Lincoln Democracy Index

The personality and psychology of politics in America

powered by: **QuestionPro**

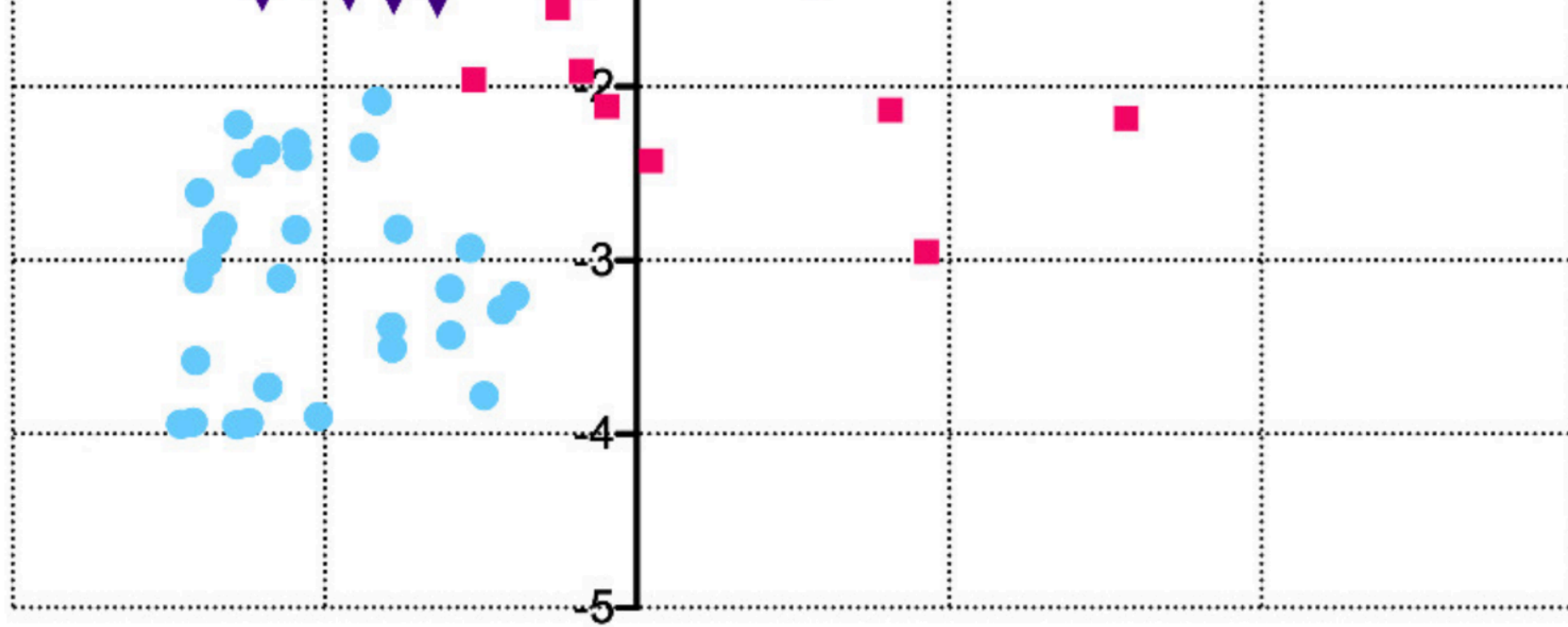# The Lincoln Democracy Index Panels

Since the start of the 2024 presidential election cycle, the Lincoln Democracy Institute has tracked nearly 3,000 voters across the key battleground states of Arizona, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, capturing over 50 independent data points beyond demographics, including cognitive skills, personality traits, decision-making styles, partisanship, and vote motivation.

This research explores the psychological and informational drivers of voter behavior, examining how micro-behaviors shape political choices, the role of ideology, and inclinations toward extremism and authoritarianism. We also assess how direct and indirect information influence political narratives and engagement.

This presentation highlights the intersection of Americans' fears, personality traits, and demographics, as well as the historical events shaping their outlook on the future.

