

The two faces of American voters

They want politicians to compromise.
But they themselves won't compromise.

BY JONATHAN HACK

Americans are hypocrites, politically speaking. Overwhelmingly, voters express a desire for politicians to compromise. A Pew Research Center study in June found that 65% of Americans believe it is very important that elected officials compromise with opponents. This sentiment holds when viewed along party lines — 61% of Republicans and 69% of Democrats say politicians should compromise.

Yet, here's the kicker: Despite this hope for more genteel politics, when asked about core issues — for example, immigration — Americans won't stomach compromise. Accepting compromise is a lot harder when outcomes do not reflect strong-held views. Voters pay lip service to a less polarized political landscape but refuse to do what is needed to achieve that for fear of appearing weak.

These competing preferences are unsurprising. Wishing for something is always easier than

doing the work needed to bring it about. The problem, however, is that this cognitive dissonance makes it even harder for the country to find paths toward a less vicious political climate. Depolarizing America is a mammoth undertaking, but one way is to turn the spotlight away from national events and refocus on local politics.

Since 1968, politics, like most things in America, have become nationalized. There is greater turnout during presidential years; turnout is low for the midterms, and ballot roll-off increases exponentially the more local the candidate. Many voters know more about top-line candidates than they do about their municipal representatives. That makes sense: News outlets are often inclined to cover the eye-popping national events — but doing so comes at a detriment.

The nationalization of American politics requires the unification of disparate groups under a broad theme where multiple entrance points are necessary. Here, antipathy toward the



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other side is the easiest. Whether a voter is rich or poor, highly educated or not, the easiest narrative uniting disparate groups cutting across differences is, "The other side is destroying our way of life."

What, if anything, can be done to refocus and help depolarize?

Some argue for a fundamental overhaul of the American political system. We accept the nationalization of politics and change our electoral system to better reflect this reality. In other words,

scrap the districting system, move to the proportional representation electoral system, and make politics truly about political parties and national interests. Make America a Parliamentary System (MAPS! I found my campaign slogan).

This will fail, if for no other reason than it is the complete antithesis of American democracy.

A more realistic approach ensuring a multifaceted politic promoting bipartisan cooperation, is to turn our attention to local news and politics. A forth-

coming study finds that when it comes to local issues, Democrats and Republicans look similar. Using data from a YouGov survey, researchers examine the preferences of Democratic and Republican residents of eight U.S. metro areas (including the cities and suburbs): Charlotte, Cleveland, Houston, Indianapolis, Memphis, Rochester, Seattle and St. Louis.

Huge differences exist between Democrats and Republicans nationally, but when it comes to local issues committing ourselves to local politics would ensure that our participation has the greatest chance of mattering. An individual active in local politics can affect outcomes more directly than he or she could nationally.

Local politics can be a release valve depressurizing nationalization and polarization that we claim to hate so much.



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AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES / OLIVIER DOULIERE

Supporters rally in favor of President Donald Trump on Friday outside the Capitol in Washington.

tion is based on an invalid premise.

Leonard Cohen,
Wantagh

To the reader who wrote "Congress should get back to critical needs" [Letters, Oct. 11], I wish to offer some facts. First, Democrats are not trying to

"overturn the 2016 presidential election." In my opinion, they are attempting to ensure that there are consequences for any illegal and immoral acts that President Donald Trump has committed or encouraged others to commit.

The writer states that he wants Congress to act on

"things meaningful to the average American." He is apparently unaware that the House has passed many dozens of bills to benefit us average Americans, only to have Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell allow them to languish in the Senate. Examples of such legislation involve gun safety, voting rights, protection of affordable health care, campaign finance reform, etc. I believe his main priority for almost the last three years has been to assure that judicial vacancies are filled with right-wing ideologues, many of whom are unfit for their positions.

What would truly be meaningful to average Americans would be to have an administration that worked for us, rather than for President Donald Trump, his family and those who have enabled them to trample on the Constitution and pervert democracy as we know it.

Sherry Eckstein,
Huntington

Proceed with care in creating a new agency

The article about the Huntington Town Board's consideration of creating a Bureau of Administrative Adjudication to handle code and ordinance violations raises many questions ["Enforcing the code," News, Oct. 14]:

Would parties affected by a violation, other than the defendant, be able to get details on and attend a hearing? Would verbatim transcripts be made available to the public and subject to the Freedom of Information Law? Who would appoint the director? Would there be a mechanism to ensure that it is not simply a political appointee who will act in accord with the governing ideology of the town supervisor and/or attorney?

Huntington residents need to understand the legal ramifications of this proposal, lest they create a new opaque institution.

Marc Schenck,
Albertson

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