

Southern Voters Agree Disabled People Have Inclusivity in Their Local Community but Face Discrimination When It Comes to Interacting With Law Enforcement

By Kirby Phares, Tenneth Fairclough II, Evangel Penumaka, Kiana R. Jackson, and Jennifer M. Gray

Introduction

From October 3 to 10, 2023, Data for Progress and New Disabled South conducted surveys of likely voters in [Alabama](#), [Georgia](#), [Louisiana](#), [North Carolina](#), [South Carolina](#), and [Tennessee](#) to examine voter sentiment on several aspects of life for disabled people in the South. This includes whether voters believe their local community is inclusive to disabled people and whether disabled people experience discrimination due to their disability while interacting with law enforcement. These surveys also looked into different personal interactions voters report having with law enforcement across each state.

The surveys show that voters across these Southern states overwhelmingly believe their local community is inclusive of disabled people. Voters' opinions vary slightly, however, on whether they believe disabled people in their communities experience discrimination due to their disability when interacting with law enforcement; for instance, disabled and Black voters frequently agree with this sentiment more than non-disabled and white voters. When thinking about their own personal interactions with law enforcement, a plurality of voters in these Southern states report saying their first interaction with law enforcement came after being stopped during a traffic stop, while other interactions include calling 911 about an emergency or being a victim of a crime, calling about a non-emergency, and reporting a crime. Our results show that while voters believe disabled people have inclusivity in their local communities, a plurality of voters believe they face discriminatory barriers from local law enforcement. These results also show a large knowledge gap on these sentiments from voters across different demographics, pointing to the need for continued awareness and education on the plight of disabled people in the South.

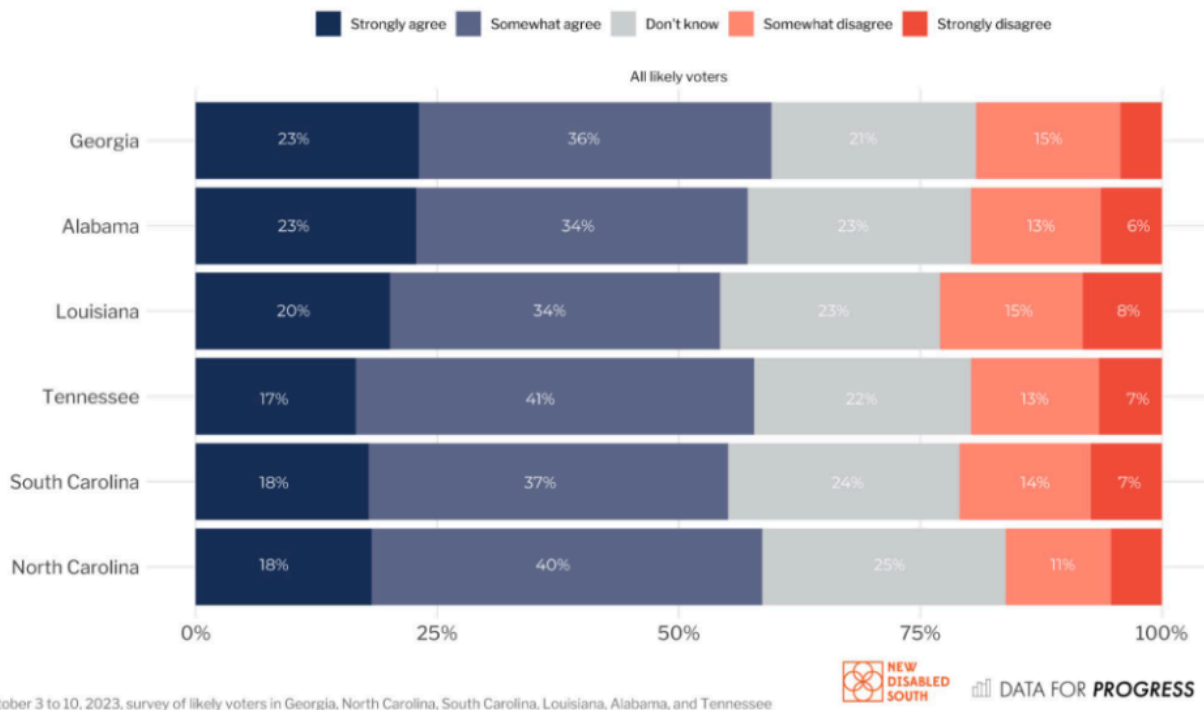
Non-Disabled and White Southern Voters Are More Likely to Agree Their Local Community Is Inclusive of Disabled People

First, we examined whether voters in each of the six states believe their local community is inclusive of disabled people, focusing on differences in attitudes by disability status, race, partisanship, and urbanicity.

We find that a majority of likely voters in Tennessee (58%), South Carolina (55%), North Carolina (58%), Louisiana (54%), Georgia (59%), and Alabama (57%) agree that their local community is inclusive of disabled people and their needs.

Majorities of Southern Voters Agree That Their Community Is Inclusive of Disabled People

Do you agree or disagree that your local community is inclusive of disabled people?



Next, we examined how attitudes differ between voters who self-report having a disability and those who report not having a disability. To properly identify disabled voters, we utilized methods similar to those used by the Census Bureau, where we asked respondents if they experience any of the following 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.