These insights provide a deeper understanding of political engagement, institutional trust, and acceptance of political violence. Looking ahead, these findings—combined with extensive baseline data—will inform future research, tracking the evolving dynamics of the electorate and the psychological underpinnings of democratic stability.

Uncovering the Fears that Shape America's Psyche

Exploring the distinct clusters of fears that define the mindset of different groups within the United States

Fear Typology

LDI has identified five distinct clusters of fear shaped by past events, each characterized by specific concerns, demographics, political leanings, personalities and worldview

The Institutionally Skeptical

High-Anxiety Generalists
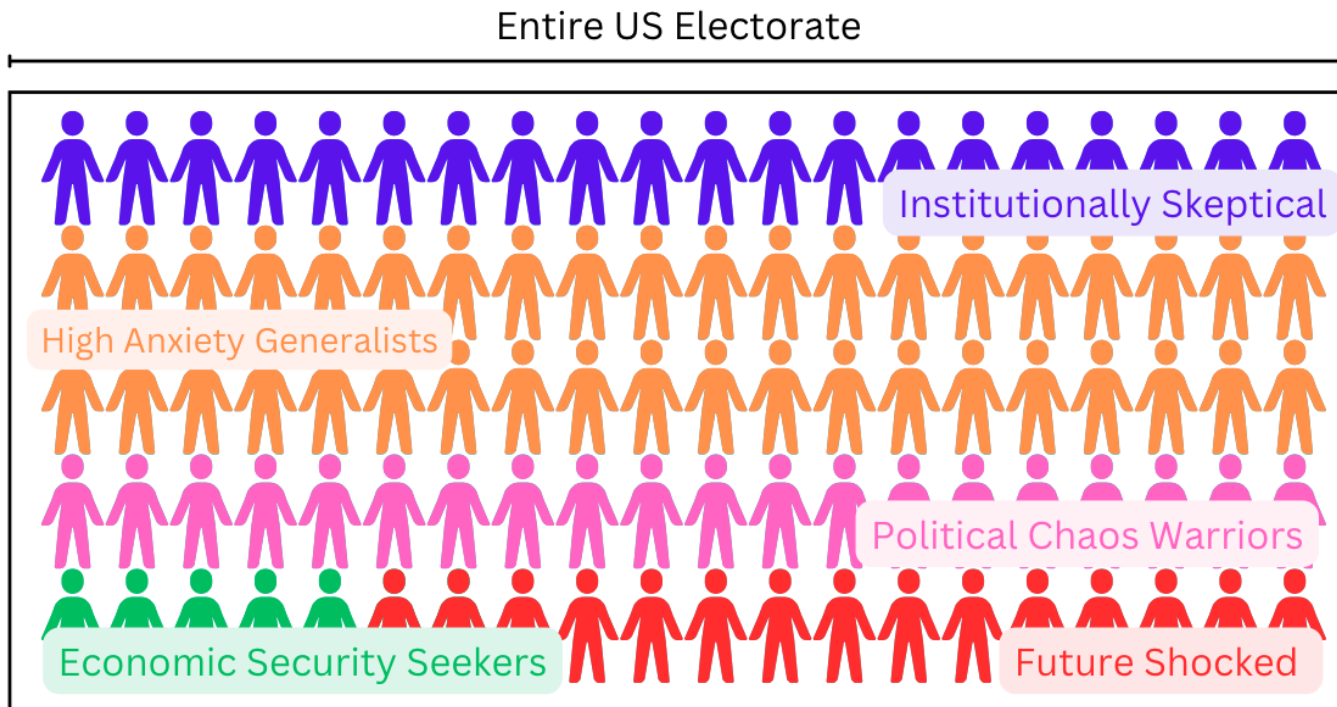
Political Chaos Worriers

Economic Security Seekers

The Future Shocked

Electorate Breakdown

Entire US Electorate

Institutionally Skeptical

High Anxiety Generalists

Political Chaos Warriors

Economic Security Seekers

Future Shocked

High Anxiety Generalists (40%)

Political Chaos Worriers (19%)

The Institutionally Skeptical (19%)

Future Shocked (15%)

Economic Security Seekers (7%)

The Institutionally Skeptical

"America cannot handle more turmoil."

