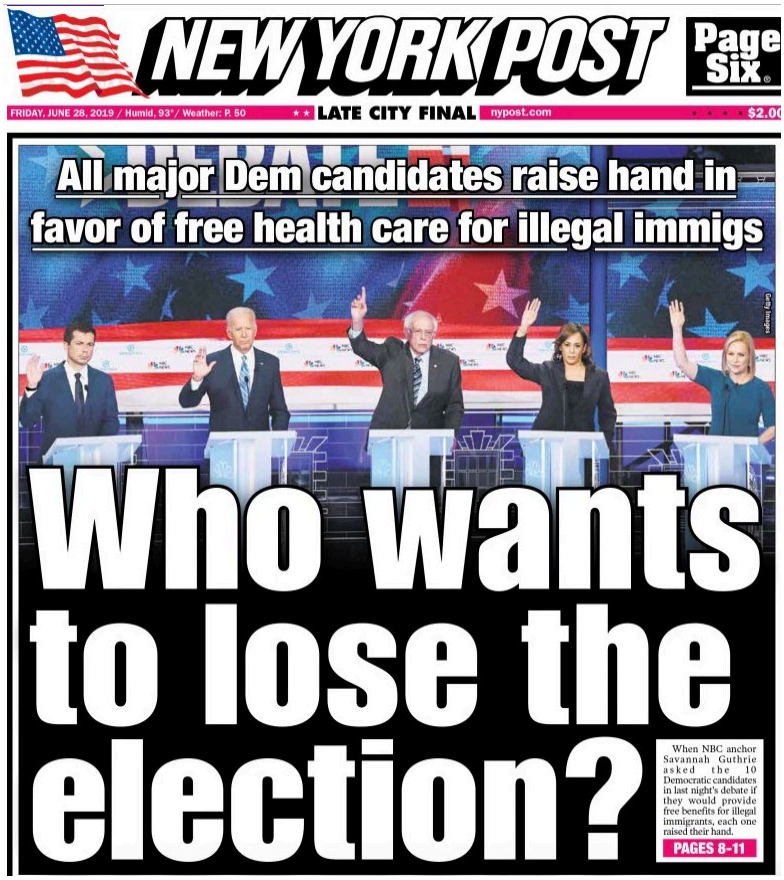
July 2019

A Solution to Political Chaos

So you know: 1) The following idea won't be hugely popular; 2) Tim Zagat was a lawyer at one of my brokerage clients; 3) I was strongly advised years ago, never to discuss politics in the IRL; 4) Know, sadly, many voters may be unable to point to China on a map; and 5) This *solution* is somewhat tongue in cheek



In the recent NBC-sponsored Democratic Debates the large 2020 field split on key issues including health care, immigration and student loan debt. Some shouted over others to be heard; many interrupted each other; a few stood by silently with one candidate even suggesting his microphone had been turned off. As California Senator Kamala Harris famously said during a disorderly point in the proceedings "The American people don't want to witness a food fight…" – well, that's pretty much what they got.

And so, this is American politics in the early stages of a Presidential election[1] that is some 16 months away with left-leaning populists hijacking

[1] The next US presidential election is scheduled for Tuesday, November 3, 2020. In America, election votes take place every four years, and this will be the 59th election since the first in 1788

what could have been reasoned dialogue aimed at healing the social and economic divides facing the country and electing a new president. Name-calling and other insults to common courtesy have no place in polite society. Well, that's says it – we're no longer a polite society. The days of civil discourse are gone for now. How do we fix this?

Some people I have spoken with share a deep concern about the efficacy of the primary voting system, led by the state chapters of the major national political parties, i.e. the Republicans and Democrats.

During the last Presidential election cycle the Democrat Party's organization at least showed clear rivalry, a bit harsh from time to time, but still well within bounds, but the Republican Party let its primary voting system be hijacked by ruthless populists. The results are never the less, that the rank and file of both parties disliked and even distrusted their respective presidential candidates.

So the question is: what can we do?

Here's the suggestion: Have 'Zagat'[2] use its know-how and experience in soliciting the unfiltered opinion and choice of the public about the candidates, and publish it.

Zagat over the last three plus decades has been highly successful in gaging and ranking a number of public services, but most importantly the restaurant business by asking the diners themselves to give their opinion, no strings attached either side, about important characteristics of each restaurant such as quality of the food, service and ambience. It gained the reputation and trust as being an effective and unbiased organization.

I have no idea how it was done, but Zagat's comparative ranking of the restaurants is 'spot on', and has been consistent over time. The fact that the results represent the 'vox populi', and that the reviews are not reviewed by others or experts, adds measurably to their credibility and correctness.

My question, phrased as a suggestion, can Zagat not apply its know-how and experience, to gaging the personal opinion of the public, the American voters, of how it values the presidential candidates?

---

[2] Tim and Nina Zagat established the Zagat Survey in 1979 as a way to collect and correlate the ratings of restaurants by diners; for their first guide, covering New York City, the Zagats surveyed their friends. At its height, ca. 2005, the *Zagat Survey* included 70 cities, with reviews based on the input of 250,000 individuals with the guides reporting on and rating restaurants, hotels, nightlife, shopping, zoos, music, movies, theaters, golf courses, and airlines. The guides are sold in book form, and were formerly only available as a paid subscription on the Zagat website. In 2011 the company was bought by Google and in 2018 it was sold to The Infatuation, an American New York-based restaurant recommendation website and messaging service, created by former music industry executives Chris Stang and Andrew Steinthal in 2009. They are most known for publishing restaurant reviews and guides, and as creators of the hashtag #EEEEEATS.

I suggest a small but important number of personal traits on which each candidate should be rated, in absolute terms, not relative to the other candidates, for instance:

1. Character
2. Leadership
3. Experience

…and then combine the ratings for each candidate, in a predetermined ratio or weighting, to arrive at an overall relative ranking of each candidate based on his/her individual strengths/weaknesses.

The end result would be the measured and rationalized, but also direct and unfiltered, view and choice of the 'voters' about the candidates. Not the outcome of an opaque, layered polling system, in which local priorities and local politics tends to obfuscate the real choice of the national voting public.

How Zagat should perform this survey, I do not know, as I do not know the organization or its systems, but probably thru the organization of its former big bother owner Google there's a way. There are certain elements which I think are key:

- The submission of the results should be substantially anonymous (to the extent that is possible in our modern electronic world)
- The number of 'reviewers' should be as large and geographically and socially as wide as possible
- The results should be kept secret until a specific date, when they are all tallied and published
- The publication of the date should be organized as a television event
- The event should be widely pre-advertised as an 'American Idol' or 'Oscar' like show
- The project should be completed and the show held before November 3, 2020 (16 months form now)
- Then cost of the project should be funded by pre-selling commercial advertising pace during the TV show

The general opinion is that now-President Trump made the primary voting system an anachronism and jumped over the heads of the political establishment by appealing directly to the Republican voters in each state and by organizing his campaign as a brawling television reality show. Let Zagat use its strength by asking the national voters, not just by jumping over the heads of the political establishment, but by appealing directly to the 'better' part of each reviewers self and asking for a measured and rational opinion of each of the candidates individually, and by making it a real television show as well.

One last suggestion: Congress needs to consider passing a law that mandates everyone must vote or be penalized in one fashion or another.