Increasing the Disability Vote

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Executive Summary

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) describes itself as "a convener, connector, and catalyst for change." With a mission to increase the political and economic power of people with disabilities, it is no surprise that the AAPD strongly advocates voting. Though the organization was founded in 1995, its voter engagement initiative, REV UP (Register, Educate, Vote, Use your Power), was founded only a few years ago in 2016. In order live up to its name and message, AAPD has posed the following question:

What are effective strategies the AAPD can implement in order to raise awareness and increase the disability vote?

The disability vote, referring to the voter turnout of people with disabilities, has been historically lower than that of people without disabilities. This is despite the fact that 1 in 4 American adults has a disability according to the Center for Disease Control. If disabled people were officially recognized as a minority group, they would be the largest one. Yet, candidates do not cater to them and websites, town halls, and debates are not 100% accessible. The disability vote is the overlooked and forgotten vote.

To answer the question posed by AAPD, I conducted a series of interviews with people from various disability rights and voting advocacy organizations. The interviews expanded on four common barriers that exist within the disability community and other minority communities:

1. Discrimination
2. Voter Suppression
3. Voter Apathy

4. Lack of Information

They also revealed various approaches and techniques to increase voting amongst their respective audiences, including:

1. Social Media

2. Relationship Building

3. Candidate Consideration

Furthermore, the voting habits and outreach techniques of three minority groups were studied – the Latinx population, the LGBTQ+ community, and young people. A brief look at the results of the case studies are in the table below:

Minority Group	Voter Outreach Methods
Latinx	- Coalition building - Social media targeting - Door knocking - Spanish-language media
LGBTQ+	- Partnering with other organizations - Creating a digital model to directly identify and target potential voters - Going to college campuses - Traveling billboard
Youth	- Digital targeting with social pressure - Celebrity endorsements - Peer-to-peer contacting - Youth-led movements

After carefully analyzing the list of best practices generated through research and taking AAPD's capabilities and mission into account the recommended strategies for increasing the disability vote are:

Relational Organizing | Targeted Voter Database | Partnerships

Policy Problem

Identify barriers to voting for the disability community in the United States and what the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) can do to increase the disability vote for the 2020 elections.

Background

Disability Issues

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines a person with a disability as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.[i] The Census Bureau has divided up the types of disabilities into six main categories: ambulatory, hearing, cognitive, vision, independent living, and self-care (See Appendix A for the prevalence of each type amongst disabled American workers).[ii] Alongside people of color and those that live in poverty, the disability community has been discouraged from going to the polls and casting their vote. Persons with intellectual or mental health disabilities are deterred because of prejudicial assumptions about their capabilities. Furthermore, 22% of voters in 2016 noted "issues of physical accessibility, including problems with accessible parking, inability to locate the entrance or voting area, ramps or elevators being broken or difficult to use, or not enough space for wheelchairs in voting areas."[iii]

Moreover, individuals who are blind or have low vision are sometimes not able to cast their vote because the ballot was inaccessible to them.[iv] For example, either accessible voting machines are not set up and/are broken or polling place workers are not trained

on how to use them and are unhelpful.[v] These barriers to access promote the message that people with disabilities are disregarded when it comes to voting procedures.

The History of Disability Voting

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, is the earliest federal legislation to include disability suffrage. It requires that election officials allow a voter who is blind or has another disability to receive assistance from a person of the voter's choice. It also "prohibits conditioning the right to vote on a citizen being able to read or write, attaining a particular level of education, or passing an interpretation 'test.'"[vi] Next came the pivotal 1973 Rehabilitation Act passed and signed during the Nixon administration, which became the foundation for disability rights.[vii] This legislation was the first true attempt at making the playing field even for those with disabilities. Specifically it is Section 504 that prohibits "discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities, public or private, that receive federal financial assistance."[viii]

In 1984, Congress passed the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act (VAEHA) passed, which states that polling places in federal elections must be accessible to elderly individuals and people with disabilities. If the polling place location cannot be made accessible, then the state must provide voters with an alternate means of voting on Election Day.[ix] It was not until 1990, with President Bush in the office, that the first legislation solely focused on disabled persons was passed – the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA is a federal civil rights law that provides a variety of protections for people with disabilities, including full and equal opportunity to vote. It covers all aspects of voting including voter registration, site selection, and the casting of

ballots. The ADA comes with a checklist that is intended to guide election officials in the process of making polling places available to all by evaluating the accessibility of parking spots, building entrances, the voting area and more. It goes beyond physically accessing the polling place by requiring that voters with disabilities can fully participate in the election process, e.g. voting information in Braille or having sign language interpreters.[x]

In 1993, President Clinton signed the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), requiring all offices that provide any disability-related assistance to also enable voter registration for federal elections. The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), signed into law by President George W. Bush, required that electoral jurisdictions set up at least one accessible voting system for disabled persons at each polling place.

As described above, there are numerous acts and pieces of legislation that have attempted to make people with disabilities equal citizens in this country and have them be a part of all social and civil processes. While a great amount of progress has been made, there is still more that needs to be done to truly level the playing field for all. As the author David Pettinicchio states, "Americans with disabilities today struggle for social services and civil rights, just as they did in the 1970s and 1980s…"[xi] This struggle has been further categorized into disability rights versus disability justice. The main distinction between the two is the audience they serve: disability justice came about because people of color and LGBTQ+ people felt that disability rights ended up only helping the white, heteronormative population. Clark University's Catherine Jampel explains it further: "Disability justice is the framework of the social movement to end ableism in conjunction with ending other systems of oppression. Disabled, queer and trans people of color have led the development of the disability justice framework since

2005...disability justice includes a commitment to addressing multiple forms of oppression rather than being 'single issue identity based'"[xii]Disability rights is the movement that started the fight for equal access and fairness for people with disabilities and disability justice is an expansion of that fight to make sure it goes beyond straight, white people.

One of these forms of oppression is voter suppression and the barriers all disabled people, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or sexuality, face. In the past three presidential elections alone, the voter turnout rate for people with disabilities has not only been below the rate of non-disabled persons, but has slowly declined – from 57.3% in 2008, 56.8% in 2012, and 55.9% in 2016 (See Appendix B).[xiii]

The Importance of this Policy Question

Disabled persons make up 25% of the US population – 61 million Americans that span all income groups, races, ethnicities, genders, ages, and sexual orientation (See Appendix C).[xiv] In fact, this could actually be an underestimate as it is based on self-reporting on the US Census and there are many persons with disabilities that do not identify as such. Regardless, according to the Institute on Disability, if the disability community was formally recognized as a minority group, it would be the largest one in the United States, and that is before we include family and friends of those with disabilities.[xv] Yet, this minority group is constantly overlooked, especially when it comes to politics and voting. As journalist Abigail Abrams states, "...politicians who ignore disabled Americans may be missing out on a growing group of voters whose support could be up for grabs in 2020..."[xvi]

The 2018 midterm elections saw record-breaking voter turnout within the disability community, giving hope of an upwards trend.[xvii] Yet, the turnout was still 5 percentage points lower than the non-disabled population – a difference of over 2 million people.[xviii] The issue of increasing the disability vote is important because voting is a basic right of every citizen and every citizen should be able to play an equal role in the progression of our country. The disability community is a powerful voting bloc that has been systematically excluded from democratic participation, whether intentional or not. Their needs have been dismissed and their voices have been ignored. The ADA, the only legislation that addresses the disability community, was passed only 30 years ago and even now it is not fully enforced. In order to live up to the ideals laid down in the ADA and to make sure that people with disabilities are not made to feel like second-class citizens, the disability vote needs to be addressed.