"From Vietnam to Wall Street bailouts, the rich and powerful always protect themselves while the rest of us get screwed."

Meet Lisa

The Institutional Skeptic

Lisa, 47, is a divorced factory worker living paycheck to paycheck, feeling like she's done everything right but is still falling behind. She has voted for Trump every time—2016, 2020, and 2024—believing he is the only one who truly fights for working people like her. Without a college degree, she has worked hard for decades yet still can't afford a home, watching prices soar while politicians focus on issues that have nothing to do with her life. She worries about her teenage son being taught values in school that go against what she believes, seeing it as another way the left is forcing its agenda on families like hers. Lisa is fiercely pro-MAGA, convinced that Democrats are out of touch, the system is rigged, and only Trump can fix it, and she sees every election as a battle between the corrupt establishment left-wing deep state and those who want to take back the country for people like her.

Core Fears of the Institutionally Skeptical

America's Future

Afraid my children or grandchildren will grow up in an America worse than the one I grew up in.

Immigration

Afraid that immigrants entering the country will negatively impact jobs and security.

Traditional Values

Afraid that political ideologies are replacing traditional values.

War with an Adversary

Afraid of a conflict between the U.S. and a major military power like China or Russia.

The Institutionally Skeptical cluster consists of anti-establishment, deeply distrustful voters who see government, political institutions, and elites as corrupt and self-serving, with strong support for MAGA-aligned candidates and policies driven by fears of government overreach, economic instability, and a cultural shift led by an out-of-touch left that threatens their values and way of life.

The Institutionally Skeptical

Demographics

- More Female than Male
- Overwhelmingly White, living in Rural or Ex-Urban areas.
- Less educated than the general population with only a quarter (27%) having a college or advanced degree, and 38% having only a high-school education..
- Lower average incomes with half having less than $50,000 in family income and lower average home ownership (55% own to 45% rent)
- Far more Religious than average (41% rate religion very important) and much more likely to own firearms (53%).
- Least likely group to have retirement savings.

Political Leanings

- Overwhelmingly supported Trump in all three elections, including 71% support in 2024 up 16% from 2020.
- Two in Five demonstrate strong loyalty to MAGA Movement.
- Most politically ridged group with half demonstrating little commitment to political compromise.
- Most Republican group with 48% identifying with the party.

Personality Traits

- **High in Distrust & Suspicion** – Question motives of leaders, policies, and even other voters.
- **Low in Agreeableness** – Less likely to accept mainstream narratives or engage in group-based political movements.
- **High in Personal Independence** – Feel that people must look out for themselves because institutions will not.
- **Attracted to Anti-Establishment Authoritarianism** – While they do not favor authoritarianism for its own sake, they are open to anti-elite disruptors, even if those leaders use authoritarian tactics.

