

# *Which Voter Type Are You and How Can You Make Your Vote Count More?*

## White Paper

by  
Jill Cody M.P.A.

### Introduction

Our democracy is crumbling. There is no outside enemy to blame; rather, it is our fault. Apathy, doubt and anger are our sins, and they threaten to topple everything for which we stand. It is clear that, in our society, there are populations who are just barely hanging in there and those who are not really hanging in at all, such as the embarrassingly large homeless population. These populations have had so many cards stacked against them that they have more reason than *anyone* to vote in their own best interests, but alas, apathy and increasingly prohibitive voter restriction laws collude to prevent these populations, as well as people of color, from exercising their right. Bill Maher, host of *Real Time with Bill Maher* on HBO, once said, "There are two types of Americans: those that vote and those that don't." I agree, but I would take this statement one step farther. In fact, there are five types of Americans; four types that vote and one that does not.

### Apathy

There is a certain logic to this apathy when you think about it. Why vote when there are powerful political, religious, industry and ideological forces convincing us not to? The candidates are all crooks and liars, right? The ballot issues contain contorted descriptions such that *no* may mean yes and *yes* may mean no. Perhaps worst of all, Republican-held state legislatures have rigged the system in ways that make it nearly impossible to vote, as Alabama did by requiring a driver's license to vote and then closing 31 motor vehicle offices.

### Ignorance

There are, however, a large number of people who just cannot be bothered to take the time to learn about issues or candidates at the local, state, and federal levels, so they willingly abandon their vote. This is when the late Paul Weyrich, American religious conservative political activist and commentator, and his followers win. In a speech to a conservative Christian group, Weyrich said, "*I don't want everybody to vote.*" And, "*As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down.*" Then, there are those who have registered to vote, which assumes some interest in participating in the democratic process, but stay home. This again is when the Weyrichs of the world win. In addition, there are those who need to be *excited*

about an issue or candidate before they are motivated to turn out or, in some cases, simply mail in their ballot. Once again, the Weyrichs of the world win. The end result is that three sizable groups of citizens willingly abandon their vital voting power due to their failure to understand the weight their individual vote carries.

## Turnout

After a recent local election, a newspaper article quoted the Registrar of Voters forecast for the election, saying only a 35% turnout was expected because "... *there are not a lot of hot issues*" on the primary ballot." This meant that 65% of registered voters were abandoning their vote by staying at home or at work, believing their vote would not count, or that there were not enough *hot* or exciting issues to warrant their time.

They totally miss the main point -- that *voting* is the *hot* issue because so many nefarious forces are stealing it. It is the *hot* issue of all issues in a democracy. In 1996, Taiwan had its first democratic presidential election with a 76% voter turnout. It was a spectacular level of voter participation. The same year, the voter turnout for the US presidential election was 49%. What would this country look like if America had a 76% voting rate?

## Courageous Voter

Courageous Voters are both voters and activists, devoting much of their time to positively contributing to society. The Courageous Voter knows how important it is to be well versed on the issues and to discuss these issues with others, not just during midterm and presidential election years. Following purposeful, principled, and serious candidates, the Courageous Voter is not easily swayed by the entertainment news media and their ratings-driven stories that are meant to emotionally manipulate viewers. They are proactive with their emotions, and they understand that a *more perfect union* is possible only when people vote. Repulsed by inflammatory rhetoric, they are also tolerant of the occasions when campaigns can get messy and even nasty. These voters know that policy issues at all levels of government determine the quality of their lives, and they are life-long learners, open to new ideas. They see voting as a responsibility, not an option. Bringing to the table refined information, literary skills and a sharp sense of what is true, they keep in mind that elections have consequences, and they use sites such as Politifact.com or OpenSecrets.com to fact-check candidates' claims. They vote the entire ballot, even the judgeships, not just the *hot* issues. At times, they may even contact their congressional representatives and senators, keeping their names, phone numbers, and email addresses in their Smartphones. They do not treat democracy as a spectator sport.

## Concerned Voter

Like the Courageous Voter, the Concerned Voter stays on top of the issues in an election and has an acute sense of what is nonsense or crazy talk. Concerned Voters cannot be swayed by inflammatory rhetoric, and they educate themselves about policy but somewhat less rigorously than do the Courageous Voters. Always looking to learn, they listen intently to and engage in political discussions. They understand that it is important to be heard by their elected representatives, although, because they are concerned about their privacy, are hesitant to advocate for any positions publicly. Occasionally, they may hold their elected officials accountable by reaching out to their offices, and they will respond to emailed petition signature requests (armchair democracy) and, much more

rarely, write their own letters to their elected representatives. They are not knee-jerk voters. Again, they are like Courageous Voters, tolerant of the messiness and nastiness that sometimes become part of campaigns. They too understand that democracy is delicate and that voting is their primary expression of power.