Previous Efforts to Increase the Disability Vote

Although multiple federal laws have been passed to grant people with disabilities guaranteed access to all voting procedures, their execution has been inconsistent. In 2017, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a study that examined 178 polling places and found that 60% of them had one or more potential accessibility impediments.[xix] In light of that, disability rights organizations have worked to address the lack of accessibility, raise awareness on voting, and register more disabled people. AAPD established its REV UP (Register, Educate, Vote, Use your Power) initiative in 2016 with the belief that it would be meaningful to use AAPD's network to unite people around the disability vote. Within three years they partnered with over 30 states to promote the initiative. In order to raise awareness on voting for the disability

community the National Disability Voter Registration Week (NDVWR) was started, where every year the third week of July is dedicated to social media promotions and registration events. In response to concerns that the disability vote was being suppressed in federal elections, the Disability Visibility Project, an online community focused on promoting disability issues, launched "#CripTheVote" as a Twitter hashtag campaign.[xx] Other organizations such as the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN), the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL), and American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT) are also working to raise awareness and increase voting in the disability community. However, there are barriers making it difficult to resolve the problems related to the disability vote.

Landscape Analysis

Literature on the Barriers to Voting

There are numerous studies on the barriers that discourage disabled Americans from casting their vote. A 2017 *Social Science Quarterly* article surveyed voters on how easy or difficult their experience was at a polling place and found that voters with disabilities were more likely than those without disabilities to say it was somewhat or very difficult (5.8 percent compared to 1.7 percent). As the article states, "While the 5.8 and 1.7 percent figures may seem small, given the size of the populations, these represent about 1.5 million people with disabilities and 1.5 million people without disabilities, or 3 million people total. [This] is enough to affect many election outcomes if these people decide not to vote."[xxi] The researchers also dove into specifics and stated that "[11.7% of voters with disabilities] reported difficulty in reading or seeing the ballot, while [10.3%]

reported difficulty in understanding how to vote or operate the voting equipment. These difficulties were significantly less common among voters without disabilities [0.9 and 1.3 percent, respectively]."[xxii]

Barriers:

- Inaccessibility - Voting machines are the most accessible ballot options for voters with disabilities, but those who fear interference in our elections are pushing for everyone to use paper ballots, believing that "[they] are evidence of voters' choices that cannot be altered by compromised software or hardware."[xxiii] This method would alienate many disabled voters. "Marking a paper ballot with a pen or pencil may seem easy to able-bodied voters…But holding a pen, seeing text on a ballot and so on may not be possible for many people with disabilities."[xxiv] Voting machines need to not only be available at polling places, but also updated and checked for malfunctions.

- Lack of transportation – People with disabilities were also more likely to cite transportation problems as a reason for not voting in 2018 (8% compared to 2% of non-disabled individuals), consistent with their higher rate of voting by mail.[xxv] Yet absentee voting can also present problems. People with disabilities were least likely to vote in the states where they had to report a disability for every election in which they wanted a mail ballot.[xxvi] Absentee voting is already seen as a hurdle to most people, but having to constantly resubmit one's disability status increases the administrative burden.

- Stigma – Many in the disability community feel that they are not treated the same as those who are "abled". They believe they are either looked down upon,

pitied, or forgotten, which in turn discourages them from being an active member of society – especially when it comes to the public and civic activity of voting. In her *Stanford Law Review* article, Rabia Belt states it perfectly: "Barriers to voting contribute to the low feelings of political efficacy on the part of people with disabilities."[xxvii]

For people with disabilities these barriers imply that they are not wanted as political citizens. Low political participation will not only hurt the disability community's fight against ableism but will also reduce the effectiveness of a potentially powerful voting bloc. It is an issue of civil rights and justice that is constantly being overlooked.

Challenges and Gaps in Disability-Related Research

Within the growing field of Disability Studies, research on voting and disability is limited. There some challenges that contribute to the reduced amount of research. Some nondisabled researchers are reluctant in identifying or working with the disability community, as it is a notion that is still attached with a negative connotation and people are uncomfortable with that which they do not understand. This limits the pool available for interviews or observation. Many of the nondisabled are still uncomfortable when dealing with the notion of disability. Also, researchers may have a hard time working with "adults with learning difficulties, communication difficulties or other disabilities such as autism with associated complex challenges in communicating, understanding and taking part in qualitative research."[xxviii] This is more specific to qualitative studies, where interviews and interactions are key. When the subjects of the research are not able to completely express themselves and have a difficult time communicating their answers then it makes conducting disability-related research a challenge.

The research done on how many disabled persons voted in all the presidential elections, including the demographics of those voters, is severely limited. Along those lines, there should be more research conducted on the reasons people choose not to register in the first place. Another gap in research is regarding studies conducted on intersectionality. Intersectionality is a term coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989; it describes how race, gender, and other characteristics of an individual's identity "intersect" and overlap with each other.[xxix] Intersectionality has not played the role it should in disability studies research – often the researchers and sometimes the subjects themselves are solely white. The compounding effects of being disabled and a part of the racial minority (or any other minority) are not studied nearly enough.

Additionally, as Keri Gray of AAPD expressed, a lot of exploration needs to be done in policy development for those who have intellectual or psychiatric disabilities and rely on the support of guardians. There is an ongoing debate on whether people with such disabilities have the capacity to make their own decisions and thus whether they should be allowed to vote. Unfortunately, there is not enough concrete evidence in the field that would contribute to this debate. Finally, researchers should also explore the issues around which the disability community can coalesce – if issues such as housing, transportation, and subminimum wage are given more attention perhaps more disabled persons would be incentivized to vote. This paper proposes to reduce the gaps by making recommendations on what nonprofits, like the AAPD, can do to appeal to the disability community and encourage more disabled persons to register and vote.

Research Plan

My research is based on a qualitative approach. I focused on a qualitative method because I believe that stories, comparisons, and communications are powerful, especially in the disability rights field. As Disability Studies researcher Melanie Nind states, "Qualitative research can access the perspectives and experiences of oppressed groups lacking the power to make their voices heard through traditional academic discourse."[xxx] I used informational interviews (full list of interviewees and questions in Appendices A and B) and comparative case studies to determine what is being done currently regarding disability voting, what the barriers are, and what more can be done.

Interviews

The first interviews conducted were with my client, the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD). I started with AAPD's Senior Director of Stakeholder Engagement and Strategic Communications, Keri Gray, who is also spearheading the REV UP initiative mentioned previously. Then I moved on to interviewing the former CEO of AAPD and co-creator of REV UP – Helena Berger. And finally, I ended with AAPD's current CEO and president, Maria Town. I wanted to gain a better understanding of their view on the topic and what they have done so far to address the issue of the disability vote. The questions I started with were (See Appendix F for all questions):

- *Can you tell me more about REV UP and the motivation behind it?*
- *What do you think are the barriers that disabled voters face? Are there any other reasons the disability vote is lower than that of non-disabled persons?*

- *Do you have suggestions for feasible solutions they can work towards regarding this issue?*

These interviews resulted in an overall indication of where AAPD currently is and how my recommendations could help them move forward.

The second set of interviews I conducted started with Professors Lisa Schur and Douglas Kruse – the leading experts in disability studies and the inspiration behind my own policy problem. I questioned them on their report regarding the disability vote for the 2016 and 2018 elections and what they expect for 2020 (See Appendix D).[xxxi] Specifically, the questions I asked were:

- *Can you explain the research you have done so far regarding the disability vote - specifically the ones conducted in 2016 and 2018?*
    - *What was your motivation?*
    - *Did you have any difficulties?*

- *Do you have predictions for the election this year?*

- *What are the challenges you've experienced in disability studies in general? Have you noticed gaps in research?*

After that I talked to individuals from major disability rights organizations: NCIL, NDRN, and DVP (all mentioned earlier). While the Disability Visibility Project is the only one that solely focuses on voting, all of these organizations have made the disability vote a key part of their advocacy efforts. The questions I asked them included the AAPD questions along with the ones listed below:

- *What do you say to those who believe those with intellectual disabilities cannot and therefore should not vote? How do you recommend helping the intellectually disabled specifically?*

- *Can you speak more to intersectionality and the relationship between minorities based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. and the disability community?*

- *What can a disability nonprofit do to increase voter outreach, maybe based on what other minority groups are doing?*

Finally, my last group for interviews consisted of members of organizations focused on voting rights, specifically within various minority groups. I interviewed persons from Voto Latino, the Human Rights Campaign, When We All Vote, and more (see Appendix D). For them my questions included:

- *How significant is the disability community in the work you are doing to encourage political participation and increase voter turnout?*

- *Do you think there are similarities in the barriers that people with disabilities and [people in targeted minority group] face at the polls?*

- *What methods have you used to increase voter turnout?*
  - *How much has social media been a part of that? What about celebrity advocates?*

All interviews were semi-structured, conducted by phone, and recorded for accuracy with the Otter app. Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind an expert or activist's experiences.[xxxii] A semi-structured interview controls the flow of conversation while still giving participants the opportunity to answer open ended questions.[xxxiii] The responses to the interviews were summarized and analyzed in order to identify trends in both disability rights and civil rights fields, to better identify the barriers to voting, and to gather suggestions on potential policy initiatives.