The High Anxiety Generalists

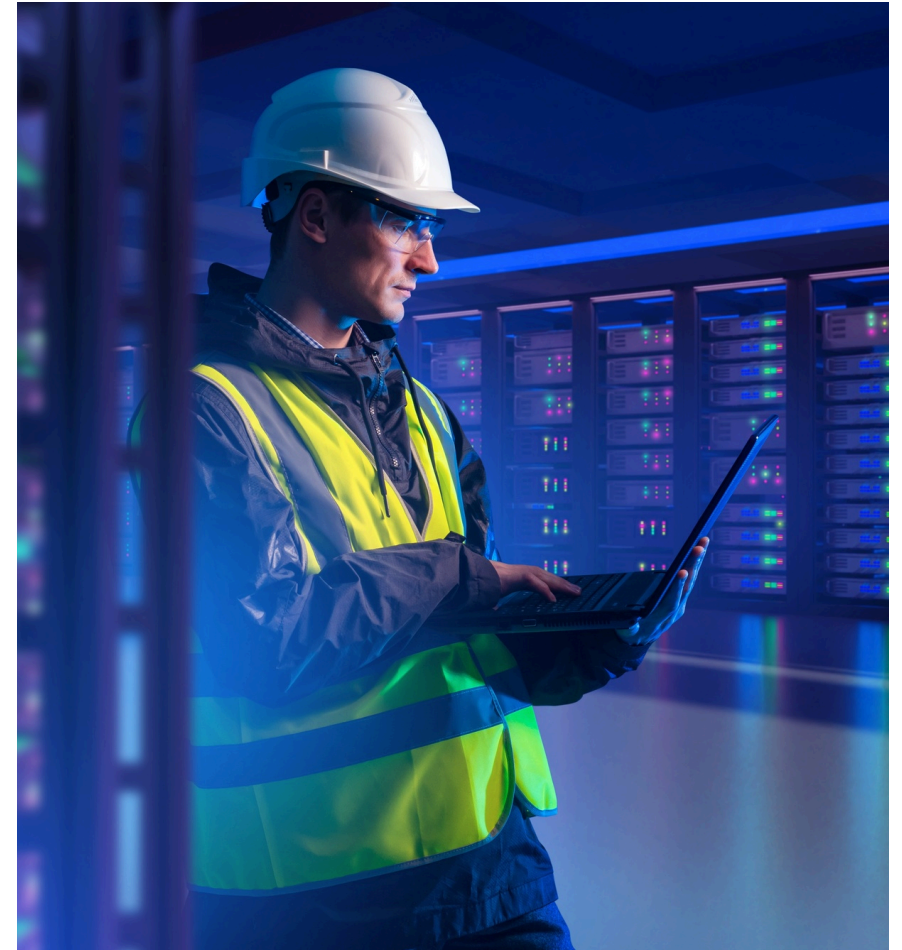**"We Must Prepare for the Next Crisis"**

"Terrorism, pandemics, financial crashes—disasters keep coming, and the world feels more unstable every day. We need leaders who can handle chaos before it handles us."

AMERICA: DAY OF TERROR

'Today, our nation saw evil'

Bush: Worst-ever attack on U.S. will not break nation's resolve

LE JEUDI 26 M

La formule du « premier arrivé, premier servi » vaut-elle ou les respirateurs ? Le comité d'éthique devra

Meet Jake

The High Anxiety Generalist

Jake, 38, is a married father of two who works as a technician for a telecommunications company and lives in a middle-class suburb outside a major city. Despite not having a college degree, he has built a stable career and family life through hard work. However, with inflation and rising costs, it feels like his paycheck doesn't stretch as far as it used to. He voted for Trump in 2016 because he wanted change, for Biden in 2020 hoping for stability, and then switched back to Trump in 2024 because he felt the economy was better when Trump was President. Although he's not deeply ideological, he's attracted to leaders who project strength, as he believes the world is becoming more dangerous, and weak leadership exacerbates the situation. Seeking balance, he also supported a Democrat for U.S. Senate, believing that divided government might compel politicians to work together to address problems rather than making them worse.

Core Fears of the High-Anxiety Generalists

Affording Necessities

Afraid of not being able to afford basic necessities.

Economic Depression

Afraid of an economic depression happening in my lifetime.

America's Future

Afraid my children or grandchildren will grow up in an America worse than the one I grew up in.

Immigration

Afraid that immigrants entering the country will negatively impact jobs and security.

The High-Anxiety Generalists are defined by their broad and intense fears, covering personal safety, economic instability, political turmoil, and global threats. They are the most reactive and risk-averse, viewing the world as increasingly volatile and full of looming crises.

High-Anxiety Generalists

Demographics

- Largest fear group (40% of electorate) making them highly influential.
- While still predominantly white, this is the most racially diverse fear group, with a greater presence of nonwhite voters compared to the others.
- They are more racially diverse compared to other clusters, though still majority White.
- They are more likely to be male (54%) than female.
- Moderate income distribution, with a large portion feeling economically vulnerable but not in deep financial distress.
- More urban than most other fear groups, but with strong suburban representation.

