



Public Agenda

Voters' Experiences in 2008 and the Future of Engagement

Voter Experience Survey, 2008

With support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund

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Who is Public Agenda?

- A nonpartisan, nonprofit organization devoted to public opinion and public policy
- Founded in 1975 by social scientist Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance



About the survey

- Telephone survey of 1,485 voters conducted immediately after the November 5th election through November 16th
- 10 minutes of questions designed to shed light on key questions, including:



Areas of inquiry

- Did balloting problems in previous elections affecting voters' attitudes this year?
- What was the voting experience like this year? How did it differ from previous years?
- Does the experience of voting affect trust in local government?
- If people trust in their local polling places, do they trust the legitimacy of the Presidential election?



Areas of inquiry

- Why do some people choose to vote early?
- Do civically engaged voters have different perceptions of voting than less engaged voters?
- Can we expect a high level of engagement in the future?



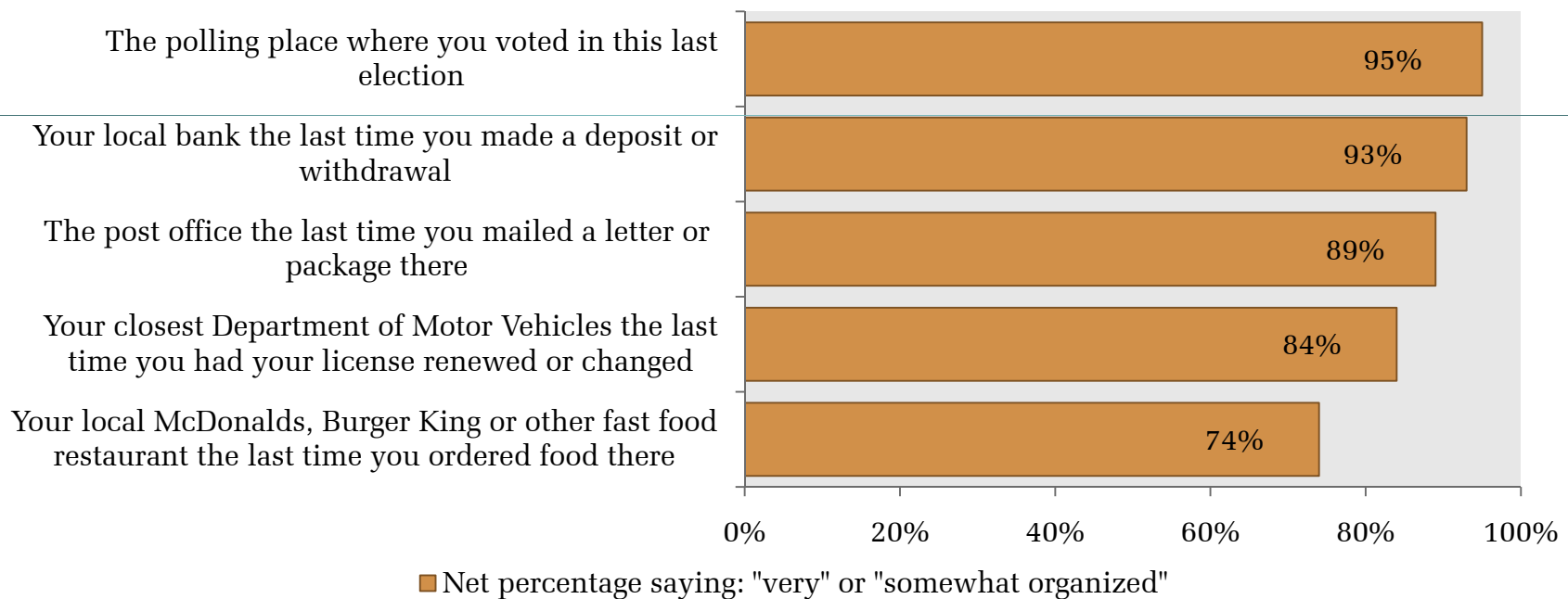
Vast majorities were happy with their voting experience

- 89% said their voting experience was positive
 - 95% agree that poll workers did a good job overall
 - 86% agree strongly they are happy they spent the time voting
 - 72% say that their voting experience was better than the last time they voted
 - 63% say the election process did not change how they view their local governments, and 25% said it gave them more confidence



Voters say their polling places are well-organized compared to other institutions

We'd like to know how well -organized you find different places that you visit.
For example, overall how organized would you say:



But not everyone was happy with their voting experience

- While 79% of low-income voters were more excited this year than in previous elections...
 - Compared with 63% upper-income voters



