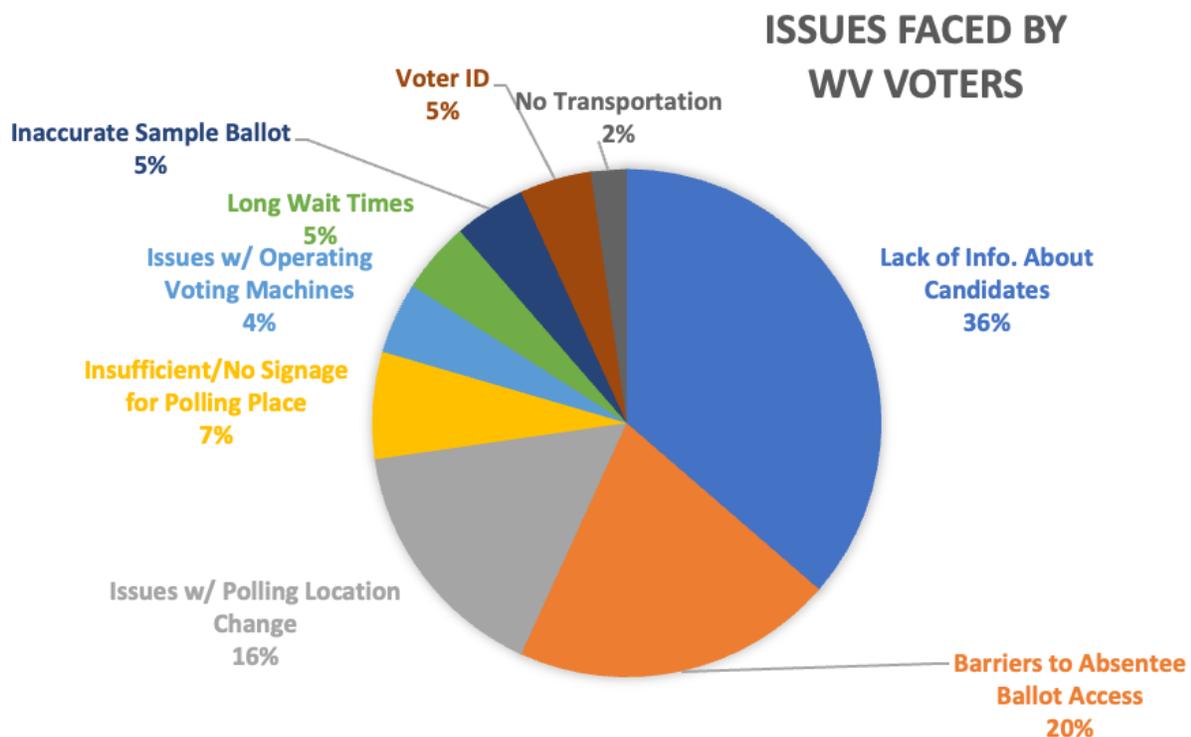
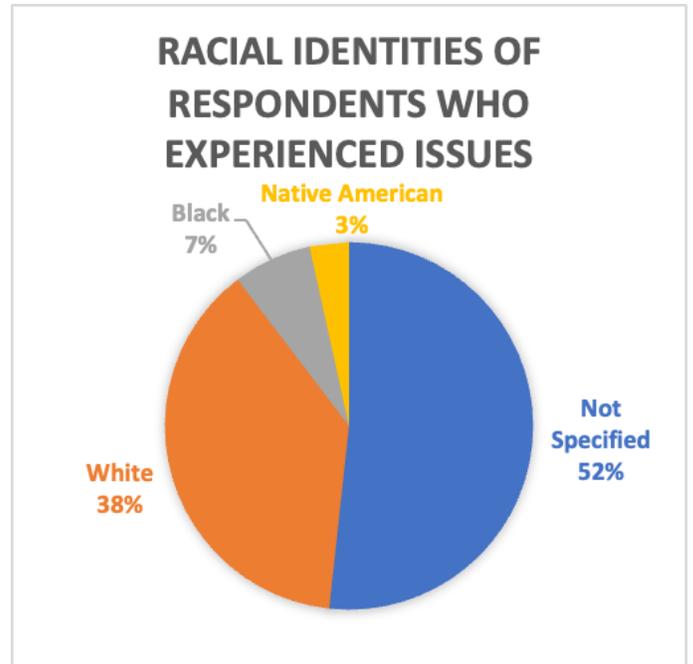
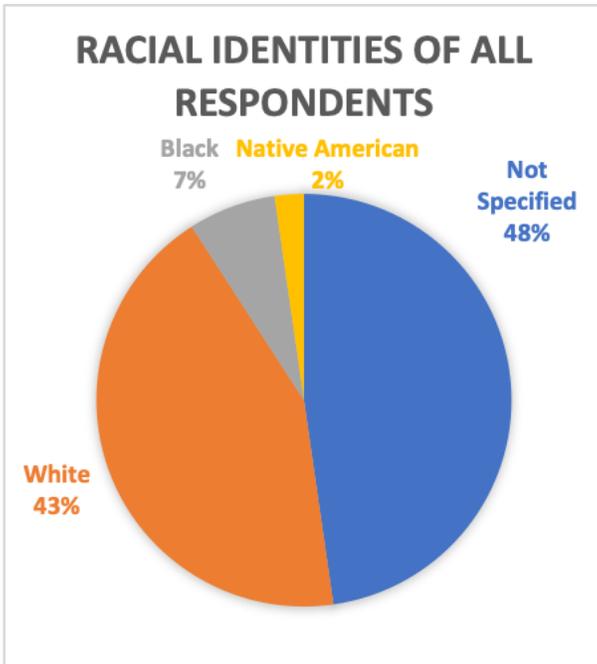


