability turnout in states with “no major changes” or “mixed impact” of voting legislation. Among people without disabilities, turnout did not change significantly in states with “mostly improved access,” which was better than the significant turnout declines in states that “mostly restricted access” (-2.0 points) or had “no major changes” (-3.0 points) or “mixed impact” of voting legislation (-3.3 points).

While these results cannot establish clear causality (since other state-specific factors may be responsible for the changes in turnout), these pre/post comparisons are consistent with the idea that policies making it easier to vote are especially beneficial for increasing the turnout of people with disabilities.



State Voting Rules and Turnout by Disability Status

All figures represent voter turnout.

	Disability		No Disability		Voter turnout change from 2018 to 2022	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	Disability	No Disability

State changes in mail ballots 2018-2022[^]

Remained excuse-required (15 states)	46.0%	46.3%	50.5%	47.6%	0.3%	-2.9% *
Remained no-excuse (23 states + DC)	50.0%	49.6%	55.6%	53.1%	-0.4%	-2.5% *
Remained all vote by mail (3 states)	58.8%	60.7%	60.7%	63.0%	1.9%	2.4%
Changed from excuse required to no excuse (5 states)	51.1%	58.0%	57.4%	58.8%	6.9% *	1.5%
Changed from no excuse to all vote by mail (4 states)	49.7%	55.0%	52.0%	51.1%	5.3% *	-0.9%

State changes in voting policies 2021-2022^{^^}

Mostly restricted access (11 states)	51.4%	49.6%	52.6%	50.6%	-1.8%	-2.0% *
No major changes (10 states)	46.7%	47.4%	54.4%	51.4%	0.7%	-3.0% *
Mixed impact (6 states)	48.6%	48.2%	53.5%	50.2%	-0.4%	-3.3% *
Mostly improved access (23 states)	49.4%	53.8%	54.7%	54.0%	4.4% *	-0.7%

* 2018-2022 change is large enough to be outside 95% margin of error.

[^] Based on data from National Council of State Legislatures at <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/voting-outside-the-polling-place>.

^{^^} Based on data from Voting Rights Lab at https://votingrightslab.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/VRL-2022_EOY-Report-AprilEdit.pdf.

Breakdown by Employment Status and Demographics

Disability turnout grew among almost all employment and demographic categories from 2018 to 2022. There was no gap in voter turnout between employed people with and without disabilities in either year, indicating that employment helps provide resources and social contact that encourage voting. The disability voting gap was concentrated among the non-employed, as shown in the numbers below. The 2022 disability gap was also:

- Larger among women than among men, reflecting especially high voter turnout among women without disabilities;
- Larger among white non-Hispanics than among other race and ethnicity groups;
- Smaller among the youngest (18-34) and oldest (65+) age groups

The strongest improvement was among young voters with disabilities, where the disability gap decreased from -13.2 points in 2018 to -7.0 points in 2022.

	Disability		No Disability		Disability Gap	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
Overall	49.3%	50.9%	54.0%	52.4%	-4.8% *	-1.5% *
Employed	53.1%	52.6%	54.5%	52.3%	-1.4%	0.3%
Not employed	48.1%	49.9%	53.9%	54.3%	-5.7% *	-4.4% *
Women	48.8%	50.2%	55.9%	53.5%	-7.0% *	-3.3% *
Men	49.8%	51.7%	52.1%	51.2%	-2.3% *	0.4%
White non-Hispanic	51.2%	53.8%	58.4%	58.3%	-7.2% *	-4.5% *
Black non-Hispanic	49.2%	46.3%	51.7%	45.5%	-2.6%	0.8%
Hispanic	40.1%	41.2%	40.4%	37.5%	-0.4%	-3.7%
Other	38.8%	40.5%	42.3%	41.1%	-3.5%	-0.7%
Age 18-34	25.6%	28.1%	38.8%	35.1%	-13.2% *	-7.0% *
Age 35-49	37.6%	34.6%	53.6%	51.4%	-16.0% *	-16.9% *
Age 50-64	48.0%	50.4%	62.6%	61.3%	-14.6% *	-10.9% *
Age 65+	57.6%	60.0%	69.6%	69.6%	-12.1% *	-9.5% *
Northeast	47.7%	54.1%	53.9%	53.8%	-6.2% *	0.3%
Midwest	50.2%	49.2%	56.9%	54.9%	-6.7% *	-5.7% *
South	47.4%	47.3%	52.1%	49.1%	-4.7% *	-1.8%
West	53.2%	57.0%	54.7%	54.4%	-1.5%	2.6% *