We find that non-disabled voters in South Carolina, North Carolina, Louisiana, Georgia, and Alabama have higher rates of agreement than disabled voters when it comes to believing that their local community is inclusive of disabled people:

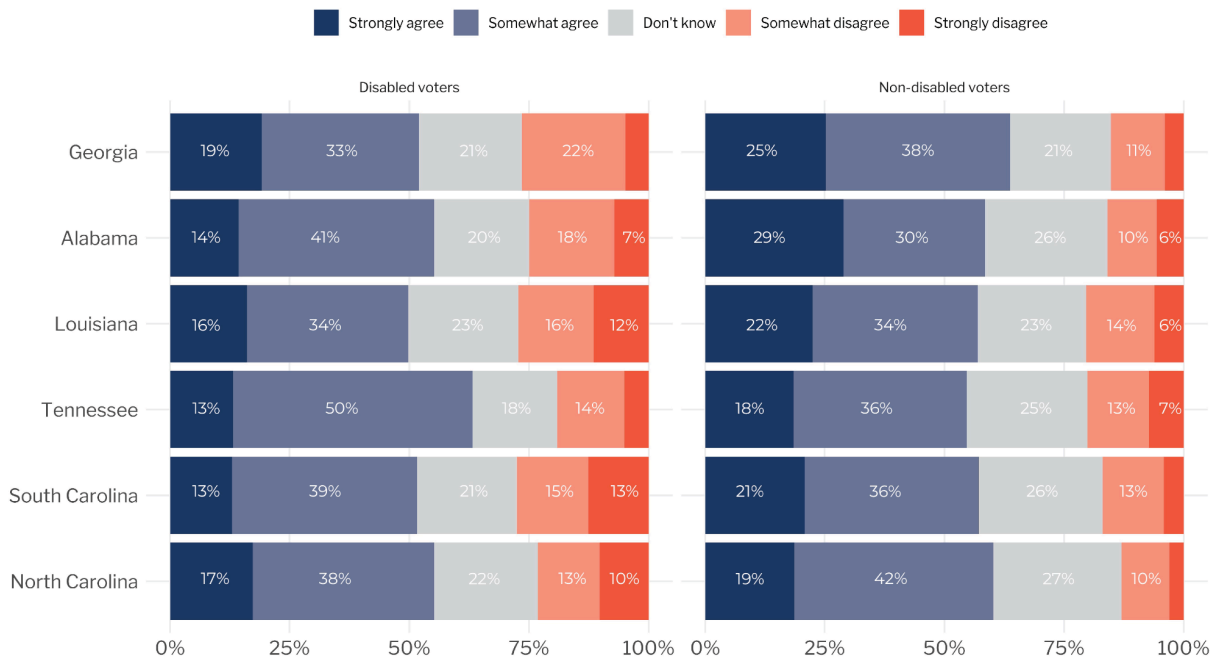
- In Georgia, 63% of non-disabled voters say they agree that their local community is inclusive, compared with 52% of disabled voters.
- In North Carolina, 61% of non-disabled voters say they agree that their local community is inclusive to disabled people, compared with 55% of disabled voters.
- In Alabama, 59% of non-disabled voters say they agree with this sentiment, compared with 55% of disabled voters.

- In South Carolina, 57% of non-disabled voters say they agree with this notion, compared with 52% of disabled voters.
- In Louisiana, 56% of non-disabled voters say they agree with this sentiment, compared with 50% of disabled voters.

Tennessee is the only Southern state we surveyed in which disabled voters are more likely than non-disabled voters to agree that their local community is inclusive: 63% of disabled voters say they agree, compared with 54% of non-disabled voters who say the same.

Majorities of Disabled Voters Believe That Their Community Is Inclusive

Do you agree or disagree that your local community is inclusive of disabled people?



October 3 to 10, 2023, survey of likely voters in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee



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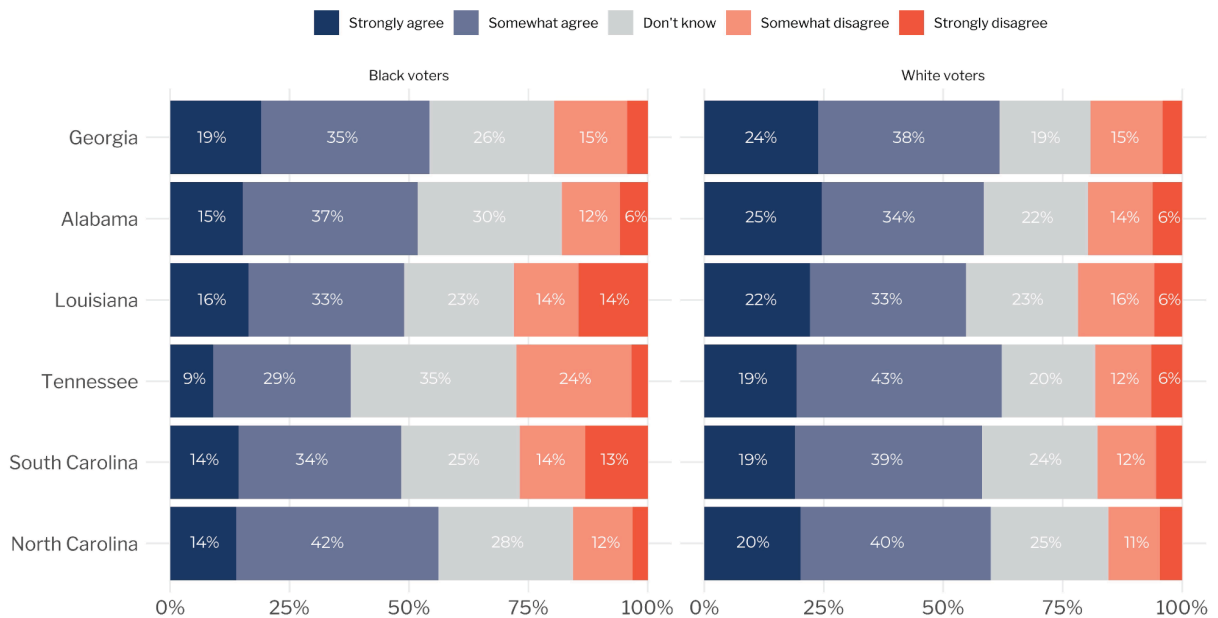
We also examined whether there are differences in how white and Black voters view their local community's inclusiveness toward disabled people. We find that white voters have a higher rate of believing that their local community is inclusive, compared with Black voters, across all six Southern states, with the biggest difference in Tennessee:

