

# The Huffington Post



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## The High Cost Of Low Information

Posted July 29, 2008 | 02:36 PM (EST)

I have a friend who faithfully listens to Rush Limbaugh. He's only on AM radio in her town, and she doesn't have an AM radio in the house.

So she goes out to listen to him in her car.

I think of her in the driveway, sealed inside with the motor running, absorbing the political guidance of a man who advocated zero tolerance for drug users as he gobbled Oxycontin like Tic Tacs.

In this simple metaphor is a troubling question: how can so many people be content to see the world exclusively through the smeary prism of a man whose intolerance and fears are vaudevillian?

It's a question relevant all along the political spectrum.

The term "low-information voter" has bubbled up often in this election. Everybody wants to reach them; nobody dares criticize them.

The usual reference is to the uninformed and easily led. But with a world of reinforcement of our beliefs just a click away, we are actually becoming a whole nation of low information voters.

Once, a handful of national news magazines, three well-tailored nightly news anchors and hard-working editorial staffs of city papers had their hands firmly on the levers of national discourse. Even with their assorted biases (real or imagined), the relatively few outlets guaranteed we at least encountered a diversity of opinion. We all passed through the same gates.

No more.

As technology has freed us, it has also has given us a global warren of ideological hidey-holes -- places where we can seek out our own kind and hear our own opinions echoed and amplified.

Huff Post, of course, is one of them. Sure, conservative opinion is welcome - even encouraged. But nobody finds their way here in search of George Bush's world vision.

There are two ways to become a low-information voter - by choice and pattern. I'm not sure which is scarier.

Those sequestered by their opinions make a conscious decision not to go anywhere where there are opinions that might conflict their personal world-construct.

Those who live outside the slipstream of events have no construct. They waft along on spoon-fed impression.

Studies over 40 years have shown that voters don't vote on what they know, but what they feel. If a group you never heard of makes a charge you don't fully explore - creating a sliver of doubt unchallenged by fact - mission accomplished. How many people actually know what a swift boat is?

Before the crowd shouts "elitist" and drags me to the dunking stool - seriously: shouldn't we be a little concerned that 12 percent of both Democrats and Republicans who told Pew Research Center recently that they are convinced Obama is a Muslim? How about the 30 to 40 percent who continue to believe that Saddam Hussein was behind 9-11? The 30 to 40 percent who believe in flying saucers and that Adam and Eve rode the dinosaurs are a whole other story.

In what could be a close election with more riding on the right pick than any time in recent memory, we need to open the doors and breathe in some new ideas - even if they challenge our own.

Whether our political low-information grows from willful seclusion or practiced ignorance, let's remember the first law of political marketing: You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time ... and that's usually good enough.

And as we do, let's also remember what it has cost us over the last eight years.