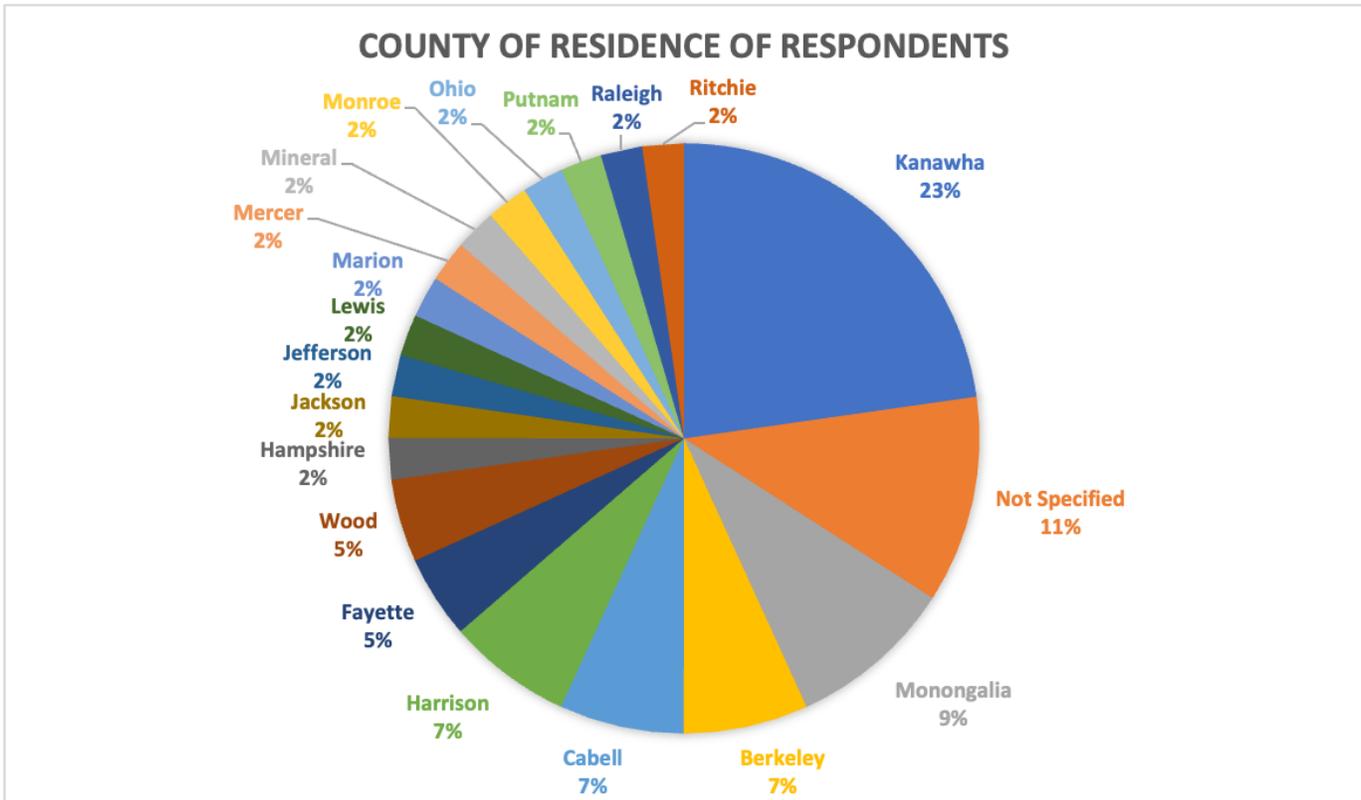
Voter Issues and Action Survey: Full Summary of Results

