

Insights into the Experience of U.S. Voters with Disabilities

Prepared for:



October 2019

Why we did this research

In the 2018 midterm elections nearly 50% of people with disabilities – 14.3 million people – voted.* Overwhelmingly, U.S. voters with disabilities want to be able to cast their ballot independently and privately. Yet, more than half have experienced some sort of challenge at the polls.



This research was designed to...



- 1 Gain an understanding of the physical and emotional voting experiences for voters with disabilities at the polls.
- 2 Uncover how well voters with disabilities believe their election officials and technologies meet their needs for accessibility and usability at the polls.
- 3 Determine if accessibility and usability are factors in whether or not voters with disabilities actually vote.
- 4 Explore ways election officials and technologies can better meet the needs of voters with disabilities and the 65+ population at the voting booth.

* *Fact sheet: Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2018 Elections*, by Lisa Schur and Douglas Kruse, Rutgers University

What We Did



Sample Sizes

Total voters with disabilities	N=1004
Likely voters	N=964
Non-recent voters	N=504

Definitions:

- Likely Voters: Voters who say they are very or somewhat likely to vote in ANY 2020 political election
- Non-recent Voters: Voters who last voted two or more years ago

Methodology

Using the field services of Gazelle, we fielded a 10-minute online survey among a non-partisan sample of 1,004 Americans age 18 or older who are registered to vote and self-identify as having some vision, cognitive, hearing, or mobility impairment. Our survey fielded from July 19 through July 30, 2019.

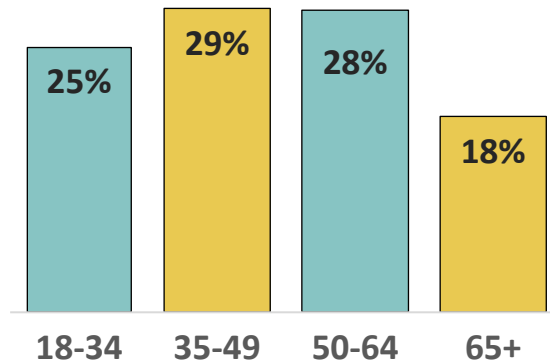


Respondent Profile: Respondents are spread across the United States in mostly suburban areas and average 48 years old.

