

Pity the Democracy. “US Media runs our Proud American Democracy”

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Sit back and enjoy the ride. US media runs our proud American democracy. It's in their interests to keep Trump in the forefront, then shift to Carson, maybe move to Fiorina—just for a day- with interludes into the cozy nest of Democratic contenders.

We are being toyed with by our news outlets—print, radio and TV, national and local. With every day the American presidential campaign moves on (if not forward), I become more dismayed. Take one major contestant for the White House, The Donald—I love media's moniker for this political celebrity. Trump is a blustering, inarticulate, egoistic, maybe smart fellow who makes outrageous claims and calls people nasty names. Somehow, he has popular appeal. Thus he's newsworthy.

Whether it's Trump's declaration that he's not beholden to donors or his false statements on world history, he ought to be seriously challenged. He's not; neither by his opponents nor by journalists. The men and women questioning Trump—everyone's getting in on the act, like how, before the invasion of Iraq, every international correspondent dreamed of bagging an interview with Saddam Hussein- do not really confront his outrages. They discuss Trump's rudeness; they gossip about him with their political commentators; they fact-check Trump's statements; they compare his poll numbers; they play clips from his rallies. The result:—more airtime for The Donald. And we read reports like “The most stupid things said on the campaign trail”. That's helpful?

Journalists can only push so far, they claim. “We can't be advocates and we should not appear partisan”, we argue. Really?

Which candidate shines on any particular day varies as we move through the week, theoretically in response to shifting popularity polls. If we don't learn much from a candidate's declarations, we still follow them, eager to quote their latest outrage to friends. We eat it up. As Mr. Trump declared at the opening of one speech: “We're killing them; we're killing them.”

Audiences of 24 million and 15 million tuning into televised debates don't reflect how popular Trump and his co-debaters are; those numbers demonstrate the cunning of our media producers. A lot of money is rolling into media coffers from companies blasting their commercials at us 24 million enchanted viewers. Later, ad revenue will be augmented by paid-for promotions from candidates' coffers. All those \$25. donations and the million dollars checks to your favorite candidate will end up in the accounts of media outlets too.

Today, Trump's lead seems to be waning. Although it's only by a fraction less than the

margin of error, media are quick to exploit this and they shift to the soft-spoken surgeon. Carson's statements on Muslim citizens and on gun violence seem to have done his popularity no harm; in fact they may have earned him more support. This week is Ben Carson's week. So we're treated to vignettes from his youth, his family, his medical career.

I watch. Am I waiting for Carson to make some blunder that drops him back to second place, or will Rubio shout some wisdom that will bump the good doctor off his perch? Both Trump and Carson have written books, I see. So if there's no new news, we can watch book reviews. And maybe if something in these memoirs is questionable— as just happened <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/11/ben-carson-west-point-215598> — guess what? More coverage.

Surely the entertainment power of these campaigns is confirmed by their imaginative reach into hit TV comedy shows—Kimmel, the View, SNL, The Late Show with Colbert. We need some lightness; we need to get away from awful subjects like military budgets, crony-capitalism, police violence, or the future of social security. Laughing candidates remind us we real human beings are running for the nation's highest office. Look, they can take a poke.

You're thinking of emigrating to the more civic-minded Europe, you say? According to Serge Halimi's survey of recent elections across the Atlantic <http://mondediplo.com/2015/10/01bigmedia>, big media is in control there too.

Although you might consider Canada. In last month's election there, it seems all big city newspapers, the majority of which endorsed the Conservative party, (which lost) were challenged for their apparent attempts to deceive the electorate.

<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/nov/01/election-blow-canada-postmedia-stephen-harper>.

I admit I'm hooked on the US show. I'll worry about democracy later.

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