But not everyone was happy with their voting experience

- ...Low income voters also report more concerns about their polling place
 - 18% agree that poll workers were not able to answer questions
 - Compared with only 7% of upper-income voters
 - And 13% say that they worry the results from their polling place may not be accurate
 - Compared with 6% of upper-income voters



But not everyone was happy with their voting experience

- Not surprisingly, the outcome of the election affects perceptions of voting experiences
- While only 9% had a negative voting experience overall...
 - 50% of those who had a negative experience voted for John McCain
 - Compared with 25% who voted for Barack Obama



Voters were happy with their own polling place

- Most are happy with their own polling place—only 8% are worried about the results from their own polling place
- And exit polls report that 90% are confident that votes “in your state will be counted accurately”



But some question the legitimacy of the U.S. election on a national level

- There were concerns about voter eligibility
 - 62% are concerned there were organized efforts to register people who weren't eligible
 - 55% are concerned some people who are registered may not have been allowed to vote
 - 53% are concerned that some people were not allowed to register
 - 51% are concerned there were organized efforts to discourage voting among some groups



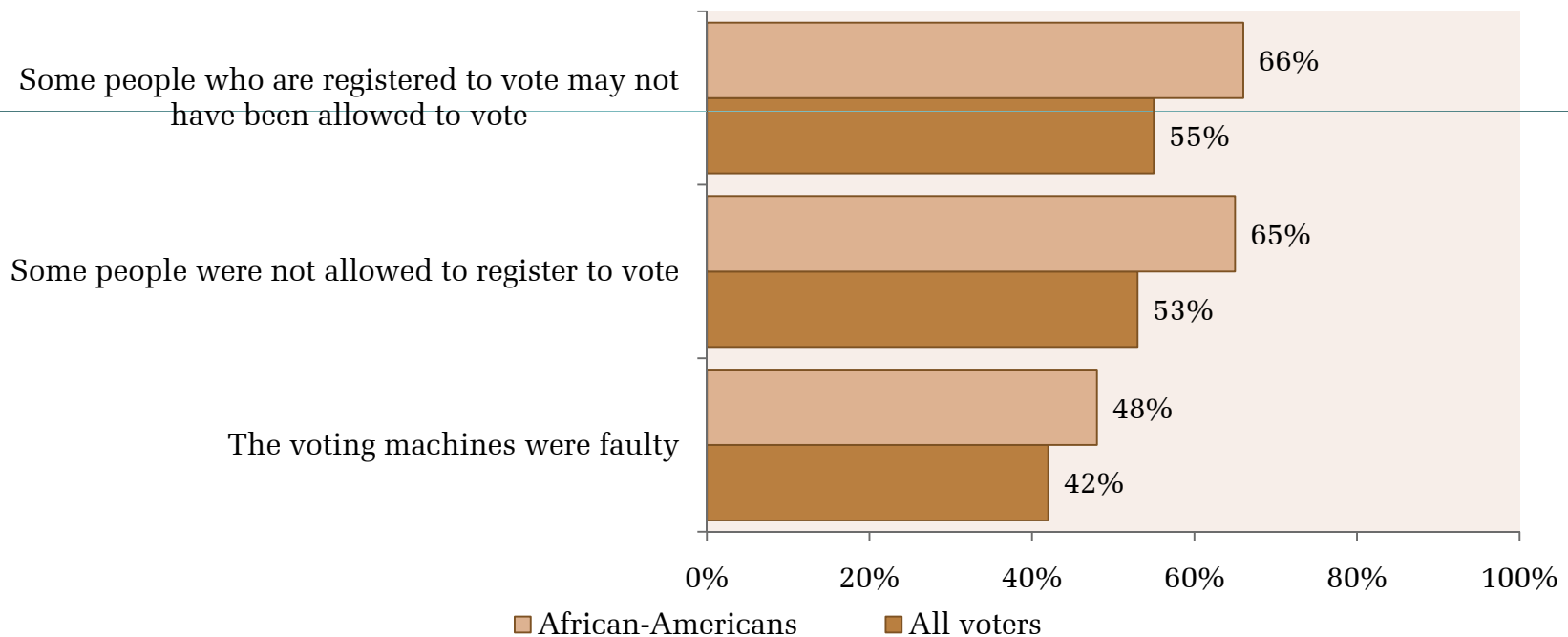
But some question the legitimacy of the U.S. election on a national level

- And some question the outcome
 - 57% are concerned that overall there may have been human error in counting the votes nationwide
 - 42% are concerned that voting machines were faulty



African-Americans are especially concerned about legitimacy

How concerned are you that the following may have happened in the 2008 Presidential election, even if it did not happen to you. Would you say very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned or not at all concerned?



