

# How Americans Select Their Dictators

When it comes to selecting a candidate for president, how do you choose?

The answer seems like a no-brainer to some: simply choose the person whose ideology most closely aligns with your own.

But if a recent [article](#) from *The Wall Street Journal* is any indication, that's not the way many Americans operate. Instead, they choose their candidate based on charisma, electability, and relatability. It's this mentality that's causing problems as the Democrats try to figure out the best candidate to take on President Trump:

*'I don't think ideology is the deciding factor,' said Chris Henning, chair of the Democratic Party in Greene County, Iowa. 'I think they want the change and hope, and somebody who can take on Trump and win. That's a lot of people's bottom line.'*

*Ms. Henning added that based on her conversations, undecided Democrats are looking for something much simpler than ideology: 'People are looking to be fired up about somebody.'*

That's certainly understandable, and it's not an issue unique to Democrats. Many Republicans went through similar agony preceding Trump's emergence as the 2016 frontrunner. It's also a state of mind foreseen by Alexis de Tocqueville in his 1840 volume of [Democracy in America](#).

Tocqueville, an ardent supporter of democracy, nevertheless recognized that all good things can come to an end, or at least regress to a less than ideal state. One sign of this is mass equality, in which individuals seek "to procure the petty

and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives.” A second sign is isolation from society at large, in which an individual surrounds himself with only a few family members and friends, and is primarily self-seeking.

Citizens in this state, Tocqueville explains, are subject to a type of guardian who “watch[es] over their fate.”

*It would be like the authority of a parent, if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks on the contrary to keep them in perpetual childhood: it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they think of nothing but rejoicing. For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness: it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances—**what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?** [Emphasis added.]*

In this state, however, individuals still seek to maintain control over their thinking, particularly in the realm of choosing their leader:

*Our contemporaries are constantly excited by two conflicting passions; they want to be led, and they wish to remain free: as they cannot destroy either one or the other of these contrary propensities, they strive to satisfy them both at once. They devise a sole, tutelary, and all-powerful form of government, but elected by the people. They combine the principle of centralization and that of popular sovereignty; this gives them a respite; **they console themselves for being in tutelage by the reflection that they have chosen their own guardians.** [Emphasis added.]*

Such choosing, Tocqueville continues, is a sham and shows a false sense of security:

*Every man allows himself to be put in leading-strings, because he sees that it is not a person or a class of persons, but the people at large that holds the end of his chain. By this system the people shake off their state of dependence just long enough to select their master, and then relapse into it again.*

Tocqueville's words seem sadly descriptive of our culture. We love to pick our president, and we fuss over who would be the best choice – the most likeable, the most electable, the one with the least baggage – yet we think little about his or her ideology. We are content as long as our social security checks keep coming, our healthcare plan remains the same, and we have enough in our bank accounts to buy the latest gizmos and gadgets.

Sadly, Tocqueville explains that such an attitude leads to despotism, a type of government which few relish.

Is it too late to avoid such a fate for our country? Can we, by being thoughtful individuals who choose our leaders based on ideology rather than popularity, stem the tide of despotism?

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