- In Georgia, 62% of white voters say they agree with this notion, compared with 54% of Black voters.
- In Tennessee, 62% of white voters say they agree with this belief, compared with 38% of Black voters.

- In North Carolina, 60% of white voters say they agree with this sentiment, compared with 56% of Black voters.
- In Alabama, 59% of white voters say they agree that their community is inclusive, compared with 52% of Black voters.
- In South Carolina, 58% of white voters say they agree that their community is inclusive of disabled people, compared with 48% of Black voters.
- In Louisiana, 55% of white voters say they agree that their community is inclusive, compared with 49% of Black voters.

Black Voters Across the South Are Less Likely to Agree That Their Community Is Inclusive of Disabled People Than White Voters

Do you agree or disagree that your local community is inclusive of disabled people?



October 3 to 10, 2023, survey of likely voters in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee



In addition, we observe varying degrees of agreement among voters in different parties. While at least 52% of Democratic voters in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and South Carolina say they agree that their community is inclusive of disabled people, only a plurality of Democrats in Tennessee (47%) say they agree with this sentiment. Majorities of Independent voters in each of the six states say they agree with this notion (with at least 55% believing it in each state), but only a plurality of Independent voters in Louisiana (48%) say the same. Majorities of Republicans in all six states say they agree that their local community is inclusive of disabled people.

Lastly, we examined how voters across urbanicity feel about whether their local community is inclusive to disabled people. We find that urban voters more frequently believe in this sentiment, compared with suburban and rural voters, in five of the six states:

- In Tennessee, 63% of urban voters say they agree that their community is inclusive of disabled people, compared with 59% and 51% of suburban and rural voters, respectively.
- In North Carolina, 63% of urban voters say they agree with this sentiment, compared with 58% and 51% of suburban and rural voters, respectively.
- In Georgia, 63% of urban voters say they agree with this sentiment, compared with 57% and 56% of suburban and rural voters, respectively.
- In South Carolina, 61% of urban voters say they agree with this notion, compared with 55% and 47% of suburban and rural voters, respectively.
- In Louisiana, 59% of urban voters say they agree that their community is inclusive, compared with 53% and 50% of suburban and rural voters, respectively.

We find that the only state where this pattern does not hold is Alabama, where 60% of suburban voters say they agree that their community is inclusive to disabled people, compared with 56% and 54% of urban and rural voters, respectively.

Notably, at least 20% of voters from all demographics report not knowing whether they agree or disagree that their local community is inclusive of disabled people.

Majorities of Voters in Southern States Believe Their Communities Are Inclusive of Disabled People

Do you agree or disagree that your local community is inclusive of disabled people?

Survey respondents who selected: *Strongly agree or somewhat agree*

	All likely voters	Democrat	Independent / Third Party	Republican	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Alabama	57%	53%	61%	57%	54%	60%	56%
Georgia	59%	57%	61%	60%	56%	57%	63%
Louisiana	54%	53%	48%	60%	50%	53%	59%
North Carolina	58%	61%	57%	58%	51%	58%	63%
South Carolina	55%	52%	55%	57%	47%	55%	61%
Tennessee	58%	47%	55%	67%	51%	59%	63%

October 3 to 10, 2023 survey of likely voters in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee



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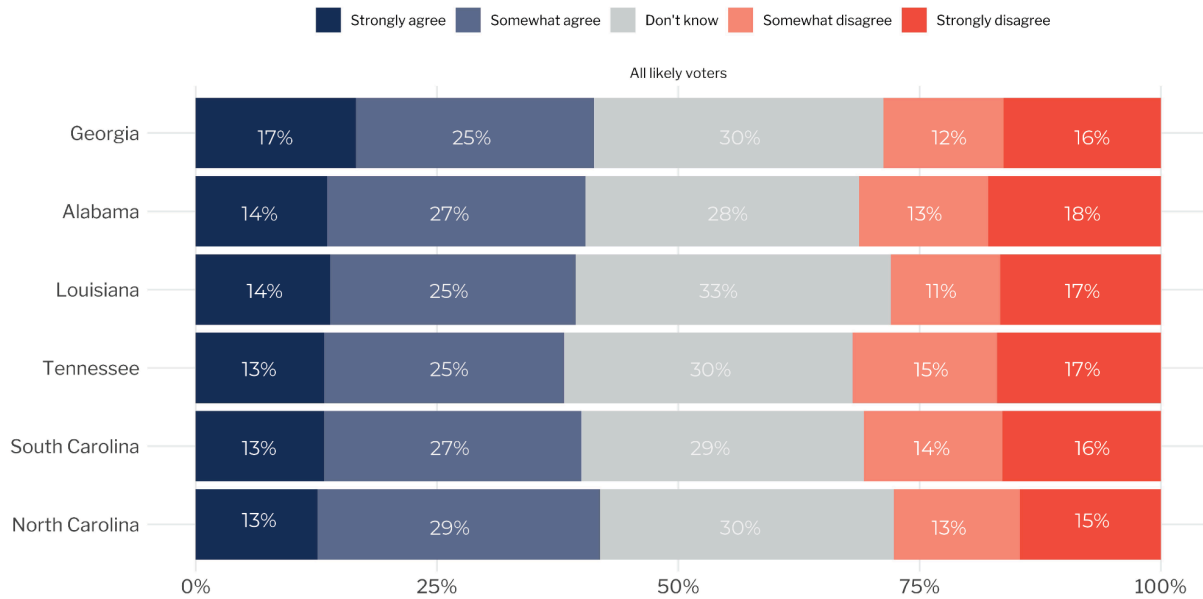
Southern Voters Are Divided on Whether Disabled People Experience Discrimination While Interacting With Law Enforcement

