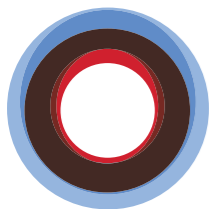

Google Vote

Civic Innoation Lab

April 30, 2015

Nicky Krause

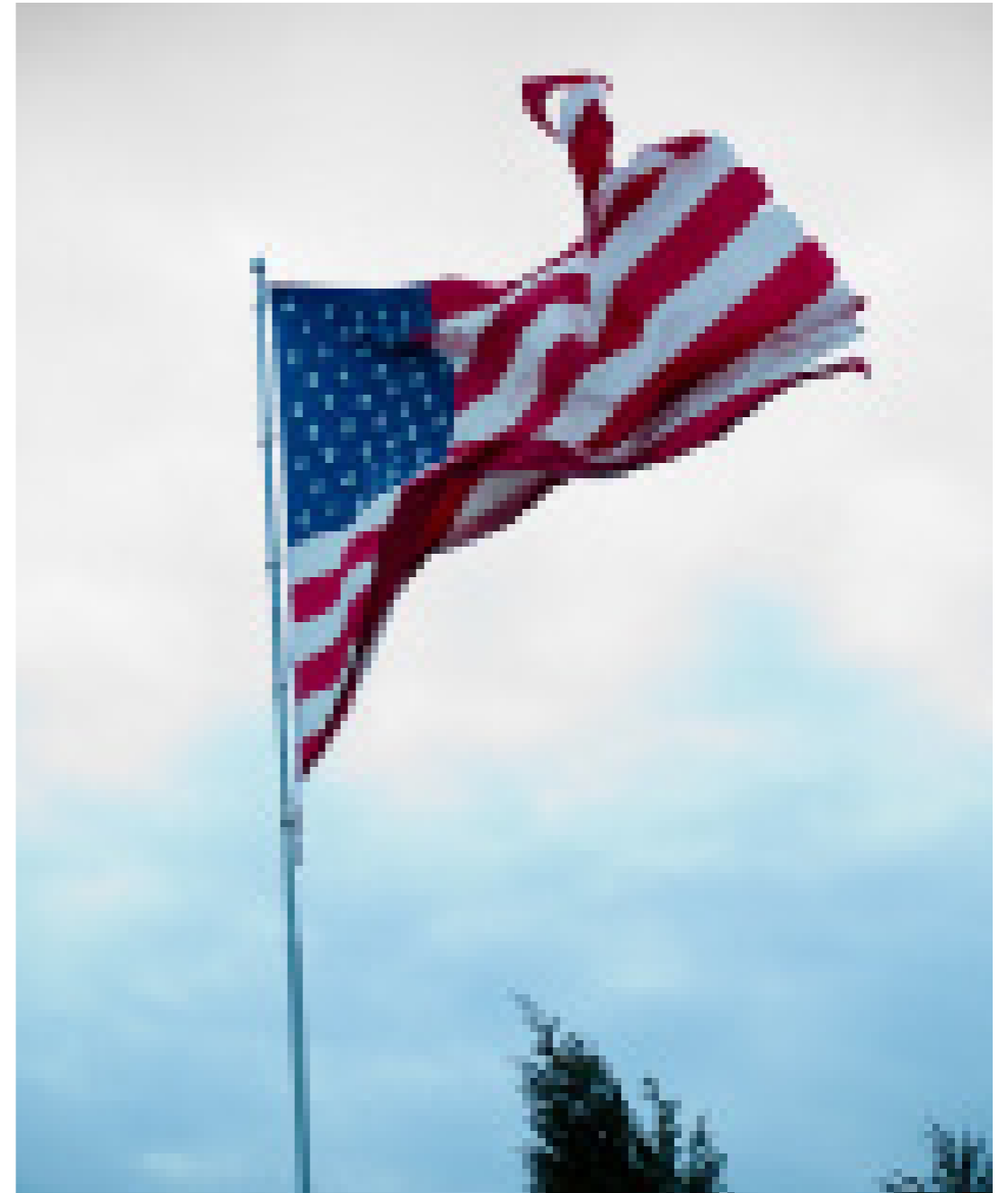


The Problem

Civic engagement is declining in the United States.

