CIVILITY IN AMERICA 2011

One year ago, Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate, in partnership with KRC Research, released its first annual *Civility in America: A Nationwide Survey*. Due to the increased attention paid to civility over the past year, we wanted to re-assess Americans' attitudes towards the subject. Coverage in the media, community attention to the issue and creation of new non-profit organizations such as The National Institute for Civil Discourse have continued to attract attention to the topic. In an online search, over 12 million mentions of "civility" surfaced. This is a 460% increase from the same time one year ago. How, if at all, has this increased attention impacted civility or perceptions about it?

Without a doubt, the past 12 months have been tumultuous when it comes to how civility has played out on the national stage. Several high-profile events accentuate how civility has infiltrated our everyday conversation and sense of well-being — Donald Trump's "birther" investigation of President Obama, Chicago Bulls' Joakim Noah swearing at a fan on camera, online comments about CBS war correspondent Lara Logan's sexual assault in Tahrir Square and Charlie Sheen's radio rants against his executive producer that led to the actor's dismissal from the top-rated sitcom *Two and a Half Men*.

Civility, and the lack of it, in America begs greater understanding of how Americans' lives are impacted and how Americans can take more responsibility for their communications and interactions online and offline.

"Civility in America should be an inalienable right. Americans have a right to defend their names and explain their actions and opinions, but the increasing unruliness in the public square is worrisome and demands attention and new solutions."
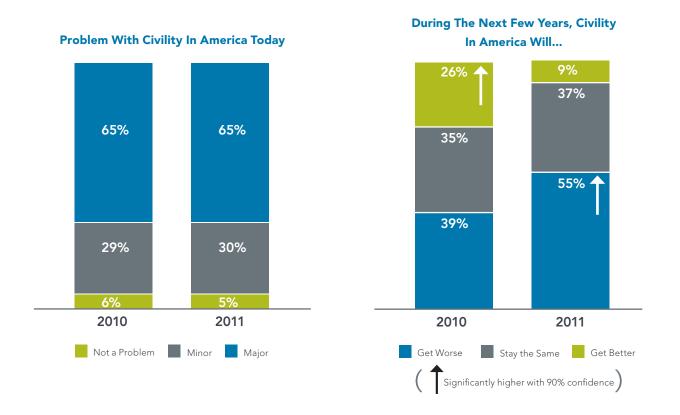
Jack Leslie
Chairman of Weber Shandwick

Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate regularly conduct research on topical communications issues impacting companies and organizations and the constituents they serve. We leverage findings to further inform the strategies we develop to address our clients' most pressing communications challenges. The second wave of Civility in America was conducted by KRC Research in late May 2011 using an online survey of 1,000 U.S. adults.

The 2011 results from Civility in America fall into several key areas in this report — civility in politics, education, the workplace, the Internet and the marketplace.

Is Incivility Getting The Worst Of Us?

Attitudes about the state of civility in America remain as high as they were one year ago — two-thirds (65%) still believe that we have a major civility problem. The more disturbing news, however, is that Americans expect civility to erode even further over the next few years. Whereas more than one-third (39%) expected things to turn less civil when surveyed in 2010, now more than one out of two Americans — 55% — expect a lack of civility to become the norm. Only nine percent in this year's survey expect civility to get better compared to 26% who expected some relief last year. Incivility seems to be here to stay.

On a political note, Republicans in our survey are significantly more likely than Democrats and Independents to say that civility will decline over the next few years (65% vs. 47% vs. 52%, respectively).

Problem With Civility In America Today

	2010	2011
Major	65%	65%
Minor	29%	30%
Not a Problem	6%	5%

Legend: Not a Problem (green), Minor (gray), Major (blue)

During The Next Few Years, Civility In America Will...

	2010	2011
Get Better	26% ↑	9%
Stay the Same	35%	37%
Get Worse	39%	55% ↑

Legend: Get Worse (blue), Stay the Same (gray), Get Better (green)

(↑ Significantly higher with 90% confidence)

Most Americans report they have been victims of incivility (86%). Their most common encounters with rude or disrespectful behavior come while driving (72%) or shopping (65%).

