

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? The U.S. system is really better

The late Hunter S. Thompson, founder of what was called Gonzo journalism, had this to say about the much-maligned U.S. primary election system:

?The genetically vicious nature of presidential campaigns in America is too obvious to argue with, but some people call it fun, and I am one of them.?

Me too.

I grow a tad weary every election cycle reading smug Canadian pundits snorting about the ?circus? that is the seemingly endless U.S. presidential marathon, the basic tenet being that our system is far more refined and, not only that, somehow it is more democratic to boot.

Not in my view. Quite the reverse.

It is true, as critics point out, that American political hopefuls must raise millions upon millions in order to even be in the mix for their respective party nomination. But while the numbers are obviously smaller in Canada ? given the fact our population is a little more than 10 per cent of their population ? the fact is, our system takes a pile of money to succeed as well. That's just the way it is, not only here but throughout the democratic world.

I admit freely to being an incurable political junkie, one who checks the latest standings of the candidates on U.S. websites every day and rarely misses a debate. To me, that's more fun than the Super Bowl (although, being a baseball and golf junkie too, it doesn't outrank the World Series or the Masters.)

But we digress.

Many hands have been wrung for months now because the billionaire blowhard Donald Trump has been leading the public opinion polls by a significant margin.

How, people cry, can such a crude man ? not to mention a race and gender bater ? like Trump possibly become president of the United States? But the odds are, he can't. And he can't because of, not despite, the system where all candidates have to weather countless debates, caucuses and other state-wide elections before party delegates finally settle on their candidate.

The thing about national polls in these things is that ? at least until the general election ? there is no national election happening. Instead, it's an internal party matter. And yes, he's leading lots of those polls too, but when you break down the results of all the other candidates, Trump has a significant following but there is no room for him to grow and, once the others are weaned out, and it gets down to just Trump and one or two others (my hope is that Marco Rubio ultimately gets the nod), and then you will see a different result.

Compare that to our system, where, for the most part, individual party members have little ? usually no ? say, in the ultimate outcome. Compared to the exposure U.S. candidates must endure, our leadership hopefuls enjoy a virtual walk in the park.

In Canada, most political parties at both the federal and provincial levels have adopted a system whereby all registered party members get a vote. That replaced the old system of an open convention, where candidates were grilled by party delegates, and forced to speak under pressure, followed by furious horse trading leading up to an ultimate winner.

To me, the old system was far superior to the new one. At least we got to see the candidates performing under pressure ? an important talent for a leader, wouldn't you think? Now, it's just a matter of who has the cash to convince more people to sign up for your hopeful. It's also far more boring than the old convention was. But there you are.

And just as the Republican hopefuls are being exposed ? warts and all ? time and again, the same is true on the Democratic side. Again, it's because of their system requiring a sustained campaign of wooing delegates in order to achieve the final blessings.

In Canada, a candidate with Hilary Clinton's credentials ? and money ? would be a mortal lock for a nomination and could easily escape the kind of public scrutiny and accountability for her past actions that she is currently fighting.

Somebody like Bernie Sanders couldn't possibly make his case ? and undermine hers ? in Canada the way the much more open and democratic U.S. system allows him to do.

Clinton may ultimately carry the Democratic hopes ? she likely will ? but at least her fellow Democrats have the opportunity to register their complaints about her, an opportunity that only a relative handful of insiders would have under our system.

So to me, once again, when it comes to which system is more democratic ? not to mention a lot more fun to watch ? I'll take the U.S. system.

Pity we don't adopt it. That way, we'd get leaders ? for good or ill ? that each party really wants.