Net percentage saying: "very" or "somewhat concerned"



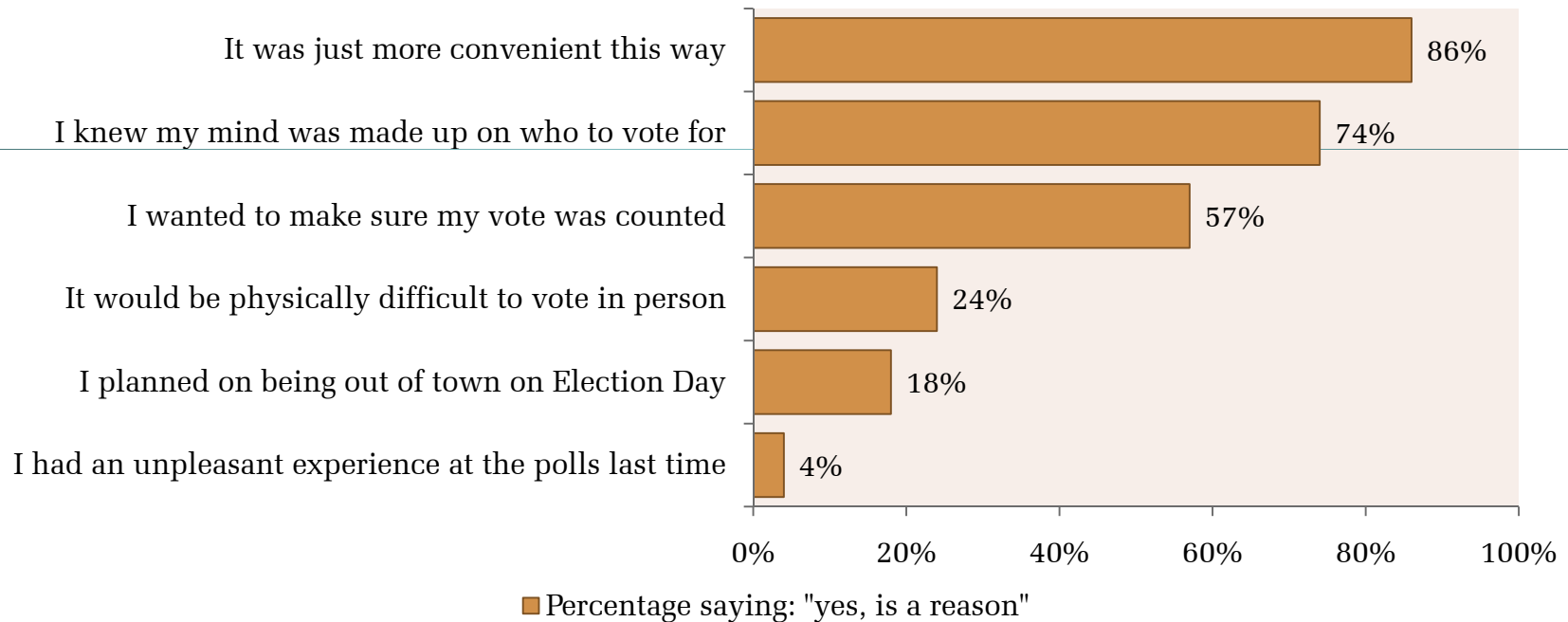
Voters who vote early do so primarily for convenience, not out of necessity

- 99% of those who voted in person said their polling place was safe; 97% said easy to get to
- 90% of those who voted in person rated the experience positive
- And 34% of all voters said they think they will vote early in the next Presidential election



Voters who vote early do so primarily for convenience, not out of necessity

Why did you vote early or by absentee ballot? For each that I read please tell me if it was a reason or not:



But there are exceptions

- Close to 50% of those under 45 years old who voted early cite difficulties in voting on a weekday as a reason for early voting
- 38% of 65+ voters say it would be physically difficult to vote in person



Voters are engaged with the election process

- 87% say they feel like they are part of democracy when they vote
- 80% say they talked a lot about the issues that came up during the presidential campaign with people they know
- 73% say they believe their vote made a difference in this election
- 71% say that they feel guilty when they don't vote



Voters show a high level of engagement overall

- 65% agree they were more excited about the election this year than most other elections. This includes:
 - 92% of first-time voters
 - Compare with 61% repeat voters
 - 72% people who vote only in presidential elections
 - Compare with 59% of those who vote in local elections as well