Next, we tested whether likely voters in these six Southern states believe disabled people in their local community experience discrimination while interacting with law enforcement, with comparisons across disability status, race, partisanship, and urbanicity.

We find that a plurality of likely voters in all six Southern states agree with this sentiment.

A Plurality of Voters Across the South Believe Disabled People Experience Discrimination During Interactions With Law Enforcement

Do you agree or disagree that disabled people or people with a physical or mental condition experience discrimination due to their disability when interacting with law enforcement in your community?



October 3 to 10, 2023 survey of likely voters in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee



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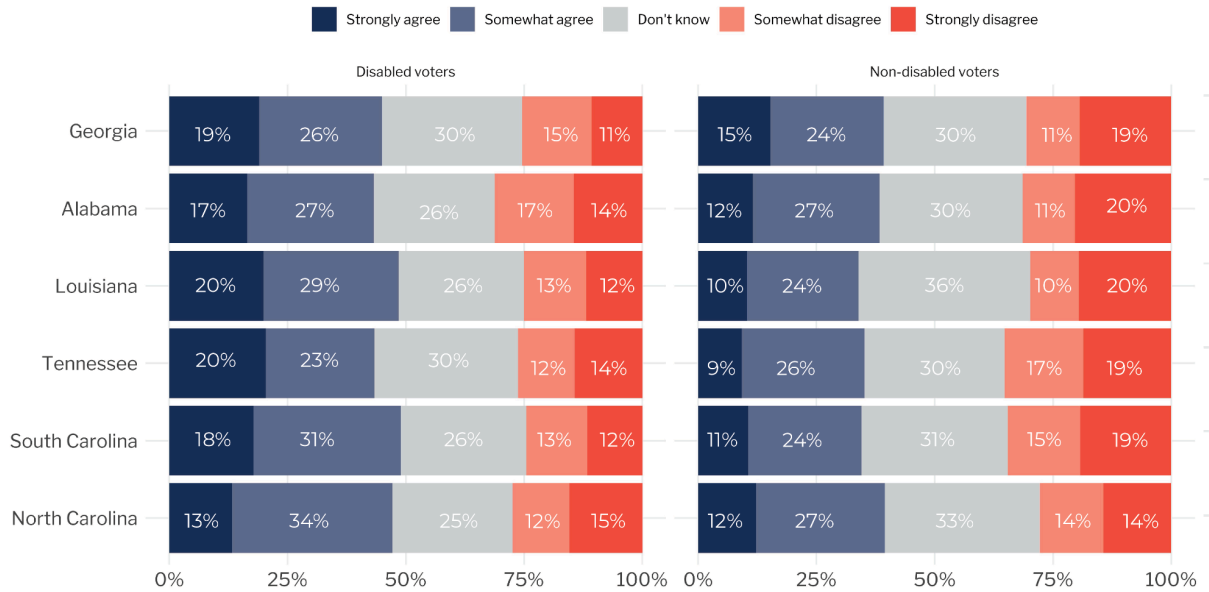
Mirroring how disabled voters are more in tune with their difficulties of having inclusivity in Southern communities, disabled voters more frequently agree that disabled people experience discrimination by law enforcement in their community, compared with non-disabled voters, across all six states:

- In South Carolina, 49% of disabled voters say they agree with this notion, compared with 35% of non-disabled voters.
- In Louisiana, 49% of disabled voters say they agree with this sentiment, compared with 34% of non-disabled voters.
- In North Carolina, 47% of disabled voters say they agree that disabled people experience discrimination when interacting with law enforcement, compared with 39% of non-disabled voters.
- In Georgia, 45% of disabled voters say they agree that disabled people experience discriminatory behavior while interacting with law enforcement, compared with 39% of non-disabled voters.
- In Alabama, 44% of disabled voters say they agree with this sentiment, compared with 39% of non-disabled voters.
- In Tennessee, 43% of disabled voters say they agree that disabled people experience discrimination when interacting with law enforcement, compared with 35% of non-disabled voters who say the same.

Among both demographics, there are many voters who report not knowing whether they agree or disagree that disabled people in their local community experience discrimination while interacting with law enforcement. At least 25% of disabled voters and 30% of non-disabled voters across all six states say they do not know if they agree or disagree with this sentiment.

