

Critical Voter

How to Survive the Next Election by
Making Yourself (and Your Kids) Smarter

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Critical Voter
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2020 Edition

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Forward to the 2020 Edition

The first edition of this book, which came out during the party primaries running up to the 2016 election, ended with commentary about the odds that that year's presidential contest might be between a Vermont socialist (Bernie Sanders) and someone who had never before held public office (Donald Trump).

While that particular scenario did not unfold, an equally unlikely one did, leaving the nation run by someone whose first public job was that of Commander in Chief.

That turned out to have been just one of several improbable events that unfolded in the four years since *Critical Voter* was first published, with others including a global pandemic, worldwide economic collapse, and civil unrest. With each of these crises came a host of choices, few of them easy, such as when to reopen the economy or let kids back into school.

Now we have always had a variety of ways to navigate challenges and make decisions. For example, we can lead with emotions such as anger or exuberance (rational or irrational) or make choices based on gut instinct. But if we want to increase the odds of getting things right, I continue to believe that we need to leverage the most powerful tool our species has ever evolved: our ability to reason.

As I explored in a more recent book,¹ critical thinking must be distinct from other intellectual virtues such as intelligence and wisdom (otherwise, why would we need a different term to describe it?). While people have been debating for centuries whether those other intellectual virtues are innate or learned, critical thinking can be mastered by anyone, regardless of demographics or income, by learning and putting into practice the skills covered in this book.

Those hoping for a political book that will confirm how rational you are compared to those dolts who don't think or vote the way you do will be disappointed since *Critical Voter* is a how-to guide that uses presidential politics to illustrate the principles needed to become a skilled critical thinker, not a book that will tell you who to vote for and why.

But the skills you will learn from reading it can be applied to so much more than presidential politics, including those important personal choices we make every day, even when catastrophe does not loom.

For those who feel that the state of the world calls for passion instead of reflection, who feel that thinking things through systematically might waste valuable time, I'd like to ask a question that paraphrases one of the most memorable political lines in the last half century: Do you feel more empowered than you did four years ago?

While becoming a critical thinker is not a guarantee that every choice you make will be the right one, it does increase

¹ [*Critical Thinking*](#) (MIT Press, 2020), part of the MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series.

your odds of success considerably. And how much could we accomplish if enough of us follow this path to create a critical-thinking society rather than whatever we might call the society we live in today?