Political Leanings

- Donald Trump won 56% of High-Anxiety Generalist in 2024, eight percentage points better than he did in 2020.
- These Americans lean slightly center right but there are also pockets of left leaning voters in the group.
- The High-Anxiety Generalists are more open than most Americans to compromise and demonstrate less partisan rigidity than other voters.
- The Partisan beaks are 46% Republican, 39% Democratic, and 15% Independents.

Personality Traits

- **High in Neuroticism** – Strong emotional responses to uncertainty, danger, and political instability.
- **High in Risk Aversion** – Prefer stability and security over rapid change.
- **High in Emotional Reactivity** – Quickly responding, "Think Fast" to political messaging emphasizing crisis or danger.
- **Moderate Openness to Experience** – Willing to consider new solutions, but fear of instability limits their risk-taking.
- **High in Authority-Seeking** – Trust strong leaders in times of crisis, but skeptical of weak or indecisive politicians.
- **High in Crisis-Oriented Thinking** – See the world as one crisis after another, making them more susceptible to fear-based messaging.

Political Chaos Worriers

"Fix the System Before It's Too Late"

History In Context

"Every crisis from Watergate to 9/11 and January 6th—was a warning. If we don't act now, the next disaster could be the one that breaks democracy for good."

Meet Brenda

The Political Chaos Worriers

Brenda, 54, is a high school teacher who lives in a urban neighborhood with her husband, Rich. Now that their kids are off in college. She worries that billionaires hold too much power, corrupt officials are eroding democracy, and America is losing its global influence, believing that protecting rights, democratic stability, and social cohesion is essential. She voted for Clinton in 2016, Biden in 2020, and Harris in 2024, fearing a second Trump presidency would push the country into crisis. A liberal-leaning Democrat, she sees checks on power and government accountability as the last defense against national decline.

Her husband, Rich, shares her concerns but focuses more on the rule of law, corruption, and institutional decay, believing systemic failures—not just leadership—are driving America's instability.

Core Fears of the Political Chaos Worriers

Corrupt or Incompetent Government Officials

Afraid that corrupt or incompetent officials will remain in power.

Democracy Collapsing

Afraid that American democracy could collapse or be replaced by one-party autocratic rule.

America Losing Global Power

Afraid that America is becoming too dependent on other countries for resources and trade.

Billionaires Contoling Government

Afraid that billionaires have too much control over the government, policy decisions, and the economy.

The Political Chaos Worriers are deeply concerned with protecting democratic institutions, ensuring government accountability, and preventing authoritarian overreach, fearing that corruption and extremism could destabilize the country.

Political Chaos Worriers

Demographics

- More female than male, but not overwhelmingly so.
- Primarily middle-aged (35-64), with a significant portion of older voters
- Predominantly white, though slightly more diverse than Future Shocked and Institutionally Skeptical voters.
- The most highly educated of the fear-based voter groups, with over 40% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. They are more likely to follow politics closely and engage in civic activities.
- A middle to upper-middle-class group, with fewer struggling economically.
- Primarily suburban, with a notable urban presence.

Political Leanings

- In 2024, the majority supported Harris-Walz (71%). Biden received the highest level of support in 20 (55%) and Clinton in 16.
- Far more Democratic (50%) than Republican (30%)
- Women in this group tend to be more motivated by concerns about rights, democratic stability, and social cohesion, while men focus more on rule of law, corruption, and institutional decay.
- Most liberal and progressive of the fear-based groups, nearly 40%.
- High in Political Engagement – More likely to be politically active, attend protests, and consume political news.
- Generally distrustful of power, particularly corporate.