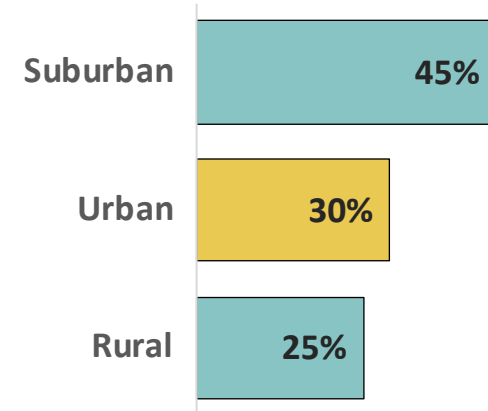
Gender



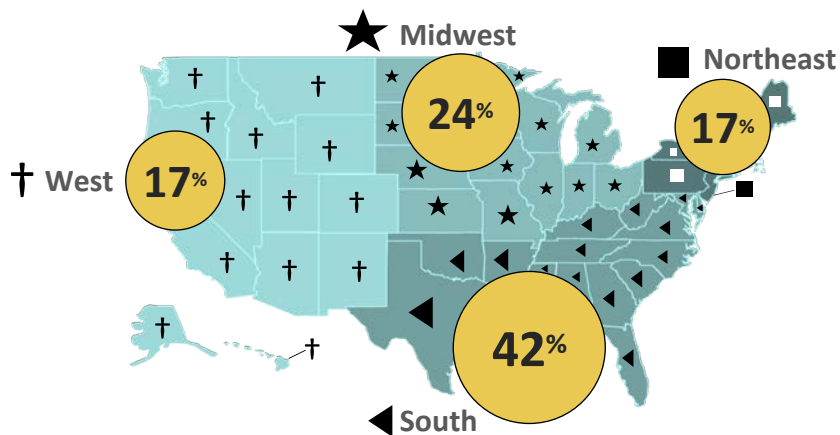
Age



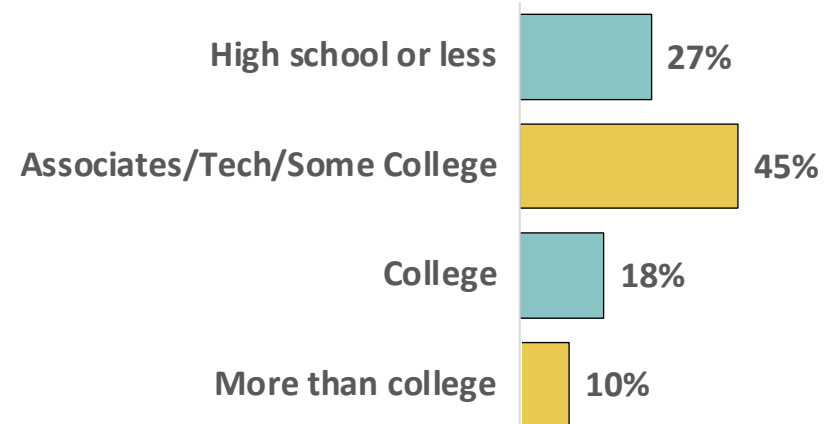
Area



Region

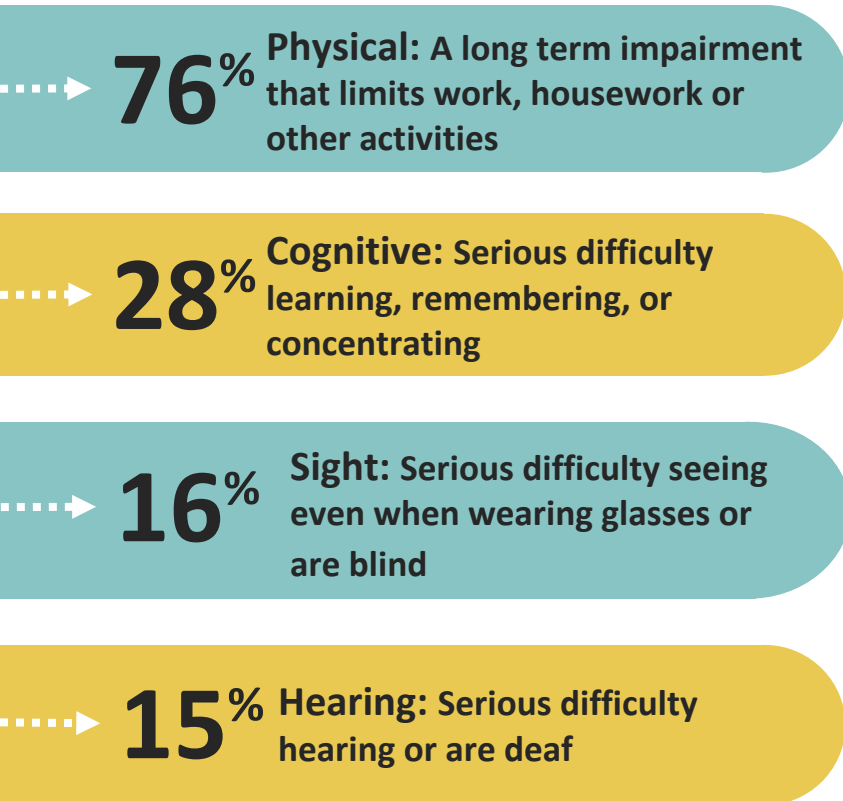


Education level

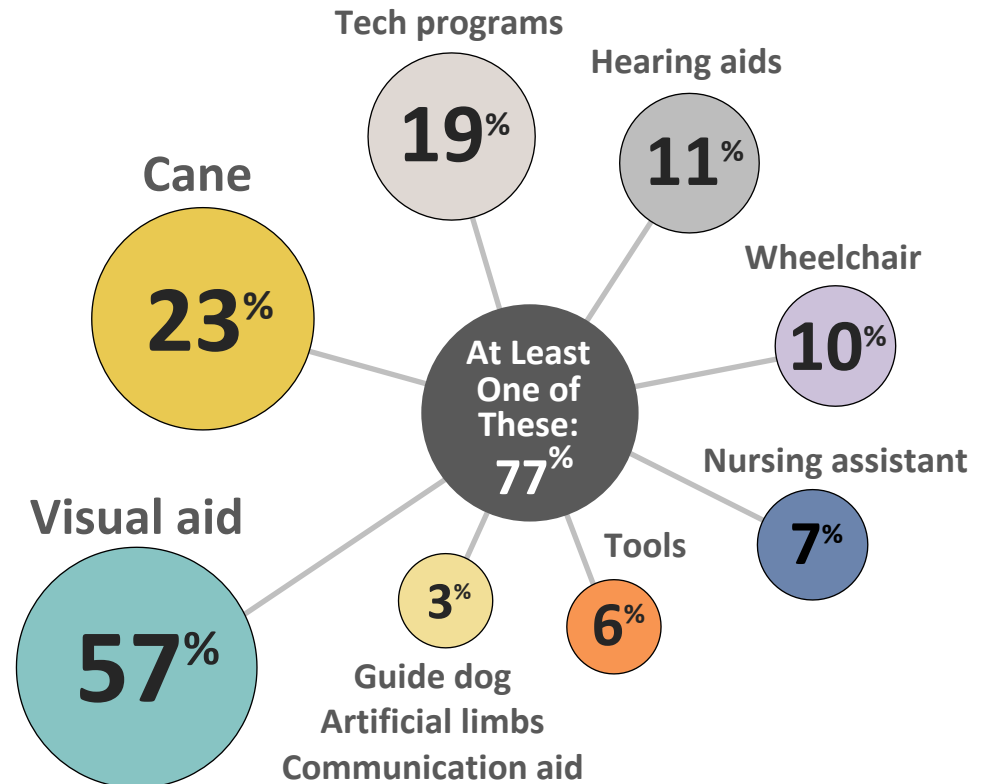


Respondents most commonly report physical limitations;
77% regularly use some tool or form of assistance.

Type of Disability



Assistance and Tools Used



1

The voting experience has room for improvement when it comes to voting machine technology and usability. Nearly all voters with disabilities feel that everything should be done to make accommodations for every voter. More than half of voters with disabilities have experienced challenges at the polls, with 28% experiencing a voting machine issue. This is amplified among those who have sight limitations. These challenges impact turnout among voters with disabilities. More than half of those who have experienced challenges at the polls would say they stay away from the polls because of those challenges. Voters with disabilities who have faced challenges in the polling place most frequently cite voting machine issues as the top grievance keeping them home on Election Day (45%).

2

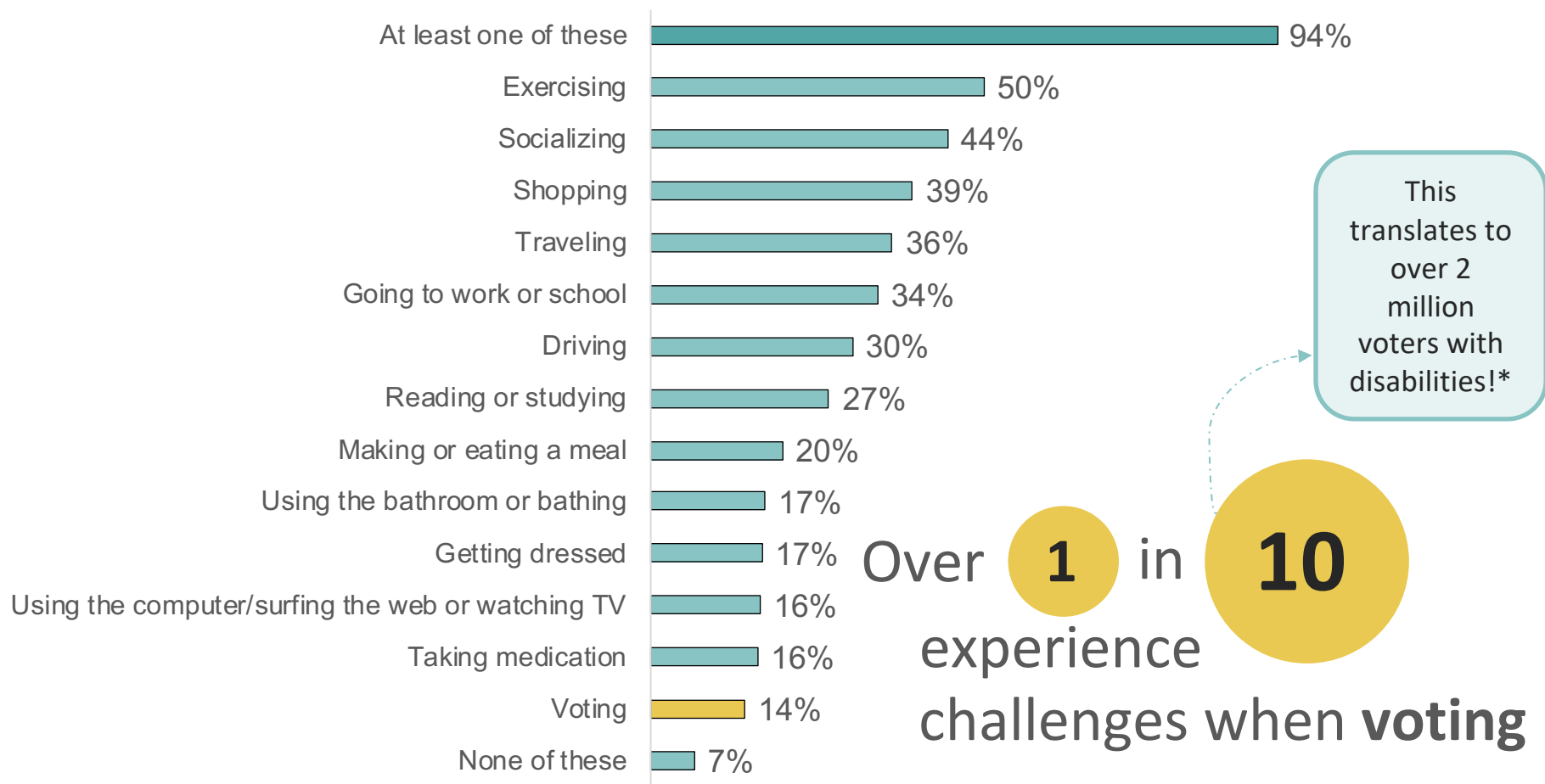
Voting privately and independently are priorities for voters with disabilities. Voters with disabilities are highly engaged in politics and want to vote in person to experience the excitement and exhilaration of Election Day. While at the polls they want the same liberties as others and the ability to vote privately, independently and on the same machines as everyone else. While many are currently experiencing independence at the polls, they would feel self-conscious and frustrated if not given those freedoms.