Case Studies

After I conducted all the interviews, I focused on comparative case studies. A multiple case design was applied to see what other minorities have done to increase the number of voters and how AAPD can implement similar strategies. Case study work consisted mainly of online research, where I examined various articles, studies, and pages that

discussed the voting relationship, barriers, and outreach methods within each subset of the population.

I decided to look at three different minority groups and compare their relationship with voting to that of the disability community, with the goal of finding different voter outreach techniques that could be replicated. I chose to look at the Latinx/Hispanic community[1], the LGBTQ+ population, and the youth of America. While these groups are only a small number of the multitudes of minorities in this country, I decided to focus in on them because their attempts to increase the vote in their respective groups seemed comparatively more explicit. For instance, the Latinx vote in the 2018 midterm election nearly doubled from the 2014 election.[xxxiv] This is an example of a minority group that mobilized and took to the polls to express their opinions and pass judgement on the policies impacting their lives. Conducting a comparative case study can offer insight into what gaps exist in the field and why some strategies or actors have a better impact than others.[xxxv]

Interview Results

Barriers

The brief landscape analysis I conducted at the start of the project exposed some of the major barriers people with disabilities face: inaccessible polling places and voting machines, lack of transportation, and social stigma. However, the interviews with AAPD and other disability rights organizations not only revealed more barriers, but also

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[1] In this paper, the term Latinx will be used to refer to anyone who identifies as originating from a majority Spanish-speaking country (e.g. Mexico, Cuba, Spain, Guatemala, Argentina, etc).

relayed the emotional trauma surrounding those barriers. And of course, many of these barriers are also prevalent in the communities that the voting rights organizations serve.

1. **Discrimination**

The first theme that clearly presented itself across the interviews was an expansion of the stigma barrier. Discrimination being a major factor in lower voter registration and turnout was revealed across all minority groups interviewed. The disability rights/justice organizations discussed ADA non-compliance, tying the disability vote back to inaccessibility and describing how many places ignore the guidelines stipulated in the ADA. Specifically, churches are one area where this problem arises frequently. Because of the Constitution and religious freedom, churches are not required by law to be ADA-compliant, and yet many churches have polling places set up within them, especially in areas populated by racial minorities.[xxxvi] This results in people with disabilities having to find a another polling place that is accessible to them. This place would most likely be much farther away and would cause people with disabilities to generate a different route of transportation than their usual one, which deters them from voting. Disregarding the ADA and making a polling place inaccessible projects a discriminatory message to people with disabilities, telling them that they are not important enough to be considered and their vote does not matter.

> *"Voting stations are becoming less accessible – there used to be around 65% accessible ones in 2008 and in 2016 it went down to about 46%. They're not being set up with wheelchair access, with headphones out for audio ballots, or with privacy for the voter; poll workers are just not setting them up." – Michelle Bishop, National Disability Rights Network*

Multiple interviews brought up the specific treatment people with intellectual disabilities receive – within an already marginalized group, people with such disabilities are discriminated upon even further. There are many in the general public that believe those with intellectual disabilities should not be allowed to vote because they are not capable of forming their own opinion. Furthermore, in many states the guardianship process can lead to a judge stripping a person's identity and right to vote, when all the family wanted to do was help.[xxxvii] Due to inherent bias and prejudice, people assume that those with intellectual or developmental disabilities do not have the capacity to make decisions such as knowing for whom to vote.

"Excluding people from voting because somebody says they can't exercise decision making is wrong." – Judith Heumann

Discrimination of course is visible in every minority group and was emphasized by the voting rights organizations I talked to outside of the disability community. The barriers for those who are disabled and a racial/ethnic minority or have a different sexual orientation are compounded. For example, Narissa Rahaman from the Human Rights Campaign discussed how transgender people also face bigotry at the polls – they get turned away if the name they provide does not match the name on their ID. According to her, 55% of transgender people did not vote in one or more prior elections because their ID name, sex, or even photo did not match their gender identity or expression.[xxxviii]

"Every marginalized group has experienced discrimination personally and that links them together..." – Leslie Adames, Voto Latino

2. Voter Suppression

The next theme, voter suppression, is usually brought up when people generally discuss voting within minority groups. This is a strategy that contains any efforts made to influence the outcome of an election by discouraging or preventing certain groups of people from voting. A tactic used in this strategy is gerrymandering – manipulating the boundaries of electoral districts in a specific way that puts one party at a greater advantage than the other. Voter suppression is frequently eschewed by organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU); however, it is not often associated with the disability community.

As AAPD's Helena Berger stated, "Voter suppression laws impact people with disabilities, especially those of color, who end up being at a greater disadvantage".[xxxix] Another voter suppression tactic is the presence of voter I.D. laws; several states require photo identification to be presented in order to cast a ballot, most commonly through a driver's license. Many disabled persons do not drive and therefore do not have driver's licenses, which has proven to be an unnecessary hurdle when attempting to register and/or vote. Other methods of voter suppression include eliminating early voting or same-day registration and unnecessarily shutting down polling places.

Early voting and same-day registration encourage voters who have difficulty in readjusting their established schedules and transportation routes (such as people with disabilities) to be able to cast a ballot without taking on an extra burden or stress. People with certain disabilities can find long lines very troublesome and early voting enables them to avoid the heavy traffic that occurs on Election Day. Eliminating these rules would hurt not only disability and racial minority groups, but young voters as well. Deandrea Newsome of Advance Carolina illustrates this with her story: "If I didn't vote during early voting, and register at the same time, I would not have been able to vote at all. I recently moved and my last address, in Morrisville [North Carolina] was in Wake County, and since I only moved to the other side of Morrisville, I thought I was still in Wake County. However, I was actually at the tip of Durham County and you have to vote within your county. So, I was so glad that I was able to register and vote at the same time [during early voting], because I didn't know this before the voter registration deadline. I can imagine a lot of young people, who move every year or two and have stricter laws, end up not voting."[xl] If people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and disabilities are to vote, they need early voting and same-day registration rules in every district.

In a more visible show of voter suppression, polling places are increasingly being shut down. and the ADA is being blamed. Numerous counties are closing a high percentage of their voting stations and are claiming it is because they are apparently not compliant with the ADA. However, this claim is not substantial enough as the ADA has been in effect since 1990 and these counties had 30 years to fix their polling places but chose to do nothing and ignore the disability

community. When these closures start happening right in majority black or brown communities before an election, it is a clear smoke screen for voter suppression.[xli]

> *"Disability laws are being used to target minority leaders, putting bogus charges on them such as ineligibly helping someone else to vote. This has a chilling effect on many communities. And it is not only inherently offensive to all, but also threatens the existence of those laws. – Michelle Bishop, National Disability Rights Network*

3. **Voter Apathy**

No matter the community, voter apathy is always prevalent. NDRN's Michelle Bishop explains this further: "Americans in general don't see the connection between who wins in an election and their everyday lives."[xlii] People are not going to the polls simply because they do not care or do not see the point. This is especially true within the disability community, where politicians continually overlook them and do not bring their issues to the forefront. Many people with disabilities tend to be socially isolated, and within their surroundings there is no one telling them to go vote. And as NCIL's Sarah Blahovec states, "If they don't see the issue they care about, then there is a smaller chance of them voting."[xliii] People with disabilities need must emulate of the drive of LGBTQ+ voters. The LGBTQ+ voters are generally not very apathetic because many of them understand what is on the line and treat it as an issue of survival.[xliv] This must be instilled that within the disability community as well – their lives do rely on the

laws that elected officials put in place (ADA compliance, healthcare, housing, etc.).