A lack of political participation, especially on the part of young people, poses a threat to the health of democracy.

What does this mean for our political future?



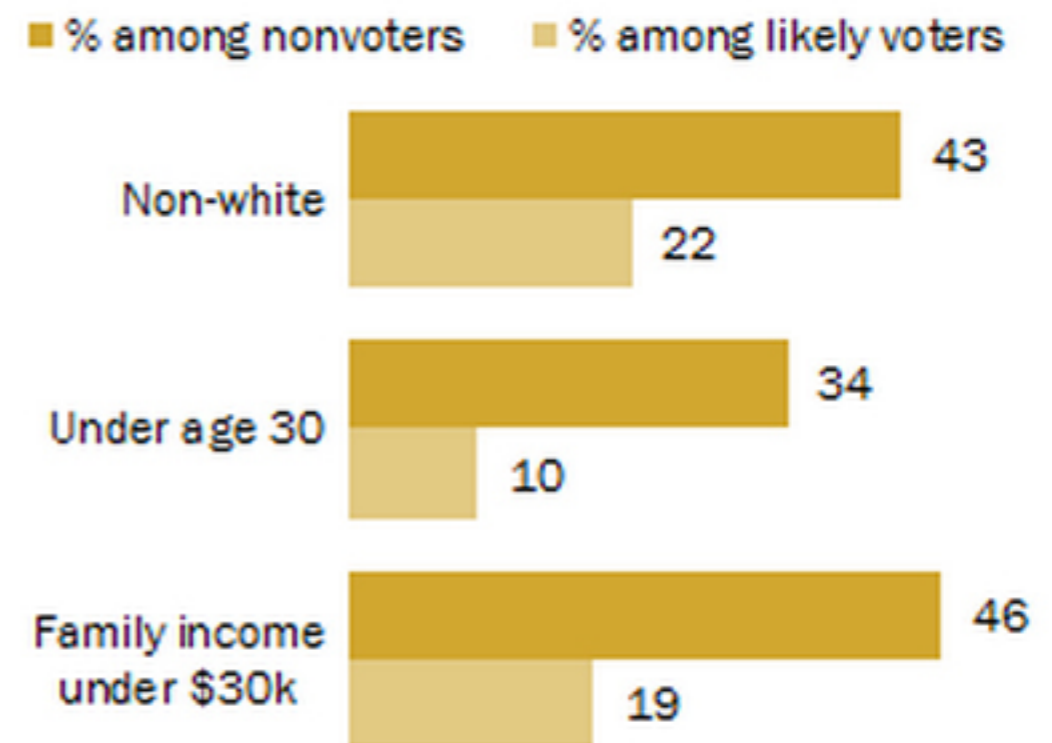
Voter landscape: Declining civic engagement

Citizens of the United States are becoming more cynical toward the democratic process.

Over **66% of Americans** perceive a gap between their elected representatives' actions and campaign promises. These people also believe that Congress often disregards the public interest.¹

In 2014, Pew Research Center estimated that **60% of adults would not vote** in the mid-term elections, and they explained that nonvoters typically have **weak or no partisan ties**.²