3

The ideal future of voting for individuals with disabilities includes voting machine enhancements and the option to vote remotely. Remote electronic voting tops the list of improvements voters with disabilities would like to see happen. When voting at polling stations, 65% would like to see improvements to the voting machines. Specifically, 32% want more user-friendly machines, 26% want machines that don't require a paper ballot, and 12% would like a machine that offers other languages.

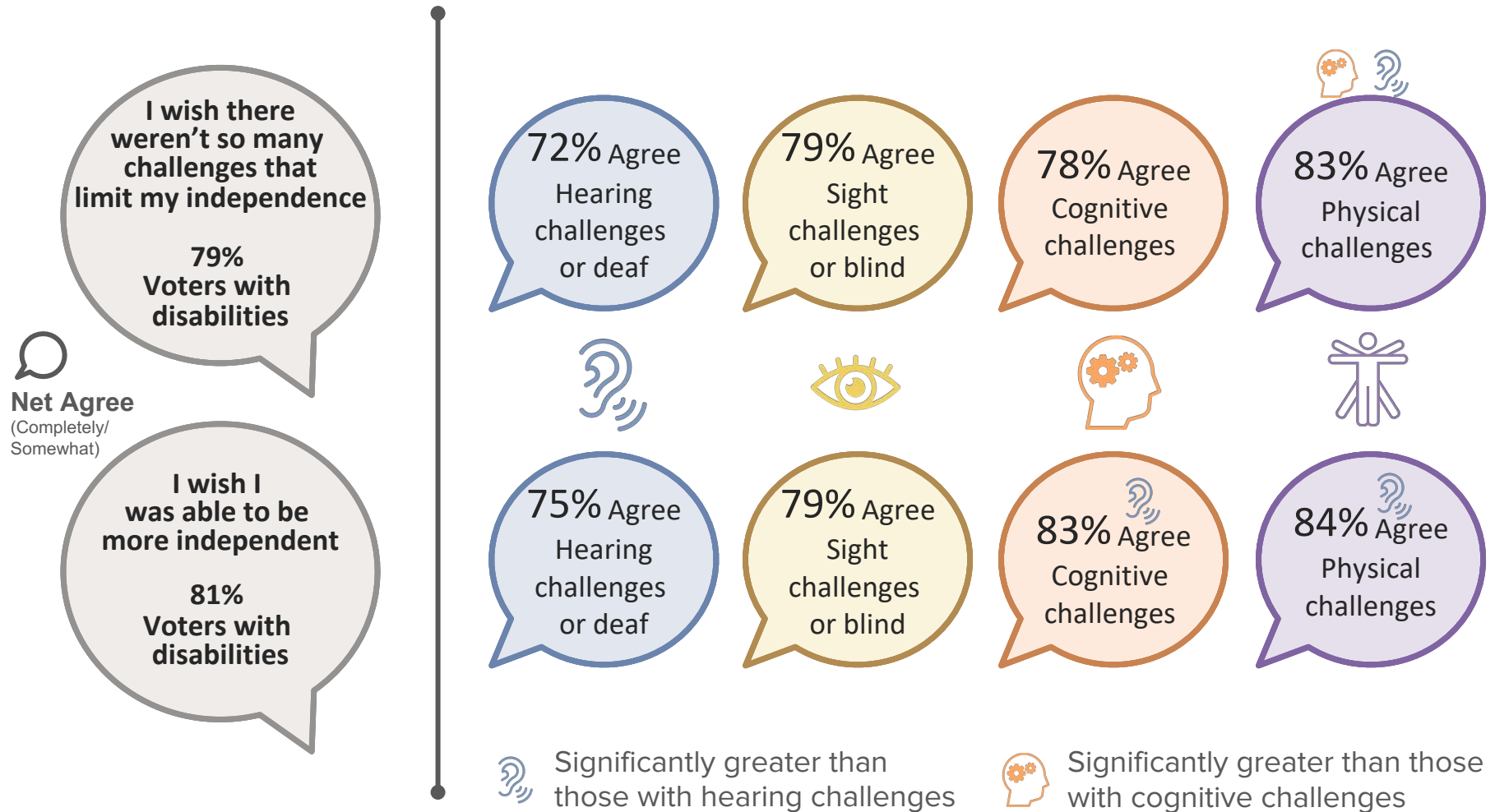
One in ten voters with disabilities consider voting to be challenging – which translates to over 2 million people.

Challenges Experienced by Voters with Disabilities



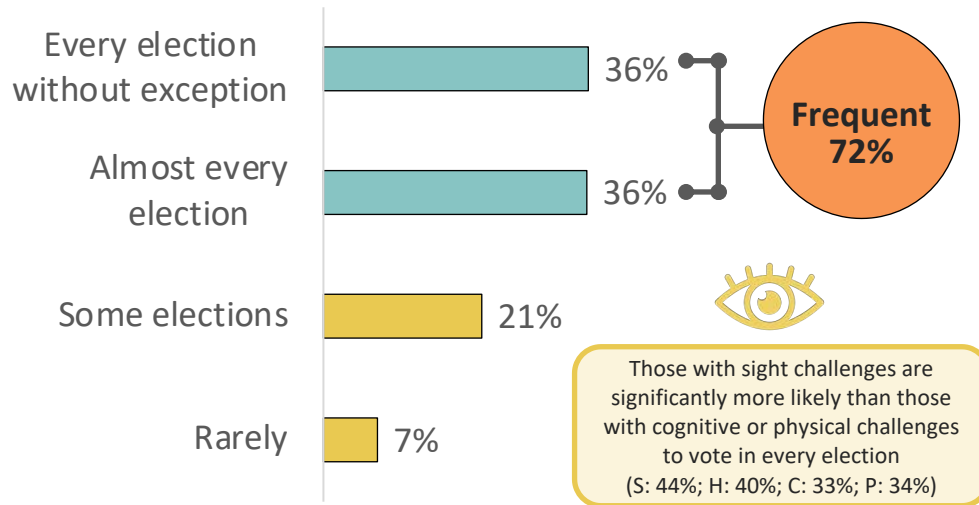
*According to *Fact sheet: Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2018 Elections*, by Lisa Schur and Douglas Kruse, 14.3 million voters with disabilities voted in 2018.

Being more independent is a priority for voters with disabilities, with 80% saying so.

