



Just 3 in 10 Disabled Voters Believe Leaders in Washington, D.C. Care About People with Disabilities, Finds New TCF and Data for Progress Poll

APRIL 21, 2022 – THE CENTURY FOUNDATION AND DATA FOR PROGRESS

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Sixty-one million, or one in four U.S. adults, live with disabilities—numbers that are rising rapidly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been a mass disabling event. Yet disabled people represent an historically underappreciated voting bloc in American politics, and have largely been left behind by the U.S. economy: they face poverty rates twice as high as people without disabilities more than three decades after the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, promised equal opportunity, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.

Now, new polling conducted by Data for Progress, in partnership with The Century Foundation’s newly launched Disability Economic Justice Collaborative, underscores the political consequences of ignoring voters with disabilities: **just three in ten disabled voters believe that leaders in Washington, D.C. care about people with disabilities.**

As part of an April survey of 1,167 likely voters nationally, we measured public attitudes—with special attention to the attitudes of disabled voters—on a range of policy proposals that would begin to break the persistent link between disability

and poverty and fulfill the as-yet unrealized economic goals of the ADA. We find that **large majorities of voters of all political stripes—disabled and nondisabled alike—overwhelmingly support policies that would move the needle towards long overdue economic justice for Americans with disabilities.**

Yet, with little movement on priorities such as eliminating subminimum wages for disabled workers; updating outdated asset limits in the Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, program; and investing in home- and community-based services, despite their immense popularity with voters across the political spectrum, **it comes as little surprise that disabled voters don’t feel that leaders in Washington, D.C. care about them.**

Our Findings

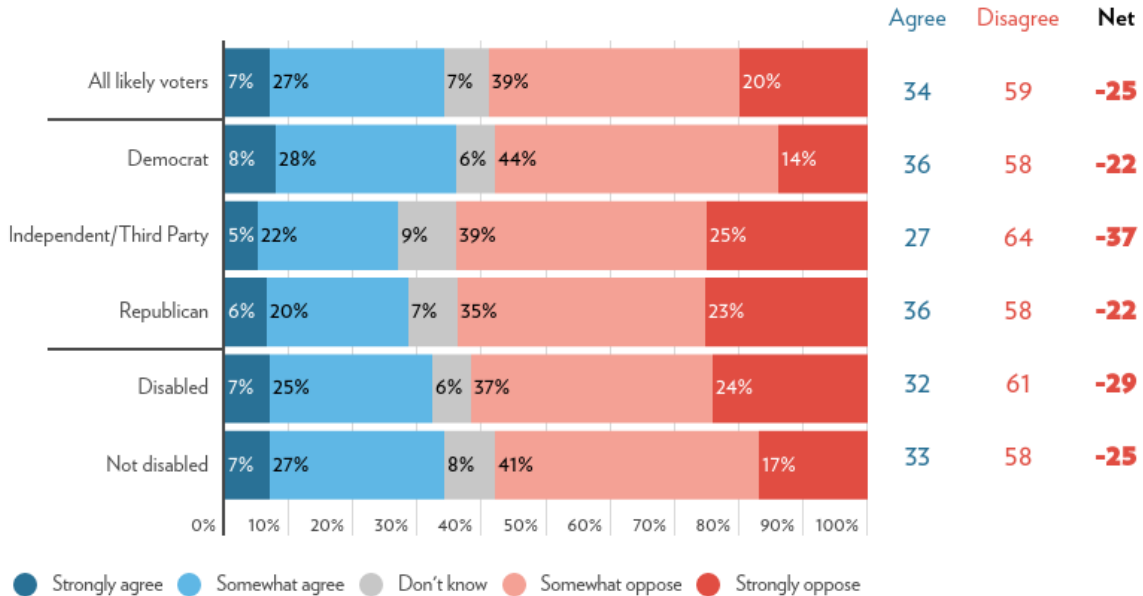
We asked whether voters agreed with the following statement: “Leaders in the federal government care about people with disabilities.” Just 32 percent of disabled voters agreed with this statement, while nearly twice as many (61

FIGURE 1

Just 1 in 3 Disabled Voters Believe Leaders in Washington, D.C. Care About People With Disabilities

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“Leaders in the federal government care about people with disabilities?”



percent) disagreed. Notably, disabled as well as nondisabled voters across the political spectrum overwhelmingly share the view that federal leaders do not care about people with disabilities: just 33 percent of nondisabled voters overall, and just 36 percent of Democrats, 27 percent of Independents, and 36 percent of Republican voters report believing that federal leaders care about people with disabilities.