Disabled Voters in the South Are More Likely to Say That Disabled People Experience Discrimination While Interacting With Law Enforcement

Do you agree or disagree that disabled people or people with a physical or mental condition experience discrimination due to their disability when interacting with law enforcement in your community?



October 3 to 10, 2023, survey of likely voters in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee



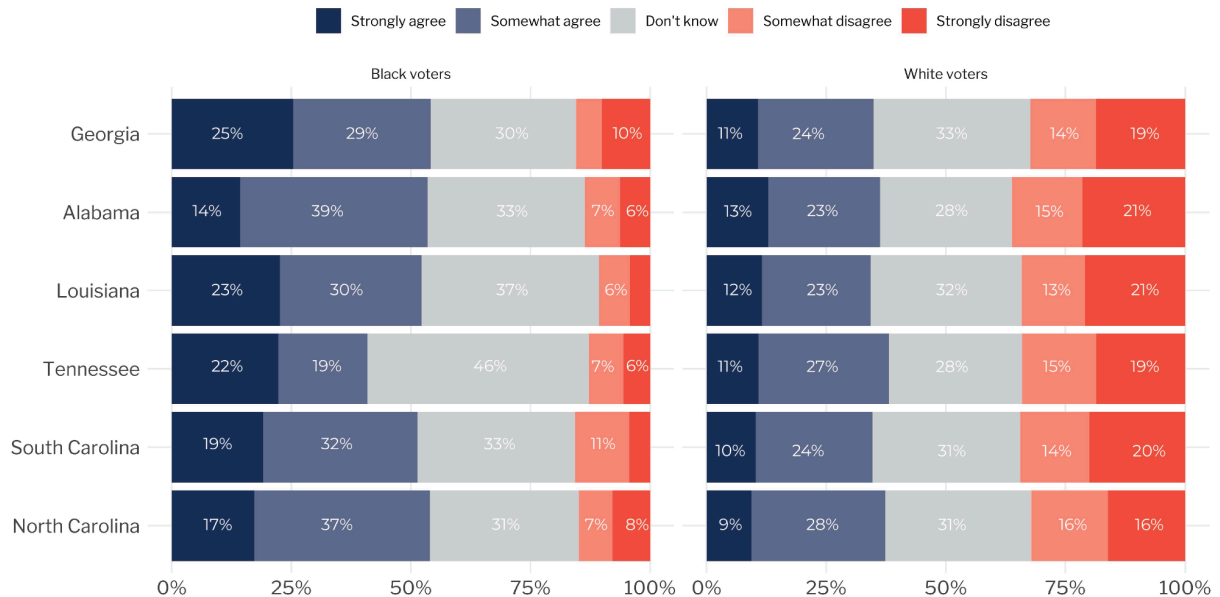
Equivalent to how Black voters are less likely to agree that their local community is inclusive of disabled people, Black voters agree at higher rates than white voters that people with a physical or mental condition experience discrimination due to their disability while interacting with law enforcement. This difference in agreement between Black and white voters is found throughout each of the six Southern states that we surveyed:

- In North Carolina, 54% of Black voters say they agree that disabled people experience discrimination while interacting with law enforcement in their community, compared with 37% of white voters.
- In Georgia, 54% of Black voters say they agree that disabled people experience discriminatory behavior while interacting with law enforcement, compared with 35% of white voters.
- In Alabama, 53% of Black voters say they agree with this notion, compared with 36% of white voters.
- In Louisiana, 53% of Black voters say they agree with this sentiment, compared with 35% of white voters.
- In South Carolina, 51% of Black voters say they agree with this notion, compared with 34% of white voters.
- In Tennessee, 41% of Black voters say they agree that law enforcement discriminates against disabled people, compared with 38% of white voters who say the same.

At least 30% of Black voters and 28% of white voters across all six states report not knowing whether disabled people in their community experience discrimination while interacting with law enforcement.

Majorities of Black Voters in Most Southern States Believe That Disabled People Are Discriminated Against by Law Enforcement

Do you agree or disagree that disabled people or people with a physical or mental condition experience discrimination due to their disability when interacting with law enforcement in your community?



October 3 to 10, 2023, survey of likely voters in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee



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Next, we find various degrees of agreement for this sentiment when looking across party lines. While a majority of Democrats in all six states agree that disabled people experience discrimination while interacting with law enforcement, only a plurality of Independent voters from all six states agree with this notion. We find Independents in Tennessee (43%), South Carolina (46%), Louisiana (42%), and Georgia (41%) agree with this sentiment at higher rates than Independents in North Carolina (39%) and Alabama (35%). Republicans in all six states show the lowest ratings of agreement — below 30% across the board — when it comes to believing disabled people face discrimination while interacting with law enforcement.

We also find varying degrees of agreement with this sentiment across urbanicity in these Southern states:

- In Alabama, 56% and 42% of urban and suburban voters, respectively, say they agree that disabled people experience discrimination while interacting with law enforcement in their community, compared with 29% of rural voters.
- In Louisiana, 51% of urban voters say they agree with this notion, compared with 37% and 25% of suburban and rural voters, respectively.
- In Tennessee, 51% of urban voters say they agree that law enforcement discriminates against disabled people, compared with 35% and 31% of suburban and rural voters, respectively.
- In Georgia, 46% and 40% of urban and rural voters, respectively, say they agree with this sentiment, compared with 37% of suburban voters.
- In South Carolina, 44% and 42% of rural and urban voters, respectively, say they agree with this notion, compared with 36% of suburban voters.
- In North Carolina, 43% of urban voters agree that disabled people experience discriminatory behavior, compared with 42% of both rural and suburban voters.