*Disability gap is large enough to be outside 95% margin of error.

Whether Voted by Mail and on Election Day

Among voters with disabilities in 2022, only 44% voted at the polling place on Election Day, compared to 51% of those without disabilities. They were instead more likely to vote by mail before Election Day (37% compared to 28%), reflecting the mobility problems faced by some people with disabilities. There was no significant difference between people with and without disabilities in voting early in person.

Between 2018 and 2022, there was a large increase in voting by mail before Election Day among people with disabilities (29% to 37%) and those without disabilities (20% to 28%). This increase was very similar for people with and without disabilities, so the disability gap in voting by mail before Election Day was very similar in 2018 and 2022 (both about nine percentage points). Except for the percentage voting at a polling place before Election Day, the disability gaps in both years are strong enough to be outside the survey’s margin of error.

How Voted	Disability		No Disability		Disability Gap	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
At polling place on Election Day	52.9%	43.5%	60.9%	50.9%	-8.0% *	-7.4% *
At polling place before Election Day	16.4%	17.6%	16.8%	18.2%	-0.4%	-0.6%
By mail before Election Day	29.4%	37.1%	20.3%	28.1% *	9.0% *	-1.5% *
By mail on Election Day	1.3%	1.8%	2.0%	2.8%	-0.8% *	-1.0% *

* 2018-2022 change is large enough to be outside 95% margin of error.

^ Based on data from National Council of State Legislatures at <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/voting-outside-the-polling-place>.

^^ Based on data from Voting Rights Lab at https://votingrightslab.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/VRL-2022_EOY-Report-AprilEdit.pdf.

State Breakdowns in Voter Turnout

The voter turnout gap between people with and without disabilities varied by state, as shown in the breakdown below. It should be cautioned that the sample size is low in many states, which increases the margin of error and decreases the likelihood of finding a disability gap that exceeds the margin of error. The disability gap in 2022 was large enough to be outside the margin of error (indicated by an “**”) in nine states and was within the margin of error in the remaining 41 states and the District of Columbia.

