

What The Election Results Really Mean

Just a few days after the conclusion of what has been dubbed the most partisan and rancorous Presidential election in memory, every news outlet seems to be leading with stories detailing the deep divide that separates red and blue states. Time magazine wonders "if our divided nation can be healed." The New York Times declares that we have become "two nations." A USA Today front page story asks "Can Common Ground Be Found?" Yet, for all the talk of wounds, painful rifts, and acrimony, from my vantage point, most people seem to be peacefully going about their daily business without any outward signs of suspicion, distrust, or anxiety. This was particularly apparent on recent trips to the battle ground states of Florida and Ohio. Reading the news reports, I expected to see was rabid partisanship and conflict. What I found were people quietly getting on with their lives.

Interactions in a cross section of retail stores were particularly noteworthy for their lack of partisanship. Whether it was on the floor of a high-end piano showroom, a full line m.i. retailer, or a drum shop, customers and salespeople were talking about music and products without making any reference to Republicans, Democrats or the election results. In fact, watching these transactions, it was impossible to discern the political leanings of either the customer or sales person. People on the selling end were no doubt keeping their views to themselves because they didn't want to potentially offend a customer and risk losing a sale. As for the customers, they seemed more interested in quickly completing their purchases than holding forth on politics. And, what's the point in going off on a political rant anyway? In both cases though, the situation hardly suggests a nation beset with irreconcilable differences.

For over two centuries, through a succession of passionately contested elections--from John Adams vs. Thomas Jefferson through Richard Nixon vs. George McGovern, up to the most recent contest, citizens argue heatedly for their side, await the voice of the electorate, and then quickly get back to business. This political process, where minority and majority manage to coexist peacefully after elections, is bit like oxygen in the air: both are only fully appreciated when they're gone.

The durability of our political process is particularly relevant in an issue that focuses on the global markets and the forces that drive the sale of music products. As we document in the following pages, the amount individual nations spend on music and sound products rises or falls based on a combination of economic prosperity, demographics, edu-



cation, and a grab bag of cultural factors. However, all of these factors presuppose a base level of political stability. The Middle East and Sub Saharan Africa have large populations, natural resources, and rich cultural traditions. However, because of a lack of political stability, they don't even register as music markets.

When we examine why the U.S. has pulled ahead of the

rest of the world in terms of per-capita music purchases, there are a number of factors that stand out. The first is basic income level. By any measure, U.S. citizens have more disposable income than anyone else in the world. Second is demographic. Unlike Western Europe and Japan, where there the birth rate has dropped precipitously, the U.S. has a significantly younger population. More people in the 12 to 22 year old age group translate into higher sales of the full range of music products. Other contributing factors include more instrumental music education in the schools, and a deeply ingrained "folk music" tradition. Not folk music in the sense of Peter, Paul, and Mary, but "folk" in the sense that there is a willingness to make all types of music without having to enter a conservatory or study with a master.

The forces that encourage music making are a topic that inspires long discussions, particularly around a bar at trade show time. However, if after every election cycle, the red staters and blue staters armed themselves and took to the streets, there would be a lot less to talk about. It doesn't take much of a history scholar to realize that our peaceful transfer of political power is the exception and not the norm. It's wonderful thing that shouldn't be taken for granted.

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