Wide Demographic Divides Between Nonvoters and Likely Voters



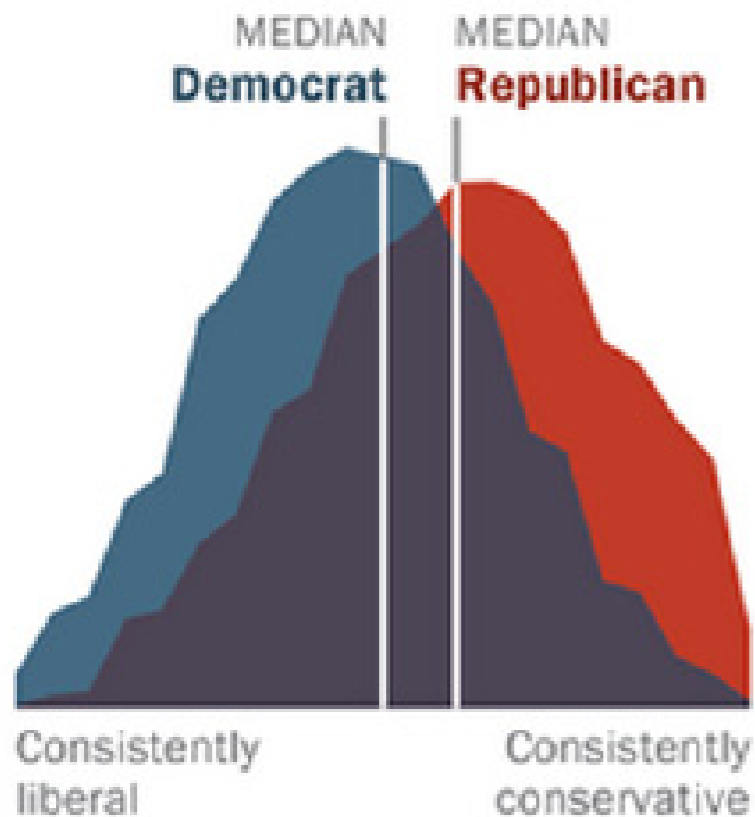
Survey conducted Oct. 15-20, 2014.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

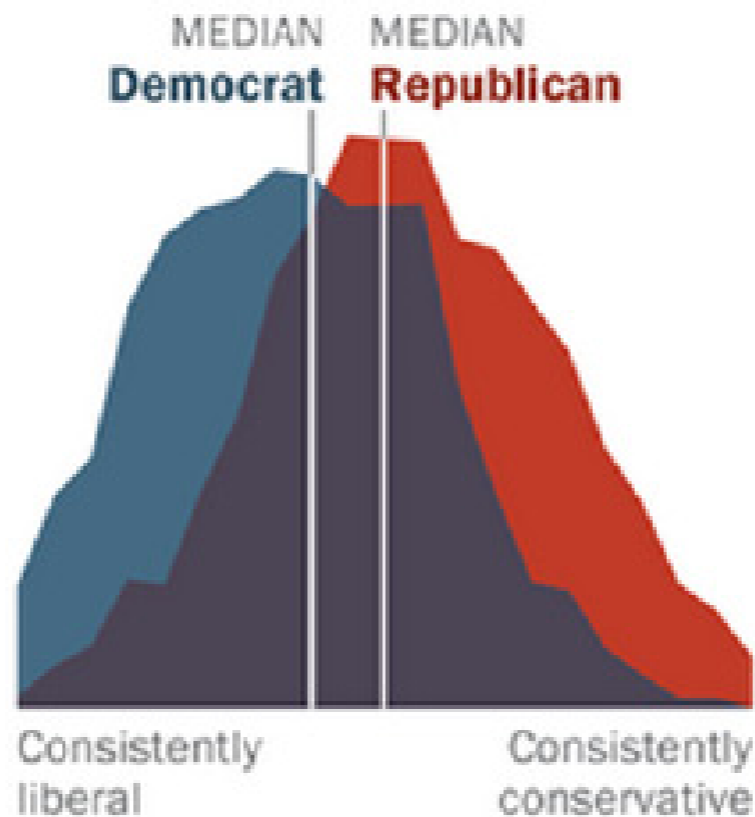
Voter Landscape: Political Polarization

“Republicans and Democrats are more divided along ideological lines – and partisan antipathy is deeper and more extensive – than at any point in the last two decades... and a new survey of 10,000 adults nationwide finds that these divisions are greatest among those who are the most engaged and active in the political process.”³

