

Why don't we get the politicians we need?

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I liked this question in [the Guardian](#) this morning:

At least 100 million people are eligible to run for US president. Why are we left with Robert F Kennedy Jr?

Arwa Mahdawi



There should be an inspiring field of candidates to choose from. But the latest to challenge for the Democratic nomination shows the options are severely limited

I think Arwa Mahdawi asks a wholly relevant question of the US and is more than able to answer it, so let me use this as the start point for a tangential thought.

The real question to ask is, I think, not about the US. Nor is it about the Democrats. It is about the electoral systems of the US and UK that appear unable to produce anything much approaching a competent politician these days. If they could we would not have Biden, whose only advantage is that he comes from a different era, and Sunak, whose only advantage is the insensitivity to opinion that extreme wealth provides.

In truth, what these supposed democracies have in common are three things.

First is first-past-the-post electoral systems, which very largely reduces electoral democracy to a choice between those able to progress through the murky, back-room shenanigans of two-party candidate selection processes. Most who do so know that once elected they are either almost guaranteed a seat or are completely wasting their time until a better opportunity comes along. But the skills required for selection are a long way removed from what we need in our elected politicians. So we are always given sub-optimal choices.

Second, we have a media that promotes stupidity. I am not sure much more explanation is required. The whole idea of the fourth estate holding much of democracy to account disappeared, long ago.

Third, candidates have to live in a wholly artificial goldfish bowl of scrutiny that few sane people would wish to endure. So, we get those with unusually thick skinned, or whose flaws destroy them, upon which fate they are willing to gamble when taking office. Neither greatly advantage us.

This is why we get the dire politicians that we do. To be blunt, no one with any sense would want the job. And if you want it, you're probably not fit to have it.

Can we do better than that? I think so. But to do that we have to break the power of the two party system, and that means the end of first-past-the-post. That's where the corruption of the UK's democracy and politics begins. Everything else flows from there.

I am not saying any alternative will be a panacea. I am saying it will be better than what we have got. And that would be a start.