"For voters who argue their vote doesn't matter or that nothing can ever change, engage in simple questions: If your vote doesn't matter, why do we have gerrymandering or voter suppression? [These issues] are carefully orchestrated to limit voting power. Each election cycle, we see races being decided by just a few votes, and especially local races where turnout is normally lower. That's a powerful reminder that every vote really does matter." – Halley Rogers, When We All Vote

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4. **Lack of Information**

Related to voter apathy is an information barrier when it comes to voting. Activist Judith Heumann describes it as a "lack of knowledge." She claims that if people understood what they were voting for then they would take more of an interest and engage.[xlv] According to Deandrea Newsome, this issue starts in school – "Civics courses are not as fruitful as they should be…there are people my age, around 27, who do not know the three branches of government and don't understand what they do or what impact citizens can have. I think education is a major issue that can inhibit young people from participating in this process."[xlvi] Just as it is with the youth vote, voting can also be overwhelming, especially if there is no one reaching out to explain the procedure and why it is important. It is not just about why you should vote, or who you should vote for. As Michelle Bishop explains, it's about the basic how-to for voting. She notes further, "There is no public campaign on the voting machine, so potential disabled voters know nothing about it and what it can do. Many of them gave up on voting over 20

years ago and don't know that there are accessibility measures in place for them."[xlvii] All civil rights related organizations must be active in reaching out to people in all communities and making sure they understand the impact of voting and what the process is.

> *"What we're seeing is an information barrier [regarding the youth vote] … a lot of people are asking 'When is my primary? Am I registered? How do I register?'" – Stephanie Young, When We All Vote*

Approaches

Every interviewee was asked their thoughts on what they believe AAPD could do to help increase the vote – what were their recommendations on strategies to implement? About eight different organizations were interviewed and the resulting suggestions were varied and numerous, however there a few that proved to be a commonality across the board.

1. **Social Media**

   When asked, a majority of the interviewees suggested an increased use of social media. A barrage of social media posts can certainly raise awareness on specific issues, as has been seen through the ALS challenge, Kony 2012, and many more examples. The Disability Visibility Project has proven the effectiveness of this method through its #CripTheVote campaign. One of the founders of the movement, Andrew Pulrang, describes the reason behind the hashtag: "Twitter is

good because you have to be efficient about word use - helps focus and prevents wandering off. Hashtags are a critical tool that ties conversations together."[xlviii] The goal is to engage as many people as possible while making the process extremely simple and user-friendly, i.e. reducing the number of clicks people have to make. Voto Latino has taken this concept to the next level by promoting their own registration app called Voter Pal. With this app installed, you can get a registration form filled out in four steps and then you just print and mail it.[xlix] They are also using social media to fight voter apathy, while the Human Rights Campaign is making sure to have ads on Facebook and Instagram to inform people about candidates and remind them of election days.[l]

> *"Educating the members of our community is very important…provide them with information instead of having them look it up. Sustained, frequent, intentional, and year-round engagement [is the key]"*
> *– Narissa Rahaman, Human Rights Campaign*

2. Relationship Building

Another approach that was referenced often is in-person relationship building. As When We All Vote's Halley Rogers, describes "[It's about] relational organizing. We train volunteers to have conversations with family, friends, and colleagues and to give them the resources to register. [We're confident] this is more effective than [going] door-to-door, phone-banking, or ads."[li] Social media can be effective when the potential voters are inside the confines of their own homes and/or offices. However, when they are part of the outside world, it is more powerful to go out and

engage with them in person. Speaking from her advocacy experience, Deandrea Newsome advises: "You have to meet the community where they are."[lii] Many groups, like Voto Latino, engage in grassroots events on the ground – they make sure to go to the people.[liii] This is especially important when it comes to young people, as they already have an onslaught of online outreach targeted towards them. Which is why When We All Vote is trying to make voting personal and fun; they are connecting to schools and working with teachers and administrators to promote voting. They also hosted parties near polling places during the 2018 midterm election.[liv] The basic idea is to help people to draw the connections between voting and how it will impact their lives.

"[You need to] build that rapport, share some things about you, share what you're trying to do, share how there may be a benefit to them. And just continue to work out that relationship before you ask for anything, before you try to influence them to do anything… People are always going to be hesitant because it's something not familiar for them but helping to make it familiar to them is something that requires a lot of time and a lot of relationship building." – Deandrea Newsome, Advance Carolina

3. **Candidate Consideration**

Several interviewers mentioned the importance of partnering with the candidates who are running in the election. They also must do their part in convincing people, all people, to vote for them. There is data to support that if political candidates reached out to the disability community, the largest minority in the United States, then there would be a definite increase in the number of votes cast.[lv] There are a number of ways to do this, and fortunately some have been slowly implemented in this current presidential election. The first, and most

direct way, is to hire more people with disabilities to work on election campaigns. Mayor Pete Buttigieg employed a wheelchair user, Emily Voorde, to work for his campaign. Although the position was not at a high level, she worked as a travel assistant to his husband, she was still the only person on any campaign that was openly disabled. Seeing someone with a disability as part of a presidential campaign, no matter the role, is inspiring to all. When people can see themselves in the candidates or their team then it makes the candidate more trustworthy. It is necessary for candidates to have a platform that speaks directly to the disability community. According to Michelle Bishop, "People don't believe they're speaking to them and that drives participation."[lvi] Candidates need to be reminded that when they ignore disability issues, they are ignoring issues that affect ¼ of the U.S. population. Finally, to make sure their message and disability-related platforms reach the disability community, their websites must be completely accessible for all. This entails actively generating subtitles for all videos uploaded – instead of relying on the automatic ones that are often inaccurate – and making sure the site is easily readable to those who are blind or have low vision. No matter the election, candidates must cater towards the disability community just as they do to any other minority.

> *"Candidates court your vote because you either vote in high numbers or write a lot of checks – people with disabilities might not have the money, but we do have the power and the numbers."*
> *– Helena Berger, AAPD*

Case Study Results

Latinx Vote

This subset of the population was once viewed as lazy, uneducated, and indifferent, but is now the fastest growing ethnic minority and is predicted to have an increasingly significant impact on our nation's politics and economy.[lvii] In 2018 the Latinx voter turnout increased by 13.4 percentage points, in comparison to the 2014 midterm election – the highest increase out of all the racial or ethnic groups.[lviii] Just like any other minority, Latinx people have faced, and continue to face, numerous obstacles when it comes to voting. As mentioned previously, they too have had to deal with discrimination and voter suppression and such, yet they also have their own separate struggles. As Voto Latino's Leslie Adames describes, many in the Latinx communities "have a language barrier, don't know much about voting, work a minimum wage job and can't leave to vote, and are inhibited by their citizenship status."[lix] So how did this previously underrated and overlooked minority group gain the strength and influence to, as Univision claims, "inform and shape the upcoming 2020 election"?[lx]

First and foremost, the numbers are in their favor. According to the Latino Vote Project report, "A projected 32 million Latinos will be eligible to vote in 2020, which would mark the first time that Latinos will be the largest racial or ethnic minority group in the electorate."[lxi] The Latinx population is also the nation's youngest ethnic group, therefore that number will only continue rising in the foreseeable future.[lxii] However, the size of the electorate does not translate into voter turnout numbers on its own.

The idea of a singular Latinx electorate was not necessarily created by the members of that electorate – rather it was thrust upon them. Ever since the 1960s, those of Hispanic

and Latin origin have been working to have their voices heard and their issues discussed on the national stage, but it was not until they banded together and built a lasting coalition that their various populations began to be recognized. In his book, *The Rise of the Latino Vote*, Benjamin Francis-Fallon explains it further: "The relationships built and differences negotiated, identities defined and harmonized, platforms and institutions created and promoted, drew liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans alike into a self-reinforcing consensus that "Spanish-speaking Americans" (later "Hispanics" or "Latinos") constituted a unique civil rights constituency, electoral bloc, and statistical population."[lxiii] Coalition building has been integral to the rise of the Latinx vote.