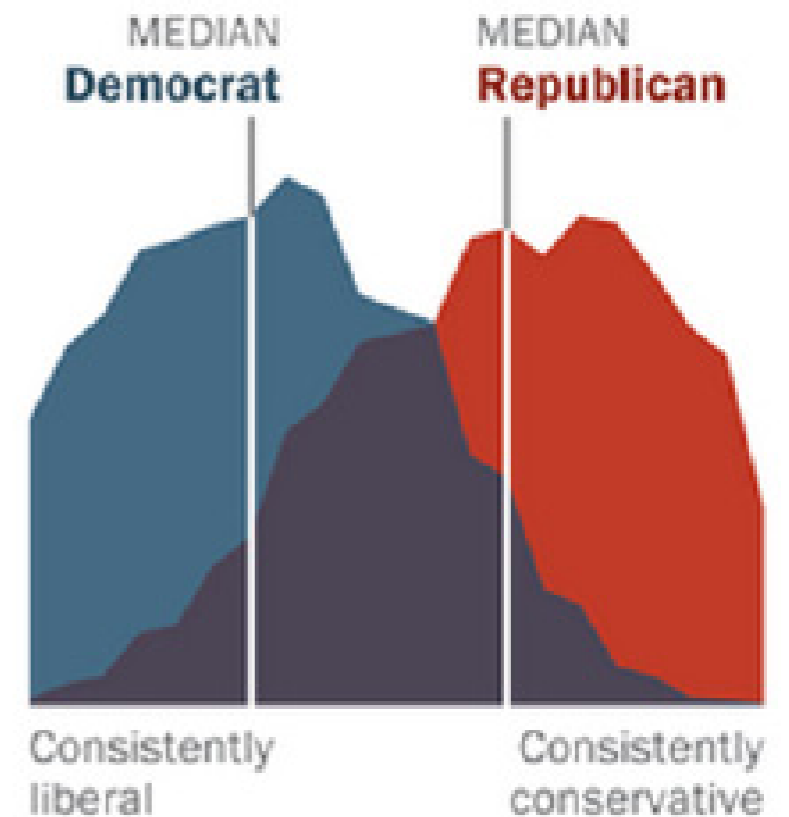
1994



2004



2014



Media and Politics

Research has shown that the mass media serve to “set the agenda” for what Americans think is relevant in terms of political issues.⁴

Research also shows that the most politically polarized Americans (also the most active) may experience an “echo chamber” effect: consuming news from fewer, ideologically-charged sources, or engaging on social media only with those who share their views.⁵

Extreme voices make the most noise, and participate the most, even though most of the country is moderate (or leaning democrat).²

Consistent liberals...

...name an array of main news sources

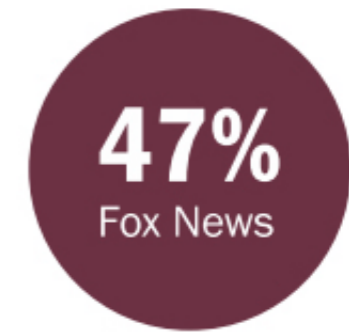


...are more likely to defriend someone on a social networking site because of politics

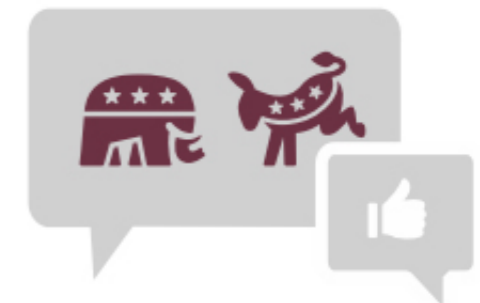


Consistent conservatives...

...are tightly clustered around one main news source



...are more likely to hear political opinions similar to their own on Facebook



The Spiral of Silence⁵

Louder extremists in the media (and social media) create the perception that extreme, polarized views are much more popular than moderate ones.