Americans also admit to perpetrating incivility — approximately six in 10 (59%) Americans acknowledge that they themselves have been uncivil.
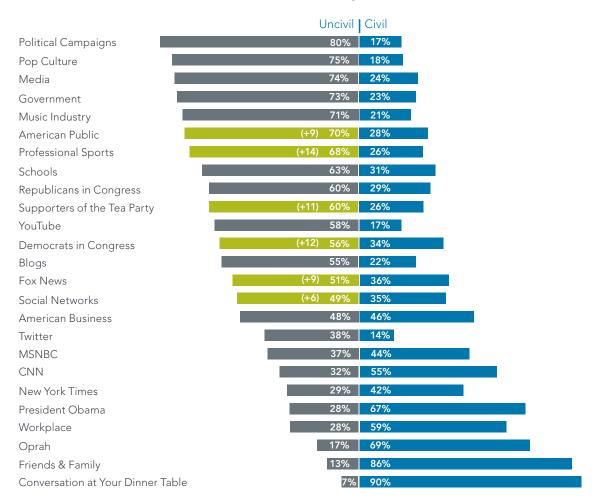
Is Civility Red, White And Blue?

More than 70% of Americans consider political campaigns, pop culture, the media, government and the music industry hubs of incivility. Sanctuaries of civility, on the other hand, are few and far between — they are found among friends and family and at the dinner table.

The most significant increases in uncivil behavior since last year's study are among the following: professional sports (+14 points), Congressional Democrats (+12 points), Tea Party supporters (+11 points), the American public (+9 points), Fox News (+9 points) and social networks (+6 points). (Note: Not all items on this year's list below were included in last year's survey.)

Congressional Democrats, Congressional Republicans and Tea Party supporters are all viewed as more uncivil than civil.

Similar to 2010, more than twice as many Americans find President Obama civil as they do uncivil (67% vs. 28%, respectively). Interestingly, President Obama is considered as civil as television host and producer Oprah (69%).

General Tone And Level Of Civility In...

Uncivil | Civil

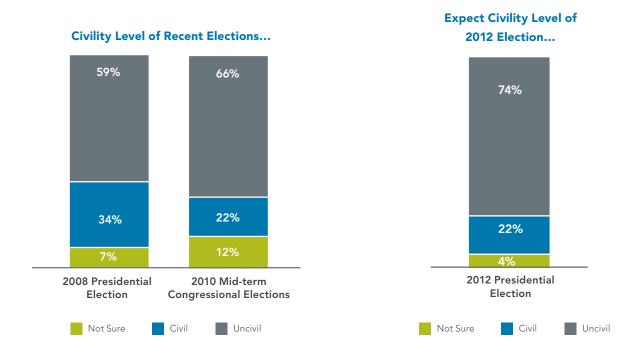| Category	Uncivil	Civil
Political Campaigns	80%	17%
Pop Culture	75%	18%
Media	74%	24%
Government	73%	23%
Music Industry	71%	21%
American Public	(+9) 70%	28%
Professional Sports	(+14) 68%	26%
Schools	63%	31%
Republicans in Congress	60%	29%
Supporters of the Tea Party	(+11) 60%	26%
YouTube	58%	17%
Democrats in Congress	(+12) 56%	34%
Blogs	55%	22%
Fox News	(+9) 51%	36%
Social Networks	(+6) 49%	35%
American Business	48%	46%
Twitter	38%	14%
MSNBC	37%	44%
CNN	32%	55%
New York Times	29%	42%
President Obama	28%	67%
Workplace	28%	59%
Oprah	17%	69%
Friends & Family	13%	86%
Conversation at Your Dinner Table	7%	90%

(Significantly more uncivil since 2010 with 90% confidence. Percentage point increase in parentheses.
Note: not every item in list was included in 2010 survey and therefore not able to be compared to 2011.)

Incivility In Politics & Government Is To Blame, But It Doesn't Have To Be That Way

While one-third (33%) of the American people accept the notion that incivility is a routine part of the political process, the vast majority (85%) believe that politics is becoming increasingly uncivil. However, Republicans are significantly more likely to believe that incivility is inherent in the political process than Democrats and Independents (41% vs. 27% vs. 31%, respectively).