Organizations like Voto Latino, UnidosUS, and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) put in a lot of time and effort to mobilize voters and push them towards the polls. The primary tactics used by such grassroots organizations include canvassing, phone banking, SMS/text messaging, door knocking, hosting events, digital targeting, using Spanish-language media, and recruiting candidates.[lxiv] The methods that stand out the most are digital targeting (specifically through social media), door knocking, and using Spanish-language media. As referenced previously, Voto Latino successfully created and implemented its app Voter Pal, and UnidosUS conducted a digital mobilization campaign called Power of 18 (for the 2018 midterm election). The Latinx community has also been able to increase registration when they personally reach out to each other. Research has shown that Latino canvassers are better than non-Latinos at contacting young Latino voters. Along those

lines, young Latinos are more receptive and more likely to engage than non-Latinos when it comes to door-to door mobilizing.[lxv]

Finally, a method that is unique to this minority group is its use of Spanish-language media. A Latinx political research firm called Latino Decisions demonstrated that exposure to Spanish ads leads to increased voter turnout. They compared similarly situated media markets within the same state, controlling for competitiveness, and showed that in 2016 the Latinx voter turnout was 73.3% in markets with Spanish ads versus 60% in ones without.[lxvi] Given the enormity of the Latinx population, it is no surprise that numerous techniques have to be used to bring the people together and increase their voter turnout. Since the disability community is even larger, it can look to the Latinx community as a guide in how to unite and create the lasting impact they are looking for.

LGBTQ+ Vote

According to UCLA'S Williams Institute, 4.5% of the population identifies as either gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.[lxvii] Although the LGBTQ+ population can be seen as a minority within minorities, they do incorporate people from all other communities – all races, ethnicities, ages. At the same, like the Latinx subset, the majority of them are millennials or younger.[lxviii] In the 2018 midterm election the LGBTQ+ community consisted of 6% of the electorate.[lxix] While that may seem like a small percentage, it is actually an increase from past elections and a significant enough number that could be a deciding factor in a close race (around 7 million). That number is made even larger when families, friends, and allies are taken into account (Equality Voters), it turns into 57 million voters.[lxx] This is a close-knit community and since many of them believe the

country is heading in the wrong direction, they are making a great effort to increase registration and voter turnout.

LGBTQ+ organizations are employing voter outreach methods similar to those of the Latinx population - social media posts, emails, text alerts, direct mail, phone calls, and door-to-door canvassing. They have also been engaging in coalition building, though in this case it goes beyond unifying the different identities within the subset. For example, the Human Rights Campaign partnered with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in order to appeal to more black voters.[lxxi] They also partnered with Catalist, a data and analytics firm, to create an "Equality Support model" which reveals the degree to which a person is likely to support progressive LGBTQ policies (e.g. same-sex marriage). HRC will use this model to identify and reach out to millions of pro-equality voters in crucial battleground states.[lxxii] They also worked with CNN to host a Democratic presidential town hall that was solely devoted to issues crucial to the LGBTQ community. As claimed by HRC, "this town hall [was] the first time a major cable news network [aired] a presidential event devoted to LGBTQ issues."[lxxiii]

The Human Rights Campaign, the National LGBTQ Task Force, GLAAD (formerly known as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) and other groups have also spent their time mobilizing members to volunteer on political campaigns and work the polls. Some have been focusing specifically on young people, conducting college tours in which they can appeal to both "queer and non-queer" students and encourage them to vote and help others vote.[lxxiv] GLAAD went one step further and launched an "Amp Your Voice" campaign by "sending a traveling billboard across the country – from New York

City to San Francisco – touring Pride festivals in major cities to raise awareness for the campaign, register new voters, and inspire the next generation of LGBTQ youth to vote."[lxxv]

The overarching goal of the LGBTQ+ community matches that of the disability community – they need politicians, especially the presidential candidates, to pay attention to them and address their issues. They are pushing the candidates to "promote inclusion and accessibility in the right to vote…[facilitate] legal gender recognition, [lower] barriers to voting, [end] felon disenfranchisement, and [decriminalize] HIV transmission and sex work…"[lxxvi] The LGBTQ+ population has been to raise its voice and create a space for itself in the political realm that belies their small numbers; this accomplishment can be attributed to their singular outreach efforts and their refusal to be indifferent or to give up when it comes to politics and voting. As GLAAD's Zeke Stokes says, "This is about making sure people have the information they need to make really good decisions, because literally our rights, our equality and our quality of life depends on it."[lxxvii]

Youth Vote

Traditionally young people have espoused liberal social policy and advocated for fairer laws but failed to turn up at the polls – they have generally had the lowest voting rate of all age groups.[lxxviii] However in recent years that trend has been reversing. In 2014 the voter turnout amongst 18- to 29-year-olds was 20% and in 2018 it jumped up to 36% - the largest percentage point increase amongst all the age groups.[lxxix] The youth population may seem to be glued to their phone, and there is no denying that some of them are disinterested and indifferent. But for many others being on their phone only

enables them to be more informed and connected than before – as Associated Press's Connie Cass says, "They are the best-educated generation of Americans yet, and they have nearly infinite information available at their fingertips…"[lxxx] People like female education activist Malala Yousafzai, environmental advocate Greta Thunberg, and the Parkland students fight for gun control (Emma González, Jaclyn Corin and David Hogg) are continuously showing the world that being young does not mean being powerless and apathetic.

Taken together Millennials and Generation Z account for the majority of eligible voters in 2020, with Millennials making up 27% and Generation Z 9%.[lxxxi] With this knowledge in hand, most organizations' voter outreach endeavors have targeted the youth. Every organization mentioned beforehand has incorporated social media in its strategies, but when it comes to the youth vote social media becomes the main tool. As Yamiemily Hernandez states, "Young people between the ages of 18 and 29 were the first to adopt social media platforms into their daily routines and they continue to be the leading users of social media…"[lxxxii] The numbers illustrate the need to utilize social media: 81% of young people between the ages of 18 and 29 use Facebook, 94% of YouTube users are young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. Social media is not limited solely to entertainment – 35% of social media users used the networking websites to encourage others to vote and the majority of the people that were encouraged to vote through social media were people aged 18-29 (45%).[lxxxiii] One significant difference in the utilization of social media within the youth population compared to the Latinx and LGBTQ+ communities, is the concept of social pressure. Young people are inherently more connected to each other and up to date with what people in their social circle are

engaged in. According to Hernandez, "Knowing that a close friend or family member is voting for a particular candidate creates a social pressure that influences [their] vote, even if that person has never voted before in an election."[lxxxiv] When taking this method in account, it is important to remember that social media can be used as more of a weapon than a tool – it can compromise security and enable a proliferation of misinformation. So, caution must be exercised when using social media to target voters.

Research shows that young people are also influenced by those outside their personal social circle. Studies have found a link between celebrity endorsements and political efficacy levels in young people. When people that are well-known and respected by young voters endorse candidates, spout political beliefs, or encourage voting, attention to political issues is increased; they become more palatable and interesting to young voters.[lxxxv] This is clearly demonstrated in what CNN labeled, the "Taylor Swift effect." In 2018, singer Taylor Swift uploaded a political post on Instagram where she encouraged her 112 million followers to register and vote. Kamari Guthrie, director of communications for the nonprofit Vote.org, claimed that numbers had spiked both nationally and in Swift's home state of Tennessee, "We are up to 65,000 registrations in a single 24-hour period since T. Swift's post."[lxxxvi] When celebrities like Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, Justin Timberlake, Dwayne Johnson, and Rihanna speak up, people pay attention.

