

The Fundamentals Of Intelligent Voting

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As we prepare for November's elections, it will be crucial for us to apply critical thinking, efficient fact-finding, and conscious thought to our voting process. Selecting the right candidate has everything to do with understanding the nation's needs and each candidate's ability to address them. Intelligent voting starts by avoiding diversionary and distracting tactics and learning how to become a discerning voter who thoroughly researches the issues relevant to any particular election and develops a clear understanding of each candidate's willingness and capabilities regarding those issues. Start your process by removing those diversionary and distracting circumstances.

8 Voting Traps To Avoid

The Herd Mentality—Be an individual. Try not to vote based on what the world is doing and how they are voting. You lose your individuality and compromise your fact-finding capabilities by following the crowd. Before you decide to accept someone else's opinion, do the work yourself. Research each issue. Know the facts. This will help you understand each candidate's political agenda and give you the necessary information to make an intelligent decision.

Identification And Acceptance—Never vote to be accepted into any political or social group. You don't earn acceptance by blindly following the coercive efforts of others. Research the information, get the facts, make your own decision, and be willing to stand behind it.

Single-Minded Focus—No election is about a single issue. Topics like discrimination, personal choice and right to life, and border issues, to mention a few, are all important issues. Try to stay away from selecting one or two of them and making these your deciding factors. Research all of the foreign and domestic issues, and do your best to understand how each candidate can be of service in all of them.

Media Pressure—Journalism used to be more concerned with presenting the facts and staying unbiased. In today's world, it's a bit more difficult to obtain relevant information since media outlets may be skewed in favor of one candidate or another. It makes good sense to monitor the reports from various outlets, even

those that don't seem to support your candidate. This helps you to obtain more relevant information.

Bullying—We live in a world where people often attack others who do not share the same opinion as their own. Bullying has little to do with the collection and dissemination of factual information. It is often an emotional tactic used to pressure you to do what others want. Keep in mind that voting is about intellectually collecting and understanding the facts. Aggressive, emotional persuasion has nothing to do with this process. Walk away from the assaults.

Glitter—Candidates often secure the help of celebrities and other socially prominent people to endorse their campaigns. There is one rule that you should follow. Make sure they are giving you well-researched, factual information. When they do, research it yourself. Don't fall into the trap of casting your vote for a candidate because someone famous is endorsing them. This has nothing to do with sound fact-finding. It robs you of intellectual freedom and your right to think for yourself. Cast your vote based on the facts, not the glitter.

Righteous Anger And Preconceived Notions—Be wary of over-emotional voters who have their fists in the air and are launching angry attacks at one candidate or the other. Angry people rarely have the facts. Their emotion blocks their ability to gather factual information, and the adrenaline rush caused by their anger convinces them that they are doing the right thing. Their views tend to be simplistic and poorly researched. Stay close to those who are calmly discussing the information and are willing to listen to different points of view.

Buying Into Malicious Attacks—You need information about each candidate's platform and what they are willing and able to do regarding the many issues surrounding their candidacy. You get no information through the malicious attacks expressed by candidates from whom you need information. Attacking another candidate usually means the attacker has some holes in their plan. Be willing to vote solely on the information they provide about their plans to address the relevant issues their campaigns need to cover.

The Ten Fundamentals Of Intelligent Voting

Slow Down—Intelligent decisions are arrived at through sound information gathering. Going too fast can lead to conclusions based on small sample sizes of information. You don't need to make a decision immediately. Slow down and give

yourself the time you need to gather the information that can lead to an intelligent decision.

Listen to all points of view with an open mind—An intelligent decision is rarely, if ever, based upon one point of view. All too often, we look for information that supports our point of view without considering that the views of others may be based on sound information. Be willing to listen as others present the information they have.

Be a multifaceted fact-finder—Start your fact-finding with the understanding that examining as much information as possible is essential. Never assume you've arrived at the correct conclusion until you've examined information from various sources and perspectives.

Keep your emotions to the bare minimum—Emotions are extremely efficient information killers. They cause us to make quick decisions and attack others unnecessarily, and they keep us from gathering information that can be essential in making the right decision. Emotions often bring us to a conclusion long before we have taken the time to examine the information. So, keep your emotions in check as much as you can. You will know if they're becoming a problem if you feel stressed, less tolerant of others, and unwilling to consider alternative perspectives.

Consider all campaign issues—All too often, we tend to base our vote on one or two issues that are important to us. Many issues are important in any election, especially a presidential election. Make a list of all the issues. Get as much information as possible on each candidate's position on those issues and what they intend to do about them. Base your vote on their big-picture platform.

Refrain from debating with emotional people—Debates with emotionally charged people rarely, if ever, yield any productive information. They usually devolve into arguments steeped in anger. Be willing to discuss the information everyone is gathering, whether or not it supports your initial feelings. Intelligent conversations with people willing to express the facts they are finding and any information relevant to the election issues are the best ways to help you arrive at an intelligent decision.

Be a question asker—Be willing to ask other people questions, not to challenge them, but to get a better feeling about the information they are expressing. As far as the candidates are concerned, you need to understand where they stand on all relevant issues, exactly how they intend to address them, when they will begin to

address those issues, and how you can measure their progress. Remember, the person you are voting for must be able to address all the relevant problems, domestic and foreign, and have plans they are willing to share to illustrate how they will address these issues. Hold the candidates accountable. Vote for the one who has actionable plans to address all the issues.

Get the source of the information—Whenever someone provides you with information, ask them for the source of their information. Avoid general responses like I heard it on the news or everyone's talking about it. Know exactly where it came from so you can investigate what's being purported and determine if including it in the information you are collecting makes sense.

Treat others' opinions with respect—Treating others' views with respect fosters good feelings and peaceful, informative, and efficient information exchanges. We will all need to share space in this nation when the elections are over. The willingness to respect the opinions of others starts that process and provides a fundamental basis for continued cooperation.

Each candidate's potential to inspire unity, not division, should be one of your primary considerations—A red flag for a candidate that will have difficulty uniting the nation is their willingness to engage in angry and negative outbursts directed at their adversary. If they are respectful, stay focused on important issues, and are willing to share their plans for addressing them, it's a good indication regarding how they will conduct themselves in office. Get away from the mud-slinging and the negativity. Stay focused on the information you need to compile, and make your decision based on what the candidate has to offer, not their ability to annihilate the other candidate.

In any election year, your first decision is not who to vote for. It is to become an intelligent voter. Do exercise your right to vote. Before you do, however, do everything you can to gather the information you need and avoid those traps that can impede your ability to make sound decisions. Ultimately, your vote will only be as good as the process you used to make your decision. Be a sound, fundamental voter. Go slow, get the facts, ask questions, respect the opinions of others, and always consider the bigger picture.

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