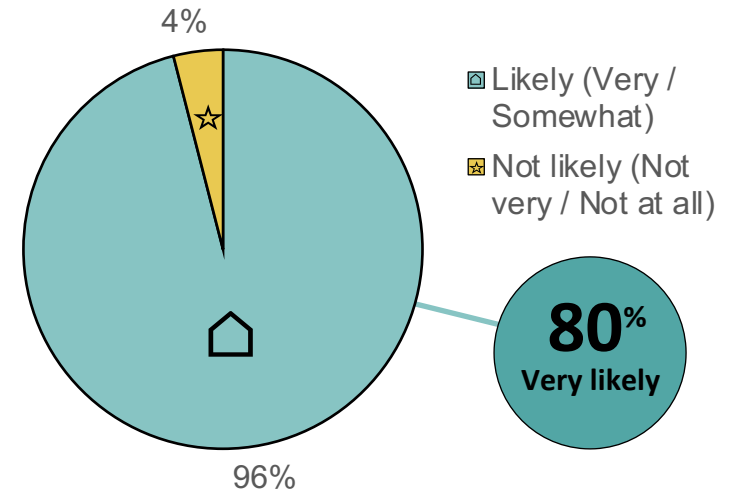


Voters with disabilities are **extremely engaged in politics and voting**. Nearly all are likely 2020 voters and stay informed about politics and public affairs.

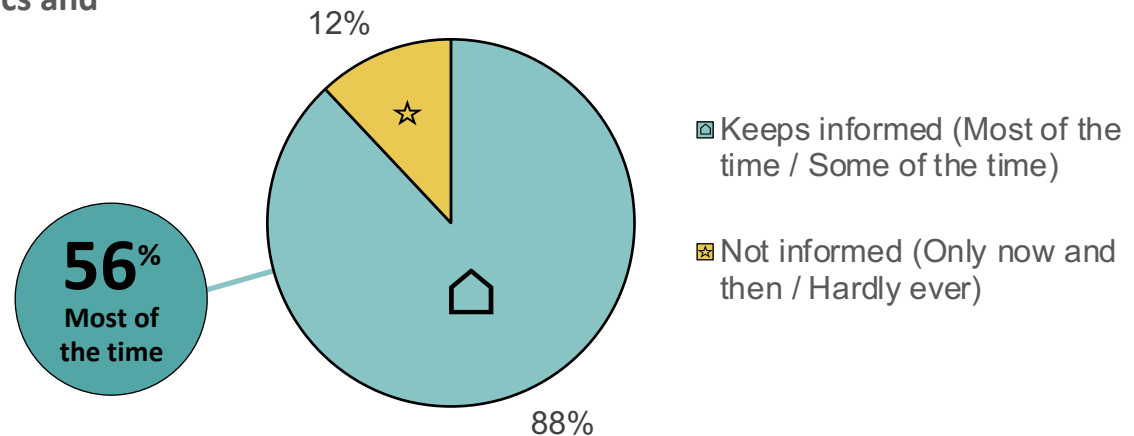
Frequency of Voting



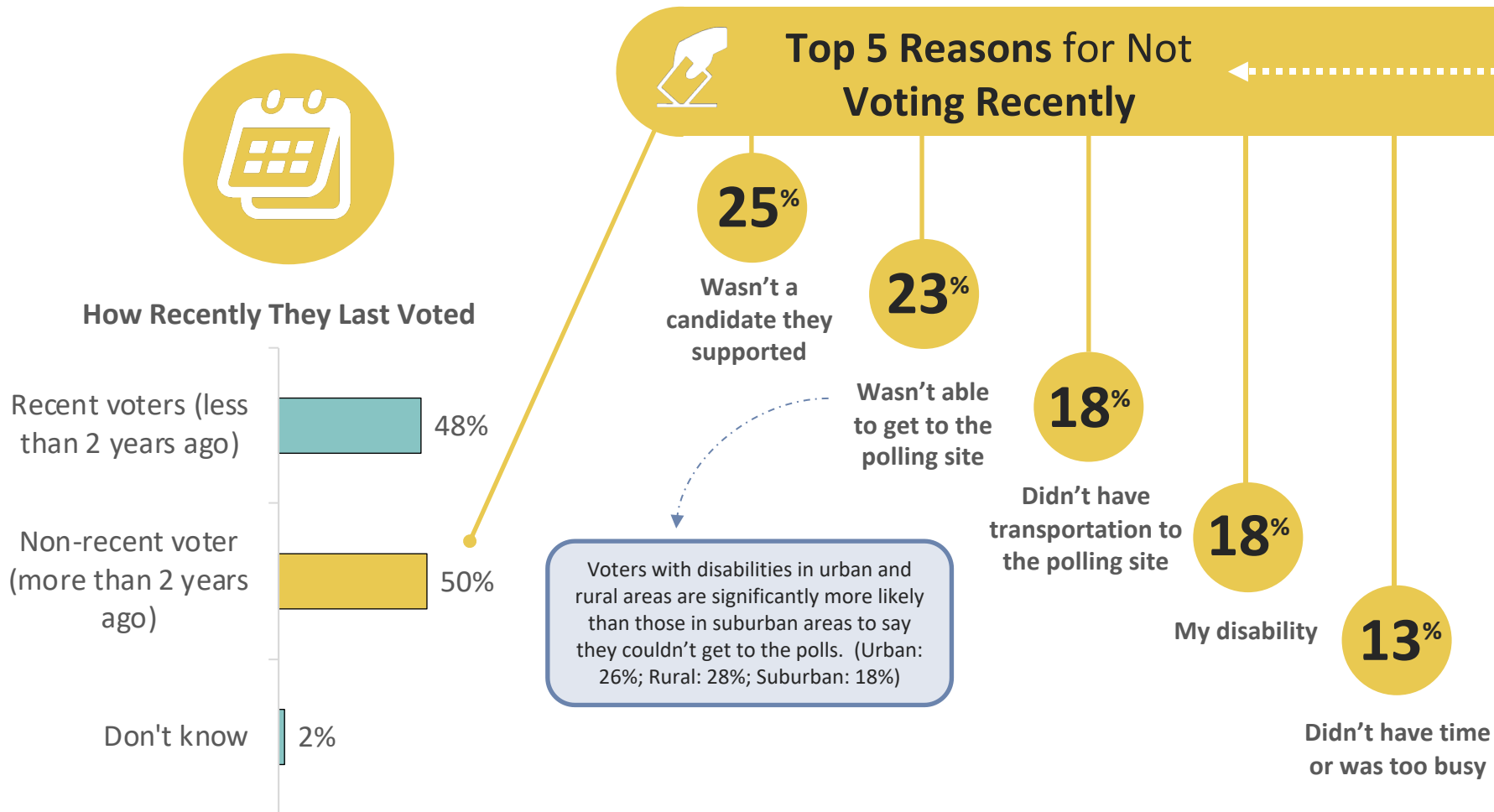
Likelihood of Voting in 2020



Staying Informed about Politics and Public Affairs



Half of respondents report that they voted two or more years ago. **Candidate choices** and **transportation issues** top the list of why they didn't go to the polls more recently.



“Everything possible should be done to make it easy for **EVERY** citizen to vote.”