A Majority of Urban Voters in Tennessee, Louisiana, and Alabama Believe That Disabled People Experience Discrimination During Interactions With Law Enforcement

Do you agree or disagree that disabled people or people with a physical or mental condition experience discrimination due to their disability when interacting with law enforcement in your community?

Survey respondents who selected: *Strongly agree or somewhat agree*

	All likely voters	Democrat	Independent / Third Party	Republican	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Alabama	41%	66%	35%	29%	29%	42%	56%
Georgia	42%	58%	41%	28%	40%	37%	46%
Louisiana	39%	52%	42%	29%	25%	37%	51%
North Carolina	42%	60%	39%	28%	42%	42%	43%
South Carolina	40%	50%	46%	28%	44%	36%	42%
Tennessee	38%	55%	43%	26%	31%	35%	51%

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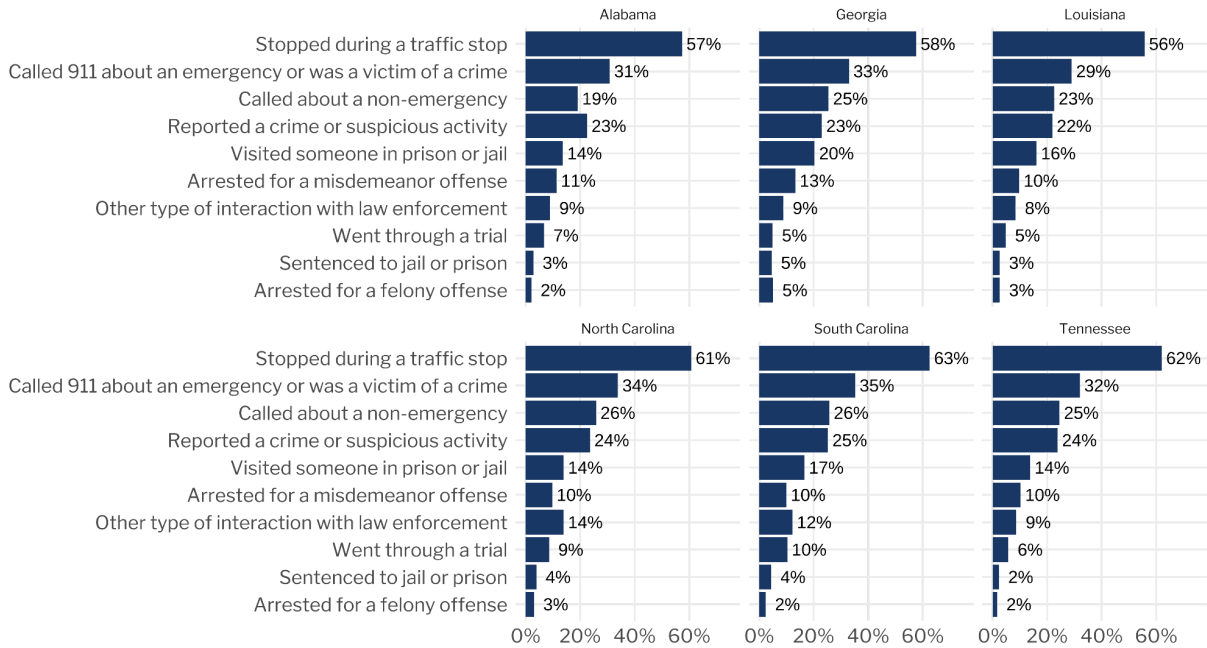
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Personal Interactions

To examine the different experiences and outcomes of disabled voters in their communities, we asked likely voters in the South about the interactions they have had with law enforcement. On average across states, the highest-ranked interaction is being stopped during a traffic stop, with at least 56% of voters in each state reporting this type of interaction. Calling 911 about an emergency or being a victim of a crime is the next most common interaction among voters, including 29% of Louisiana voters, 31% of Alabama voters, 32% of Tennessee voters, 33% of Georgia voters, 34% of North Carolina voters, and 35% of South Carolina voters. Voters in these states are least likely to have interacted with law enforcement through being arrested for a felony offense or being sentenced to jail or prison.

At Least 56% of Voters in Southern States Have Been Stopped During a Traffic Stop

When thinking about the interactions you have had with law enforcement in general, which of the following best describes the interaction?

