

# Power in Numbers: A Profile of American Voters with Disabilities

July 12, 2013

A product of the Youth Transitions Collaborative's advocacy working group, which includes the American Association of People with Disabilities, Autistic Self Advocacy Network, The HSC Foundation, Institute for Educational Leadership, National Council on Independent Living and United Cerebral Palsy.

# Introduction

While the U.S. Census Bureau reports there are nearly 57 million Americans with disabilities—about one in five Americans—their voting patterns remain largely unexamined. To better understand the political views, advocacy trends and partisan affiliation of people with disabilities and chronic conditions, the Youth Transitions Collaborative conducted the first survey of its kind to study the political impact of this large community of people with disabilities, their families and caregivers.

Called “Power in Numbers: A Profile of American Voters with Disabilities,” the survey also shines a spotlight on young people with disabilities and chronic conditions, finding evidence of an emerging generation who may become more engaged in the political process.

The Youth Transitions Collaborative is a membership group of organizations with a commitment to serving people with disabilities. Bringing together the collective resources of more than 45 regional and national organizations, the Collaborative focuses on transitions-related services, research, public policy, best practices and innovative projects to help young people and young veterans with disabilities build paths to independence. The Collaborative is facilitated by The HSC Foundation and provides direct services, expertise and guidance for the National Youth Transitions Center.

The “Power in Numbers” survey is the first product of the Collaborative’s advocacy working group, which includes the American Association of People with Disabilities, Autistic Self Advocacy Network, The HSC Foundation, Institute for Educational Leadership, National Council on Independent Living and United Cerebral Palsy. Its findings offer a wealth of information about the potential political impact of this community:

- The community considers a candidate’s record on supporting people with disabilities in their voting decisions, with 84 percent of respondents saying that having a record of supporting services and programs for people with disabilities is somewhat or very important.
- Not only is a candidate’s record important, the community will actually vote against candidates they otherwise support if that candidate supports cuts to existing government services for people with disabilities. For individuals under the age of 30, this enthusiasm is even higher.
- The community is politically diverse, with party affiliation tracking closely to the general population.

The results clearly show the power and motivation of the disability community—and in particular, a readiness to act on critical issues, regardless of political affiliation. This is an important first step in understanding how Americans with disabilities vote and participate in the political process.

For the first time in recent memory, we have a clear picture of how issues drive voting decisions for people with disabilities, as well as strong affirmation that this is a powerful group of voters. But while this survey is an important look at a community that has been understudied, more research is needed, as additional data are key to continued advancement of the independence, productivity and full citizenship of people with disabilities.

Jessie MacKinnon  
Chief Operating Officer, National Youth Transitions Center

## Executive Summary

Funded by The HSC Foundation, “Power in Numbers: A Profile of American Voters with Disabilities” was a combined telephone and online survey of 1,008 participants. Designed by maslansky + partners, a non-partisan polling and research firm, the survey was conducted in part by Research Now from late May 2013 through June 2013.

It included representative population samples and a mix of mental/cognitive, physical and sensory disabilities (including both vision and hearing impairments). It also incorporated responses from those who self-identified as having a disability or chronic condition or who qualified through the series of questions the U.S. Census Bureau uses to determine disability status (n=663), as well as family members and other caregivers of people with disabilities or chronic conditions (n=345). The margin of error of  $\pm 3$  percent was at a 95 percent confidence level.

Overall, the survey found that people with disabilities and chronic conditions are politically just as diverse as the general population, with voting patterns and issue rankings in line with other Americans. However, respondents overwhelmingly reported they will vote against a candidate they otherwise support if that candidate supports cuts to existing government services for people with disabilities. It also shows that the enthusiasm for holding politicians accountable to the interests of the disability community is even higher among people with disabilities in the 18-to-30 age range. Highlights of key findings are below.

### The community votes in high numbers

The political engagement of the survey sample was based on U.S. Census Bureau reporting of voter registration within the disability and chronic conditions community. The best current Census estimates place voter registration for this community at 69 percent. The survey design set quotas to ensure a community with 74 percent self-reported registration, allowing for some measure of over-reporting in the sample.

When asked, 72 percent of participants said that they voted in the 2012 presidential election, compared to the 57.5 percent voter turnout recorded by Bipartisan Policy Center. A high percentage of this community said they plan to vote in the upcoming midterm elections, with 61 percent saying they will vote in the 2014 U.S. House and Senate elections.

### A candidate's record is important

The community considers a candidate's record on supporting people with disabilities in their voting decisions, with 84 percent of respondents saying that having a record of supporting services and programs for people with disabilities is somewhat or very important.

### It's enough to change their vote...

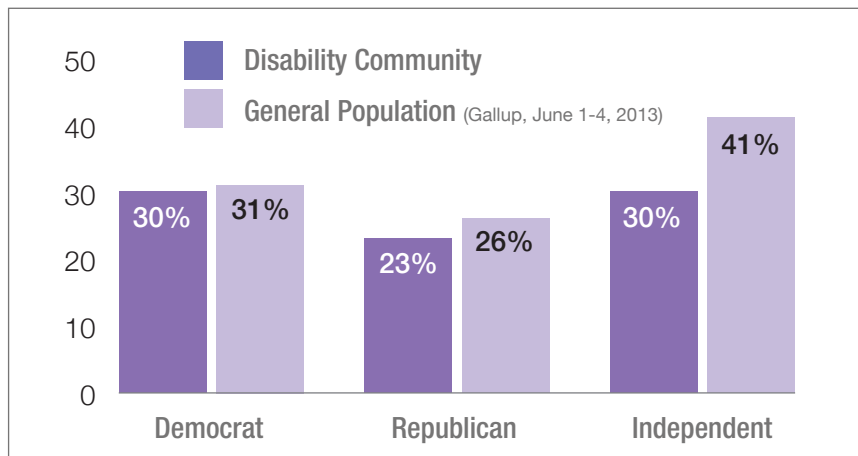
Not only is a candidate's record important, the community will actually vote against candidates they otherwise support if that candidate supports cuts to existing government services for people with disabilities. Eighty-seven percent of respondents said they would consider voting against a candidate they otherwise supported who was in favor of cuts to services (45% saying they definitely would).