### Casual Voter

Casual Voters willingly abandon their vote by failing to vote in every election. Unknowingly, they are playing right into the hands of those who do not want everyone to vote. These voters can often be fooled by the strength of a candidate's personality, and they will not take the time to ascertain the candidate's character or anti-character\* behavior. Casual Voters do not pay attention to politics until the campaign season is upon them, and more likely, they are not engaged unless it is a presidential campaign year. They usually do not use the information resources that are readily available, such as the Internet and, thus, depend on political ads for their self-education. These voters will not look deeply into any issue. They can corrode democracy by tipping the scales when they choose not to participate in an election. It was the many Casual Voters that lost the 2014 midterm elections for the Democratic Party, creating the lowest voter turnout since 1942 when they decided not to vote at all. This apathy changed the course of history that year, flipping the Senate from Democrat to Republican majority and contributing to the victories of many Republican governors. Casual Voters vote only when it is convenient, and will skip ballot questions if they do not take time to research issues, especially the all-important judgeships.

### Caustic Voter

Caustic Voters, who vote with anger, represent a clear and present danger to democracy. They are reactive, vindictive, and irrational, following candidates who voice their negativity. Caustic Voters do not move the country forward in any meaningful sense. They vote for candidates who could hurt others (e.g. deport immigrants). The Caustic Voter can be fooled by the strength of a candidate's personality and even is willfully blinded by character or anti-character behaviors. This group is drawn to their candidates or political issues because they hit an emotional or fear-based resonance within them. Americans who respond to hate-talk fall into this category and are easily manipulated by incendiary candidates and pundits. Caustic Voters may have good intentions, but they choose to live inside a simple, fantasy-based reality. Also called the *Nostalgia Voter*, the *Values Voter* or *One-Issue Voter*, the Caustic Voter believes that the country has declined since the 1950s, romanticizing the period that, in fact, featured a constant threat of nuclear war and the absence of technology that improves our lives today.

### Cynical Citizen

The Cynical Citizen is a non-voter. Stephen R. Covey calls *cynicism* "a wound of the heart." Cynical Citizens believe they have been abandoned by our country in an unforgivable manner, injuring their heart. Thus, they see no reason to participate in the political process. They have thrown their birthright away, thus aiding and abetting the Weyrichs of the country by making no effort to become involved in the democratic process. In the fiscal sense, they would be called "freeloaders," individuals who take advantage of others' generosity while giving nothing in return. In a democracy, those

who do not vote are democratic freeloaders, citizens who reap the benefits of living in a democracy while choosing non-participation in return. They promote apathy in society. Why vote? Nothing will ever change. People will say anything or do anything to win, right? Their victim mentality can be insidious because it brings collective harm to our democracy. They have checked out. They have abandoned the rest of us and their country.

## Conclusion

In a democracy, it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to make informed decisions at least once every year. Yes, there are elections *every* year. Vote for your school board. Vote for your city council. Vote for your representatives. Become as involved as your busy life permits, and do your research so that you can cast your vote with supreme confidence. Never let anyone tell you that your vote doesn't matter. Do you know when your vote doesn't matter? When you don't cast it. Read. Talk. Listen. If your elected representatives do something of which you disapprove, you had better let them know. If they do something you endorse, let them know that too. In a functioning republic, the elected officials should occupy the role, more or less, of figureheads, the true power resting in the hands of each and every one of us--making decisions together, supporting each other, doing what we think is best. That's democracy.

## Saving America Through the Ballot Box

Can you stand up and move a *step up* from your current self-identified Citizen Voter Type? If you are already a Courageous Voter, will you consider running for office? You would make a great candidate. Concerned Citizens, you are so close to becoming a Courageous Voter. Ask yourself what action you can take to be a bit more active and focused. If you identified as a Casual Citizen Type, think about how you can become more consistent in your voting. Does it just require planning ahead? It goes against human nature to determine that you may be a Caustic Voter. However, our democracy may depend on you being honest with yourself. Please take a serious look at how unhelpful you may be to the American political process by exemplifying anger and reactive behavior. The call to action for Cynical Citizens is to reevaluate your role in the political process; again, our democracy may depend on it. Each and every eligible voter must take a stand through the ballot box to wrest control from the billionaires and corporations who have grabbed it.

## Which Voter Type Are You?

Watch the video "Don't Vote~ Ruin Your Country" here: [\(link\)](#)

Learn more about the book and the author here: [\(link to home page\)](#)

\* Note: I define anti-character behavior as intentionally committing wrongful acts that do not usually rise to the level of criminality. When they do reach the level of criminality they are executed with the expectation that no accountability will follow.