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Democracy as Default

By JOHN MADIGAN
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In our current political culture, democracy is often hailed with uncountable accolades for its genius across a wide range of situations (though this praise often withers away when people don't like someone who was elected). However, at the time of our founding, democracy was referred to only in a pejorative way. Each founding father could have pointed to the ancient world's democracies and pontificated on the tyranny of the masses' unrefined (ignorant, thoughtless, or excessively selfish) will

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and the factionalization of the public. Democracy could also be seen as a necessary evil, a way to understand the will of the people, without being considered a good way to govern. Such views of democracy have declined over time, and now it is praised and viewed as the default system of governance.

The problems of the unrefined will and factionalization are prominently displayed in the current state of the Democratic primaries. From the first debate on, the supposedly informed voters who are most likely to watch have been subjected to non-stop pandering, petty insults, and bickering meant to energize a hodge-podge of demographic and ideological groups for candidates trying to eke out a narrow plurality. Reaching a consensus is irrelevant in a democracy. What matters more is who can buy the most ads, or make the most promises to a public in which simplistic instinct and prejudice are sometimes much too rampant.

The commonsensical belief in affordable health care, minimizing student debt, and racial equality are contorted into Medicare for All, cancellation of student debt, and reparations. There is clearly a need for something to be done, but policies resulting from fickle passions are rarely effective.

In contentious times, democracy's advocates often point to the "miracle of aggregation," the idea that the choices of uninformed voters are essentially random and thus don't affect election

results in any particular direction, meaning elections are decided by the more-informed. Although this can be true when the issues at hand are unemotional, many uninformed voters are animated by a particular issue that affects them personally. How can we blame them? Most Americans do not have the time to inform themselves on which candidate has the most effective policies or to weigh their various flaws. We all want to make our lives better, but we are all victims of fanaticism and fallacies.

People who acknowledge democracy's flaws often fall back on the famous notion espoused by Winston Churchill: "democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." This notion, though, fails to apply to the everyday lives of Americans. From local government to the infamous lengthy faculty meeting, the unrefined will of the majority of those who actually attend triumphs

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Sanders and the Ticket

By DR. DAVID FRISK
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

The Democratic party's dilemma this year is simply stated but difficult. It can take back some of Donald Trump's voters by nominating Senator Bernie Sanders, or it can keep the recently won support of most of the anti-Trump former Republicans (or people who formerly tended to vote Republican) by choosing almost anyone else. It cannot, broadly speaking, do both. Although it isn't clear which course of action would be more likely to win the presidency, a party should always consider the down-ballot consequences. And there, a Sanders nomination looks like a net minus.

Although Trump is not an extremist in policy terms, he seems extreme to many people who might accept a president with the same views who talked and acted differently. He also blatantly repudiates the moderate style that has long (almost

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always, really) been dominant in Republican presidential politics. Most of his supporters love that, and his opponents hate it. Trump is a name-caller and uses unprecedentedly aggressive language in other ways as well. Some of his opponents cite these characteristics in condemning him and are sincerely offended by them, but are no loss to the Republicans since they vote Democratic regardless. But others find them deal-breakers, and this rather than policy is the

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over or subverts the original agendas put forward. Our ever-shortening attention spans have created a chaotic environment where fads and a shallow rationalism dominate while experience, history, and tradition are laughed at. In situations where populists have to convince only a small number of people to vote for them or their ideas, the baby is often

thrown out with the bath water.

Instead of using democracy as a way to find solutions, we should use it more as a way to find problems: to identify the long-term issues we care most about. Elected officials and leaders of organizations should be insulated from the short-term buffeting of public opinion and should be in office for long enough to effectively implement necessary but unpopular decisions. For some

organizations, this would be achieved most effectively by appointed leaders; it would be undemocratic but effective. And as citizens, we need to focus more on the problems and less on the solutions. There should still be democracy in our American system, but its current ubiquity has troubling consequences. A longer-term approach to fixing our nation's problems would set the stage for difficult but vital changes to our system.

SANDERS AND THE TICKET *cont.*

main reason why they're against Trump. Although a significant source of new support for the Democrats,

somewhat open-minded can easily recognize its opposite—except among the minority of politicians who are

[Sanders'] hostility to the American economic system and passion for iron-fisted government has a psychological equivalent in his arrogant closed-mindedness.

they cannot be taken for granted.

Sometimes political converts are quite zealous for their new party or cause. But not always. The Never Trump people who to one degree or another have left the Republican party may not be voting Democratic for long. Their votes for Democratic candidates in competitive congressional districts in 2018 are ones the Democrats cannot afford to lose. And they aren't a constituency for Sanders.

There are two reasons for this. One is that they don't want their country or themselves to be oppressed by the confiscatory levels of taxation and regulation that Sanders can be expected to push for as president. The other is that their disgust at gross incivility is bipartisan, and Sanders is far from a nice guy unless you're completely on his side. His hostility to the American economic system and passion for iron-fisted government has a psychological equivalent in his arrogant closed-mindedness. Voters who are themselves civil and

both good at concealing harshness and arrogance and wish to, a charmed circle that doesn't include Bernie Sanders. Granted, Sanders is real. But in his case that can be a problem.

The presidential nominee need not define the whole party, of course, and freshman Democrats in previously

for "sellout" Democrats in order to keep them in office, even though they are the ones responsible for the party's House majority. One problem for the Democrats' more moderate incumbents in 2020 is that they are too easily, however unfairly, associated with a Democratic establishment and a "Clinton machine" that are widely detested on the left wing of the party. They cannot afford to be charged with such sympathies more often than they already are. Both the resulting need to placate left-wing Democrats and their own total opposition to Trump will, I suspect, lead non-leftist Democratic incumbents to support

Some Sanders backers who would reluctantly vote for, say, Joe Biden in order to get rid of Trump won't necessarily vote for "sellout" Democrats in order to keep them in office, even though they are the ones responsible for the party's House majority.

Republican districts can signal their discomfort with Sanders to moderate voters. But that is a difficult tactic in a superheated political environment like this year's. My sense is that Berniecrats will expect strong, not vague, support for their guy if he's the nominee. Some Sanders backers who would reluctantly vote for, say, Joe Biden in order to get rid of Trump won't necessarily vote

Sanders (if he's the candidate) more clearly than they would prefer. And that might lose them more than a few of the votes they won in 2018.

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CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

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