

Political system suffers from bipolar disorder.

The only constant in this nation's presidential election cycle is that it is a cycle and that the cycle has a fixed period that is accompanied by the few harmonics of congressional, state, and local elections. It is the four-yearly return to the presidential ballot box that draws the most attention, the most money, and the most hype. Participants in the campaigns for the highest office in the land try their damndest to convince every voter that their candidate is the one to save the nation and that the opposing candidate is akin to the devil and intent on bringing disaster to the country and its citizens. Since all campaigns before the primaries and the two remaining campaigns thereafter have the same goals and follow the same script, the number of truths and untruths fly about indiscriminately and only serve to emotionally tie voters to one candidate or, failing that, emotionally separate them from the other. Many voters have been, and will continue to be, turned off by these tactics and, with Election Day still months away, will have decided to sit this one out. In the mean time the campaigns and their candidates continue their battle for the remaining, more committed voters. It may be that the elimination of the sporadic voter is a calculated gambit. Votes by this group may be much more unpredictable than that of the more frequent voters. Thus having reduced the electorate to the two partisan camps with a number of independents in the middle, the campaigns can now switch over to the task of coaxing the undecided to their side. Issues are tested for effectiveness on focus groups before they are launched. Policy promises are tailor-made and almost everyone knows that they can't be kept by the candidate once in office. But, if they aren't too wild, enough voters will want to believe them and eventually cast their vote for the candidate that appeals the most, on whatever grounds.

The candidate that wins does so, of course, with the votes of a majority of the participating electorate. Thus the partisans of the majority are euphoric over their win. A great high has been reached. After all the positive energy they exerted the partisans of the losers slip into an immediate depression which usually lasts until the activity for the next election gives them renewed hope.

Almost immediately the winning candidate, the president elect, will start to downplay the promises: economic times are such that ...,

Congress will have its voice, unforeseen events may ..., and there is the national debt, always. And, indeed, come January the new president is sworn in and the Whitehouse and Congress begin their negotiations over policy and legislation and, voila, promises cannot be kept, other forces prevail, and new conditions presented themselves. The voters, who pushed these officials into office on that wave of promises, have no recourse for another four years – maybe two if you consider the House and one third of the Senate – and are quickly sent into a funk. “I told you so,” say the voters who didn't vote and those of voting age who didn't bother to register feel vindicated in their convictions that “they are all crooks and they do whatever they want anyway,” and continue their perpetual funk.

What would be the antidepressant that could cure us from this political bipolar disorder? It is the communication between the politicians and the electorate that is driving this cycle. Because our election cycle is constant there is no reason for politicians to spend a lot of money on communications with the voter in off-years. In European countries messages from candidates are most intense before elections, just like here, but the intensity is only marginally higher than the communications during the off-years. There are two reasons for this: campaign funds are limited to membership dues because there is no private funding, and political parties are given broadcasting slots to present their causes to the public on a regular basis. This ensures a low volume but constant communication of comprehensive messages to the electorate. It is a constant stream of information that emphasizes the party programs in fairly fine detail. The multi-party democracies offer a greater basket of nuanced programs. Coalitions are formed after an election and the parties' performance is easier visible to the public. In the U.S. system both the Democratic and Republican parties are coalitions by themselves and the unified message is much more difficult to attain so that it often looks muddled. The voters have to choose between all these aspects of the party programs. This is very difficult to do. Therefore they rely on the candidates to define the party program and, as a result, there is no continuity of programs since every candidate brings his/her own issues to the campaign. The result is a cycle between great hype and promise followed by a deep disappointment and funk during which the country has effectively eliminated half of its voting age public. This, surely, is not the definition of a great democracy.