

San Francisco, Election Day Analysis: The Presidency, “Voting American Style”

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San Francisco. This is penned on November 8, and the United States goes to the polls in a swell of turbulence.

The milk has long soured, the wishes of the electorate curdled by dissatisfaction and disgust. The sense of wishing to vote for neither candidate – Hillary Clinton for the Democrats or Donald Trump for the Republicans – has been thrown in along with partisan voices and furious promises.

This, however, is only the tip of what is a vast, bulky structure that has been put into motion. The outsider casting a cold eye on the proceedings will marvel at the various suggestions, multiplied through various formats, guides, and punditry. Activism abounds in various shades. There are suggestions, and in some cases, all out endorsements for candidates at all levels of government.

Much of this has the tone of a fund drive for a struggling charity or radio station, and a desperate one at that. In a society where voters may be discouraged, rendered irrelevant by helplessness and estrangement, the cry of “Vote!” is loud, incessant, and a source of unconvincing persuasion.

“Don’t stand still, vote,” goes a stilted slogan from the Clinton campaign, featuring Hillary, Bill and Bon Jovi, all taking the irony-free Mannequin challenge. Each election, many are not convinced by what is seen as an essentially impotent exercise, and participation rates tend to be horrendously low. Voters, in some instances, might as well be backing candidates in mid-freeze, dumb to their wishes.

In San Francisco, as with everything else, the activism has a singular slant. There are suggestions from such pundits as Broke-Ass Stuart (Stuart Schuffman), former mayoral candidate for the city, poet, and irate columnist for the *SF Examiner*. He advises voters today to go raise money for the homeless and protect the arts. That is merely the start of it.

His suggestions are predictable at the federal level: Clinton for President; Kamala Harris for US Senator while two Congressional districts (12th and 14th) also feature. The State levels follow – California State Senate Districts 11, 17 and 19. Within San Francisco itself come more cheat sheet recommendations that comprise more districts, the Board of Education, the City College Board, legal officers, and the BART Board. Democracy rings curiously, and variously, indeed.

While foreign presses and audiences tend to focus on the presidential election itself, with some concern of the composition of Congress, ballot initiatives tend to be ignored. These

tend to form an essential, and in some cases vital softening, of the result at the Presidential level. Madness may prevail in the machinery of Washington, but that is hardly an excuse to not get hands dirty at the local level.

An overview of some of these suggests how extensive they potentially are. The complex fabric of the United States warrants an understanding of what is happening at the elemental level. In California itself, there are propositions 51 to 67, among them the legalisation of marijuana (Proposition 64), and Proposition 62 (Death Penalty Abolition) and Proposition 66 (Death Penalty Procedures).

The wonder here is how some of these propositions ever reach the voter's scrawl. Not all have the gravitas of abolishing the death penalty or feeding the libertarian instinct of having pot. Proposition 60 covers the issue of condoms in Adult Films. (Broke-Ass Stuart suggests voting No for this one.)

Then come the avalanche of Propositions A to X, finished by Measure RR dealing with safety for the BART train system. These are similarly as varied as the numbered propositions, with Prop H calling for a public advocate, and Prop F insisting on engaging youth in the electoral process.

Such bewildering options can be daunting, and may serve to do less for informed democratic practice than supposed. Voting is trumpeted as a sacredly held responsibility, but that does not mean it will be discharged before the mountain of considerations facing the voter.

Adding to that is the structural set up of polling stations, with variable voting equipment and facilities. These can be found in the most curious of places. Restaurants, for instance, can be transformed on Election Day for reasons of proximity to the registered voter. (Ala Turca Restaurant on Geary Street is one such venue.)

What matters in counting as a polling place are certain "management requirements" outlined by the Election Assistance Commission, including accessibility and adequate space for setting up the equipment for voting. Law requirements specific to the state also apply.

Last but not the very least for the voter today is the distinct nature of this particular election. Brock Keeling, writing for *San Francisco Curbed* (Nov 7) suggested steps to take in the event of violence. "Seeing as how this has been both a dividing and violent election season, it's always a small possibility that there could be instances of voter intimidation on Tuesday." The recommendation is to call the California Secretary of State or Election Protection. To the very last, this promises to be a day of fear and loathing, garnished with a good deal of paranoia.

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