The “spiral of silence” theory says that when people perceive their opinion to be “unpopular,” they don’t express it.⁵

People often feel more comfortable publicly agreeing with opinions that they believe (or know) are incorrect, rather than risk social isolation by expressing their dissenting opinions.⁷

“The Mass media play a large part in determining what the dominant opinion is, since our direct observation is limited to a small percentage of the population...”⁶

“To run with the pack is a relatively happy state of affairs; but if you can’t, because you won’t share publicly in what seems to be a universally acclaimed conviction, you can at least remain silent, so that others can put up with you...”⁵

Speculation

_ Algorithmization and automation of taste

- .Netflix suggestions, Amazon suggestions
- .Facebook news feeds, personalized news
- .Big Data can “profile” your beliefs & behavior

_ Technology untethers us from physical spaces

- .GoogleExpress, Amazon shopping
- .Virtual Reality, Working from home

_ Privatization, neoliberalism, ad-based revenue models for tech and the media

Speculative design question:

Given these trends, what might the democratic process look like in 2050?

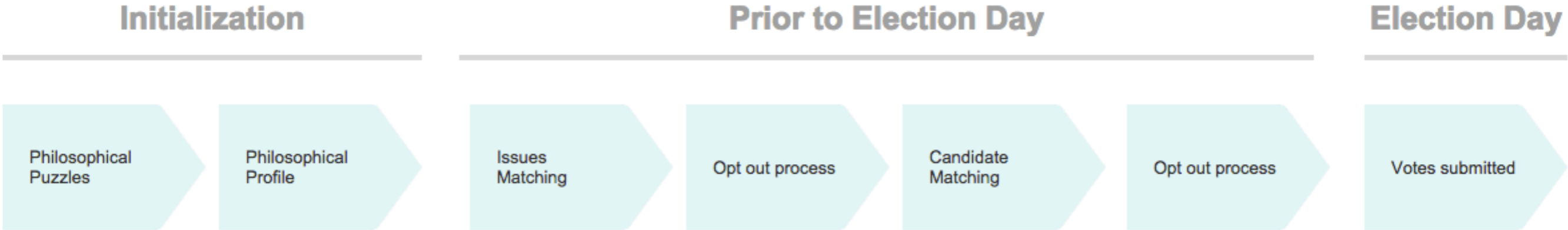
Initial Thoughts

By 2050...

- Political polarization becomes so extreme in Washington that Congress is virtually immobilized.
- Civic engagement bottoms out; almost no one participates in the democratic process.
- The government must force people to vote; technology seems like the answer.
- The government contracts Google to create a voting app; all voting is now electronic.
- Google agrees to do it on the condition that they are...a) highly paid, b) able to use the data for advertising and other purposes

If people won't vote on their own, then we'll get Google to automate the process.

Profiles, Recommendations, and an Opt-Out Strategy



Profiles, Recommendations, and an Opt-Out Strategy

Initialization

Philosophical
Puzzles

Philosophical
Profile

Example:
Some members of your community raise concerns about a complicated threat to the community's safety. You are unfamiliar with the details of the problem, and you have not personally experienced the threat.

Of the 100 community experts on the subject, 97 of them agree that the threat exists and that not addressing it will have catastrophic consequences, but 3 of them believe the opposite.

Addressing the threat would be expensive and there are also other threats to your community.

What do you do?

Prior to Election Day

Issues
Matching

Opt out process

Example:
Is global warming a threat to the environment?

Candidate
Matching

Example:
Your results are most similar to Gary Johnson, of the Libertarian party.

If you wish, you may change your vote.

Otherwise, your vote for Gary Johnson will be cast on election day.

