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New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC)

2012 Presidential Post-Election Poll

NYSILC recently conducted an online post-election poll of New Yorkers with disabilities who voted in the 2012 Presidential Election. The online poll was conducted on Survey Monkey during the weeks after Election Day through the month of November 2012.

The sample included 112 (100%) voters with various disabilities from across New York State. They self-identified through the initial question, "Do you have a disability or medical condition that impacts your mobility, hearing, sight, cognitive, or mental abilities?" When asked, "Are you registered voter," 99% responded "Yes" while 1% stated "No." As a follow up, 99% indicated that they voted on Election Day, while 1% did not.

In terms of party affiliation, the following breakdowns were identified: 64% Democrat, 18% Independent, 9% Republican, 3% Conservative, 3% Green Party, 1% Liberal, 1% Working Families, and 1% Other. When asked, "What factors help you to vote for a candidate (Check all that apply - exceeding 100% in total)," the following factors were identified as having the highest impact: 83% Position on key issues that impact the country, 71% Position on disability issues, and 62% Position on issues that impact me personally. The following factors were identified as having the least impact: 28% Party affiliation, 11% Image, 8% Political campaign ads, and 4% How friends and family are going to vote. Finally, the question was asked, "In the Presidential Election, who did you vote for?" 76% voted for Barack Obama, 14% for Mitt Romney, 6% Jill Stein, and 4% Other.

Disability Voting Trends

Individuals were asked, "How did you vote?" The vast majority (71%) of New Yorkers with disabilities in this poll casted their ballots on scanners. 23% voted on the Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs). 3% marked and submitted an absentee ballot in advance of Election Day. The remaining 3% listed "Other" situations related to a scanner or a BMD. This raised awareness about the next set of four questions.

"Did you encounter any problems or access issues with the voting technology?" 69% replied "No," but ten years after the passage of Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and more than three to five years after implementation of the new systems (depending on the system), 22% replied "Yes" to having issues, and 9% responded to "Other." A few of the other comments included:

- Tried to use Ballot Marking Device (BMD) and the polling site didn't know how to use machine, and due to my own time constraints could not wait for official needed assistance filling out ballot and then feeding through scanner.
- I was told that there was a machine for disabled voters but that it was broken. The same thing happened last year.

- Person who had me sign the voting book didn't know what a BMD was.

See footnotes for additional comments.¹

“Did you encounter a physical barrier or any issues at the polling place?” 80% replied “No,” but again, 19% stated “Yes,” and 1% responded to “Other.” A couple of the other comments included:

- Numerous stairs, but I was told once inside, there was an elevator available.
- I have a hearing disability and the worker wouldn't speak up when giving me the instructions. After I asked her the third time to speak up, she laughed.
- No automatic door and polling place poorly marked.
- Lack of interpreters.

See footnotes for additional comments.²

“Do you feel the poll workers were adequately trained and knowledgeable about the voting technology and your needs?” 61% stated “Yes.” 31% replied “No” and 9% responded to “Other.” A few of the other comments included:

- They didn't know how to operate the BMD after the ballot was in. They were relieved that I could figure it out.
- No one at my polling site knew how to use BMD - had to call someone off site - could not wait for that person to come from off site.
- The poll workers were unable to give direction as to which line to vote. They caused more confusion than necessary.
- They never offered to help me. Fortunately, my aide stepped in.

See footnotes for additional comments.³

“Were you able to vote privately without someone seeing your voting choices?” 81% stated “Yes,” while 16% replied “No.” 4% responded to “Other.” A few of the other comments included:

- They did not have privacy screens.
- I voted privately, but my aide had the opportunity to see my votes when she fed the ballot through the scanner.
- No, I was seated at a table near the entrance. Poll workers and other citizens kept walking past me. They kept peeking over my shoulder as I was voting.

See footnotes for additional comments.⁴

¹ “Told poll workers had low vision. Was handed a magnifying glass. Could not use for ballot and scanner. Used BMD instead.” “Had to use a friend to vote.” “Poll workers were not trained to operate the ballot marking devices.” “Not enough light in ballot marking areas. Difficult to see choices on ballot and make appropriate selections.” “Audio/voice on BMD cut in/out until I held the headphone wire a certain way. The method of navigating choices by using arrows to choose among slate of judges was confusing, although I've done it before. Poll clerks tried to be helpful, but did not have enough information to be helpful. Each year, there has been a group effort to get the BMD to work. It took 15 minutes for them to set it up, 10 minutes to vote, and 5 to cast the ballot in the slot. Much better than my past experiences!” “The attachment of the sip-n-puff was not properly plugged in.” “There was no BMD present.” “I needed assistance from a poll worker to complete the ballot.”

² “One step.” “Inappropriately marked access aisle. Entry way lip over 2 inches and a locked entrance.” “Small lip at doorway.”

³ “They were courteous, friendly, and tried to help.” “Not equally aware.” “Some of them were well trained. There was a problem with communication between poll workers which created confusion as to which line I was supposed to be on for which action to be taken.” “Courtesy and manners would be nice.” “Did not have that opportunity.” “Two workers were the only ones at the table and were talking amongst themselves. Being the only one in line at the time, I was ignored for about 10 minutes until acknowledgement was made of my presence.” “My needs were met, but poll workers said that they wouldn't be able to adjust the machine for someone using a chair.” “No BMD machine on site.” “One worker well trained-others seemed uninvolved.” “I told them I had vision and fine motor problems with my hands. I had an assistant who helped me mark the ballot in the right spots. I didn't ask to use the BMD and they didn't offer to set it up after I told them about my vision and hand coordination issues.”

⁴ “I requested the poll workers help in reviewing the ballot. There was no intentional review of my choices on his part.” “Not as privately as those not in a wheelchair.”

Asked, "Have you ever been trained or served as a poll worker," 12% stated "Yes," while 88% replied "No." 27% indicated that they have volunteered for election campaigns, while 72% have not. 1% responded to "Other":

- I am a member of my local Democratic Party committee. In addition to petitioning for myself, I have to carry petitions for all other candidates for the party.

When asked, "Have you ever run for elective office," 8% stated "Yes," while 92% replied "No." In a follow up question, of those that stated "Yes" to the previous question, they were asked, "Were you successfully elected to office?" 23% stated "Yes," 62% replied "No," and 15% responded "Other." The most relevant comment was:

- Lost the vote BUT was appointed.

Finally, 38% indicated that they have contributed to a candidate/election campaign, while 62% have not. When asked, "Would you ever contribute to a disability Political Action Committee (PAC)," 47% stated "Yes," 35% replied "No," and 18% responded "Other." It should be noted that the "other" comments ranged from "unsure of what a PAC is - need more information," to "maybe," "depends what particular points they are pushing," "split reaction - if appropriate political action and public funded," and "last election turned me off to contributing again - billions contributed that could have helped with the deficit."