

# Understanding the Psychology of 'Post-Election Stress Syndrome'

A major election leads to major change—psychologically, that is. No matter who wins an **election**, the unexpected emotional letdown or explosive reaction after the ballots are counted can be overwhelming to many—especially the aged or over-involved, who can be set up for crushing amounts of what I call “Post-Election Stress Syndrome.”

This election has likely been the most stressful of any during our lifetime because of numbing news fatigue and continual media overexposure, yet the real problems are yet to come.

Personal anxiety, professional panic and poorly thought-out decisions are on the horizon regardless of your political persuasion.

## Why Such a Gloomy Projection?

It's based on how this election process has been so overwhelming much of the time with months of negative news, never-ending data to process, and confusing choices to make on complex issues while partisan experts are shouting every half hour on news/talk stations that we are all doomed if their candidate doesn't win. Not to mention the huge challenge on who is trustworthy, since you often don't know who will say something inappropriate on YouTube and crash their credibility, leaving you feeling very alone to make some major decisions without leaders who lacked the strength of character to stand on their convictions instead of popular opinion polls.

Mountaintop experiences guarantee the next step is always the valley.

Think of a major campaign like climbing a major mountain range. You prepare for years and climb for months to finally reach the top. Once there the view is great. You take some pictures, but you can't stay on a mountaintop; so no matter which way you head, it's down in any direction. After the mountaintop comes the valley, which is a normal part of life. The danger is that for many people the downward slide is so unexpected.

Most actual mountain-climbing accidents happen on the way down, and I project that there will be millions of people who are unprepared for the emotional upheaval they are about to experience after the election is over.

Everyone will feel some degree of emotional letdown once the issues have been decided and the acceptance speeches are given. That's normal. However, for some the removal of posters, signs, balloons and banners will lead to a free-fall of depressing emotions. If someone has been a "news junkie" the last few months it will be especially stressful. Those feelings of distress will come out in one of two ways:

1) *Anger*: This can lead to violence and impulsive decisions. People who feel violated by the election process will often turn to dumping volcanic levels of anger at someone or something to find relief for the pressure inside. This can lead to devastating decisions, impulsive rage or using the wrong words in front of the wrong people and losing credibility, or worse—a job. This can happen in men or women, young or old, but is most commonly seen in more extroverted personalities and it tends to blow up and blow out fast.

2) *Apathy*: This is a more dangerous reaction, since it can lead from distress to the early stages of depression. Stuffing emotions inside is like burying them alive and they just keep building up, yet instead of blowing up and out, they blow in. This leads a person to feel emotionally numb, and often can cause an individual to commit a series of very quiet, yet very

harmful self-destructive acts. Eating for comfort, drinking to numb the pain, hooking up with the wrong partner to try and forget about the election, or just refusing to answer the phone, closing the mini-blinds and checking out on life like a hermit hiding in a dark cave.

The best choice after an election is completed is *acceptance*.

It's over and now it's time to move on with whatever leaders and issues the majority of voters selected. You can't change the outcome of an election, but you can freak yourself out with fears about the future apocalypse predicted by many. Don't do that! Life will go on, and your world will continue. God is bigger than any politician and isn't in a panic, so trust in heaven's agenda—and not that of Washington, D.C.—and you'll immediately find a deeper level of peace.

What happens in your house is way more important than what happens in the White House; you can't control what political leaders do, but you can control you. Let this journey off of the political "mountain" be one of a growing sense of perspective as you remember that after the valley there will be another mountain to climb. There will be another day to vote on national issues and when the dust settles your life will usually be about as good as you choose to make it.

This approach takes the power to control your mood away from the politicians or the media, so you can build a better life without losing sleep or energy from the dangers of Post-Election Stress Syndrome.

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**Dwight Bain** is a nationally certified counselor and certified life coach in practice since 1984. He partners with media, major corporations and non-profit organizations to make a

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