93% of voters with disabilities agree

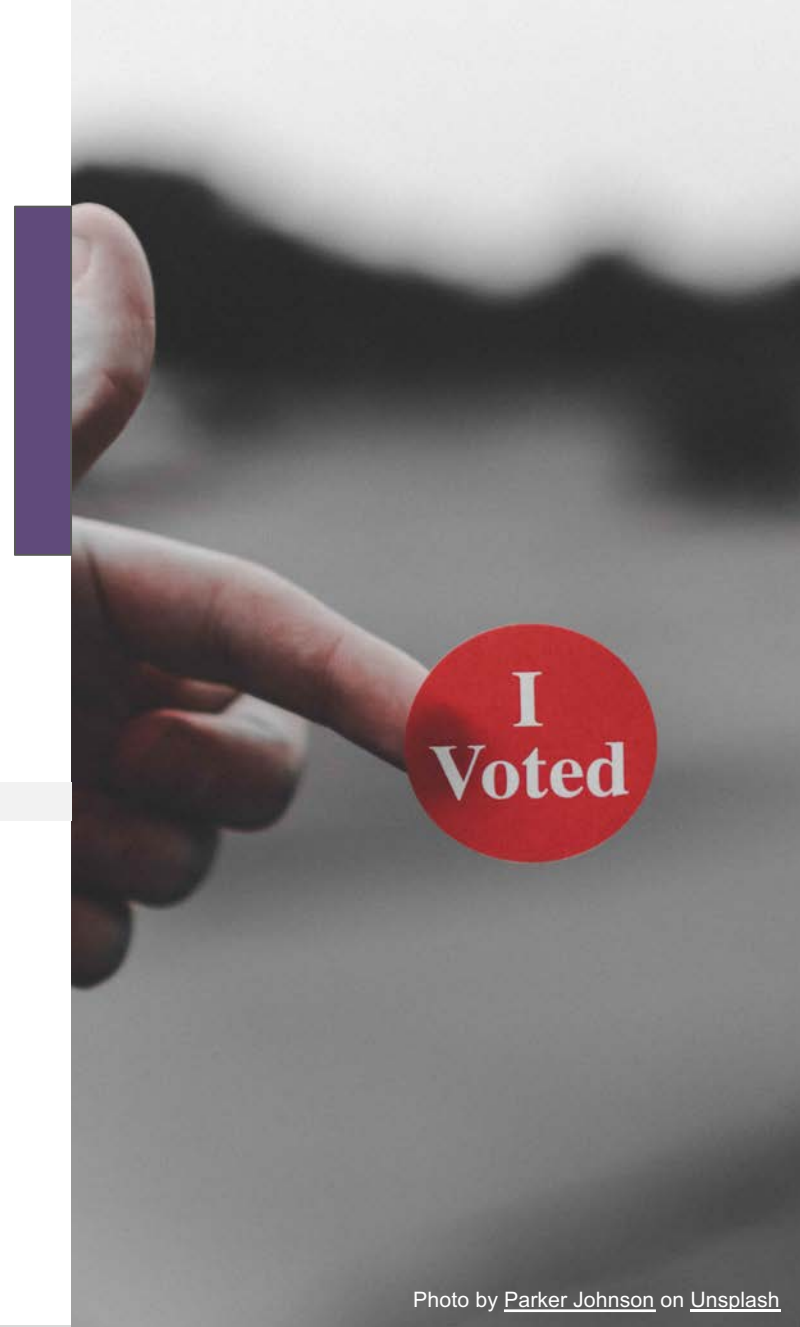


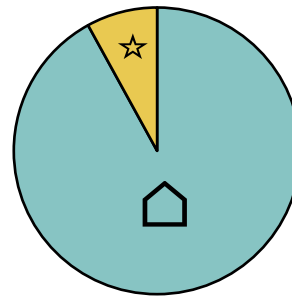
Photo by [Parker Johnson](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Nearly all voters with disabilities **value voting independently, privately and in the same way as everyone else.**

Importance of Voting....

Independently

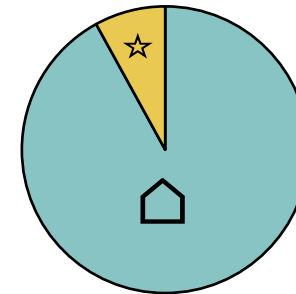
8%



92%

Privately

8%



92%



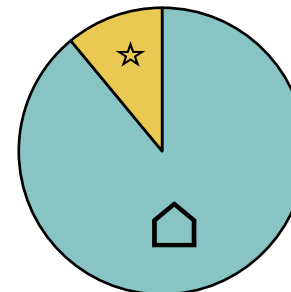
Important (Somewhat/Very)



Not important (Not very/Not at all)