We also measured likely voters’ attitudes on several leading policy proposals that would increase economic security for disabled people in the United States. While support is greatest among disabled voters, each of the policies surveyed enjoys widespread support among disabled as well as nondisabled voters, with nearly all garnering broad backing from voters across the political spectrum.

We asked voters about a provision in federal wage and hour law that allows employers to pay disabled workers less than the federal minimum wage; estimates suggest 40,000 to 100,000 disabled workers are currently being paid

subminimum wages—on average, roughly \$3.34 per hour. Seventy-nine percent of disabled voters support eliminating subminimum wages so that workers with disabilities are paid at least the federal minimum wage. This reform enjoys wide support among voters across party lines, disabled and nondisabled alike, with 74 percent of nondisabled voters and 76 percent of voters overall—including 80 percent of Democrats, 73 percent of Independents, and 74 percent of Republicans—supporting abolishing subminimum wages for disabled workers.

We also asked whether voters support **increasing the supply of affordable, accessible housing for people with disabilities**. Four in ten disabled renters are facing trouble paying their rent, compared with 25 percent of renters overall—yet just 5 percent of federally funded housing is required to be accessible to people with disabilities. Eighty-five percent of disabled voters, and 83 percent of voters overall—including 90 percent of Democrats, 80 percent of Independents, and 78 of Republicans—support increasing

FIGURE 2

Disabled and Nondisabled Voters Across the Political Spectrum Overwhelmingly Support Eliminating Subminimum Wages

Currently, federal law allows employers to pay less than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour to certain workers, such as workers with disabilities.

Would you support or oppose eliminating subminimum wages so that workers with disabilities are paid at least the federal minimum wage?

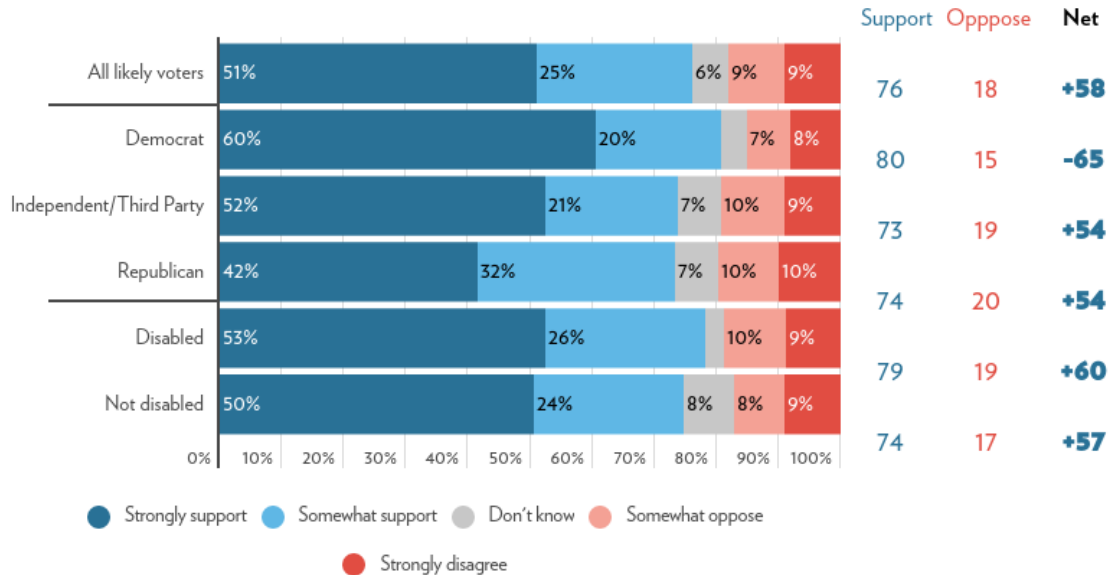


FIGURE 3

Bipartisan Majorities of Disabled and Nondisabled Voters Support Increasing Availability of Affordable, Accessible Housing for Disabled People

In the United States, five percent of federally funded housing is required to be accessible to people with disabilities. In 2021, nearly 40 percent of renters with a disability struggled with paying rent, compared to 25 percent of people nationally.