Personality Traits

- **High Cognitive Complexity** – More likely to analyze political issues deeply and expect institutional accountability.
- **High Agreeableness** – More willing to cooperate on solutions but frustrated by inaction.
- **Moderate to High Openness to Experience** – Open to new ideas and systemic change, but only if it ensures stability.
- **Low in Trust but High in Engagement** – Distrust of institutions but actively seeks reform rather than disengagement.
- **Moderate in Risk Aversion** – Fear instability but believe proactive governance is the solution, rather than avoiding change altogether.

Economic Security Seekers

"We can't afford another financial meltdown. Let's protect what we've built."

"From the Great Depression to the Financial Crisis to COVID-19, bad policies wreck the economy while working people pay the price. We can't afford another collapse."

Meet Dave

An Economic Security Seeker

Dave, 50, is a skilled tradesman at a manufacturing plant in a mid-sized suburban town, now divorced and splitting time with his kids. Despite lacking a college degree, he built a solid middle-class life, but now fears losing his job to overseas workers and struggles to keep up with rising costs. Inflation, healthcare, and job security weigh heavily on him, making him feel like the American Dream is slipping further out of reach and that retirement may never be an option. He voted for Trump in 2016, 2020, and 2024, believing Republicans are better for the economy, even though he dislikes Trump's personality. Frustrated with Biden's inability to lower prices, he wants leaders who will make life more affordable, protect American jobs, and ensure he can retire without constant financial stress. When he doesn't have the kids, he enjoys going to the gun range with friends, seeing it as a way to unwind and feel in control in an unpredictable world.

Core Fears of the Economic Security Seekers

Retirement Savings

Afraid that they will not have enough money for retirement.

Immigration

Afraid that immigrants entering the country will negatively impact jobs and security.

Affording Necessities

Afraid of not being able to afford basic necessities.

Job Loss

Afraid of losing my job or source of income.

The Economic Security Seekers are primarily focused on financial stability, fearing job loss, rising costs, and an uncertain retirement, while being less engaged in broader social or political issues.

Economic Security Seekers

Demographics

- More males than females, but fairly balanced. Men focus on jobs and wages, while women worry more about household expenses and healthcare.
- Mostly middle-aged (35-64), with a sizable older segment nearing or in retirement, concerned about long-term financial security.
- Predominantly working-class with low college attainment, making them vulnerable to wage stagnation, fewer job opportunities, and limited access to high-paying careers.
- Largely middle-class but financially fragile, with most earning $50K-$150K, where inflation and rising costs hit hardest.
- More religious than most but not overtly faith-driven, they see religion as a cultural anchor.
- Their higher gun ownership than Political Chaos Worriers, but lower than Future Shocked voters, reflects a belief in self-reliance and security over ideology.

Political Leanings

- Leans Republican but not rigidly partisan – 34% identify as Republican, 37% as Democrat, and 30% as Independent, making them true swing voters driven by economic concerns.
- Voted for Trump in 2016 (41%) and 2020 (37%) – Support dipped in 2020, but Trump won them back in 2024 (62%), likely due to economic dissatisfaction under Biden.
- Moderate but pragmatic conservatives – 25% identify as Moderates, 14% as Independent-Leaning Conservatives, and 11% as Traditional Conservatives, favoring economic stability over ideological battles.
- Not overwhelmingly MAGA, but a significant faction exists – 41% are Not MAGA, 24% are Swing Voters, 13% are Traditional GOP/Soft MAGA, and 23% are Strong MAGA, showing a divided but right-leaning bloc.
- They are more concerned with economic policy than social issues. While 7% identify as MAGA, only 4% are Progressives, making them unlikely to engage in culture wars but willing to back policies that protect their financial well-being.

Personality Traits

- **Low in Openness to New Experience** – Prefer stability over sweeping economic changes.
- **High in Conscientiousness** – Value hard work, personal responsibility, and financial security.
- **High in Financial Anxiety** – Strong personal concerns about inflation, job security, and national debt.
- **High in Risk Aversion** – Fear economic instability, making them more cautious in their voting choices.
- **Moderate in Agreeableness** – Willing to support economic policies that provide security but not big government intervention.
- **Low in Emotional Reactivity** (*unless related to economic issues*) – Responds more to financial crises than social issues.