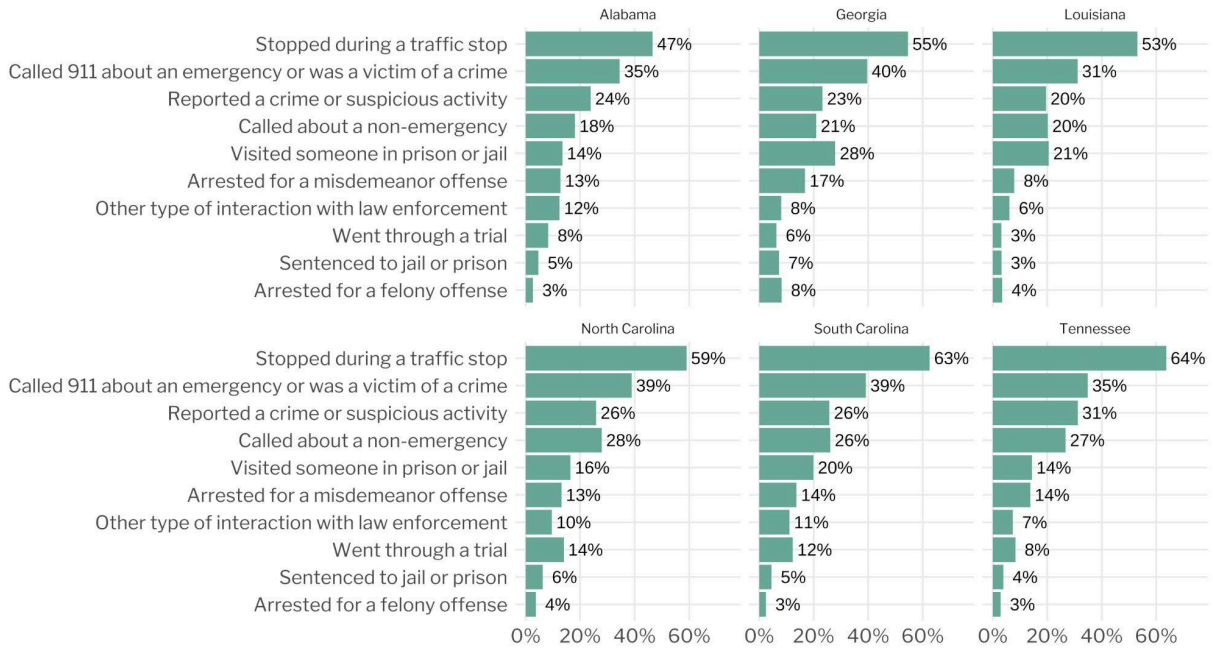


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Interacting with law enforcement during a traffic stop is also the most common interaction among a plurality of disabled voters. However, there is some disparity in frequency among states. The states with the highest report of stops among disabled voters are Tennessee (64%), South Carolina (63%), and North Carolina (59%). We find lower levels of traffic stops in Georgia (55%), Louisiana (53%), and Alabama (47%). At least 31% of disabled voters in each state have called 911 about an emergency — most common among Georgia disabled voters (40%). Compared with other states, more disabled voters in Georgia also report interacting with law enforcement by visiting someone in prison or jail.

Nearly a Third of Disabled Voters Have Called 911 About an Emergency Across Southern States

When thinking about the interactions you have had with law enforcement in general, which of the following best describes the interaction?

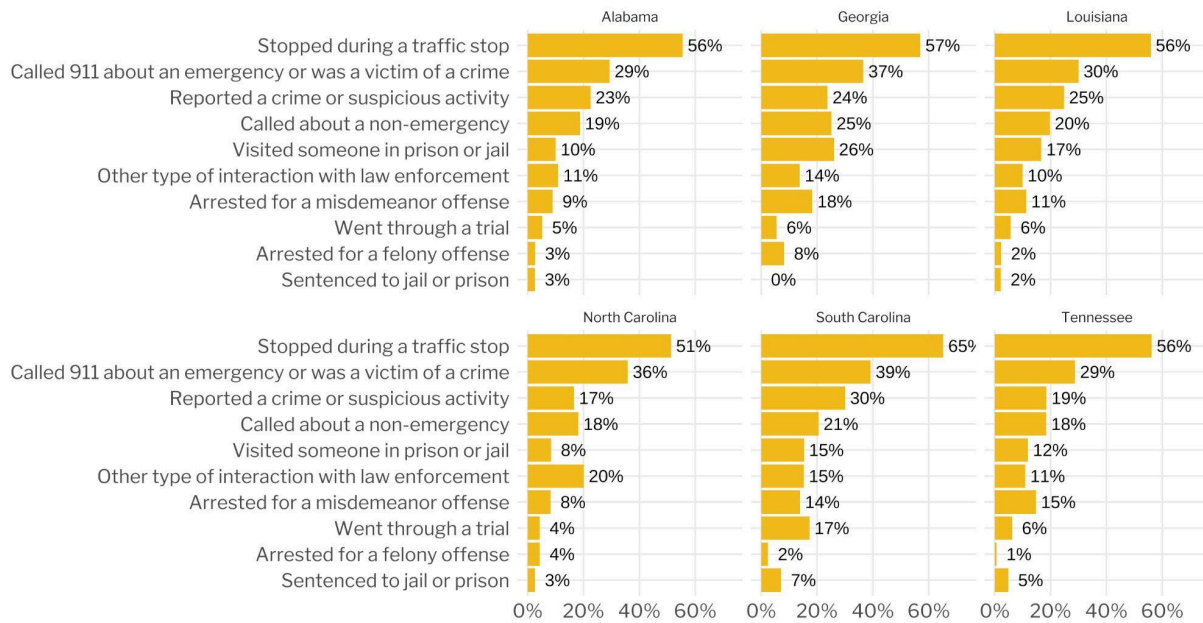


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Among voters in rural areas, majorities in each state report their top interaction with law enforcement was during a traffic stop. Thirty-seven percent and 39% of rural voters in Georgia and South Carolina, respectively, report calling 911 about an emergency, compared with 29% in both Alabama and Tennessee, 30% in Louisiana, and 36% in North Carolina. The least common interactions with law enforcement generally include going through a trial, being arrested for a felony, and being sentenced to jail or prison. However, 17% of rural voters in South Carolina have gone through a trial — at least a +11-point difference from rural voters in other states surveyed.

Traffic Stops, Calling 911, and Reporting a Crime Are the Most Common Law Enforcement Interactions Among Rural Voters in Southern States

When thinking about the interactions you have had with law enforcement in general, which of the following best describes the interaction?