Americans report that political campaigns are becoming more uncivil. They saw more incivility during the 2010 Congressional elections compared to the 2008 presidential election and they expect even greater incivility during the upcoming 2012 presidential election (74% expect it to worsen).

Civility Level of Recent Elections...

	2008 Presidential Election	2010 Mid-term Congressional Elections
Uncivil	59%	66%
Civil	34%	22%
Not Sure	7%	12%

Not Sure · Civil · Uncivil

Expect Civility Level of 2012 Election...

	2012 Presidential Election
Uncivil	74%
Civil	22%
Not Sure	4%

Not Sure · Civil · Uncivil

Who's to blame? Americans name the media (35%) and political party leaders (27%) as the most likely culprits for potential uncivil discourse and behavior that might occur during next year's presidential race. Interestingly, Americans expect less incivility from presidential candidates themselves (14%), Washington D.C. beltway insiders (13%) and the American public (10%) during next year's campaign.

The 2012 Presidential Election Might Hinge On Civility

Americans were asked about several factors that could determine their votes in the 2012 presidential election. The civility of presidential candidates will definitely be an important factor in who Americans vote for in 2012: Nearly nine out of 10 report that "the way the candidate treats and deals with people he or she disagrees with" (90%) and "the candidate's tone or level of civility" (88%) rank high in importance. Not surprisingly, the "candidate's position on specific issues" (92%) will be the most important factor in an individual's voting choice. In contrast, political affiliation of a candidate is reported to matter far less (55%) to American citizens.

Very/Somewhat Important In Determining Who You Will
Vote For In The 2012 Presidential Election...

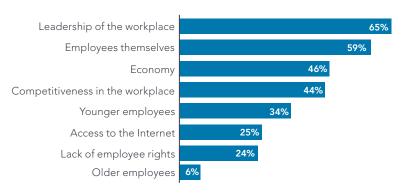|	
The candidate's position on specific issues	92%
The way the candidate treats and deals with people he or she disagrees with	90%
The candidate's personal beliefs and values	88%
The candidate's tone or level of civility	88%
The candidate's experience before running for president	84%
The candidate's political party	55%

Incivility Goes To Work

The workplace is another location for considerably uncivil interaction. Professor Christine Porath at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business remarks that incivility at work is hurting corporate America in lost productivity and stress resulting in multi-billion dollar annual hits to the economy. Moreover, her research has found that two-thirds of employees report their performance has declined due to incivility they have encountered at work.

In our survey, over four in 10 Americans — 43% — have experienced incivility at work. Almost as many (38%) believe that the workplace is becoming more uncivil and disrespectful than a few years ago. These respondents blame workplace leadership and other employees for the growing incivility problem. In fact, a Workplace Bullying Institute exists to help employees with overbearing bosses.

As a result of the awareness of — and frequent experience with — incivility many Americans report the need for civility training in the workplace (67%).

Who/What Is To Blame For Workplace Incivility?
(among those who report the workplace is becoming more uncivil)

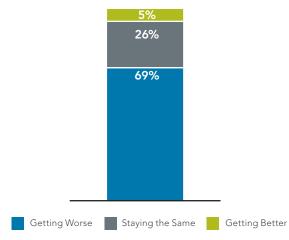|	
Leadership of the workplace	65%
Employees themselves	59%
Economy	46%
Competitiveness in the workplace	44%
Younger employees	34%
Access to the Internet	25%
Lack of employee rights	24%
Older employees	6%

Reading, Writing And Cyber Bullying

Uncivil behavior is also increasingly showing up in our classrooms, not just at work. Half of American parents (50%) report that their children have experienced incivility at school and nearly half of Americans twenty years and older (45%) say that they'd be afraid to be teenagers today because of incivility's frequent occurrence. One in 10 (11%) parents report that they have sent children to a different school due to problems with incivility.