Introduction

The campaign surrounding the Voter Issues and Action Survey (VIAS) concluded on Friday, July 15th. From this campaign, we received a total of 44 responses from West Virginia voters. While this is a smaller sample than we originally hoped for, it provides plenty of valuable information that allows us to identify some of the major issues voters are facing in our state.

A simple breakdown of the data is shown below:





In order to better grasp the issues faced by voters, this summary will dive deeper into each general category depicted in the chart, entitled “Issues Faced by WV Voters,” above.

Lack of Information About Candidates

Out of all the responses we received, the largest issue people faced was a lack of information about candidates on the ballots with 36% of respondents flagging it as an issue of concern.

There was a range of solutions offered by respondents, but all responses raising this issue seemed to agree on one thing: this lack of information is concentrated on local candidates, which makes it difficult to make an informed decision in the voting booth. One respondent summarized this issue: “It took a lot of time to find any info at all on many of them, and in some cases I couldn't find a single thing. Which meant they didn't get my vote.”

Another respondent echoes the first: “It seemed really difficult to find information in an easy to find location about smaller, local, candidates and their opinions on various issues. Aside from actually meeting the candidates in person, finding information online for smaller local candidates opinions was difficult, especially given that many of them didn't have or couldn't afford websites and only uses Facebook or other social media as a means of getting some minor information out

there. It just wasn't enough information to really get an overview of their stances on various issues without actually personally meeting them.”

Yet another respondent brings up the same issue, but they also bring attention to the ways in which this difficulty in finding information disproportionately impacts those without computer literacy: “It was difficult to find information on the candidates running for office in each party! I had to scour the internet to find information, and I’m fairly computer literate! What happens to folks who do not have internet access/are not computer literate?”

The previous respondent goes on to explain that other states send out information on candidates to registered voters via mail, and this form of information dissemination would be beneficial to West Virginians.

Barriers to Absentee Ballot Access

Furthermore, 20% of responses reported experiencing issues with obtaining an absentee ballot ahead of the election. These barriers ranged from not having access to a printer in order to print out an application to being unnecessarily questioned or challenged when requesting one and being uncertain about their eligibility.

One respondent detailed their experience being unnecessarily questioned when requesting an absentee ballot application: “After giving info, verifying application would be mailed, I expressed my SERIOUS concerns about the inquisition of persons simply calling in a request for the application. I was told it was County Policy. A simple request for an application (by telephone) should not create an unnecessary barrier to voting.”

Another respondent speaks about their appalling experience visiting their county clerk in Kanawha County to obtain an application: “She told me that since I was capable of walking in I could not qualify for an absentee ballot. I told her that isn't true[...] [She] came back to the counter with an application for an absentee ballot. As I went over the criteria she told me the first two I mentioned didn't apply. I considered this to be voter suppression since I was able to proceed based on first hand knowledge from the SOS office.”

A respondent called attention to the difference in the accessibility of absentee ballot applications: “[I]f I had wanted to vote absentee, I don’t have access to a printer to print out the [application], this is an access issue too!”

In addition to facing difficulties in obtaining an application, respondents flagged that they were unsure about whether they even qualified for an absentee ballot: “I would have preferred to vote absentee by mail due to COVID precautions. However, the rules were so complex/convoluted/vague that I could not determine whether I was eligible. And I am

well-informed about WV election law, & carefully reviewed CDC guidance as instructed by SOS. Rather than apply & be denied, I opted for Early Voting, uncomfortably.”

Some of these issues may have been solved by calling the SOS office or going to GoVoteWV.com, but this survey demonstrates that voters are not even being informed of these resources to resolve their issues. People cannot solve these issues on their own if they do not know these resources are available to them.

Issues with Polling Location Change

Additionally, 16% of responses cited unexpected changes in polling places as major issues of concern. Several respondents claimed that they arrived at the wrong precinct, and poll workers were uninformed about where to send them.