Contrary to popular belief, young people react strongly to outreach that goes beyond social media. They are also influenced by in-person conversations and peer-to-peer contact. According to a Tufts University report, "When personally targeted by nonprofits, turnout among young voters [in 2014] was 28%, compared to 22% on

average for young voters not contacted by nonprofits...Everyone contacted by a nonprofit had a face-to-face conversation with someone they knew or someone from their community...this inherently yields higher turnout rates."[lxxxvii] Along with personal conversations, peer-to-peer phone calls also increased voter turnout, as displayed in study conducted during California's midterm election in 2018. "While turnout averaged around 39.9% in the control group [no phone calls], those who were targeted for outreach (regardless of whether they picked up the phone) averaged a turnout of 42.3%. Those who were successfully contacted by phone averaged a turnout of 46.9%, indicating that phone banking resulted in an estimated 7 [percentage point] increase in turnout."[lxxxviii]

Lastly, research shows that one of the most successful methods in increasing the youth vote is having the youth leading the charge. Young people are enthusiastic and energetic, but hesitant to vote because of their increasing frustration with government officials. They have many ideals, beliefs, and solutions regarding the problems that persist today and ones that they will have to put with for decades to come, when previous generations become inactive (e.g. climate change and student debt). If they seem themselves in voting advocates and poll workers, they are more likely to register and vote. A teen herself, Bridgette Adu-Wadier claims that "Youth-driven initiatives such as voter registration drives can help remedy the lack of participation by triggering habits that build over time to increase turnout."[lxxxix] This is why leaders and organizations, like presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, are working with "youth-led movements as the Sunrise Movement, a climate-change group, and Black Lives Matter."[xc] The youth vote resembles the disability vote in the sense that this is a population that has historically

been overlooked and underestimated; if the same tactics that have been used to awaken and activate young people can be applied to the disability community, then millions more can have their voices heard and their interests emphasized.

Discussion

With 15 different interviews and 3 different case studies, there is no doubt that such an extensive list of voter outreach strategies would be generated. While every tactic on the list is valid and has shown a measurable amount of success, limitations and discrepancies must be taken into account when considering which are the most applicable and best suited for AAPD.

The interviews were illuminating because they gave a unique context to the background information obtained in the landscape analysis. Here stories were told, and emotions were conveyed. Yet, it is important to remember and acknowledge that 15 interviewees cannot accurately represent the diversity of an entire population. While I did talk to people from different races, gender identities, and ages, those from the disability rights organizations were mainly white. Out of the 10 interviewees that had disabilities, only two were people of color. This is where the nuance of disability rights versus disability justice plays a role and it is a distinction that needs to be kept in mind when considering what the best method is for AAPD to reach out to the people it serves.

Despite all this, there is no denying that the barriers that were described were felt and experienced by all, whether part of the disability community or not. Yes, the Latinx or the LGBTQ+ groups have problems that might be prominent and emphasized within their subset of the population – for instance, hindrances based on language or gender

identification – but more than anything the interviews revealed a unifying factor that needs to be translated into action. While other minority groups may not have to deal with the exact inaccessibility issues that people with disabilities must handle, they can still relate to the feeling of being overlooked, ignored, and treated like second-class citizens. This feeling is a bond that can be transformed into partnership.

The case studies illustrate the various methods other communities use to spread their message and incite action amongst their members. But once again, there are shortcomings in this method that must admitted. First, when pitting the disability community against other minority groups, you are neglecting the existence of intersectionality, i.e. specifically looking at the context and trends of the LGBTQ+ vote and comparing them to the disability vote results in omitting the experiences of a voter that is queer and disabled. The paper has constructed an "either/or situation", not taking into account those that are "both."

Along those lines, another concern is the generalizing that occurs when researching a large group of people. I examined Latinx, LGBTQ+, and youth populations, knowing that these one-word labels are not sufficient enough to cover the multitudes of identities that exist within each group. It is one thing to simply say Latinx, but it important to recognize that this term is referring to people from completely separate regions of the world – North America, Latin America, South America, Europe, etc. – and to people that are both U.S. born and foreign born. The label LGBTQ+ visibly displays lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities; however, it renders all other identities invisible, e.g. those who are asexual, intersex, pansexual, non-binary, and more. Finally, while age is based off a number and is more concrete and precise than ethnicity or

gender, this study is putting together two unique generations together. Though Millennials and Generation Z may have some common characteristics, there is of course no denying that someone born in 1980 will have a different voter profile than someone born in 2000 – their childhoods, cultures, and means of expression will be different and would impact their voting experiences in separate ways.

Despite these limiting variables, the case studies still lend themselves to the overall goal of the project. The Latinx, LGBTQ+, and youth populations banded together and presented a cohesive front that worked hard to conduct strong initiatives in voting. The disability community must do the same. Like the other groups, this is a community consisting of diverse identities and experiences – what a blind person goes through at the polls is not exactly the same as what a wheelchair user goes through – nonetheless, it has the same capability in uniting and acting together. Increasing the disability vote will benefit all factions of society and in order to determine the best method(s) for accomplishing that, previous successes had to be examined and analyzed. The recommendations laid out are based on which of those successful tactics is applicable and feasible for AAPD.

Policy Recommendations

The following is a list of strategies recommended based on the interviews and case study data from above, and each recommendation includes tactics that can be used to implement the strategy. The American Association of People with Disabilities, while doing significant work, does have a limited amount of resources and staff, which is a major factor when considering which voter outreach methods to recommend. Another

factor is the accessibility of the tactic, i.e. while a traveling billboard like the one GLAAD is utilizing would be noticeable and a dramatic statement, those with little or no vision would not be able to make use of it which means a substantial portion of the disability community would be disregarded. Considering both of those issues and, relying on the insight gained from interviews and case studies, there are three strategies that AAPD' voter engagement campaign, REV UP, can incorporate:

1. **Relational organizing**

   As NCIL's Jim Dickson said, "People with disabilities aren't voting because nobody is asking them to." We may be in the digital age, but the art of conversation has not been completely lost or devalued. REV UP has done some great work in uniting segmented subsets of the disability community and starting chapters in various states, but the work it has done as a cohesive initiative has been mainly online. Each of the three case studies demonstrated that door-to-door canvassing and in-person conversations have impacted voters the most. As cited above, the voter turnout amongst the youth population in 2014 was at 28% when contacted by a nonprofit directly, compared to 22% when not contacted.[xci] Especially if those conversations start within their personal social circles. What AAPD and the REV UP team must do is completely educate their members on the voting process and train them to encourage and register their family, friends, and coworkers. This education would include a discussion of the issues at stake, instructions on how to register to vote, how to find information on when and where elections are taking place, and what exactly to do on Election Day (including accessibility-related details). In order to go beyond AAPD's personal

social circle, enthusiastic workers and/or volunteers have to be recruited, armed with knowledge and energy, and deployed to canvass in neighborhoods across the country. These canvassers should go door-to-door, representing AAPD, and raising awareness on the disability vote. They need to convince disabled individuals that they matter, and their voice deserves to be heard. Even if the household does not include any disabled members, it is still an important message – most likely every household knows a disabled person that deserves to be included in the voting process.

2. **Targeted voter database**

REV UP has already established a growing social media presence with its hashtag, its National Disability Voter Registration Week initiative, and its connection to other online outlets (e.g. #CripTheVote). However, if AAPD were to replicate what the Human Rights Campaign did with their online strategy team, then their social media reach could become even stronger and more effective. As mentioned earlier, HRC worked with a data firm to create an "Equality Support Model" which identifies who is more likely to support LGBTQ+ policies, thus expanding their voter database. I recommend that AAPD works to create a similar model that incorporates disability policies (e.g. full funding of IDEA) and pinpoints potential supportive voters they can reach out to. This would be a new approach within the disability community, and it would require extra funding if a data firm were to be hired for collaboration. Investments are always a concern in the nonprofit community, especially with small organization like AAPD. However, since the expected outcome would be a rise in the number of voters and higher electoral participation the investment would be worth it. It is possible that

such a model would be fruitful enough to gain funding from outside AAPD, e.g. from its partners on the board or nonpartisan political organizations interested in increasing the vote.

3. **Partnerships**

AAPD has many partners and sponsors that it works with regularly and whose support it has found valuable. However, these partnerships have yet to make a significant effort when it comes to AAPD's voting advocacy. Taking a page from advocates of the youth vote, AAPD should connect with more leaders in the civil rights and voting fields and push them to openly and publicly promote the disability vote. This would entail reaching out to these leaders, starting discussions, and creating relationships. AAPD has organizations like NAACP and ACLU listed as REV UP partners, but these groups have not been as outspoken on disability issues as their position in society enables them to be. AAPD recently joined with "When We All Vote", a nonprofit organization with a mission to increase participation in elections, however the press and publicity that When We All Vote receives (especially due to its celebrity co-chairs) has yet to extend to AAPD. AAPD must make a stronger impact and work to gain more from this relationship than just a name on a page; When We All Vote and other organizations should be pushed to discuss the disability vote on their various platforms and include disabled people in their targeted approaches.

