

US Election Concern: What Is There To Vote For?

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Region: [USA](#)

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New York, New York: As Americans prepare to go to the polls, the airwaves are littered with paid advertising of the crassest and most manipulative kind. Political issues packaged by ad agencies are flooding the arena of politics with nasty negative ads.

So far, the two parties and their backers have spent a half billion dollars on political advertising with much of the placements still to come in the next few weeks. CBS reports the “spend” will top a billion dollars —just on ads.

AP warns: “Get ready, presidential swing states. Now the campaign ad crush — and TV spending spree — really begins.”

This is occurring even as the economy and unemployment remain major issues. Millions of Americans are broke and hurting as poverty grows, but there seems to be no shortage of money to grease politics.

It’s being called a “deluge,” leading many Americans, according to USA Today, to wish the election was already over.

The political pros call it “the air war”—ironically, a military metaphor—as the media sells message points the way they sell soft drinks while political personalities and their speechwriters provide buzz words and superficial slogans to define their differences.

It’s not clear if the American people and their media know or care how this wasteful, degrading and hypocritical exercise looks to people around the world: to Europeans battling austerity, Iranians surviving a vicious sanctions regime, Palestinians denied a country, Africans in many countries sinking deeper into deprivation and others coping with war and despair.

No wonder American “democracy” is losing respect in the eyes of many, including citizens inside these Disunited States, many of whom who are trying, but so far failing, to get big money out of politics.

Industry professionals see it not as a case study in political freedom, but as a cynical exercise, a caricature and demolition of real democracy. Producer Tyler Perry told an interviewer, “Just being in the business that I’m in, which is show business, I realize that a lot of things are smoke and mirrors. A lot of it is dust and let’s hide the facts.”

Because the discourse is so uninspired, the political parties are pushing voters to vote against their adversaries, not for anything better. Candidates used to say, ‘vote for me;’ Now they say, ‘vote against him!’

Media outlets cover the ads—allegedly “fact checking” them, while rarely providing any

deeper context or background. As of the end of October, Mitt Romney is the big spender on TV ads while the Obama campaign is not far behind, but more focused on an outreach effort, what's called "the Ground game."

Our politics has been turned into a covert operation. Many of the donations to these ad budgets are secret, reports National Public Radio:

"Since April, most of the TV ads supporting Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney have come from outside groups, not from Romney's own campaign. And those groups raised more than half of their money from secret donors, according to a six-month study of ads."

The Republicans came up with the deceptive SuperPACS but the Democrats, after condemning them, joined right in!

From April through September, Romney for President aired slightly more than 144,000 ads on broadcast TV. The outside groups supporting him ran nearly 250,000.

That's 250,000 ads, many focused on just 9 key so-called battleground states. They are aimed mostly at undecided voters—often the least informed. The Romney campaign reportedly is spending \$85,000 dollars day blasting away at President Obama

These ads also benefit/enrich the media, according to the Global Post.

"The massive ad buys from both campaigns are welcome revenue source for local TV stations. The International Business Times reports that political ad sales are a bright spot in an otherwise weak market. Spending on local TV ads beat expectations and rose by nearly 10 percent in the second quarter of 2012."

The odd thing is that there no definitive research proving these ads are effective, "It is phenomenally difficult to measure with precision what the effect of advertising is," said Ken Goldstein, professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, "But advertising very, very much matters at the margin." Sadly, elections play big on TV but exist in the margin of our real concerns.

This advertising pollution is partly responsible for the superficial TV coverage that resembles coverage of horse races.

The campaign has also been likened to a stage show. James A. Thurber writes in *Campaigns and Elections American Style*, "Campaigns are wars, battles for the hearts and minds, but most importantly for the votes of the American people.

Presidential campaigns as wars or battles seem an appropriate metaphor when we consider the extensive strategies and negative tactics employed by presidential candidates to win the nation's highest office. And yet a campaign is also an elaborate form of entertainment—a stage show—with the players often acting as puppets whose strings are being pulled at precise moments behind the curtain."

When asked about these ads, many voters are sarcastic and critical but the campaigns have so much invested in the game, that they don't really listen to what the critics or ordinary people have to say. Campaigns spawn an industry of political consultants, researchers and operatives, who have a stake in all this spending.

In an election where creating jobs is big issue, few of the paid pundits on the networks comment on how politics has become a business, creating lots of jobs, albeit temporary ones. Many of the underlings hope that if their guy wins, they will get a cushy government job. Idealism has nothing to do with their participation.

David Sirota explains on the website Salon that “The breathtaking speed of this political transformation (towards mega-money in politics) reflects the larger one-percent-ization of our economy. the rich got so much richer than the rest of us, and they are therefore better positioned to dominate politics with their checkbooks. Indeed, as campaign finance records show, this year’s stunning influx of cash isn’t coming primarily from small donors interested in democratic engagement — it is coming from the fat cats.

These are donors — or, better yet, sponsors — who don’t altruistically give money but who instead shrewdly invest it, in this case in candidates from whom they expect a return. And whether that return comes in the form of pre-election speeches promoting special-interest policies or post-election bills that provide windfalls to politically connected industries, the corrupt campaign finance system forcing candidates to rely on these sponsors means the investments almost always pay off.

This influence-buying explains why, for all the attempts to stress supposed differences, the two presidential candidates essentially agree on the major economic issues their Big Money financiers care about, from Social Security cuts (for them) to free trade deals (more of them) to regulations (less of them) to corporate tax rates (lower them).”

They look alike. Romney and Obama are both tall, articulate and aggressive, but when you listen closely, they often sound alike. Yes, there are stylistic differences and rhetorical distinctions but both are seeking to be perceived as centrists, focused more on dumbing it down and dumping on each other than offering bold reforms.

Third parties are not welcome in the spectacle. Last week, the Green Party’s Presidential candidate Jill Stein was arrested for protesting her exclusion from the political debates.

And so if you are still harboring any illusions about the electoral process as a lever for change, forget them. Our democracy, alas, seems bought and paid for, an empty charade, even as our media and political class lecture the rest of the world about the holy grail of democracy.

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