In the Same Way as Everyone Else

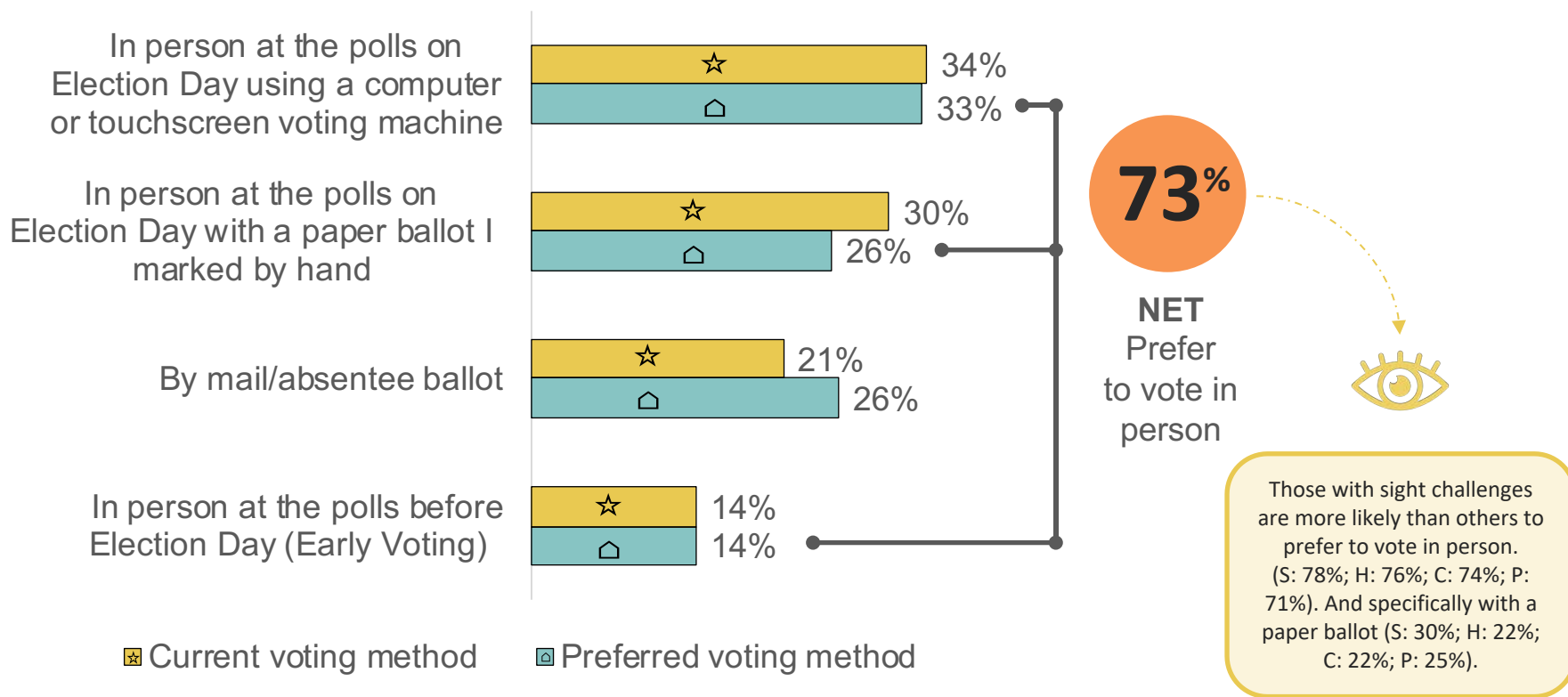
11%



89%

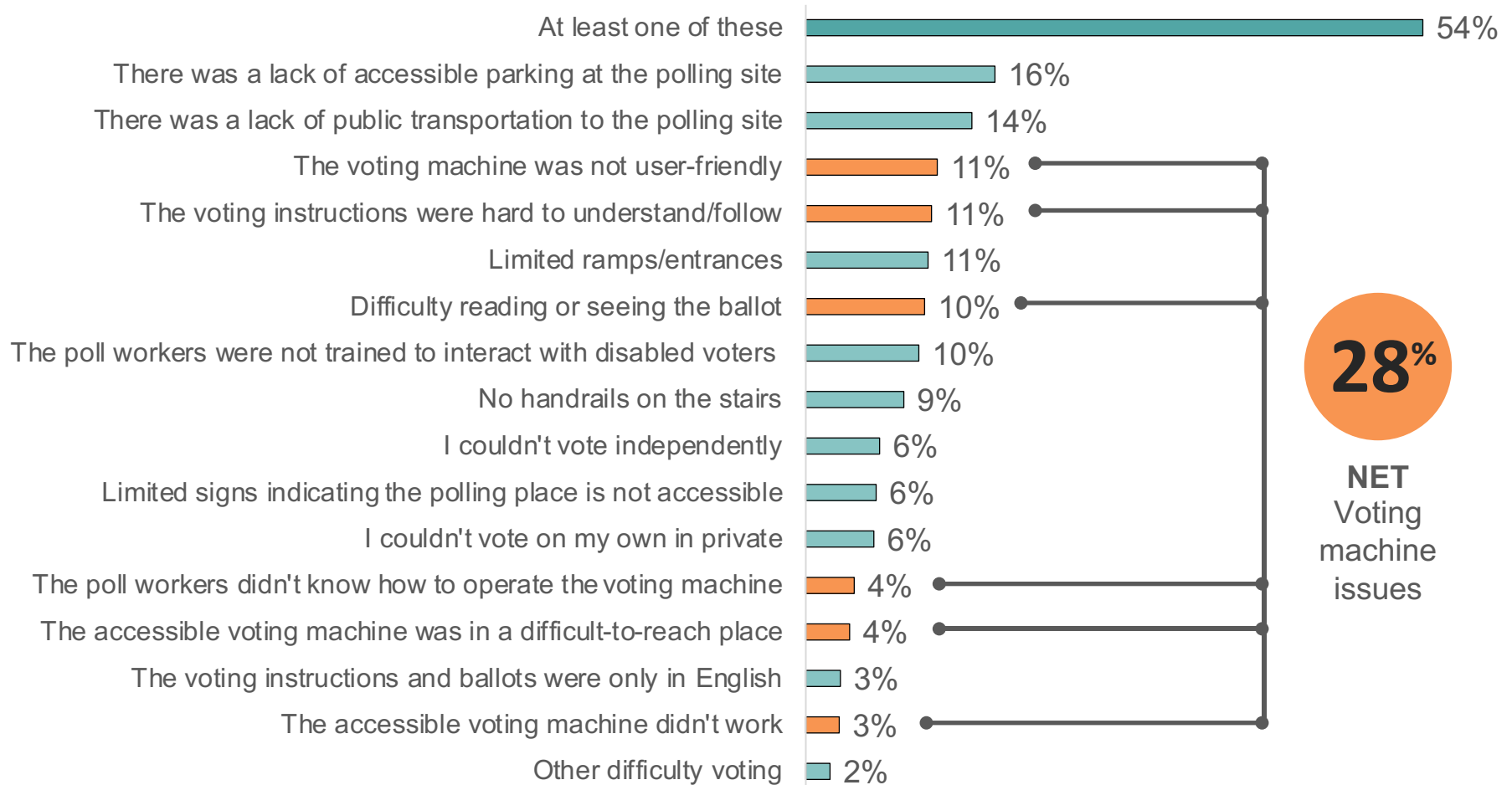
For voters with disabilities, **voting in person** at the polls is the **preferred** method; 26% would prefer to vote by mail, indicating difficulties with the in-person experience.

Current and Preferred Voting Methods



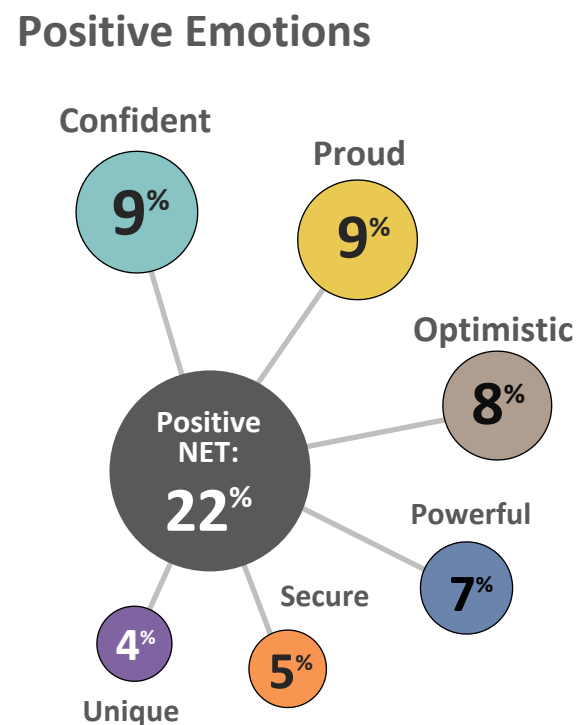
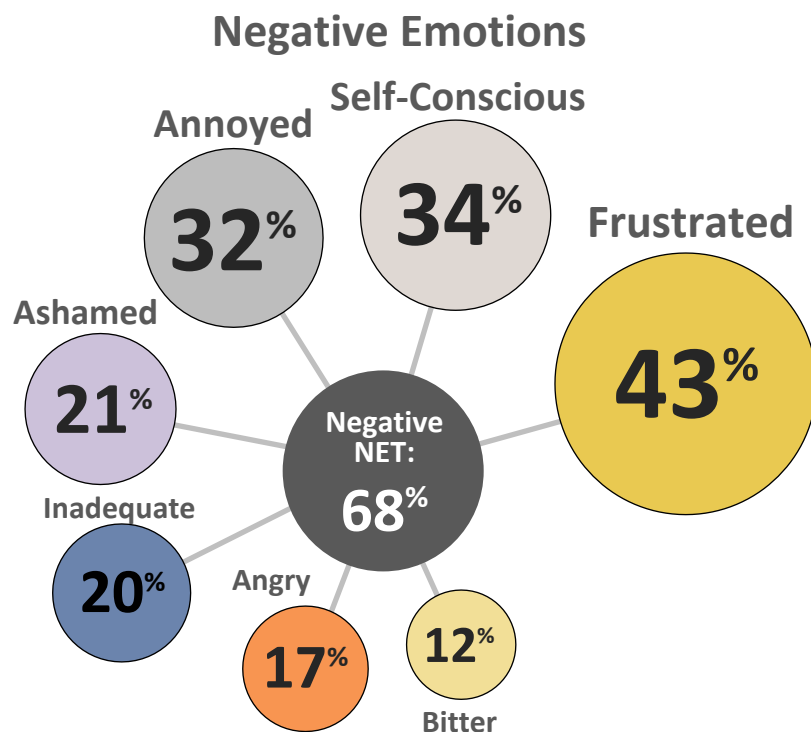
More than half of voters with disabilities have experienced challenges at the polls, with 3 in 10 saying they have run into a voting machine issue.