Another form of partnership that could result in increased visibility is working with celebrity advocates. Going back to the example demonstrated by youth population, when individuals who are well-respected and popular get involved people pay attention. There are quite a few celebrities have advocated in favor of

disability rights, e.g. Broadway star Ali Stroker has spoken up about her experience as a wheelchair user, actors Michael J. Fox and Eva Longoria have disability-related charity organizations, and Michelle Obama's father had a multiple sclerosis which has encouraged her to get involved in the field. There are also the celebrities that actively push for more voting, such as actor Mark Ruffalo and any of the co-chairs of When We All Vote (e.g. soccer star Megan Rapinoe). Such people are more likely to become involved in pushing for the disability vote. There should be at least one person who is dedicated towards reaching out to people like them, talking to their agents and managers, forming a concrete relationship, and providing material they can regularly post on their social media accounts (like Instagram). As of now, the disability vote is not recognized or understood by majority of the general public, however if someone like Taylor Swift were to talk about it (or even just post about it), then there is no doubt that at least thousands of more people would be aware of this issue and hopefully help address it.

Conclusion

Naturally, it is easier to talk about these strategies than to actually carry them out; it is a lot of work for an organization with a relatively small budget and staff. Nevertheless, the interviews and case studies conducted provide a list of best practices that can be successfully adopted by AAPD. In order to address the barriers to the disability vote such as accessibility, discrimination, voter suppression, lack of information, and voter apathy strong advocacy and community engagement efforts must be made. Out of all the methods that were presented, I believe that relational organizing, a targeted voter

database, and strong partnerships are the ones that will prove to be the most fruitful. If these strategies are incorporated into the current REV UP initiative, then over time there will be a considerable increase in the number of disabled voters and the disability community will no longer be a forgotten electorate.
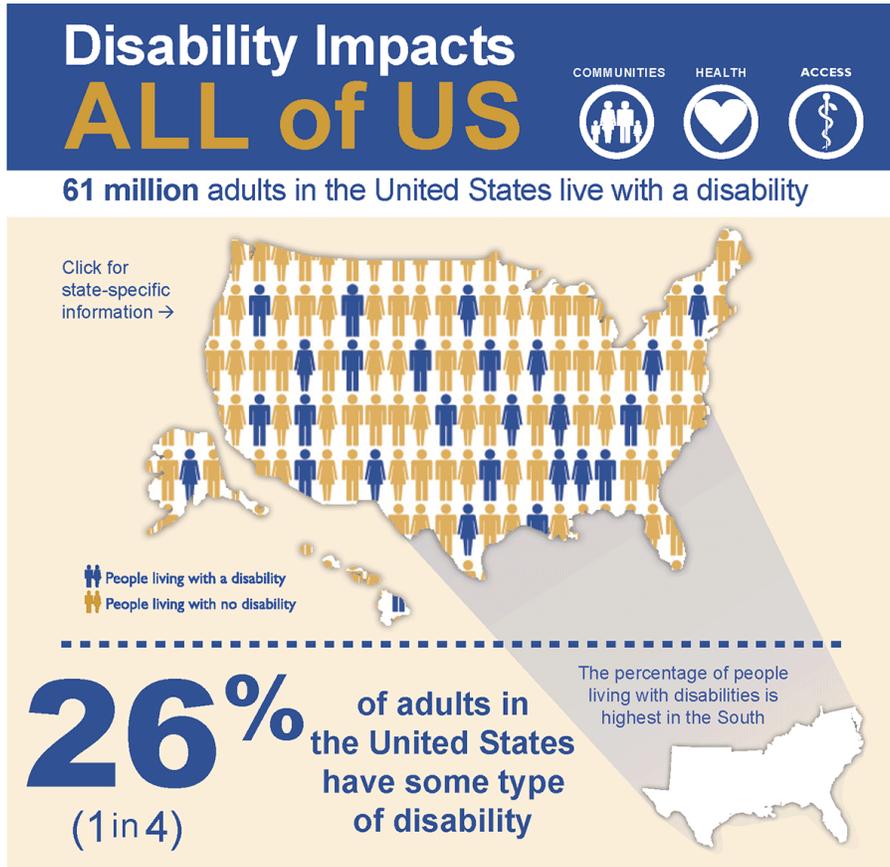
Appendix A:
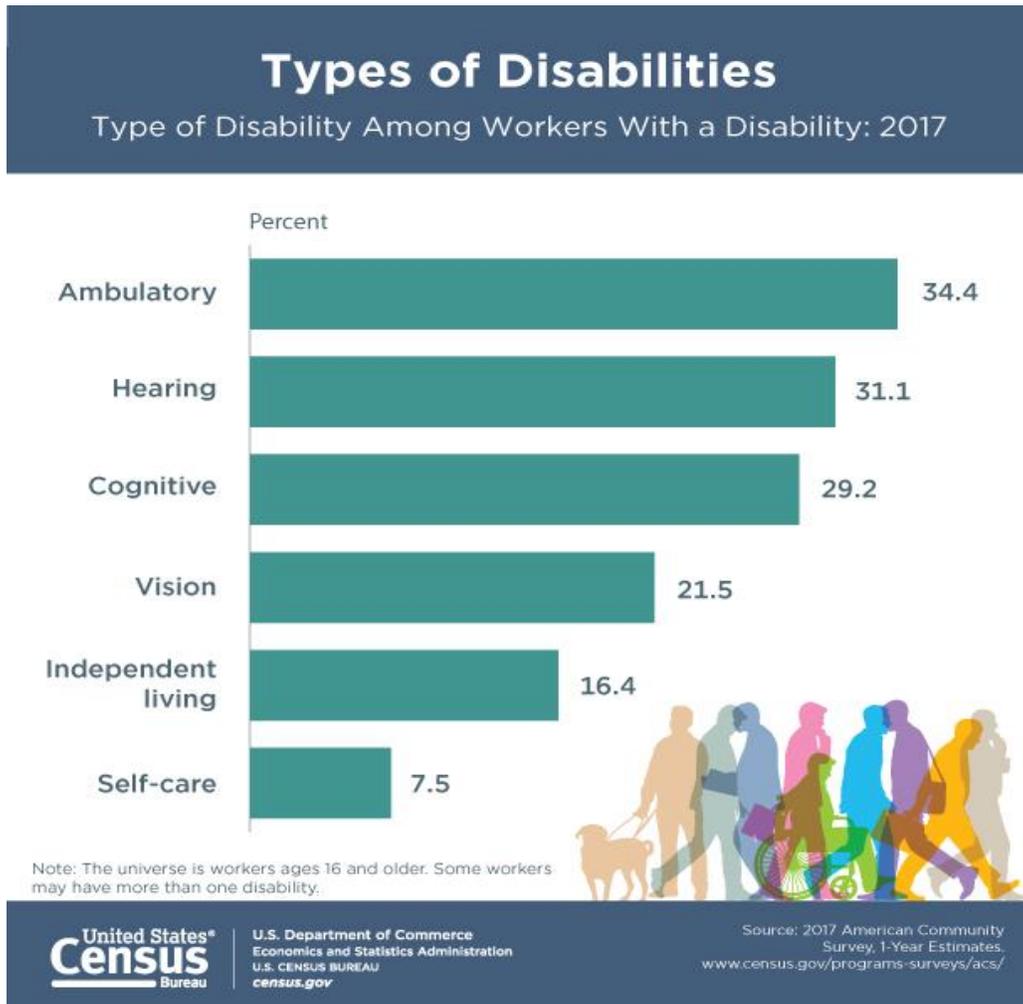
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Appendix B: Disability vs. Non-disability Voting Trends
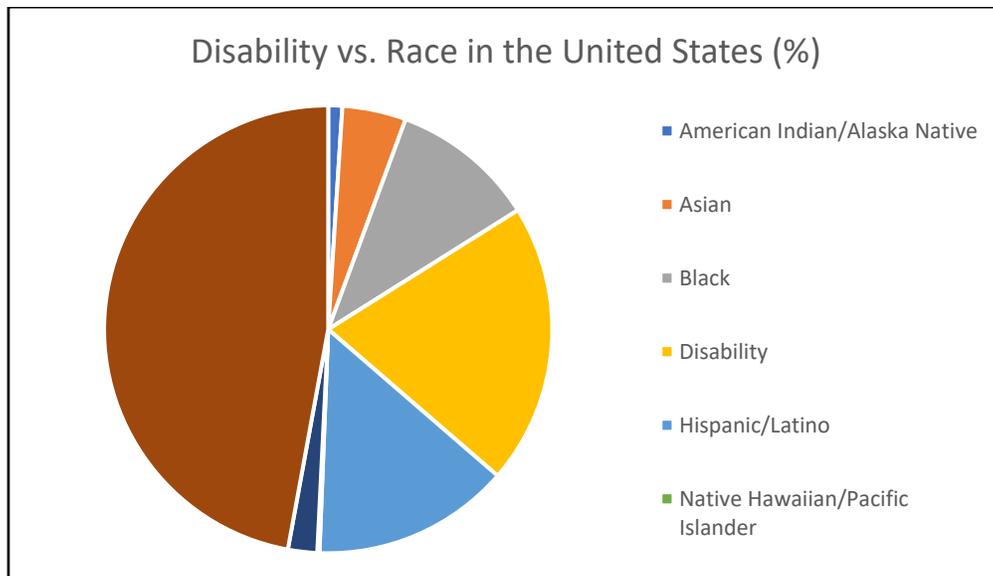
Voter Turnout (%)	Presidential Election Year		
	2008	**2012**	**2016**
No Disability	64.5	62.5	62.2
Disability	57.3	56.8	55.9

