

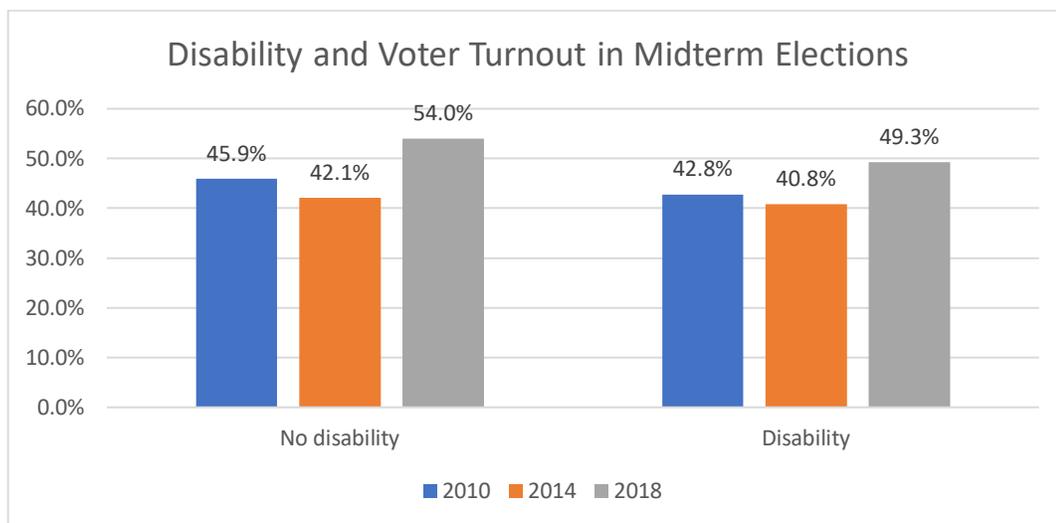
Fact sheet: Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2018 Elections

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Key points:

- Voter turnout surged by 8.5 points in 2018 among citizens with disabilities relative to the 2014 midterm elections. The surge, though, was slightly larger among citizens without disabilities (11.9 points), resulting in a 4.7 point gap in voter turnout between citizens with and without disabilities in 2018.
- The increased turnout among people with disabilities occurred across all disability types and demographic categories—gender, race/ethnicity, age group, and region.
- 14.3 million citizens with disabilities reported voting in the November 2018 elections.
- Employed people with disabilities were just as likely as employed people 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 2.35 million more voters.

These figures are based on analysis of data from the federal government’s Current Population Survey Voting Supplement for November 2018, which has a sample size of 88,749. The computations were made using six disability questions introduced on the Current Population Survey in 2008.



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Disability and voter turnout in midterm elections

	<u>2010</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>Change</u> <u>2014-2018</u>
People without disabilities	45.9%	42.1%	54.0%	11.9%
People with disabilities	42.8%	40.8%	49.3%	8.5%
Disability turnout gap	-3.1%	-1.3%	-4.7%	-3.4%
Hearing impairment	50.0%	50.4%	57.0%	6.6%
Visual impairment	39.5%	36.6%	49.5%	12.9%
Mental or cognitive impairment	29.6%	27.8%	37.1%	9.3%
Difficulty walking or climbing stairs	43.5%	40.7%	49.0%	8.3%
Difficulty dressing or bathing	32.4%	30.8%	39.4%	8.6%
Difficulty going outside alone	32.9%	32.2%	37.9%	5.7%

As shown above, among the voting eligible population (citizens age 18 or older), 49.3% of people with disabilities reported voting, compared to 54.0% of people without disabilities. Within the disability population, the voting rate among people with hearing impairments (57.0%) was higher than the overall voting rate for people without disabilities, and the lowest rate was among those with a mental or cognitive impairment (37.1%). 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 dropped slightly from 2010 to 2014 for people both with and without disabilities, but increased markedly in 2018. The 2018 increase was greater for people without disabilities so the overall disability turnout gap expanded in 2018.³

An estimated total of 122.3 million people reported voting based on this survey, which is close to the total of 118.5 million ballots counted.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 14.3 million voters with disabilities compares with an estimated 15.2 million African-Americans and 11.7 million Hispanics/Latinos who reported voting in 2018, based on analysis of this voting supplement. It should be noted that the disability total may be understated because these disability measures may not capture several types of disability.⁵

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

³ These results cannot be directly compared to elections before 2008 because they are based on a measure of disability introduced by the Census Bureau in 2008. Using 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).

⁴ <http://www.electproject.org/2018g>, accessed 4-27-19

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.

