

# Covering elections there, miscovering them here

**NEW YORK, JANUARY 10, 2005** – Elections are breaking out all over. The Palestinians voted yesterday in a irregularity-plagued day of balloting. In the Ukraine, they needed two elections to get it right. And at month's end Iraqis will go to the polls whether it makes any sense or not, or whether they want to or not.

Relentlessly pushing this “demonstration election” on in the name of the big “D” (democracy) has been President Bush even as he concedes it is “hard.” (“Hard” is a favorite Bushism first introduced in the Presidential Debate.)

Maureen Dowd commented on his comment in the New York Times on an op-ed page dominated by a pro-election feature by a former flack for the “Coalition” Provisional Authority. (Another CPA propagandist Dan Senor has just been hired by Fox News as an election analyst.)

“I know it’s hard, but it’s hard for a reason,” Mr. Bush said on Friday, a day after seven G.I.’s and two marines died. “And the reason it’s hard is because there are a handful of folks who fear freedom.” If it’s just a handful, how come it’s so hard?

“Then the president added: “And I look at the elections as a – as a – you know, as a – as – as a historical marker for our Iraq policy.”

Unremarked upon was how the President’s comments Friday came a day after the Congress debated major flaws in our own election, failings that most of our media brushed off as a “delay.” Others dismissed the evidence presented as “conspiracy theories” even as Congress member Maxine Waters of California noted correctly that voting rights are not and should not be “outcome determinative.”

Republican law makers castigated filmmaker Michael Moore by suggesting he was responsible for a discussion they dismissed as a “stunt.” The right-wing Washington Times pressed California Senator Barbara Boxer, who questioned the Ohio outcome, to distance herself from Moore.

She told them the movie Fahrenheit 911 “inspired, but did not influence” her. “Fahrenheit 9/11” had nothing to do with her challenge of Ohio’s 20 electoral votes, but she nevertheless regrets not challenging the Florida electoral votes four years ago.

“Mr. Moore’s Bush-bashing movie ‘had nothing to do with what I’m doing now,’ she says.” (Note that’s the newspaper’s characterization of a film that just won the People’s Choice award – not Boxer’s.)

Michael Moore was not alone in raising these issues. My own film Counting on Democracy, that aired in 2002, reported on an MIT-Cal Tech study that said that as many as six million votes went uncounted nationwide. Well before the election, the New York Times editorially was warning of major flaws in our voting system. A series of lead editorials noted that the irregularities we saw in Florida in 2000 had not been fixed. Activists went further itemizing the problems in Ohio. The Democratic Party patronized these concerns but did nothing about them. The GOP ignored them.

And so did the media.

Voting rights activists Bob Fittrakis, Steve Rosenfeld and Harvey Wasserman write in the Columbus, Ohio, Free Press, “In sworn testimony at public hearings convened with no help, cooperation or participation from the Kerry Campaign or the Democratic Party, scores of Ohioans told their infuriating stories. With relentless investigation, cooperation and participation from private citizens from all over the state, a gruesome portrait of GOP racism, fraud and contempt burned across the worldwide web.

“The mainstream media slept, scoffed and scorned us. But from Ohio, Florida, New Mexico and elsewhere, there emerged an irrefutable portrait of yet another stolen election.”

The independent media and organizations like Media for Democracy have been covering this story even when mainstream media has not.

A related question arises: Why is it that groups like MoveOn, which rallied members to protest voter exclusion and vote suppression, don’t financially support the alternative and independent media that IS telling the story, rather than raising millions for ads that further enrich the same media outlets that are covering up the issue?

Where is their media strategy?

And why is that activist Democrats focus so much of their energy and resources in partisan Bush-bashing and Republican ridiculing rather than in

helping build up a counter media? Who won't they enlist in the ranks of the media and democracy movement to insist on fairer coverage and a media that strengthens democracy rather than undermines it?

Some years ago, media historian Bob McChesney and journalist John Nichols published a pamphlet provocatively titled "It's the Media Stupid."

I have seen nothing since that makes me challenge that basic insight, except to wonder why so many in the opposition to this government still don't get it?

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*News Dissector Danny Schechter is "blogger in chief" of Mediachannel.org. He directed WMD (Weapons of Mass Deception) a film about the media and the Iraq War. (See [www.wmdthefilm.com](http://www.wmdthefilm.com))*