Source: Adya, Ameri, Kruse, Schur

Appendix C: Disability vs. Race Demographics

Disability Impacts
ALL of US

COMMUNITIES   HEALTH   ACCESS

61 million adults in the United States live with a disability

Click for
state-specific
information →

People living with a disability
People living with no disability

26% of adults in the United States have some type of disability

(1 in 4)

The percentage of people living with disabilities is highest in the South

Source: Center for Disease Control

Disability vs. Race in the United States (%)

- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black
- Disability
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Appendix D: Rutgers Disability Vote Report (2019)

Disability and Voter Turnout in Midterm Elections
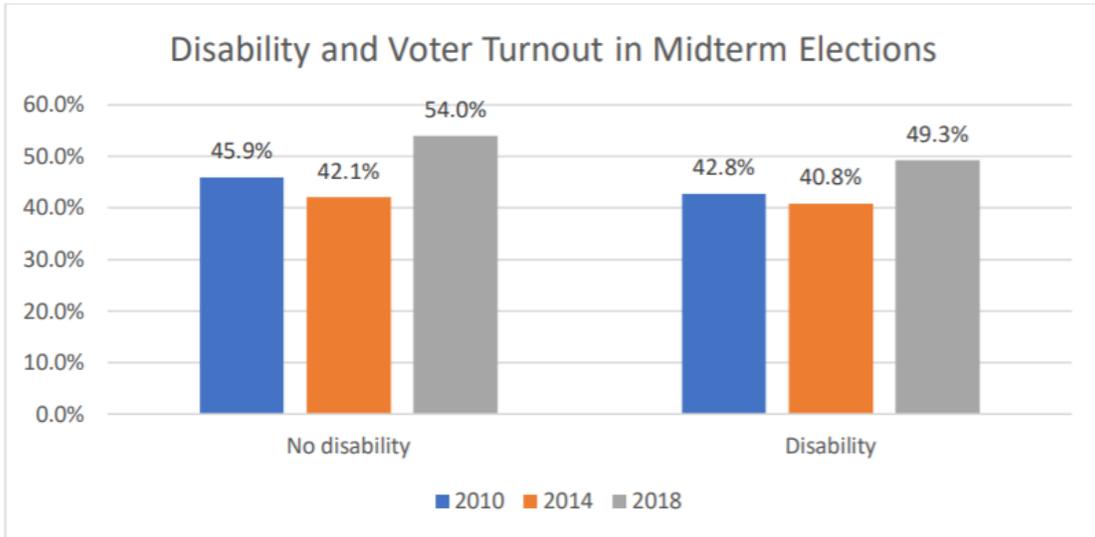
Source: Kruse and Schur

Heat Map for Percentage Point Change in the Disability Voter Turnout (2014-2018) across U.S.
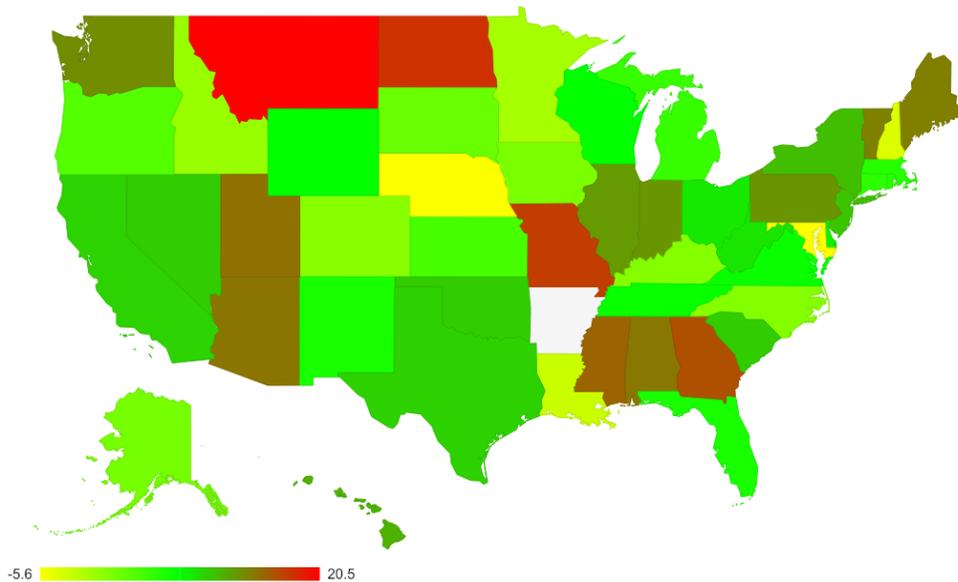
Source: AAPD

The map above shows how much each state's disability vote changed from the 2014 midterm to the 2018 midterm election, based on the study conducted by Drs. Schur and Kruse from Rutgers University

Appendix E: Full List of Interviewees

Name	Organization
Helena Berger	American Association of People with Disabilities
Keri Gray	American Association of People with Disabilities
Maria Town	American Association of People with Disabilities
Professor Lisa Schur	Rutgers University
Professor Douglas Kruse	Rutgers University
Sarah Blahovec	National Council on Independent Living
Jim Dickson	National Council on Independent Living
Judith Heumann	International Disability Rights Activist
Andrew Yang	Disability Visibility Project
Michelle Bishop	National Disability Rights Network
Victoria	National LGBTQ Task Force
Leslie Adams	Voto Latino
Narissa Rahaman	Human Rights Campaign
Halley Rogers	When We All Vote
Deandrea Newsome	Advance Carolina

Appendix F: Full List of Interview Questions

1) Can you speak to the experience of those with intellectual disabilities? There are some who believe that they do not have the capability to vote and so should not be allowed to - have you found any evidence that specifically supports or refutes this?

2) Have you noticed a jump in participation within the disability community around certain issues?

3) Based on your experience, what do you believe nonprofits like AAPD can do to help increase the disability vote?

4) What is the relationship between partisan politics and disability rights? If the ADA were to be in Congress today, would it be passed?

5) What do believe are strategies that been and/or could be implemented to help increase the disability vote?

6) How do you address voter apathy?

7) What can the current presidential candidates do to help increase the disability vote for the 2020 election?

8) What was the motivation behind starting the organization?

9) How prevalent is voter apathy?

10) Is there a specific issue that brings the [targeted community] together and pushes them to vote?

11) What kind of training do you conduct at the polls?

12) Based on your experience and the work you have done, how do you think a nonprofit like AAPD should go about increasing the disability vote? Are there certain strategies you would recommend?

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