Number of voters and non-voters in 2018

	Millions who reported:	
	<u>Voting</u>	<u>Not voting</u>
Overall	122.3	106.6
People without disabilities	108.0	91.9
People with disabilities	14.3	14.7
Hearing impairment	4.8	3.6
Visual impairment	2.1	2.2
Mental or cognitive impairment	3.3	5.6
Difficulty walking or climbing stairs	8.2	8.6
Difficulty dressing or bathing	1.9	3.0
Difficulty going outside alone	3.9	6.3
People without disabilities in disability households	10.2	9.8
Total in disability households	24.5	24.5

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 slightly from 4.7 points to 8.1 points. This implies that if people with disabilities voted at the same rate as otherwise-similar people without disabilities, there would be an additional 2.35 million voters.

Also, some of the lower turnout of people with disabilities is tied to difficulties getting to or using polling places.⁶ A variety of states and localities have made efforts to reduce barriers and increase turnout among people with disabilities.⁷ In addition, prior research has found the lower turnout is partly explained by lower levels of income, lower levels of political recruitment, and lower feelings of political efficacy.⁸

Among the 108.0 million voters without disabilities, 10.2 million lived in a household with a person with a disability. Combined with voters with disabilities, there were 24.5 million voters in disability households, equaling 20% of all voters.

⁶ The Government Accountability Office released a report on June 10, 2009 finding that only 27% of polling places in 2008 had no potential impediments to access by people with disabilities, which was an improvement over 2000 when only 16% had no potential impediments (GAO-09-685). A 2012 household survey found that 30% of citizens with disabilities who had voted at a polling place in 2012 said they encountered difficulties in doing so, compared to only 8% of citizens without disabilities (Lisa Schur, Mason Ameri, and Meera Adya. “Disability, Voter Turnout, and Polling Place Accessibility,” Social Science Quarterly 98(5), November 2017, pp. 1374-1390).

⁷ Lisa Schur, Meera Adya, and Mason Ameri. "Accessible Democracy: Reducing Voting Obstacles for People with Disabilities." Election Law Journal 14(1), 2015, pp. 60-65.

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.

Breakdown by employment status and demographics

Disability turnout grew among all of the employment and demographic categories from 2014 to 2018. 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 2018 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

Each of these disability gaps is strong enough to be outside the survey's margin of error except for the comparisons among the employed, Blacks, Hispanics, other race/ethnicity, those in the West, and men in 2014.

	Disability		No disability		Disability gap	
	2014	2018	2014	2018	2014	2018
Overall	40.8%	49.3%	42.1%	54.0%	-1.3%	-4.8%
Employed	44.0%	53.9%	41.7%	54.5%	2.3%	-0.6%
Not employed	40.2%	48.1%	42.9%	53.1%	-2.7%	-5.0%
Women	40.3%	48.8%	43.4%	55.9%	-3.1%	-7.0%
Men	41.5%	49.8%	40.7%	52.1%	0.8%	-2.3%
White non-Hispanic	43.2%	51.2%	46.2%	58.4%	-3.0%	-7.2%
Black	39.7%	49.2%	40.8%	51.7%	-1.1%	-2.6%
Hispanic	29.1%	40.1%	26.8%	40.4%	2.3%	-0.4%
Other	30.9%	38.8%	29.7%	42.3%	1.1%	-3.5%
Age 18-34	16.6%	25.6%	23.4%	38.8%	-6.8%	-13.2%
Age 35-49	27.3%	37.6%	40.5%	53.6%	-13.2%	-16.0%
Age 50-64	39.7%	48.0%	53.6%	62.6%	-13.9%	-14.6%
Age 65+	50.6%	57.6%	63.3%	69.6%	-12.7%	-12.1%
Northeast	37.4%	47.7%	40.1%	53.9%	-2.6%	-6.2%
Midwest	42.1%	50.2%	44.6%	56.9%	-2.5%	-6.7%
South	40.0%	47.4%	41.9%	52.1%	-1.8%	-4.7%
West	43.8%	53.2%	41.7%	54.7%	2.1%	-1.5%

Whether voted by mail and on election day

Among voters with disabilities in 2018, only 53% voted at the polling place on election day, compared to 61% of voters without disabilities. They were instead more likely to vote by mail before election day (29% compared to 20%), reflecting the mobility problems faced by some people with disabilities. With the exception of the percentage voting at a polling place before election day, all of these disability gaps are strong enough to be outside the survey's margin of error.

