

No place for a nervous person

Ugly election and the politics of fear

By **RALPH HEIBUTZKI**
HP Correspondent

To hear the pollsters tell it, Americans have never felt more anxious about a presidential race and the nominees it produced, Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump. One measurement of that anxiety comes from a Bloomberg News poll, posted Oct. 19, in which 59 percent of Clinton's supporters said that they'll be "panicked" if Trump wins. Forty-two

percent of Trump's supporters chose the same word to describe a Clinton presidency.

Thirty-five percent of Clinton's supporters said they'll feel "unhappy" if Trump wins. Fifty-three percent of Trump's supporters feel likewise about a Clinton presidential win.

How seriously you should take such snapshots – or how much weight to give them emotionally – is really a matter of perspective, said Dr. Glenn Chapman, a counselor at Centered on Wellness in Benton Harbor.



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"One thing I'm telling myself is this," Chapman said. "I'm 70 years old, so I have lived through at least 12 presidents. Some, I have liked, and some, I haven't liked. But I've always been able to live the life I would have lived."

Those sentiments aren't too far removed from the advice dished out in the Kinks' 1978 song, "Live Life: *'Don't get depressed, when you read in the press/About world revolution, and social events/Try*

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Unburdened by our choices

Approaches for an anxiety-inducing election

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Remembering that knowledge is freedom could be coping mechanism No. 1 for an ugly presidential election, Lake Michigan College's Tiffany Bohm said.

When asked how voters might cope, the political science instructor responded: "Exactly what I tell the students here at

LMC. We have great resources – use them. Look at the nonpartisan websites. Do research on the candidates for your district, state, national (offices) – and if you can find some common ground that appeals to your political affiliation, that probably is the best way to navigate this election cycle."

If you're feeling stressed about electoral choices, try figuring out your options, to determine what action you'll take, therapist Dr. Glenn Chapman advises.

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"In this case, our choices are voting for the person whose flaws we can more comfortably live with," Chapman said. "Another is not voting – giving yourself a pass – or voting in a protest way, for an independent, or a write-in candidate. So give yourself some options."

In doing so, voters can say, "I'm very unhappy about this situation, but what are my options? What are the things I can do to feel better about this situation?" he said.

Taking stock this way can be an effective method of regaining control over your choices, Bohm agrees.

"I think anything that people feel comfortable with is an act of civic duty, yes," she said.

Whatever happens on Nov. 8, try to keep the outcome in perspective, Chapman advises.

"Although we get very exercised over who our leaders are going to be, maybe we just need to tell ourselves, 'I may be overreacting, and I will still be able to live my life as I choose,'" he said.

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not to panic when you switch on the news! And see crooked politicians and the unemployment queues! It's only life, it's really fine! Don't always believe what you read in the headlines."

But if it's really so simple to brush off the latest pronouncements of a 24-hour news cycle, why do so many polls seem to suggest the opposite?

Lake Michigan College political science instructor Tiffany Bohm questions what the constant polling actually shows because she hasn't seen any electoral angst among her students.

"Actually, it's very opposite. The younger generations are projecting more voter apathy. I think some of it is not being covered in the media. I'd like to see the evidence" of Clinton-Trump angst, she said.

Although LMC students are definitely engaged, and keeping tabs on the election, she said "they don't appear to be full of fear. If anything, they're more frustrated."

Tuning-out time?

Bohm came to that conclusion after reviewing a week of headlines to see if she could find any major patterns. One stood out more than others.

According to Bohm, the volume of campaign donations and spending has "slowed down significantly" from the 2008 and 2012 elections.

"People are not contributing, which suggests they're turning out," she said.

Bohm and Chapman agree the barrage from negativity from both candidates – like Trump's references to "Crooked Hillary" or her dismissal of him as unfit for the presidency – makes this election a far more downbeat one than usual.

Both candidates have traded many hyperbolic statements, such as Trump's suggestion last week to



Don Campbell / HP staff

A Lincoln Township homeowner put a lot of work into expressing a dim view of Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton. The display seems an indicator of the nerves opened up by this year's election.

15,000 supporters at an Ocala, Fla., rally that Clinton's election would mean "the almost total destruction of our country as we know it."

Such statements remind Chapman of a dynamic that he's often seen in marriage counseling.

"We talk about a communication pattern called 'blame and defend' – does that sound familiar? It obviously never resolves anything, never clarifies anything, and just escalates whatever the issue might be," he said.

Among his colleagues, "the farmer's market consensus was these are two candidates that obviously elicit strong negative feelings," Chapman said. "No one used the word 'toxic,' but it's been a very toxic campaign, very little talk about issues."

Those feelings are reflected in polls like Bloomberg's, where 62 percent view Trump unfavorably, and 52 percent view him "very unfavorably" – or a September Pew Research Center poll,

in which 55 percent of its respondents felt "very disgusted" with the election.

Chapman said neither he nor his colleagues have heard clients expressing any election year angst, but they are encountering it more in their own social circles.

"In the past, if people were disaffected, they just tuned out, and left it alone. Now, people can't seem to do that. They stay connected, even in a very unhappy way," he said.

Bohm draws a different conclusion from Clinton's and Trump's negative exchanges.

"We are so divided, and the nation is so partisan right now," Bohm said. "Both national candidates appear to be appealing to issues that elicit an emotional response – charges of sexual assault and harassment, coming from Clinton towards Trump, and her mishandling of classified information, from Trump" to Clinton.

Where's the underdog?

Historically, candidates

have often used anger and frustration to turn out their base, and try to pick up independent voters along the way, Bohm said.

"The problem is that we have two candidates who are doing that very effectively, for different issues. And, potentially, it might result in low voter turnout, rather than mobilizing enough voters," she said.

One other complicating factor this year is the lack of an "underdog" for voters to identify with, Bohm said.

Instead, the outcome is focused on which Republican or Democratic "team" is winning, "rather than which candidate presents the best options for future American success," she said.

"Now you have all these (other) supporters, who are sort of lost," she said.

Faced with all those negative variables, it's not surprising that potential voters take them personally – and feel ready to tune out,

Chapman agrees.

"There's a lot of projection going on. These people, at one point, carried our hopes, but now, they've dashed our hopes with their flaws – so there's this hurt and angry response," he said.

Even so, those who do turn out often expect bigger results – particularly on the economic front – than reality bears out, Bohm said.

"If you look historically – at the stock market, how the economy goes – you can go all the way back to the 1850 (presidential) election. We expect a 'change' election, where it appears that lots is at stake," Bohm said. "If you look at the economics based on inflation, and the policies that come out, it's fairly stable. There's no bleep."

If older voters are concerned "that one candidate over the other is going to drive the economy into the ruins, there is no historical evidence for this," she said.

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