The Future Shocked

"The World Is Changing Too Fast"

"AI, automation, China's rise—everything is changing overnight, and we're falling behind. If our leaders don't keep up, neither will we."

Meet Mike

The Future Shocked

Mike, 63, is a recently retired IT specialist who spent decades adapting to new technology but now feels change is out of control. He and his wife, Linda, 61, a former healthcare administrator, live in an exurban community, watching AI, automation, and globalization reshape industries and displace jobs. A lifelong Democrat who owns guns and enjoys hunting, Mike believes Democrats are better equipped to manage economic and technological upheaval. Linda shares his worries but is even more concerned about their two grown daughters losing reproductive rights and other protections. He voted for Clinton in 2016, Biden in 2020, and Harris in 2024, convinced Republicans ignore the rapid changes reshaping society. With their children now married, Mike ushers at church each week, and both worry their granddaughter will grow up in an America with fewer opportunities and less stability than they had.

Core Fears of the Future Shocked

Corrupt or Incompetent Government Officials

Afraid that corrupt or incompetent officials will remain in power.

America's Future

Afraid children or grandchildren will grow up in an America worse than the one they grew up in.

Billionaires Controlling Government

Afraid that billionaires have too much control over the government, policy decisions, and the economy.

Supreme Court Decisions

Afraid that Supreme Court decisions will take away rights or liberties from them or their family.

The Future Shocked fear AI, automation, and globalization are reshaping America faster than leaders can manage, leaving the country unprepared for their grown children and grandchildren's future.

Future Shocked

Demographics

- The most male-dominated of the fear-based groups reflects their higher representation in STEM and technical fields, which are being reshaped by automation and AI.
- Leans older, with a significant percentage approaching or in retirement, observing how technological changes are transforming industries they once knew well.
- They are more college-educated than Economic Security Seekers but less so than Political Chaos Worriers. Many have worked in STEM, finance, or professional fields.
- More rural and exurban than other groups, reflecting a preference for stability and resistance to the fast-paced changes of large metro areas.
- One of the highest homeownership rates among fear-based groups, but many worry about property taxes and long-term affordability as the economy changes.

Political Leanings

- Heavily Democratic (51%) but not necessarily progressive, making them pragmatic rather than ideological voters.
- Skews moderate-left, but not overwhelmingly progressive, suggesting a focus on pragmatic economic policies rather than cultural issues.
- Overwhelmingly backed Harris 70%, but voted in even higher numbers for Democratic Senate candidates in their states (74%) in 2024
- Deep skepticism of Republican leadership, viewing the party as too resistant to change and too focused on cultural fights rather than preparing for the future.
- More supportive of government intervention in technology and the economy but less focused on redistribution or progressive social policies.

Personality Traits

- **Moderate in Openness to Experience** – Once embraced change but now see rapid technological and economic shifts as destabilizing.
- **High in Conscientiousness** – Value stability, hard work, and financial security, making them resistant to sweeping policy shifts.
- **Moderate to Low Agreeableness** – Skeptical of politicians, experts, and media narratives about the future.
- **High in Risk Aversion** – Fear of financial instability, AI-driven job displacement, and economic restructuring.
- **Moderate in Emotional Reactivity** – Less anxious than High-Anxiety Generalists but highly reactive to perceived threats to stability.
- **See both parties as slow to adapt to the future**, but have more trust in Democrats than Republicans to at least recognize the challenges ahead.

What Each Group Wants from Trump's Second Term

Institutionally Skeptical → Wants Trump to fight the system → He must prove he's still an outsider willing to take on corruption.

High-Anxiety Generalists → Wants safety and stability → He must show he can prevent chaos, not create more.

Political Chaos Worriers → Fears he's a threat to democracy → They aren't persuadable, but he must avoid driving away moderates.

Economic Security Seekers → Want financial stability → He must deliver on cost-of-living issues and job protection.

Future Shocked → Fear America is falling behind → He must frame his leadership as preparing America for the future, not just restoring the past.