### ... And enough to gain their support.

Beyond going to the polls, the community is willing to “actively support” those candidates looking to strengthen services. Eighty-five percent of respondents said they would be very likely or somewhat likely to support a candidate working to strengthen government services and supports for people with disabilities or other chronic conditions.

### It’s a bipartisan community

The community is politically diverse, with party affiliation tracking closely to the general population (30 percent Democratic compared to 31 percent of the general population, 23 percent Republican compared to 26 percent of the general population, and 30 percent Independent compared to 41 percent of the general population).



### And both Democrats and Republicans will act

When it comes to being willing to support candidates who help the community and vote against those who do not, it’s not just one party of voters who feel this way. The survey found willingness to act for and against candidates consistent among Republican, Democrat and Independent-identifying members of the community.

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Consider voting against	87%	86%	89%	88%
Likely to support	85%	84%	90%	85%

### People with disabilities are not single-issues voters

In fact, only 39 percent rank “services and supports for people with disabilities” in their list of top five issues when determining how they’ll vote.

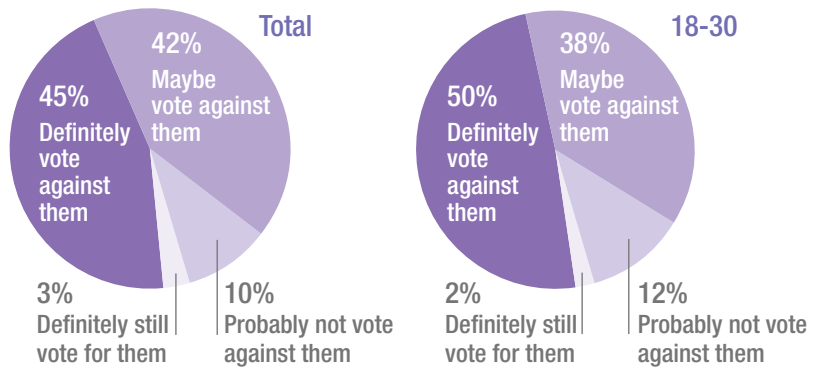
Health care and the economy are the top two concerns—as they are with the general public. However, people with disabilities rank health care above the economy, while the general public puts the economy above health care, according to a national survey of 1,000 likely voters conducted by Rasmussen Reports in June 2013.

Please rank the top five issues in order of importance to you in determining how you will vote in the next national election	Percent who selected each in their top five
Health care	80%
Economy	73%
Social Security	59%
Education	52%
Taxes	50%
Government ethics and corruption	43%
National security and war on terror	40%
Services and supports for people with disabilities	39%
Immigration	27%
Energy policy	23%
Foreign policy	15%

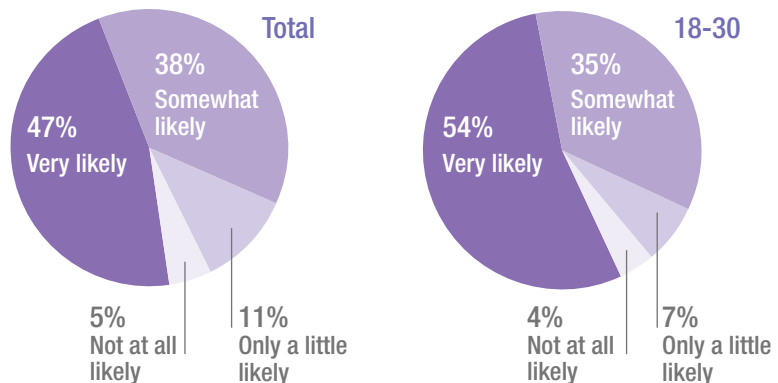
### The youth disability community feels even more strongly

People ages 18 to 30 within the disability community act even more strongly on these issues, and have stronger feelings when it comes to voting for a candidate working for their cause. These younger members of the community place a higher emphasis on a candidate’s record on disabilities issues and are much quicker to punish candidates not supporting these issues.

If a candidate you supported was in favor of significant cuts to existing government services for people with disabilities or other chronic conditions would you?



How likely would you be to actively support a candidate who was working to strengthen government services and supports for people with disabilities or other chronic conditions?



## About the Youth Transitions Collaborative

The Youth Transitions Collaborative is a membership group comprised of regional and national organizations with a commitment to serving youth and young veterans with disabilities. Facilitated by The HSC Foundation, the Collaborative provides direct services, expertise and guidance for the National Youth Transitions Center. To learn more, visit [www.thenytc.org](http://www.thenytc.org).

Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.

American Association of People with Disabilities

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Bridges from School to Work,  
A Marriott Foundation program

Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind

DC Metro Business Leadership Network

District of Columbia Association for  
Special Education

District of Columbia Department on  
Disability Services

District of Columbia Office of the State  
Superintendent of Education, Technical  
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District of Columbia Public Schools,  
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