**The Blind Voter Experience: A Comparison of the 2008 and 2012 Elections**

**Introduction**

Following the November 6, 2012, elections, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) conducted an online survey of blind and visually impaired voters to assess their voting experience and to compare the results of the 2012 survey to the results of a similar survey conducted following the November 2008 elections. Both the 2008 and 2012 surveys were conducted with funding from a Help America Vote Act (HAVA) Training/Technical Assistance grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The 2012 survey was completed online using Survey Monkey and was available from November 6 through November 21, 2012. A total of 537 blind and visually impaired voters completed the 2012 survey as compared to 566 who participated in the 2008 random sample telephone survey. The same questions related to voter experience that were asked in the 2008 survey were used in the 2012 survey. Participants in the 2012 survey were recruited through posts to the NFB members e-mail list, posts to the NFB Facebook page and Twitter feed, and an announcement on the home page of the NFB's Web site. In 2008, individuals were randomly selected from a list owned by the NFB, contacted, and screened for inclusion in the telephone survey.

**Results of the 2008 and 2012 Blind Voter Surveys**

Data from the 2008 and 2012 surveys show an increase in the number of blind voters who voted at the polls, as well as an increase in the number of voters who cast their ballot on an accessible voting machine. In 2008, 62 percent of the blind voters surveyed who voted in the November election did so at the polls. The 2012 election saw an increase in the number of blind voters who voted at the polls to 84 percent of those surveyed. In 2012, 79 percent of the blind voters who voted at the polls requested, or were offered, an accessible voting machine, as compared to 63 percent in 2008. The percentage of blind voters surveyed who reported they were able to cast a private and independent vote increased from 51 percent in 2008 to 64 percent in 2012 and the percentage of voters who cast their ballot with assistance decreased from 37 percent to 32 percent.

For blind voters who cast their ballot on an accessible voting machine, however, virtually all of the variables surveyed indicate that they had a worse experience voting in 2012 than in 2008. Only 63 percent of the blind voters surveyed in 2012 who used an accessible voting machine said that the machine was up and running when they arrived at their polling place, as compared to 87 percent in 2008.Thirty-three percent of the voters who used an accessible voting machine in 2012 said that the poll workers had problems setting-up or activating the machine, as compared to 19 percent in 2008. In 2012, 21 percent of the blind voters who cast their ballot on an accessible machine said that the poll workers did not provide them clear instructions on how to use the machine, as compared to 16 percent in 2008. The percentage of blind voters who were able to cast their vote on an accessible machine with no problems decreased from 87 percent in 2008 to 62 percent in 2012. The percentage of blind voters who were able to cast their ballot privately and independently with an accessible machine decreased from 86 percent in 2008 to 75 percent in 2012.

Survey results also indicate that blind voters in 2012 were less satisfied with the way they were treated by poll workers than the blind voters surveyed in 2008. The percentage of blind voters surveyed who felt that they were treated with the same dignity as other voters fell from 91 percent in 2008 to 71 percent in 2012. In 2008, 85 percent of the blind voters surveyed felt that they were given the same amount of privacy as other voters, as compared to 67 percent of the blind voters surveyed in 2012. Ninety-four percent of the blind voters surveyed in 2008 said that they did not feel rushed by poll workers, while 86 percent of blind voters surveyed in 2012 expressed this same feeling. The percentage of blind voters who felt that poll workers treated them with respect declined from 94 percent in 2008 to 81 percent in 2012.

A decline in the satisfaction of surveyed blind voters with their overall voting experience is also indicated by the results of the 2012 survey. In 2012, 75 percent of blind voters surveyed indicated they were somewhat to very satisfied with their voting experience as compared to 89 percent of the blind voters surveyed in 2008. The percentage of blind voters who were somewhat to very dissatisfied with their voting experience increased from 11 percent in 2008 to 19 percent in 2012. Fifty-one percent of the blind voters surveyed in 2012 said that their experience was the same as their previous experience, as compared to 60 percent in 2008. The percentage of surveyed blind voters who said that their experience was better than their previous experience decreased from 33 percent in 2008 to 27 percent in 2012. The percentage of blind voters who said that their experience was worse than their previous experience increased from 7 percent in 2008 to 17 percent in 2012. Finally, the percentage of surveyed blind voters who said they would vote again decreased slightly from 99.8 percent in 2008 to 98.7 percent in 2012.

**Conclusion**

Data from the 2008 and 2012 blind voter surveys indicate a positive trend in the number of blind voters who cast their ballot at the polls and who did so with an accessible voting machine. However, the results of these surveys also indicate a decrease in poll workers' knowledge of how to operate the accessible voting machine, a decline in poll workers' treatment of blind voters, and a decline in blind voters' satisfaction with their voting experience. These declines in the experience of blind voters who cast their ballot at the polls may negatively impact the participation of blind voters in future elections. Through the information provided by these surveys, state and local elections officials and disability rights advocates can work to improve poll worker training to ensure that blind voters have the same positive voting experience as their sighted peers.

**Appendix**

Table 1: Comparison of Data from the 2008 and 2012 Blind Voter Surveys.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2012 | 2008 |
| Number of survey Participants | 537 | 566 |
| Cast their vote at the polls | 84% | 62% |
| Cast their vote by absentee ballot or vote by mail | 16% | 38% |
| Were offered or requested an accessible voting machine | 79% | 63% |
| Accessible voting machine (AVM) up and running when arrived | 63% | 87% |
| Poll worker had problems setting up or activating accessible voting machine | 33% | 19% |
| Poll workers did not provide clear instructions on operation of AVM | 21% | 16% |
| Had no problems casting their vote on AVM | 62% | 87% |
| Able to vote privately and independently on AVM | 75% | 86% |
| All voters able to cast independent vote | 64% | 51% |
| Cast vote with assistance | 32% | 37% |
| Poll workers treated them with same dignity as other voters | 71% | 91% |
| Were given the same privacy as other voters | 67% | 85% |
| Did not feel rushed | 86% | 94% |
| Poll workers treated them with respect | 81% | 94% |
| Somewhat to very satisfied with their voting experience | 75% | 89% |
| Somewhat to very dissatisfied with their voting experience | 19% | 11% |
| Experience was same as previous experience | 51% | 60% |
| Experience was better than previous experience | 27% | 33% |
| Experience was worse than previous experience | 17% | 7% |
| Voting for the first time | 6% | 6% |
| Will vote again | 98.70% | 99.80% |