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No Disability</u>	<u>Disability Gap</u>
How voted in 2018:			
At polling place on election day	52.9%	60.9%	-8.0%
At polling place before election day	16.4%	16.8%	-0.4%
By mail before election day	29.4%	20.3%	9.1%
By mail on election day	1.3%	2.0%	-0.7%

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 2018 was large enough to be outside the margin of error (indicated by an “**”) in 17 states and the District of Columbia, and was within the margin of error in the remaining 33 states.

-	Disability		No Disability		Disability Gap			
	2014	2018	2014	2018	2014		2018	
U.S.	40.8%	49.3%	42.1%	54.0%	-1.3%	*	-4.7%	
Alabama	33.8%	48.2%	44.3%	51.1%	-10.5%	*	-2.9%	
Alaska	51.2%	52.6%	50.7%	52.8%	0.5%		-0.3%	
Arizona	45.0%	59.5%	40.0%	58.8%	5.0%		0.7%	
Arkansas	35.8%	45.5%	39.4%	42.1%	-3.6%		3.4%	
California	39.8%	49.5%	36.2%	52.1%	3.6%	*	-2.6%	
Colorado	58.5%	59.0%	59.4%	58.0%	-0.9%		0.9%	
Connecticut	48.0%	53.1%	46.5%	54.1%	1.5%		-1.0%	
Delaware	39.0%	47.2%	46.0%	52.3%	-7.0%		-5.2%	
Florida	45.4%	51.6%	44.7%	52.8%	0.6%		-1.1%	
Georgia	37.3%	53.7%	44.1%	56.1%	-6.8%	*	-2.4%	
Hawaii	35.6%	47.0%	42.6%	43.6%	-7.0%		3.4%	
Idaho	39.9%	39.6%	42.1%	49.2%	-2.2%		-9.5%	*
Illinois	41.1%	53.7%	41.8%	52.9%	-0.7%		0.9%	
Indiana	29.7%	42.5%	35.8%	50.5%	-6.1%		-8.0%	*
Iowa	53.2%	54.4%	52.8%	60.4%	0.3%		-6.0%	
Kansas	49.6%	53.4%	48.0%	57.4%	1.6%		-4.0%	
Kentucky	44.7%	45.4%	48.3%	55.6%	-3.6%		-10.2%	*
Louisiana	48.5%	45.6%	50.5%	50.6%	-2.0%		-5.0%	
Maine	51.2%	65.2%	63.5%	65.7%	-12.3%	*	-0.5%	
Maryland	47.4%	41.8%	49.1%	55.8%	-1.7%		-14.1%	*
Massachusetts	42.3%	47.8%	47.5%	56.5%	-5.2%		-8.7%	*
Michigan	50.1%	54.7%	46.7%	60.2%	3.5%		-5.5%	
Minnesota	46.7%	45.7%	52.8%	65.2%	-6.1%		-19.5%	*
Mississippi	38.0%	53.4%	43.2%	54.3%	-5.3%		-0.9%	
Missouri	33.9%	51.3%	39.5%	55.7%	-5.6%		-4.4%	

Montana	42.9%	63.4%	51.3%	63.9%	-8.3%	*	-0.5%	
Nebraska	47.6%	42.2%	43.8%	52.0%	3.8%		-9.8%	*
Nevada	39.6%	49.6%	37.0%	48.6%	2.6%		1.0%	
New Hampshire	50.6%	46.9%	50.1%	57.2%	0.5%		-10.3%	*
New Jersey	31.6%	42.0%	37.1%	55.4%	-5.5%		-13.4%	*
New Mexico	45.2%	51.4%	45.7%	47.5%	-0.5%		3.9%	
New York	32.8%	43.6%	34.6%	50.3%	-1.8%		-6.7%	*
North Carolina	44.2%	44.9%	46.5%	53.5%	-2.3%		-8.6%	*
North Dakota	43.6%	61.6%	51.9%	61.9%	-8.3%	*	-0.3%	
Ohio	37.3%	45.9%	40.1%	53.7%	-2.9%		-7.8%	*
Oklahoma	37.5%	47.5%	33.6%	49.8%	3.9%		-2.3%	
Oregon	53.8%	57.0%	55.9%	61.9%	-2.1%		-4.9%	
Pennsylvania	38.8%	51.7%	40.2%	55.1%	-1.4%		-3.4%	
Rhode Island	41.9%	47.2%	43.5%	52.1%	-1.6%		-4.9%	
South Carolina	36.6%	46.6%	43.5%	49.1%	-7.0%	*	-2.5%	
South Dakota	44.7%	46.8%	44.0%	52.5%	0.7%		-5.7%	
Tennessee	31.4%	38.5%	37.6%	51.4%	-6.2%	*	-13.0%	*
Texas	38.4%	48.2%	34.2%	48.4%	4.2%		-0.2%	
Utah	39.2%	53.9%	36.2%	58.1%	3.0%		-4.2%	
Vermont	31.2%	45.1%	44.2%	56.3%	-13.0%	*	-11.2%	*
Virginia	40.4%	47.4%	41.8%	58.9%	-1.4%		-11.5%	*
Washington	46.7%	60.0%	50.6%	62.1%	-3.9%		-2.1%	
Washington, D.C.	45.3%	46.7%	52.1%	62.9%	-6.8%		-16.2%	*
West Virginia	28.8%	37.6%	34.8%	45.7%	-6.0%		-8.1%	*
Wisconsin	48.0%	55.4%	56.4%	65.8%	-8.3%	*	-10.4%	*
Wyoming	43.5%	50.9%	39.9%	52.3%	3.6%		-1.4%	

