

“Dysfunctional Democracy”, US Elections: “Less Than A Week...”

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In-depth Report: [U.S. Elections](#)

Days before the US countrywide election (not only for the Oval Office) our democracy is leaning on what are called ‘down ballot’ races. Finally!

While national media indulge in the vicissitudes of the sleazy behavior and financial machinations of our two presidential candidates, local papers and broadcasters are making some last minute effort to help lowly citizens understand what choices we have in our own congressional and state races.

The very term ‘down ballot’ I find disturbing, implying as it does things less important, less worthy –like ‘going south’, a common trope for ‘failure’.

This belated attention to ‘down-ballot’ sums up the low priority given to hundreds of (non-presidential) races. Yet they are not insignificant. They include thousands of candidates running for the two houses of congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate, and for senate and assembly seats in 50 state legislatures. It’s the winners of these contests who make laws, who formulate environmental, agricultural, health, judicial and educational policies, who draw up budgets, and who are the real checks and balances on higher leadership. It is their ideals and their decisions which shape Americans’ day-to-day lives and our children’s futures.

I’m not the first one to note that democracy here is dysfunctional. What’s wrong with the Democratic Party? (I plead, to blank stares.) The Republican Party too. First, together they ensure that other parties, worthy but smaller, never become a serious challenge to their co-control. Second, both these major players are equally committed to the success of capitalist philosophy and the dominance of US military might across the globe.

The Democratic Party for all its moralizing and its intellectual chauvinism is well known to be notoriously negligent when campaigning beyond (and below) the presidential ticket; it seems to hibernate during what are called ‘off season’ (non-presidential) election years. Thus the loss of the Democratic majority in the House in 2010 and the Senate in 2014, resulting in influential committee chairs taken over by Republicans who could (and did) proceed to advance or withhold legislation in their own party’s interest. Thus we find ourselves with a blocked and bickering US Congress that also stonewalls President Obama’s attempts to lead.)

The brilliant and tireless civics educator Ralph Nader details [this unhappy history](#) in a recent article. An outstanding intellectual and civic campaigner, Nader asks why we repeatedly let this happen.

Even in these last hours of this shameful demonstration of how our democracy has deteriorated, when some local candidates are desperately trying to wade through their parties' muck to inform voters about their personal values and qualifications and to discuss local concerns, they too are obliged to devote resources to countering lies and half truths broadcast by opponents. Local candidates are also distracted by media's relentless questioning about Trump's personal character and Clinton's emails and lecture fees.

Like hundreds of thousands, probably millions, of citizens, I am deluged with campaign messages; rather than speak about policies, partisan campaigners like Moveon.org, DailyKOS, turnoutpac, DSCC (dsc.org) Senators Pelosi, Warren, Schumer and Sanders, the Committee of Concerned Scientists and more, plead for money to stave off the specter of a Trump victory.

People I meet and radio commentators I listen to heartily engage in gossip around the latest presidential contenders to the neglect of what's happening in their own backyard. One example is WAMC Radio in Albany which, whereas it does a fine job covering state affairs for New York, Massachusetts, Vermont and Connecticut, during this election cycle it seems to ignore local elections while devoting excessive [air time to the scandals](#) (or potential scandals) related to presidential candidates.

Media, a major culprit in the deterioration of our democracy, focuses where the drama and dirt are, tapping into the abundant whistle blowers and cynics who feed this sleaze-hungry machine. For months media has gleefully joined the fray. With vigor and expectations of profit, it may have entertained us with this indisputably colorful circus. But with what aim, except to suck up our energy and crush our ideals.

Citizens are irresistibly drawn into the drama. As dismayed and despondent and exhausted as they are, they still feed off the daily revelations, caught in the whirl of twitter and facebook posts.

We may join the gossip but I suspect many are less and less inclined to vote. Come actual election day balloting at local stations may be meager.

Starting Friday one congressional campaign I 'm familiar with is putting all its energy into what's called GOTV—GetOutTheVote. In other words, just get people to the polls next Tuesday!

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