

Politician: Wives Should Withhold Sex Until Husbands Vote

We see it every election season. Those ads featuring an outwardly diverse group of celebrities imploring Americans to get off their lazy butts and vote. (The 2016 season was unique in that one commercial, shown below, poked fun at the cliché.)

A member of parliament in Kenya is taking it up a notch. She is [urging wives to withhold sex](#) from their husbands until they register to vote. This, if carried out, is likely to prove a far more effective poll-driving strategy than Mark Ruffalo's promise to do a nude scene in his next film if enough people cast ballots.

Are such incentives and multi-million-dollar ad campaigns actually helpful to a democratic republic?

The idea that democracy is aided by using shame or other

incentives to compel people to cast ballots is, in my opinion, dubious.

If herding bodies to polls is democracy, one can find sympathy in H.L. Mencken's observation that "Democracy is a pathetic belief in the collective wisdom of individual ignorance." It would give credence to Plato's observation that democracy and tyranny are natural bedfellows.

Civic engagement and an informed citizenry are essential to a healthy democracy, and voting is merely the most basic manifestation of our civic duty. So while I think low voter-turnout is a sign of an unhealthy democratic system, it is merely a symptom of that, not a cause.

The cause would be apathy, something Thomas Jefferson implied was the Achilles heel of republican government.

"Lethargy," Jefferson [wrote in a 1787](#) letter to William Smith, is "the forerunner of death to the public liberty."

If you agree with Jefferson, the trend is not a favorable one. Modern attempts to encourage voting have proven terribly ineffective, as one can see in the Washington Post chart below.

Voter turnout in 2014, which doesn't appear on this chart, was actually [the lowest since World War II](#). What's amazing is that this decline has occurred even as political parties, non-profits, and governments have made it easier to cast ballots than ever before through voting drives, early-voting, and billions spent on public service announcements and other voting campaigns.



It's undisputed that voter participation is waning. The question is why.

The obvious reason is that people don't feel like it makes a

difference. A person might feel this way for any number of reasons. Maybe the government is corrupt or illegitimate. Or maybe it's distant and unresponsive.

The latter brought to mind Jefferson's quote on the dangers of apathy. He was right, but I wonder if it might not also be true that an erosion of liberty creates lethargy. Is it possible that as bureaucracy grows, democratic participation wanes? (I don't have an answer, but it might make an interesting doctoral thesis.)

In any event, using shame or sexual incentives to get people to vote will likely do nothing to help these democratic governments.

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