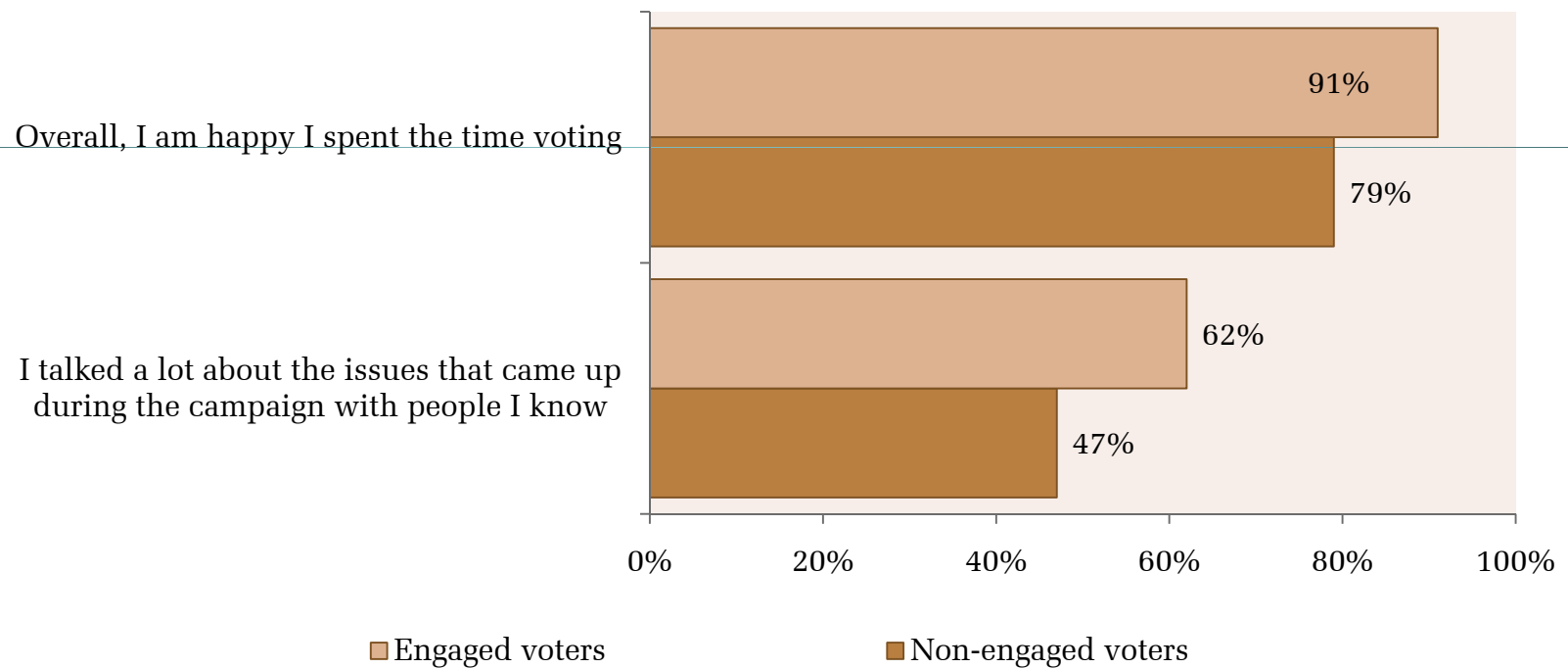
Engaged citizens have unique traits

- We defined civically engaged citizens as those who, in addition to voting, did the following in the past year:
 - volunteered on a frequent basis, or
 - “participate in any civic organizations like the PTA, rotary club, neighborhood association,” or
 - “attended any local meetings like school board meetings or city council”
- 61% of our sample is engaged in this way



Engaged citizens have unique traits

Please tell me if you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with the following:



Net percentage saying: "Strongly agree"



Engaged citizens are consistent voters

- 89% of engaged voters say they vote in every election, including local ones, compared with 76% of non-engaged voters



Majorities of voters plan on staying engaged

- 61% of all voters agree they plan on giving “as much or more” to charity over the next year
- 59% agree they intend to participate in community organizations “as much or more” as they did this past year
- 53% agree they plan on being “as much or more” active in political campaigns over the next few years



African-American voters are especially engaged

- 80% of African-Americans agree they intend to participate as much or more in community activities next year, compared with 57% of whites
- 74% of African-Americans agree they plan on giving as much or more to charity next year, compared with 59% of whites
- 74% of African-Americans agree they plan on being as active in political campaigns next year, compared with 50% of whites



McCain voters are obviously disappointed...

- In our survey, some McCain voters report a negative experience at the polls (12%)
- And exit poll data show that 92% of McCain supporters think Obama does not have the right judgment to be President...



... But many McCain supporters still intend to be engaged

- 62% of McCain supporters agree they plan on giving “as much or more” to charity over the next year
- 60% of McCain voters agree they intend to participate in community organizations “as much or more” as they did this past year
- 52% agree they plan on being “as much or more” active in political campaigns over the next few years



For complete survey details, visit Public Agenda Online at publicagenda.org/reports/the-voting-experience .

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