One voter details their experience attempting to vote at their usual polling place: “We voted at the same precinct for 14 years. We went to correct precinct and they did not have a record of either my husband or me! My husband traveled 35 minutes to a precinct they told him to go to. No one was there!”

Another respondent had a similar experience with never being informed of a precinct change and being sent to incorrect alternative locations: “I was not informed that my voting place had been changed. I was sent to 3 different locations and still they had to call the court house to find out where to go.”

The issue of polling locations being switched on short notice in Kanawha County was exemplified by these three examples provided by another respondent: “[1.] A few days before the 2020 primary, the Principal at GWHS in Charleston notified the County Clerk that the school would be unavailable as a polling place because of maintenance that could not be done while school is open. [2.] A few days before the 2020 general election the same principal notified the County Clerk that GWHS would be unavailable due to a Volleyball tournament. [3.] Just before the 2022 primary, Anne Bailey Elementary School was closed due to mold infestation and the County Clerk was told that voting could not occur there. The St. Albans Fire Station was hurriedly enlisted for the vote. The work was completed and the school re-opened on May 2, but the polling place remained elsewhere.”

Another voter was not sent the letter notifying them of a precinct change until **after** the election had already occurred.

Insufficient/No Signage for Polling Place

7% of respondents experienced issues with insufficient or absent signage at their polling places, leading to potential confusion when attempting to locate these precincts.

One respondent claimed that their polling place “[m]ay as well have been unmarked.”

A Mercer County voter describes her experience hearing from fellow voters citing the lack of signage for early voting as a concern and the county clerk’s lack of response: “The large signs on trailers which are usually posted at our four early voting locations were never put in place. We were phone banking ahead of the primary to remind voters to get out and vote and a number of them mentioned the no sign issue. We, at our Dem HQ, noted the lack of signs. I emailed our County Clerk to ask why the signs had not been posted and he answered that our Emergency Services Director was in charge of that task and had left town for a lengthy conference. I responded that my husband and I would gladly put the signs in place (there are only four) but I never got any reply. So...we had no signs out for early voting.”

Issues with Operating Voting Machines

Two respondents spoke of difficulties with effectively operating the voting machines. According to one of these respondents, only one poll worker was available to help people operate the machines, and the other respondent described a long line of people trying to vote with the machines, both leading to long wait times for everyone involved.

Long Wait Times

Both respondents flagging long wait times as an issue of concern coincide with the individuals who experienced issues operating the voting machines at their polling locations, as described in the previous section. They cite voters’ difficulties operating these machines as the reason for these long wait times.

Inaccurate Sample Ballot

5% of respondents flagged this issue as an issue of concern that personally affected them, but unfortunately, they did not elaborate on their experiences. This issue is worth looking deeper into.

Voter ID

5% of respondents cited issues with voter ID as they attempted to vote in the most recent primary.

One voter had to show ID for the first time in 35 years.

In a response submitted on their behalf, another voter details their experience being turned away from the voting booth without a provisional ballot after an issue with their voter ID: “She went to go vote at her normal polling place but was turned away. The reasoning that was provided was that she ‘was not on the list.’ She showed her voter ID card, but they still turned her away citing that her voter ID number was registered under someone else's name even though she had never

had an issue voting in prior elections. She was not offered a provisional ballot, and she has not received any information on how to solve this issue. The poll workers claimed that this was the second time they turned someone away that day for this reason.”

No Transportation

Only one respondent brought up this issue as a barrier to accessing the polls, and they did not elaborate on the specifics of their experience. However, we recognize and acknowledge that countless West Virginians face difficulties with access to reliable transportation; this must be addressed on both systemic and community levels.

Unexpected Responses

Interestingly, this survey attracted an unexpected amount of responses that were dismissive of the existence of issues regarding voter access and spouted conspiracy theories surrounding voting machines. We do not view this as a flaw in the survey; instead, we view this widespread disinformation as yet another barrier to voter access. Moving forward, political organizations, like us, must remain steadfast in lifting the voices of those facing barriers to the polls as well as addressing the rampant disinformation disseminating from the rhetoric surrounding the 2020 election. Dismissing the prevalence of disinformation and allowing it to fester will only create more barriers to accessing the voting booth.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Ultimately, the VIAS campaign was very successful in calling attention to many of the issues voters face when attempting to make their voices heard at the polls. We are confident that this will serve as a stable foundation as we work with our partners to devise new initiatives to hold election officials accountable and encourage them to resolve many of the issues identified through this campaign.