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Our review, after page 52

The Economist

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Democracy in doubt

SIR—I fear that your criteria for assessing democratic legitimacy are dangerously underinclusive (“Phoney democracies” June 24th). A recent study of North Carolina state legislative elections concluded that citizens who do not have wealth, or wealthy friends, cannot mount meaningful campaigns for public office because electoral spending has become a major determinant of who wins and loses. Mounting a viable campaign for the state senate in North Carolina now costs on average over \$125,000. The costs for statewide and national office are well into the millions. Campaign consultants once probed prospective candidates’ policies and qualifications; they now ask only “how much money can you raise and from whom?”

American elections are subject to a de facto “wealth primary” in which well-off citizens pre-select candidates for office excluding non-wealthy citizens from an integral part of the electoral process and degrading the meaning of their vote. Such a money-driven electoral system raises profound doubts about the legitimacy of our representative government.

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