Knowing what you know now, would you support or oppose increasing the amount of federally funded housing available for disabled people?

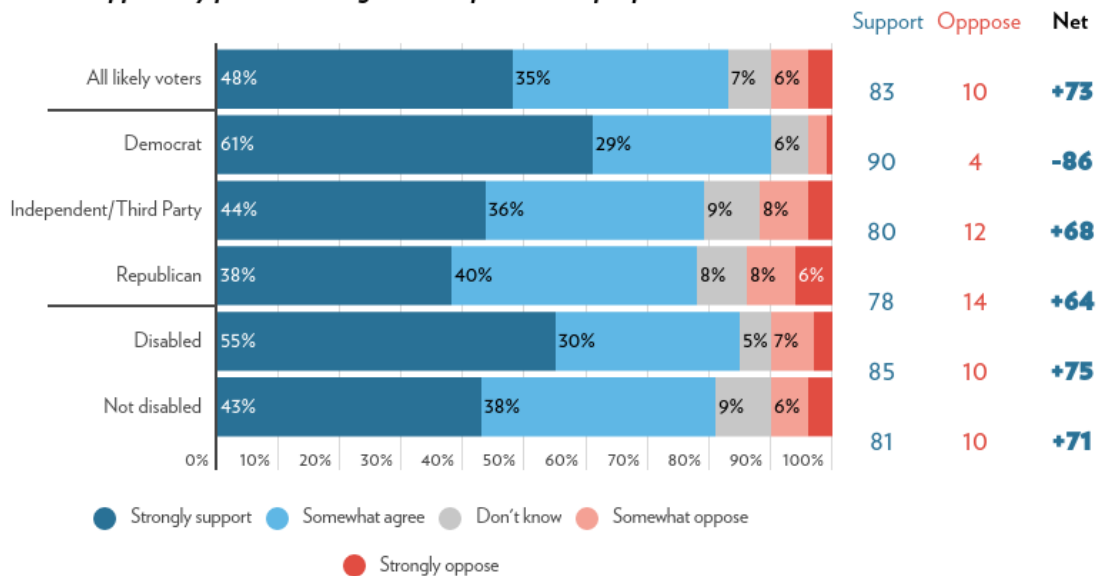
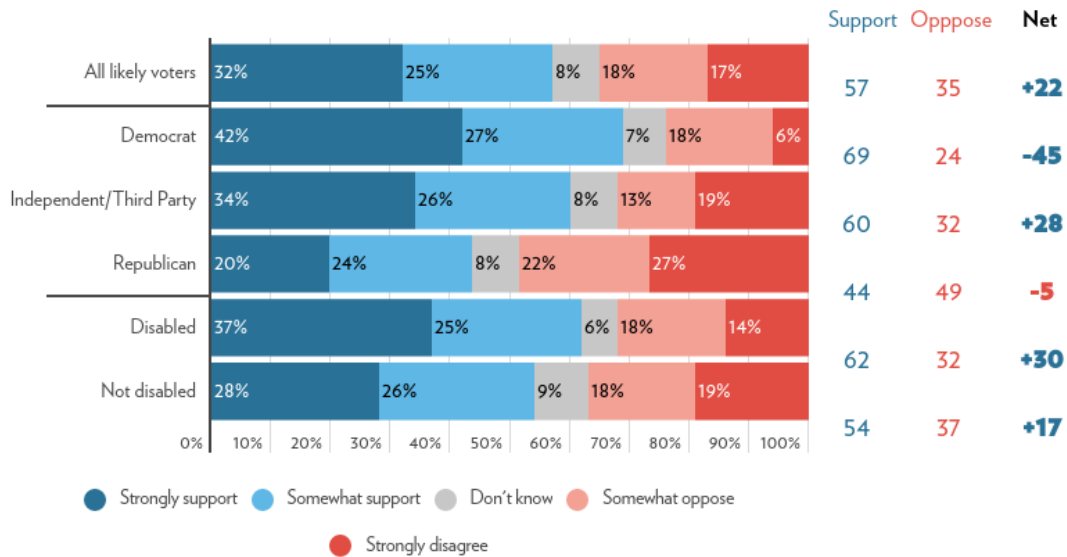