October 3 to 10, 2023 survey of likely voters in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee

Conclusion

The majority of voters in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, South Carolina, and North Carolina believe that their communities are inclusive of disabled people. We find that this sentiment varies by geography and identity. In five of the six states, disabled voters disagree that their communities are inclusive of disabled people at higher rates than non-disabled people, speaking to the important differences between lived experience and how these interactions are perceived. Similarly, in nearly all of the states, inclusivity of disabled people is highest among voters in urban areas, suggesting potential discrepancies in culture and accessible infrastructure.

While the majority of voters in these states agree that their communities are inclusive of disabled people, we find less consensus across the six states when it comes to believing that disabled people face discrimination when interacting with law enforcement. Disabled voters are more likely than non-disabled voters to agree that disabled people experience discrimination during interactions with law enforcement — particularly in South Carolina and Louisiana, where 49% of disabled voters agree and 35% and 34% of non-disabled voters, respectively, agree.

At least 76% of voters in these states have interacted with law enforcement, exhibiting that these interactions are a feature of life and bring about frequent opportunities for discrimination. Traffic stops are the most common interaction overall, and among disabled voters and rural voters in particular. Other top interactions include calling 911 about an emergency or being a victim of a

crime, calling about a non-emergency, or reporting a crime. In situations in which people are calling for assistance or help, individuals must be treated equally by law enforcement. This polling shows that while communities in the South are inclusive of disabled people, this does not necessarily extend to interactions with law enforcement. As the plurality of disabled voters agree that disabled people experience discrimination while interacting with law enforcement, it is clear that Southern states need to prioritize protecting disabled people from discriminatory practices by law enforcement in critical and impactful situations. The high rates of uncertainty among voters in the South show that advocates should continue to educate communities on the disparities in the experiences of disabled people, especially with law enforcement.

Crosstabs

Crosstabs for each state are linked below:

[Alabama](#)

[Georgia](#)

[Louisiana](#)

[North Carolina](#)

[South Carolina](#)

[Tennessee](#)

Survey Methodology

From October 3 to 6, 2023, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 789 likely voters in Alabama using SMS and web panel respondents. The survey includes oversamples of the following counties: Dallas, Greene, Wilcox, DeKalb, Franklin, Washington, Perry, Lowndes, Sumter, Bullock, and Macon. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely Alabama voters by age, gender, education, race, geography, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 3 percentage points.

From October 3 to 10, 2023, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 869 likely voters in Georgia using SMS and web panel respondents. The survey includes oversamples of the following counties: Lowndes, Dougherty, Sumter, and Bibb. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely Georgia voters by age, gender, education, race, geography, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 3 percentage points.

From October 3 to 6, 2023, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 845 likely voters in Louisiana using SMS and web panel respondents. The survey includes oversamples of the following parishes: Natchitoches, Morehouse, Sabine, Iberville, St. Landry, Lincoln, St. John the Baptist, and East Carroll. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely Louisiana voters

by age, gender, education, race, geography, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 3 percentage points.

From October 3 to 5, 2023, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 709 likely voters in North Carolina using SMS and web panel respondents. The survey includes oversamples of the following counties: Edgecombe, Martin, Washington, Vance, Bertie, Halifax, Hertford, Warren, and Anson. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely North Carolina voters by age, gender, education, race, geography, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 4 percentage points.

From October 3 to 5, 2023, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 638 likely voters in South Carolina using SMS and web panel respondents. The survey includes oversamples of the following counties: Williamsburg, Marion, Allendale, Lee, Bamberg, Hampton, Orangeburg, Dillon, and Clarendon. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely South Carolina voters by age, gender, education, race, geography, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 4 percentage points.

From October 3 to 5, 2023, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 786 likely voters in Tennessee using SMS and web panel respondents. The survey includes oversamples of the following counties: Lauderdale, Tipton, Hardeman, Fayette, Haywood, and Madison. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely Tennessee voters by age, gender, education, race, geography, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 3 percentage points.

Disability Question Wording

Data for Progress and New Disabled South identified disabled voters similarly to methods used by the Census Bureau. The survey asks respondents if they experience any of the following six disability types in their day-to-day life, where respondents who report any one of the six are considered to have a disability:

1. Difficulty hearing, seeing, or have a severe vision or hearing impairment
2. Difficulty participating in activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying
3. Difficulty remembering, concentrating, or learning due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition
4. Difficulty dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition
5. Difficulty living independently, for example, to shop or visit a doctor's office alone, due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition
6. Difficulty working at a job or business due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition.

Contributors

Kirby Phares *is a Senior Analyst at Data for Progress*

Tenneth Fairclough II *is a polling analyst at Data for Progress*

Evangel Penumaka *is the Polling Principal at Data for Progress*

Kiana R. Jackson *is the Director of Data & Research at New Disabled South*

Jennifer M. Gray *is the Research Manager at New Disabled South*

About New Disabled South

New Disabled South is the first and only regional disability organization in the country, fighting for liberation, justice, and rights for all disabled people across 14 Southern states. Through coalition-building, grassroots organizing, research, and policy advocacy, New Disabled South is working to achieve transformative change for disabled people in our lifetimes

About Data for Progress

Data for Progress is a progressive think tank and polling firm which arms movements with data-driven tools to fight for a more equitable future. DFP provides polling, data-based messaging, and policy generation for the progressive movement, and advises campaigns and candidates with the tools they need to win.