	Disability		No Disability		Disability Gap	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
U.S.	49.3%	50.9%	54.0%	52.4%	-4.8%	-1.5%
Alabama	48.2%	44.4%	51.1%	45.6%	-2.9%	-1.2%
Alaska	52.6%	57.1%	52.8%	54.3%	-0.3%	2.9%
Arizona	59.5%	61.2%	58.8%	55.1%	0.7%	6.2%
Arkansas	45.5%	46.0%	42.1%	43.5%	3.4%	2.4%
California	49.5%	54.1%	52.1%	51.2%	-2.6%	2.9%
Colorado	59.0%	55.5%	58.0%	62.0%	0.9%	-6.5%
Connecticut	53.1%	39.5%	54.1%	50.7%	-1.0%	-11.1%
Delaware	47.2%	51.3%	52.3%	54.7%	-5.2%	-3.4%
Florida	51.6%	47.8%	52.8%	49.2%	-1.1%	-1.4%
Georgia	53.7%	49.9%	56.1%	57.8%	-2.4%	-7.9% *
Hawaii	47.0%	48.8%	43.6%	50.2%	3.4%	-1.4%
Idaho	39.6%	55.2%	49.2%	47.3%	-9.5% *	7.9%
Illinois	53.7%	47.5%	52.9%	52.8%	0.9%	-5.2%
Indiana	42.5%	38.6%	50.5%	42.4%	-8.0% *	-3.9%
Iowa	54.4%	47.9%	60.4%	52.4%	-6.0%	-4.5%
Kansas	53.4%	58.7%	57.4%	59.5%	-4.0%	-0.8%
Kentucky	45.4%	54.5%	55.6%	51.8%	-10.2% *	2.7%
Louisiana	45.6%	49.2%	50.6%	48.0%	-5.0%	1.2%
Maine	65.2%	55.4%	65.7%	65.9%	-0.5%	-10.5% *
Maryland	41.8%	61.8%	55.8%	57.3%	-14.1% *	4.4%
Massachusetts	47.8%	59.3%	56.5%	56.4%	-8.7% *	3.0%
Michigan	54.7%	58.2%	60.2%	64.2%	-5.5%	-6.0%
Minnesota	45.7%	57.1%	65.2%	64.5%	-19.5% *	-7.4%
Mississippi	53.4%	43.5%	54.3%	47.1%	-0.9%	-3.5%
Missouri	51.3%	48.6%	55.7%	53.6%	-4.4%	-5.0%

*Disability gap is large enough to be outside 95% margin of error.



Montana	63.4%	61.7%	63.9%	55.8%	-0.5%	5.9%
Nebraska	42.2%	48.4%	52.0%	48.8%	-9.8% *	-0.4%
Nevada	49.6%	63.1%	48.6%	49.3%	1.0%	13.8% *
New Hampshire	46.9%	47.7%	57.2%	60.7%	-10.3% *	-13.0% *
New Jersey	42.0%	49.3%	55.4%	50.6%	-13.4% *	-1.3%
New Mexico	51.4%	49.8%	47.5%	55.0%	3.9%	-5.2%
New York	43.6%	51.3%	50.3%	48.8%	-6.7% *	2.5%
North Carolina	44.9%	41.7%	53.5%	46.3%	-8.6% *	-4.5%
North Dakota	61.6%	56.3%	61.9%	51.4%	-0.3%	4.8%
Ohio	45.9%	42.2%	53.7%	48.9%	-7.8% *	-6.7% *
Oklahoma	47.5%	46.2%	49.8%	47.2%	-2.3%	-1.0%
Oregon	57.0%	59.4%	61.9%	71.9%	-4.9%	-12.5% *
Pennsylvania	51.7%	59.5%	55.1%	60.1%	-3.4%	-0.5%
Rhode Island	47.2%	55.9%	52.1%	54.1%	-4.9%	1.8%
South Carolina	46.6%	38.7%	49.1%	46.1%	-2.5%	-7.4% *
South Dakota	46.8%	57.6%	52.5%	52.9%	-5.7%	4.7%
Tennessee	38.5%	41.6%	51.4%	45.1%	-13.0% *	-3.5%
Texas	48.2%	48.1%	48.4%	46.8%	-0.2%	1.3%
Utah	53.9%	59.3%	58.1%	51.9%	-4.2%	7.4%
Vermont	45.1%	49.9%	56.3%	64.1%	-11.2% *	-14.2% *
Virginia	47.4%	53.2%	58.9%	53.2%	-11.5% *	0.0%
Washington	60.0%	64.5%	62.1%	58.9%	-2.1%	5.7%
Washington, D.C.	46.7%	60.1%	62.9%	63.4%	-16.2% *	-3.2%
West Virginia	37.6%	34.2%	45.7%	39.3%	-8.1% *	-5.1%
Wisconsin	55.4%	50.9%	65.8%	62.6%	-10.4% *	-11.7% *
Wyoming	50.9%	43.1%	52.3%	49.9%	-1.4%	-6.9%

*Disability gap is large enough to be outside 95% margin of error.

