

In-depth survey compares nonvoters to voters

December 17 2012, by Wendy Leopold

What do nonvoters look like, can they be categorized and why don't they vote? To answer these and other questions, a Northwestern University journalism professor and Ipsos Public Affairs conducted an in-depth post-Election Day sample survey between Nov. 7 and Nov. 19, 2012.

The results of their online interviews with 1,686 [American citizens](#) aged 18 and older (516 who voted in the 2012 [presidential election](#) and 1,170 who did not) are presented in Nonvoters in America, a new website at www.nonvotersinamerica.com.

"After investigating the behaviors and opinions of nonvoters versus voters and comparing them in terms of [demography](#) and attitudes, we also identified six subgroups of nonvoters," said Ellen Shearer, professor of journalism at Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications.

Shearer also partnered with [USA Today](#), which released its own stories based on the poll in its online edition Dec. 13 and in its print edition today (Dec. 14).

Among key findings of the [national survey](#):

- Nonvoters tend to skew younger than voters, with nearly a third less than 30 years old. They also tend to be less educated than voters, lean Democratic (26 percent) versus Republican (15 percent), but are more likely than voters to affiliate themselves with a party other than Democratic or Republican (13 percent) or refuse to affiliate with any

party (14 percent). Nearly half said they would have voted for President [Barack Obama](#); 26 percent said they'd have voted for [Mitt Romney](#).

- More than four in 10 nonvoters have never voted, and few said their friends or family voted.
- Six in 10 nonvoters said they chose not to vote.
- Nonvoters are most likely to say [Internet voting](#), cleaning up government and having more or better candidates would encourage people like them to vote.

"It's clear that increasing civic participation among nonvoters has no single solution, but some nonvoters, like the ones we've named the 'doers,' might become more engaged in politics and political news if politicians and news organizations take the time to listen to them," said Shearer. She is co-author with Medill Professor Jack Doppelt of the 1998 book "Nonvoters: America's No-Shows."

The nonvoter subgroups:

- The "pessimists"—27 percent of nonvoters—are middle-aged and slightly older retired men with lower education and income who like neither Obama or Romney, express dislike of government generally and Obama specifically, feel the country is headed on the wrong track and are not civically engaged. They rarely vote, are conservative-leaning, prefer small government and are pessimistic about the future of the economy.
- The "too busys"—20 percent of nonvoters—are full-time working women or retired women with incomes between \$25,000 and \$75,000 who didn't vote for logistical reasons. They are civically engaged, believe in "big government," have voted in the past, are politically moderate and

identify with one of the two major political parties.

- The "strugglers"—19 percent of non-voters—are more likely to be female, low income and low employment. Although they are not registered to vote, they support Obama and are very worried about the economy. They dislike Romney, support a big role for the government in terms of the social safety net, are unlikely to volunteer or participate in civic activities and never vote.
- The "tuned outs" —16 percent of nonvoters—are more likely to be younger individuals and/or students who have no interest in or knowledge of political or electoral events and little awareness of current events. They feel it makes no difference to their lives who is elected, consume very little news, believe their vote doesn't count and participate in no civic activity.
- The "active faithfuls"—11 percent of nonvoters – are from the South, employed (most likely self-employed or part-time), educated, with middle to high income. They are religious, active in church and volunteer work and identify as black or white but not Hispanic or "other." They report not voting for religious reasons (13 percent cite religious reasons vs. only 4 percent of all nonvoters) or because they dislike both candidates. They are civically engaged, see differences between the parties and are big news and information consumers who know how government and politics work. They identify as members of "other" political parties and as moderates.
- The "doers"—8 percent of nonvoters—are young and Hispanic, educated and male and are big media consumers who didn't vote for logistical reasons. They are highly engaged in politics and elections, support Obama and Democrats, identify as liberal and are pro-government and pro-government institutions. They are optimistic about the nation's future and the economy, and very knowledgeable about

government and how it works. Engaged in local politics, they feel removed from Washington, D.C.

Shearer noted that the new survey offers some hope for those wanting to increase voter turnout, but also cautioned against thinking there is a quick fix.

"Nonvoters and voters alike strongly supported Internet voting as a way to increase voter turnout," Shearer said. "But they also said better candidates and better government are important to luring them to the polls—issues that are ingrained and hard to change."

For complete survey results, profiles of individuals representing each nonvoter subgroup and information on survey methodology, visit www.nonvotersinamerica.com.

Provided by Northwestern University

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