Opt out process

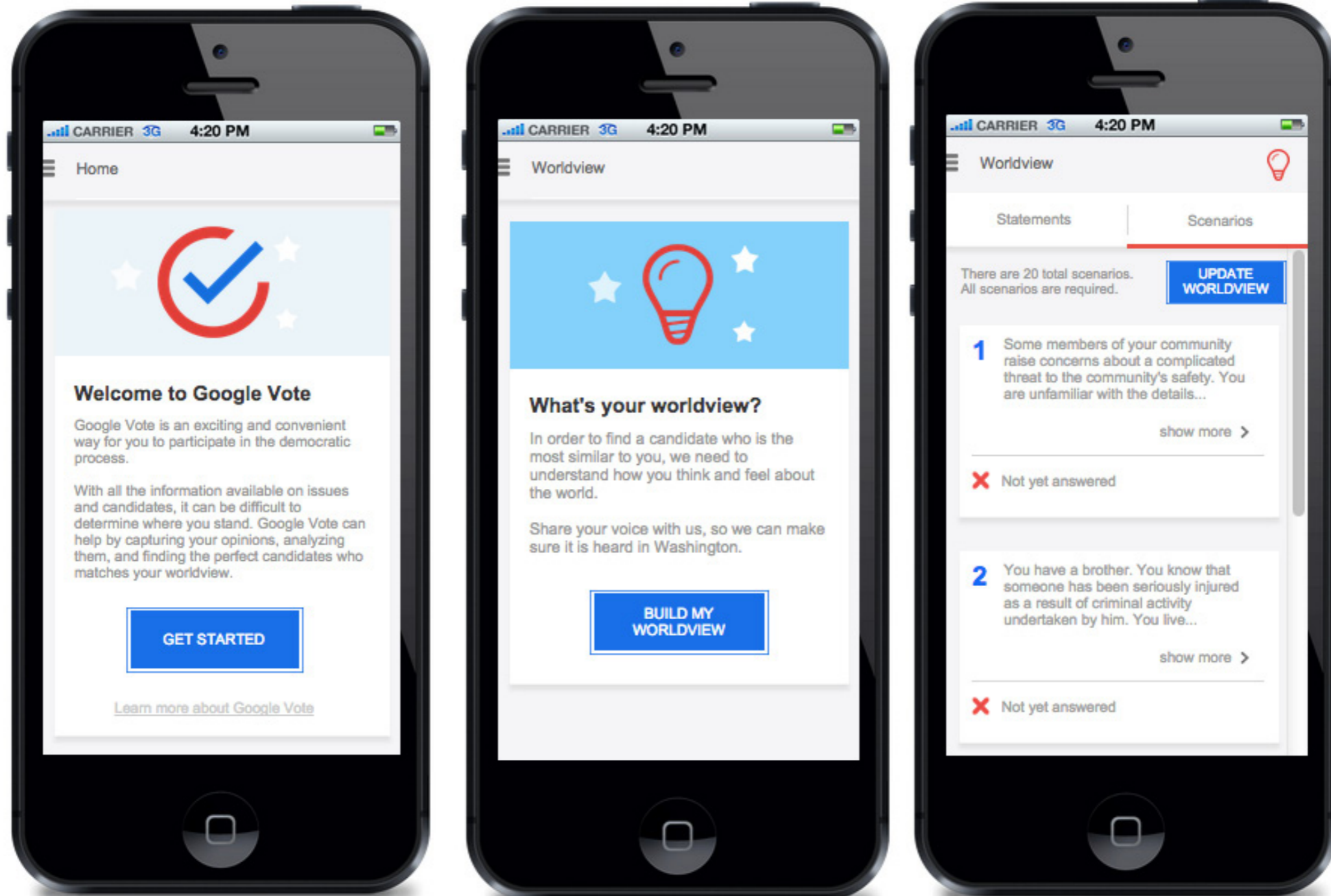
Election Day

Votes submitted

People are more likely to participate with an opt-out model than with an opt-in model.⁸