FIGURE 4

Majorities of Disabled and Nondisabled Voters Support Increasing Access to Food Assistance After the Pandemic Ends

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides food assistance primarily to low-income families, people with disabilities, and seniors, requires most recipients without dependent children to report at least 80 hours of qualifying work or job training per month in order to receive food assistance. During the pandemic the government temporarily paused this requirement.

Would you support or oppose extending this pause after the pandemic ends?



the amount of federally funded housing that is accessible to disabled people.

We also asked whether voters support **expanding access to federal food assistance** for people struggling to meet the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program’s rigid work reporting requirements, which—prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which put that policy on hold until the end of the Public Health Emergency—excluded countless disabled people from receiving food assistance. Sixty-two percent of disabled voters support extending the pause on this policy after the pandemic ends, and 57 percent of voters overall—including 69 percent of Democrats, 60 percent of Independents, and 44 percent of Republicans—support doing so.

We asked about **home- and community-based care services (HCBS)**, which allow many disabled people and older adults to live independently instead of in institutional settings. Nearly nine in ten disabled voters support investing more public funds in home- and community-based services,

to allow a greater number of disabled people and older adults to access the services they need in their homes and communities. Eighty-six percent of voters overall support this proposal—including 91 percent of Democrats, 85 percent of Independents, and 82 percent of Republicans—as well as 84 percent of nondisabled voters.

We also asked about a proposal to **update asset limits in the Supplemental Security Income program**, which provides modest income support to roughly 8 million very low-income disabled people and seniors. Those asset limits have remained stuck at \$2,000 for an individual since 1989. Eighty percent of disabled voters support updating SSI’s asset limit to \$10,000 and indexing it moving forward—joined by 78 percent of voters overall, including 81 percent of Democrats, 78 percent of Independents, and 73 percent of Republicans. This proposal also enjoys support from nearly three-quarters of nondisabled voters.

FIGURE 5

Overwhelming Majorities of Disabled and Nondisabled Voters Across Party Lines Support Increasing Funding for Home-and Community-Based Services

Some lawmakers are proposing to invest more public funds in home and community-based care services. This would allow more seniors and people with disabilities to live independently and receive care services in their homes and communities, instead of institutional settings.

Would you support or oppose this proposal?

