

All opinions are not created equal

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Be Counted

All of us have a right to our opinions. Our rights to express these opinions are enshrined in the hallowed documents of our nation. However, having the right to express an opinion does not mean that all such opinions carry equal weight. This obvious statement needs repeating often as we approach an important election, but also as we are relentlessly inundated by the 24-7 media.

When we have a medical problem, would we go to anyone but a doctor for an opinion as to possible courses of corrective action? Not only do we want a doctor to consult with, we often search for the best doctors. A medical degree is not enough because we want someone who has specialized in the problem we may have and has a serious experience base with such problems. Would we cross a bridge or fly in a plane that was designed by someone other than an engineer? And not just any engineer but one who specializes in bridges and planes. We do this with our need for expert opinions throughout our careers and lives.

Such judgments are made at a personal level and at a national level. We also apply standards and qualifications criteria in numerous instances. For example, is possession of a handgun acceptable? Well, that question cannot be answered unless we also ask "possession by whom?" We accept possession by a police officer or a soldier, but not by an arbitrary citizen without due cause. Similarly, as a nation, we ask, given that nuclear weapons are a reality, how do we distinguish between "good" and "bad" nations that possess nuclear weapons?

Example criteria include: Is the nation an aggressor? Is it a democratically led nation? Are its leaders accountable to its people and in a way to the world's sense of acceptable behavior? (We have to be careful with this one — the world has many times overlooked behavior that has resulted in the slaughter of millions and to this day ignores humanitarian issues to better its economic activity.) Do the nation's leaders threaten other nation's existence without provocation?

As a nation now about to go to the polls to elect a Congress we are inundated with messages of elected officials trying to persuade us to vote for them and telling us that their opponents are the lowest forms of life on Earth. (Since there are few criteria for running for office, all sides running may be low forms of life.) Clearly, if there is any truth in any of these messages, that truth is severely censored and biased. And yet, we are expected to evaluate all sides and come to voting decisions that reflect our beliefs and desires.

Much reading from conflicting sources is needed for a person to understand some semblance of reality. This is not an easy thing to do; different newspapers and media often present the day's events with diametrically opposed views. A serious citizen will read many such reports and come to a unique view of reality and truth. However, too many are party-line voters; they would prefer to vote for a thief from political party A rather than a good candidate from opposing party B. This is an intellectually bought person, one that party A has in their pockets. Others base their vote on the candidate's looks, or ethnic or religious identity, another dim way to vote.

Yet, in our system, all citizens have a right to vote in any way they wish, or not vote at all. One may find some comfort that those who do not vote are the least knowledgeable, but this is not always the case. How important is a good knowledge of history to our citizenry? Unless we know our own recent and distant national and international history, we are at the mercy of those who regularly mislead us, and those who paint a picture of events that are a fantasy meant to lead us to the edge of the cliff, which may indeed occur. Then it will be too late.

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