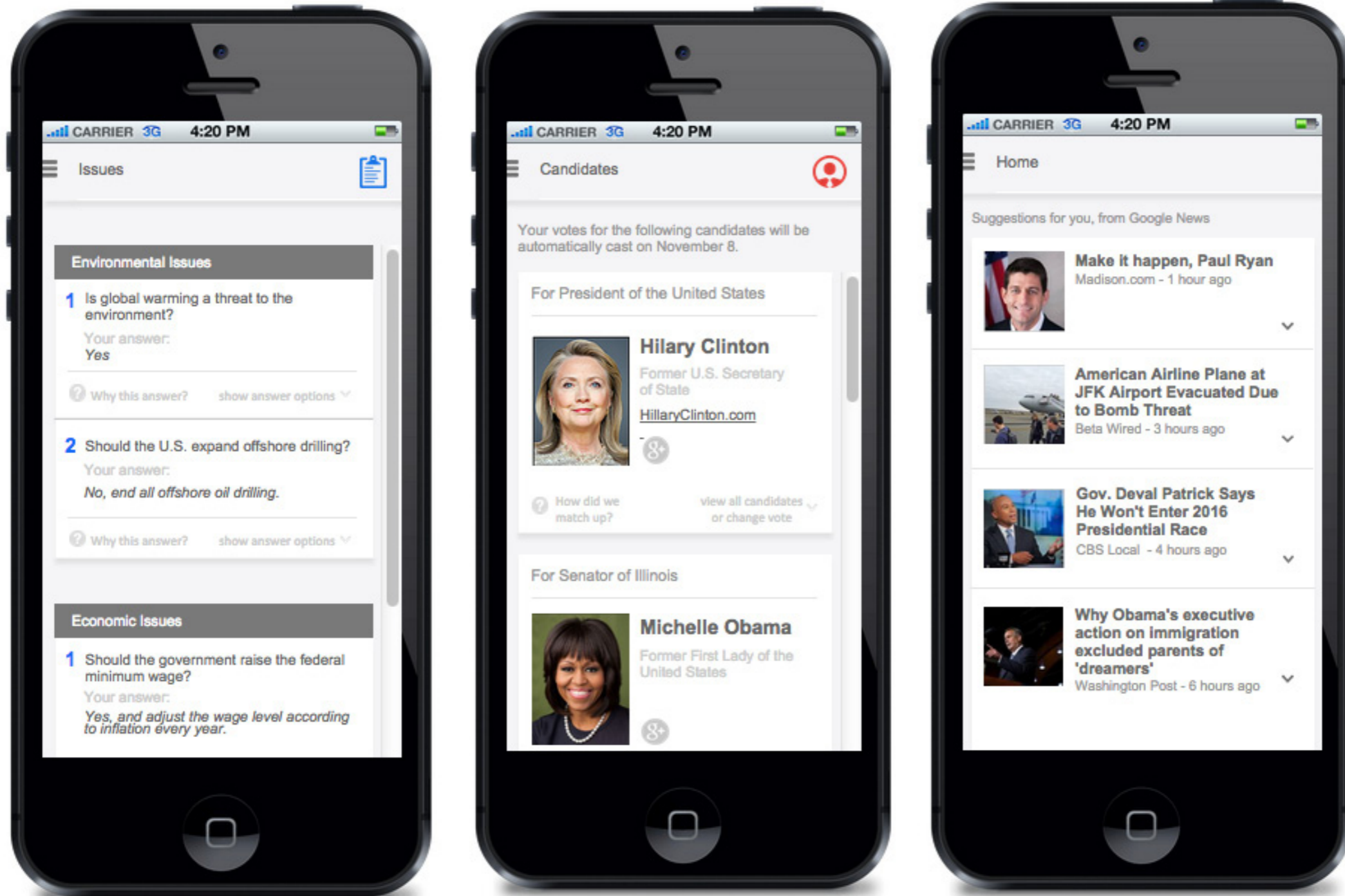
Profiles, Recommendations, and an Opt-Out Strategy

Prototype: http://mm62ki.axshare.com/iphone_frame_for_desktop_view.html



Profiles, Recommendations, and an Opt-Out Strategy

Prototype: http://mm62ki.axshare.com/iphone_frame_for_desktop_view.html



Concluding Thoughts

It is disturbing that our sense of civic duty has declined to a point where the process must be automated in order to ensure participation.

But...perhaps our cynicism comes from a reasonable place. The world is highly complex now: It is hard to know what you don't know, and it's easy to tune out rather than to feel overwhelmed.

So...

Even if Google Vote presents frightening implications for a loss of human agency, is that actually much different than the position we're in now?

For all its faults, is automation the most feasible option for us to continue our "democratic" processes, despite citizens' cynicism and silence?

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