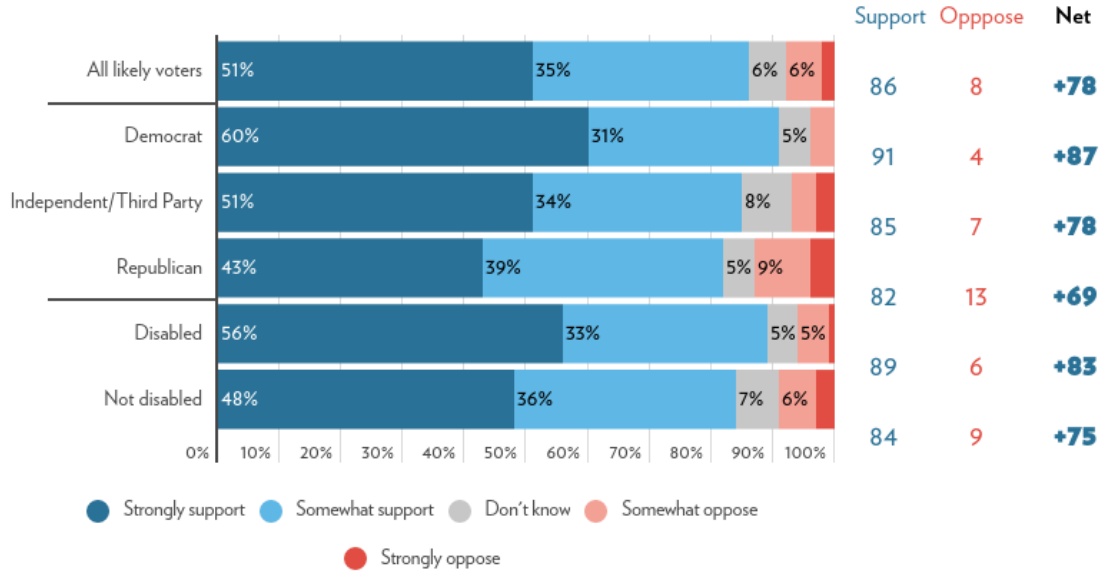
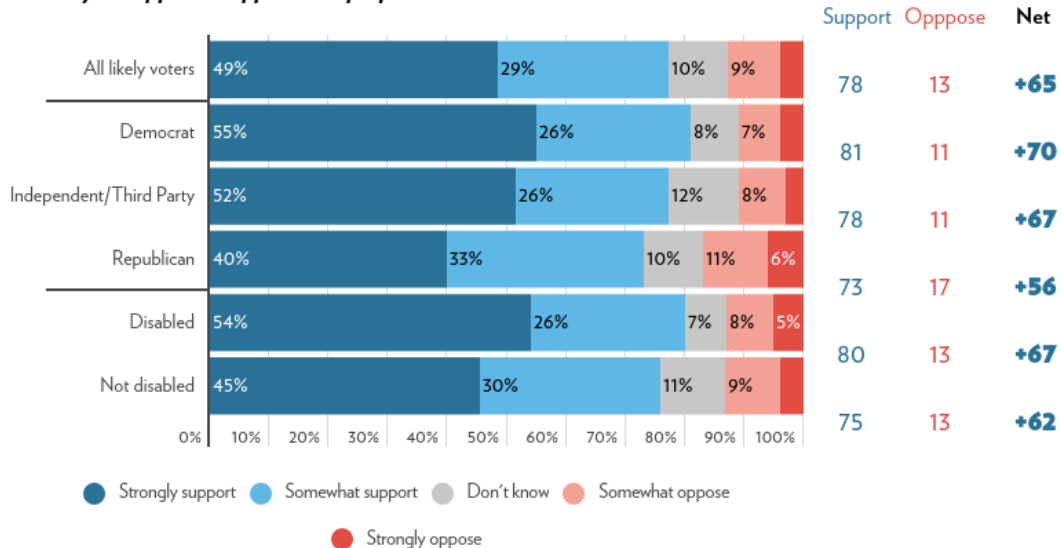


FIGURE 6

Majorities of Disabled and Nondisabled Voters Across the Political Spectrum Support Updating Supplemental Security Income's Asset Limits

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program has an asset cap, prohibiting people with disabilities and seniors from having more than \$2,000 in resources at any time. The asset cap has not been updated since 1989, and because of inflation, has lost over half its value. Legislation has been introduced to raise SSI's asset limit to \$10,000 and index it to inflation moving forward.

Would you support or oppose this proposal?



Methodology

From April 16 to April 18, 2022, Data for Progress, in partnership with The Century Foundation's Disability Economic Justice Collaborative, conducted a survey of 1,167 likely voters nationally using web-panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 3 percentage points.

Respondents who are disabled or have a disabled household member are identified similarly to methods used by the Census Bureau. The survey asks about six disability types: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty. Respondents who report any one of the six disability types are considered to have a disability.

Future polling by Data for Progress in partnership with The Century Foundation's Disability Economic Justice Collaborative will continue to examine disabled voters' attitudes on a wide range of economic policy debates and policy proposals. You can learn more about the collaborative [here](#).

Authors

The Century Foundation is a progressive, independent think tank that conducts research, develops solutions, and drives policy change to make people's lives better. We pursue economic, racial, and gender equity in education, health care, and work, and promote U.S. foreign policy that fosters international cooperation, peace, and security.

Data for Progress is a progressive think tank and polling firm arming movements with the tools they need to fight for a more equitable future. Led by Sean McElwee, we produce quality polling, data-based messaging, and policy generation for progressive causes, campaigns, and candidates.