Voting Challenges Experienced by Voters with Disabilities



When asked hypothetically about how they would feel if encountering challenges because of their physical limitation when voting, most identified negative emotions like **frustration** and feeling **self-conscious**.

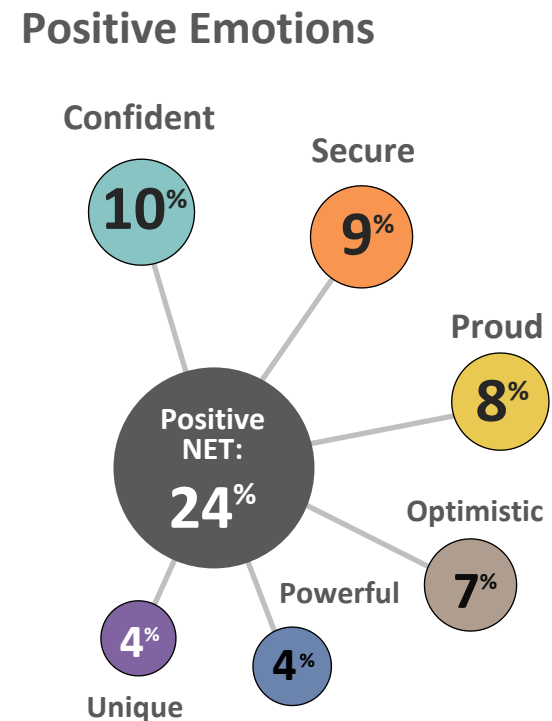
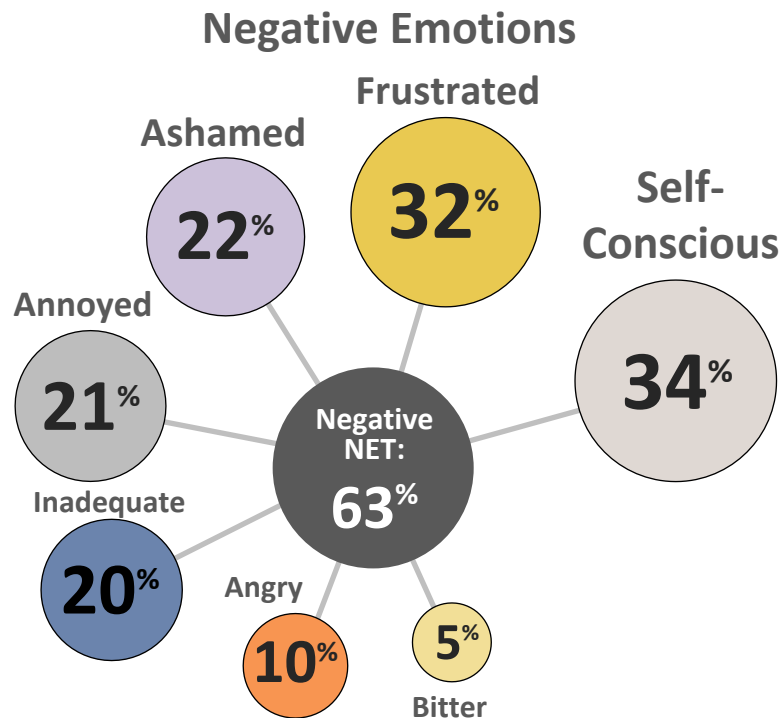
Encounter Challenges when Voting because of your Physical Abilities



Neutral emotions 9%: Content 6%, Apathetic 4%; None of the above 18%

When they were asked, hypothetically, if they are not able to vote independently, they express that they would feel feelings of **self-consciousness** and **frustration**...

Have to Ask for Assistance When Voting

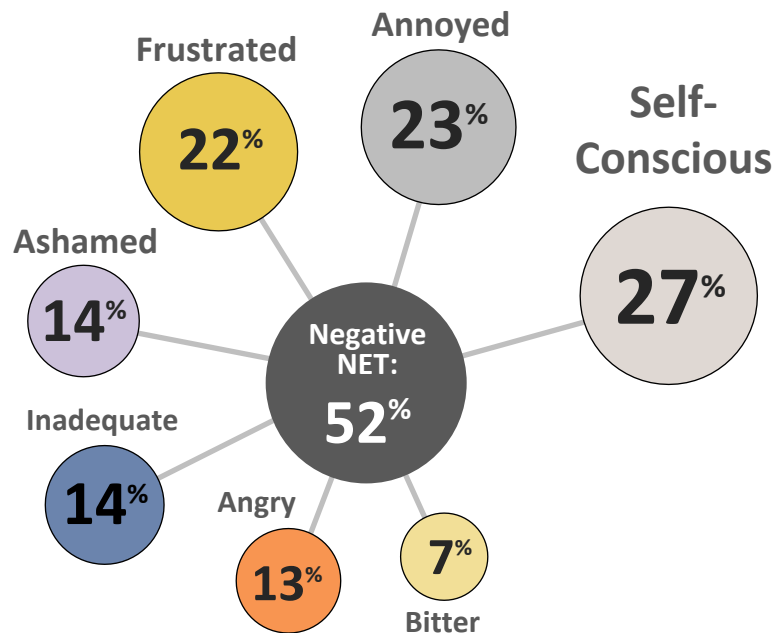


Neutral emotions 10%: Content 8%, Apathetic 3%; None of the above 18%

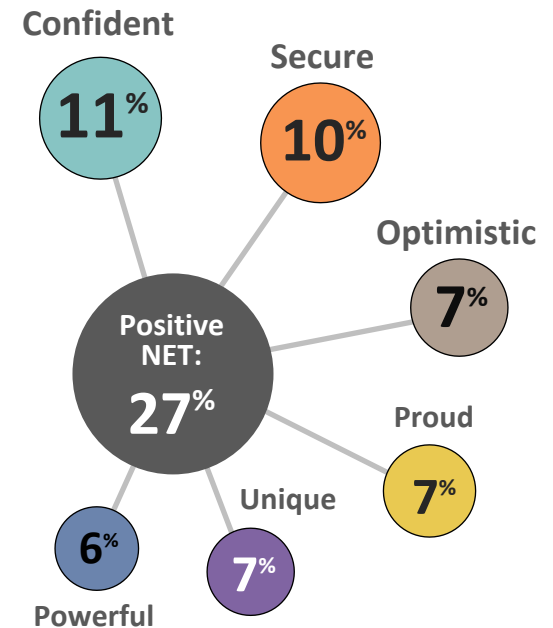
...and more than a quarter of voters with disabilities say that they hypothetically would feel **self-conscious** if they had to use a different voting machine than everyone else.