Cyber bullying — when someone is threatened, harassed or embarrassed by another using the Internet — is of great concern to Americans today. Nearly seven in 10 Americans — 69% — report that cyber bullying is getting worse. An equally large number (72%) worry about children being cyber bullied. The National Crime Prevention Council recently reported that a sizeable 58% of fourth to eighth graders have had mean things said to them

Cyber Bullying In Society Is...

5%	
26%	
69%	

■ Getting Worse   ■ Staying the Same   ■ Getting Better

online and nearly 60% of students have never told their parents about the incident.

Even more so than at work, the majority of Americans — 78% — believe that civility training should be offered in our nation's schools.

@CivilityOnline

The Internet is often blamed for creating a hostile and rancorous environment for public discourse. The anonymity of the disturbing comments on blogs or in response to articles have intensified this perception.

John Temple, editor of Peer News, has said that anonymity on the Internet has so reduced responsibility that comments sections have been dominated by "racism, hate, ugliness" and "reflect badly on news organizations that have them."

Our research found that online incivility is indeed problematic but less harmful than other sources such as politics, media, celebrities and the younger generation.

"Digital conversations are meant to be engaging and to foster multi-dimensional dialogue. They are not meant to demean others or be hurtful. Although this research shows online incivility on the rise, the connectivity and opportunity for dialogue ultimately outweighs the risk."

Chris Perry
President of Weber Shandwick Digital Communications

- Significantly more Americans consider social networks uncivil this year than in 2010 (49% vs. 43%, respectively). Approximately half of those who expect civility to get worse over the next few years blame social networks for civility erosion.

- When asked about the different types of social media and their connection to incivility, YouTube and blogs received more uncivil ratings (58% vs. 55%, respectively) than social networks such as Facebook (49%) and Twitter (38%). Interestingly, Twitter is perceived as the least uncivil form of online conversation but it is also rated as the least civil (14%). This finding may mean that the public is not quite sure of Twitter's civility role.

Why are social networks better protected from incivility? Perhaps users find safety in social networks because they are able to control who sees and posts on their pages. Bloggers have few defenses against raging virtual demonstrations against their posts and graphic images on YouTube can go viral instantaneously.

Incivility's Negative Impact On Business

With incivility a growing problem in America, the risk of companies losing business over it is becoming more of a reality. Approximately seven in 10 Americans (69%) have either stopped buying from a company or have re-evaluated their opinions of a company because someone from that company was uncivil in their interaction. Further, nearly six in 10 (58%) have advised friends, family or co-workers not to buy certain products because of uncivil, rude or disrespectful behavior from the company or its representatives. All of these reported buying behaviors have significantly increased since one year ago.

Behaviors Resulting From Uncivil Experiences

Have you ever … because of incivility	2010	2011
Decided not to buy from a company again because someone from that company was uncivil in the way they treated you?	56%	69%
Reevaluated your opinion of a company because its tone or conduct was uncivil?	55%	69%
Decided not to vote for a political candidate because you felt he or she acted or spoke uncivilly?	not asked	67%
Advised friends, family or co-workers not to buy certain products or services because you felt a company or its representative was rude or uncivil?	49%	58%
"Defriended" or blocked someone online because you thought their comments or behaviors were uncivil?	45%	49%
Stopped going to an online site because you were uncomfortable with its lack of civility or the tone of conversation?	38%	38%
Dropped out of an online community or forum because it had become uncivil?	25%	27%
Quit a job because it was an uncivil workplace?	not asked	20%
Transferred your child to a different school because he or she was treated uncivilly? (among parents)	not asked	11%

(▬▬ These are statistically higher since 2010 with 90% confidence.)

Demonstrating incivility's power on the wallet, a recent survey by *Consumer Reports* found that 64% have left a store due to poor service. This data coincides with our finding that 65% of Americans have experienced incivility during a shopping trip.

In a related finding important for the marketplace, nearly six in 10 Americans (58%) report "tuning out" advertising because of perceived incivility. Companies whose businesses depend upon consumer perception should heed these findings as they try to emerge from the recession.