Voter Registration

The disability voting gap is due in part to lower voter registration, but is due more to a lower likelihood of voting if registered. Among people with disabilities, 66% were registered to vote, only 1.4 points lower than the rate for people without disabilities. Among those who were registered, 75% voted, which was 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, public assistance agency, or registration drive, and less likely to have registered at a department of motor vehicles or using the Internet.

Each of these disability gaps is strong enough to be outside the survey's margin of error, except for the gaps in registering by mail or at a polling place.

	Disability	No Disability	Disability Gap
Registered to vote	65.7%	67.1%	-1.4%
Voted if registered	75.0%	80.6%	-5.6%
How registered to vote:			
At a department of motor vehicles	27.3%	35.6%	-8.4%
Went to a town hall or county/ government registration office	26.4%	18.1%	8.3%
Registered by mail	14.8%	14.1%	0.7%
Registered at polling place	7.7%	7.1%	0.7%
Filled out form at a registration drive	5.4%	4.4%	1.0%
At a school, hospital, or on campus	4.9%	6.1%	-1.3%
Registered using the Internet or online	4.1%	8.2%	-4.0%
At a public assistance agency	2.4%	1.1%	1.2%
Other	7.0%	5.3%	1.7%

Why people were not registered

The most common expressed reason for not registering to vote, among people both 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.

The disability gaps below are strong enough to be outside the survey’s margin of error, except for the small disability gaps in “My vote would not make a difference,” “Difficulty with English,” and “Other reason.”

If not registered to vote, why not:	Disability	No Disability	Disability Gap
Not interested in the election or not involved in politics	35.5%	44.1%	-8.6%
Permanent illness or disability	25.7%	1.6%	24.1%
Not eligible to vote	6.1%	8.9%	-2.7%
Did not meet registration deadlines	6.1%	13.7%	-7.6%
My vote would not make a difference	3.4%	3.7%	-0.3%
Did not know where or how to register	2.9%	4.7%	-1.8%
Difficulty with English	2.2%	2.1%	0.0%
Did not meet residency requirements/did not live here long enough	1.8%	4.3%	-2.6%
Other reason	16.4%	16.9%	-0.5%

Why people did not vote if registered

Among those who were registered to vote but did not do so in November 2018, about two-fifths (41%) of people with disabilities gave “illness or disability” as the reason for not voting, compared to 8% of people without disabilities. People with disabilities were also more likely to cite transportation problems as a reason for not voting (8% compared to 2%), consistent with their higher rate of voting by mail. They were less likely than people without disabilities to say that they were not interested, too busy, out of town, or expected inconvenience.

The disability gaps below are strong enough to be outside the survey’s margin of error, except for the small disability gaps in “Didn’t like candidates,” “Forgot to vote,” “Registration problems,” and “Other.”

Why didn't vote	Disability	No Disability	Disability Gap
Illness or disability (own or family's)	40.9%	7.8%	33.1%
Not interested, felt my vote wouldn't make a difference	12.1%	16.7%	-4.6%
Transportation problems	7.7%	2.1%	5.6%
Too busy, conflicting work or school schedule	7.3%	31.7%	-24.3%
Didn't like candidates or campaign issues	5.8%	5.5%	0.3%
Forgot to vote (or send in absentee ballot)	5.7%	5.7%	0.0%
Out of town or away from home	3.4%	10.7%	-7.4%
Registration problems (i.e. didn't receive absentee ballot, not registered in current location)	2.7%	3.3%	-0.6%
Inconvenient hours, polling place or hours or lines too long	1.7%	3.8%	-2.0%
Bad weather conditions	1.4%	0.4%	1.0%
Other	11.3%	12.3%	-1.0%