Voter Registration

The disability voting gap is partly due to lower voter registration but more so a lower likelihood of voting if registered. Among people with disabilities, 69.2% were registered to vote, only 0.5 points lower than the rate for people without disabilities. Among those who were registered, 74.1% voted, which was 1.6 points lower than for registered people without disabilities. People with disabilities were more likely than those without disabilities to have registered at a town hall or registration office, by mail, at a polling place, registration drive, or public assistance agency. They are less likely than people without disabilities to have registered at a department of motor vehicles, using the internet, or at a school, hospital, or on campus.

Each of these disability gaps is strong enough to be outside the survey's margin of error, except for the overall gap in being registered to vote.

	Disability	No Disability	Disability Gap
Registered to vote	68.7%	68.7%	-0.5%
Voted if registered	74.1%	75.7%	-1.6% *
How registered to vote:			
At a department of motor vehicles	29.6%	37.7%	-8.1% *
Went to a town hall or county/ government registration office	22.5%	15.4%	7.1% *
Registered by mail	17.5%	15.6%	1.9% *
Registered at polling place	6.8%	5.8%	1.0% *
Filled out form at a registration drive	4.4%	3.4%	0.9% *
At a school, hospital, or on campus	3.8%	4.5%	-0.8% *
Registered using the Internet or online	7.0%	12.1%	-5.1% *
At a public assistance agency	2.0%	1.1%	0.9% *
Other	6.5%	4.3%	2.2% *

*Disability gap is large enough to be outside 95% margin of error.

Why People Were Not Registered

The most commonly expressed reason for not registering to vote among people with and without disabilities was a lack of interest in the election or politics. About one-fourth of people with disabilities (26%) gave “permanent illness or disability” as their reason for not being registered.

If not registered to vote, why not:	Disability	No Disability	Disability Gap
Not interested in the election or not involved in politics	32.6%	44.9%	-12.4% *
Permanent illness or disability	26.3%	1.4%	24.9% *
Not eligible to vote	6.6%	10.1%	-3.5% *
Did not meet registration deadlines	5.7%	12.9%	-7.1% *
My vote would not make a difference	4.8%	4.2%	0.7%
Did not know where or how to register	3.1%	4.7%	-1.6% *
Difficulty with English	1.7%	1.5%	0.1%
Did not meet residency requirements/ did not live here long enough	2.9%	4.2%	-1.3% *
Other reason	16.2%	16.0%	0.3%

*Disability gap is large enough to be outside 95% margin of error.

Why People Did Not Vote if Registered

Among those who were registered to vote but did not do so in November 2022, about one-third (36%) of people with disabilities gave “illness or disability” as the reason for not voting, compared to 9% of people without disabilities. People with disabilities were also more likely to cite transportation problems as a reason for not voting (6% compared to 2%), consistent with their higher rate of voting by mail. They were less likely than people without disabilities to say they were not interested, too busy, out of town, forgot, or expected inconvenience.

Why didn't vote	Disability	No Disability	Disability Gap
Illness or disability (own or familial)	35.9%	9.0%	27.0% *
Not interested, felt my vote wouldn't make a difference	15.4%	18.6%	-3.3% *
Transportation problems	6.2%	1.5%	4.7% *
Too busy, conflicting work or school schedule	10.9%	30.1%	-19.3% *
Didn't like candidates or campaign issues	5.2%	5.5%	1.9% *
Forgot to vote (or send in absentee ballot)	3.6%	8.5%	-3.3% *
Out of town or away from home	2.4%	9.4%	-5.8% *
Registration problems (i.e., didn't receive absentee ballot, not registered in current location)	1.6%	2.5%	-0.1%
Inconvenient hours, polling place or hours or lines too long	0.7%	2.7%	-1.1% *
Bad weather conditions	10.8%	0.3%	0.4%
Other	16.2%	11.9%	-1.1%

*Disability gap is large enough to be outside 95% margin of error.