The Real Consequences Of Living With Incivility

The perceived lack of civility in the U.S. has far-reaching implications according to Weber Shandwick's and Powell Tate's second annual survey:
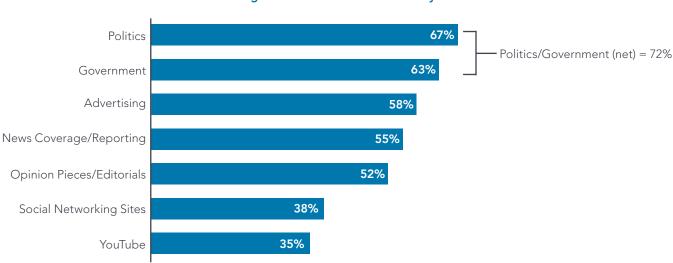
For America: Most Americans (91%) agree that incivility has negative consequences for America. Incivility in government is perceived to be harming America's future, hurting its reputation on the world stage and preventing it from moving forward. Only one-half (49%) of U.S. citizens today believe that America is among the most civil countries in the world. When looking at how Americans regard the civility of their nation, Republicans are significantly more likely to regard America as the most civil in the world compared to Democrats and Independents (68% vs. 37% vs. 40%, respectively).

For Business: As addressed earlier, many people are voting with their wallets against incivility by severing their patronage to companies, redefining their perceptions of brands, and spreading negative word-of-mouth about companies. Business leaders not only have to worry about consumer perception, but also what is happening within their own walls, as their employees increasingly encounter incivility among themselves. Uncivil employees can mean lower morale and productivity, greater legal risk and increased chances that customers will bear the brunt of an unhappy or uncivil representative.

For Politicians and Government: Two-thirds of Americans (67%) say that they have decided against voting for a candidate because he or she acted uncivilly, and nearly three-quarters (72%) have "tuned out" politics or government because of this disturbing trend.

For Media: More than half of Americans say they are "tuning out" news coverage/reporting (55%) and opinion pieces/editorials (52%) because of what they consider as uncivil commentary.

For Social Media: Online networks fare better than other venues but are still at risk of losing engaged customers and supporters due to uncivil behavior. Because of incivility, nearly half of Americans have defriended or blocked someone online, more than one-third have "tuned out" social networks and YouTube or stopped visiting an online site, and more than one-quarter have dropped out of an online community or forum.

Tuning Out Of … Because Of Incivility

Category	%
Politics	67%
Government	63%
Advertising	58%
News Coverage/Reporting	55%
Opinion Pieces/Editorials	52%
Social Networking Sites	38%
YouTube	35%

Politics/Government (net) = 72%

Remedies For Restoring Civility

Civility has been very much on the minds of Americans in the past year. Johns Hopkins Professor Pier M. Forni, co-founder of the Civility Project, defines the basics of civility as the Three R's: Respect, Restraint and Responsibility. These fundamental components of civility were echoed strongly in our research. When Americans were asked to define "civility," the words "respect" and "treating others as you would want to be treated" predominated.

Examples include:

> *"Treating each other with respect."*

> *"Can't we all get along."*

> *"Interacting with others with politeness and patience even under difficult circumstances. In the deepest way, civility involves other people's opinions, seeking to understand them, even when they differ dramatically from your own — to listen with a willingness to change your mind if you hear data and logic that makes more sense than your current understandings. Treating everyone the same regardless of background, age, affiliations…"*

President Obama has been urging Americans to act more civilly. At the National Prayer Breakfast in 2010, he said: "Those of us in Washington are not serving the people as well as we should. At times, it seems like we're unable to listen to one another; to have at once a serious and civil debate." And after the shooting of Gabrielle Giffords and the murders in Tucson, the president urged less conflict and more civility.

Civil communication begins early. The more that incivility infiltrates our culture, the more we may become dangerously indifferent to its existence and pass it down to the next generation. Many Americans agree that there should be civility training at school and at work. Perhaps a national public education program starting in the schools, cities and public squares across America could turn the tide on incivility and help restore respect and pride as a country.

"A national public education campaign endorsed by political leaders, schools, PTAs and corporate America and distributed through the media might be an important first step towards bringing civility back to our shores."

Jack Leslie
Chairman of Weber Shandwick

WEBER SHANDWICK
Advocacy starts here.

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