Have to Use a Different Voting Machine than Everyone Else

Negative Emotions



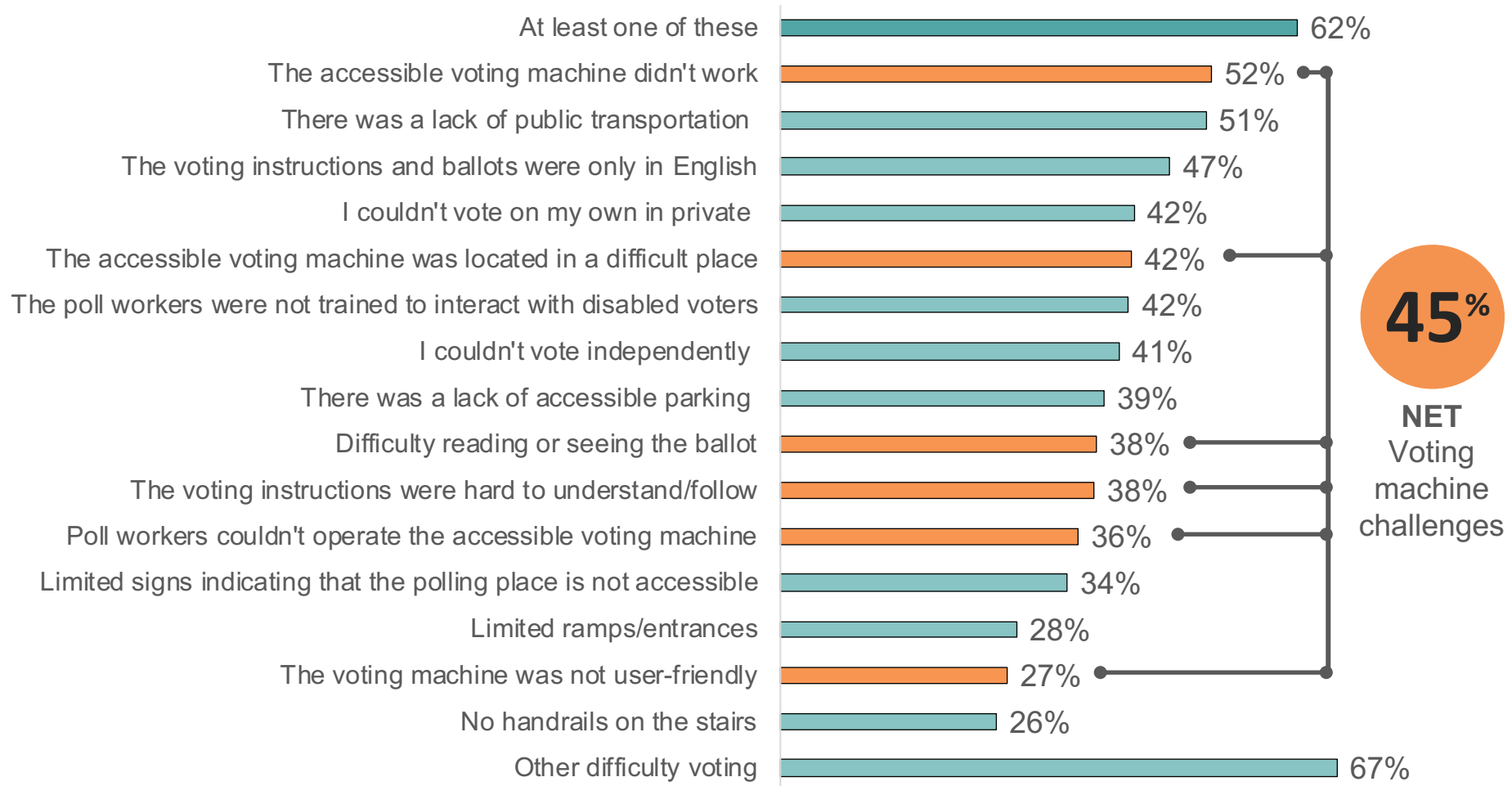
Positive Emotions



Neutral emotions 13%: Content 11%, Apathetic 3%; None of the above 25%

45% of voters with disabilities who have experienced challenges at the polls say that a **voting machine issue has kept them home on Election Day.**

Voting Challenges that Kept Voters with Disabilities from the Polls



Remote electronic voting tops the list of improvements voters with disabilities want to see. **Two thirds** would like to see **voting-machine-related improvements**.

Future of Voting		% Voters with Disabilities
1	Remote electronic voting e.g., you vote electronically from your home	41%
2	Voting instructions that are easy to understand and follow	36%
3	Raised awareness about the challenges a voter with disabilities can encounter while voting	32%
4	Voting machines that are more user-friendly	32%
5	Better training for poll workers in assisting voters with disabilities	27%
6	Voting machines that don't require handling a paper ballot	26%
7	Curbside voting e.g., an official brings the voting ballot to you outside the polling site	24%
8	Voting machines that use other languages besides English	12%



Those with sight challenges are significantly more likely than those with hearing or physical challenges to want voting machine improvements (S: 71%; H: 64%; C: 68%; P: 63%)

65%

NET
Voting
machine
improvements

Questions (1)

S1: What is your month and year of birth? N=1004

S2: Are you...? N=1,004

S3: What is the zip code where you live? N=1004

S4: Which of the following best describes the area where you live? N=1004

S5: Which, if any, of the following would you say applies to you? Would you say you have... N=1004

S6: Which, if any, of the following do you use regularly? N=1004

S8: Which of the following BEST describes how often you vote in state, local, or national elections? N=1004

S9: And when was the last time you voted in ANY state, local, or national election? N=1004

S10: You just mentioned you voted . . . For which of the following reasons would you say you didn't vote in the most recent election? Non-Recent Voters: N=504

S11: How likely would you say you are to vote in ANY 2020 political election? N=1004

S12: And thinking more generally, would you say you stay informed about politics and public affairs? N=1004

A2: Which, if any, of the following activities have been challenging for you because of your [INSERT RESPONSE FROM S5]? N=1004

A3: For the following statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each. Total Voters with Disabilities: N=1004; Hearing Challenges: N=147; Sight Challenges: N=160; Cognitive Challenges: N=283; Physical Limitations: N=763

Questions (2)

B3: For the following statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each. N=1004

B4: How important is it to you personally to be able to vote... N=1004

B5: Which of the following ways would you say you TYPICALLY vote? N=1004

B6: And which of the following ways would you say you PREFER to vote? N=1004

B9: Now thinking about when you vote in any type of election, please tell us if you have EVER experienced any of the following. N=1004

B10: Now still thinking about any type of election, which, if any, of the following have ever KEPT you from voting? [respondents only shown their responses from B9] N=varies based on B9 responses, total N=537

B11: For each of the following scenarios, please tell us how you think you would feel if you experience it when voting. N=1004

B16: Which, if any, of the following would you like to see when it comes to voting? N=1004

D2: What is the last grade of school you completed? N=1004

Southpaw*Insights*

Contact

jessica@southpawinsights.com

raeka@southpawinsights.com