

# If Voting Made Any Difference, They Wouldn't Let Us Do It

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**By John W. Whitehead**

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*“The people who cast the votes decide nothing. The people who count the votes decide everything.”—Joseph Stalin, dictator of the Soviet Union*

No, America, you don't have to vote.

In fact, vote or don't vote, the police state will continue to trample us underfoot.

Devil or deliverer, the candidate who wins the White House has already made a Faustian bargain to keep the police state in power. It's no longer a question of which party will usher in totalitarianism but when the final hammer will fall.

Sure we're being given choices, but the differences between the candidates are purely cosmetic ones, lacking any real nutritional value for the nation. We're being served a poisoned feast whose aftereffects will leave us in turmoil for years to come.

We've been here before.

Remember Barack Obama, the young candidate who campaigned on a message of hope, change and transparency, and promised an end to war and surveillance?

Look how well that turned out.

Under Obama, government whistleblowers are routinely prosecuted, U.S. arms sales have [skyrocketed](#), police militarization has accelerated, and surveillance has become widespread. The U.S. government is literally [arming the world](#), while [bombing the heck out of the planet](#). And while they're at it, the government is bringing the wars abroad home, transforming American communities into shell-shocked battlefields where the Constitution provides little in the way of protection.

Yes, we're worse off now than we were eight years ago.

We're being subjected to more government surveillance, more police abuse, more SWAT team raids, more roadside strip searches, more censorship, more prison time, more egregious laws, more endless wars, more invasive technology, more militarization, more injustice, more corruption, more cronyism, more graft, more lies, and more of everything that has turned the American dream into the American nightmare.

What we're *not* getting more of: elected officials who actually *represent* us.

The American people are being guilted, bullied, pressured, cajoled, intimidated, terrorized and browbeaten into voting. We're constantly told to vote because it's your so-called civic duty, because you have no right to complain about the government unless you vote, because every vote counts, because we must present a unified front, because the future of the nation depends on it, because God compels us to do so, because by not voting you are in fact voting, because the “other” candidate must be defeated at all costs, or because the future of the Supreme Court rests in the balance.

Nothing in the Constitution requires that you vote.

You are under no moral obligation to vote for the lesser of two evils. Indeed, voting for a lesser evil is still voting for evil.

Whether or not you cast your vote in this year's presidential election, you have every right to kvetch, complain and criticize the government when it falls short of your expectations. After all, you are overtaxed so the government can continue to operate corruptly.

If you want to boo, boycott, picket, protest and altogether reject a corrupt political system that has failed you abysmally, more power to you. I'll take an irate, engaged, informed, outraged American any day over an apathetic, constitutionally illiterate citizenry that is content to be diverted, distracted and directed.

Whether you vote or don't vote doesn't really matter.

What matters is what *e*/se you're doing to push back against government incompetence, abuse, corruption, graft, fraud and cronyism.

Don't be fooled into thinking that the only road to reform is through the ballot box.

After all, there is more to citizenship than the act of casting a ballot for someone who, once elected, will march in lockstep with the dictates of the powers-that-be. Yet as long as Americans are content to let politicians, war hawks and Corporate America run the country, the police state will prevail, no matter which candidate wins on Election Day.

In other words, it doesn't matter who sits in the White House, who controls the two houses of Congress, or who gets appointed to the Supreme Court: only those who are prepared to cozy up to the powers-that-be will have any real impact.

As Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist [Chris Hedges points out](#):

*The predatory financial institutions on Wall Street will trash the economy and loot the U.S. Treasury on the way to another economic collapse whether Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton is president. Poor, unarmed people of color will be gunned down in the streets of our cities whether Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton is president. The system of neoslavery in our prisons, where we keep poor men and poor women of color in cages because we have taken from them the possibility of employment, education and dignity, will be maintained whether Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton is president. Millions of undocumented people will be deported whether Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton is president. Austerity programs will cut or abolish public services, further decay the infrastructure and curtail social programs whether Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton is president. [Money will replace the vote whether Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton is president.](#) And half the country, which now lives in poverty, will remain in misery whether Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton becomes president. This is not speculation. We know this because there has been [total continuity on every issue](#), from trade agreements to war to mass deportations, between the Bush administration and the administration of Barack Obama.*

In other words, voting is not the answer.

As I document in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), the nation is firmly under the control of a monied oligarchy guarded by a standing army (a.k.a., militarized police). It is an invisible dictatorship, of sorts, one that is unaffected by the vagaries of party politics and which cannot be overthrown by way of the ballot box.

“[Total continuity](#)” is how Hedges refers to the manner in which the government’s agenda remains unchanged no matter who occupies the Executive Branch. “[Continuity of government](#)” (COG) is the phrase policy wonks use to refer to the unelected individuals who have been appointed to run the government in the event of a “catastrophe.” You can also refer to it as a shadow government, or the [Deep State](#), which is comprised of unelected government bureaucrats, corporations, contractors, paper-pushers, and button-pushers who actually call the shots behind the scenes.

Whatever term you use, the upshot remains the same: on the national level, we’re up against an immovable, intractable, entrenched force that is greater than any one politician or party, whose tentacles reach deep into every sector imaginable, from Wall Street, the military and the courts to the technology giants, entertainment, healthcare and the media.

This is no Goliath to be felled by a simple stone.

This is a Leviathan disguised as a political savior.

So how do we prevail against the tyrant who says all the right things and does none of them? How do we overcome the despot whose promises fade with the spotlights? How do we conquer the dictator whose benevolence is all for show?

We get organized. We get educated. We get active.

If you feel led to vote, fine, but if all you do is vote, “we the people” are going to lose.

If you abstain from voting and still do nothing, “we the people” are going to lose.

If you give your proxy to some third-party individual or group to fix what’s wrong with the country and that’s *all* you do, then “we the people” are going to lose.

If, however, you’re prepared to shake off the doldrums, wipe the sleep out of your eyes, turn off the television, tune out the talking heads, untether yourself from whatever piece of technology you’re affixed to, wean yourself off the teat of the nanny state, and start flexing those unused civic muscles, then there might be hope for us all.

For starters, get back to basics. Get to know your neighbors, your community, and your local officials. This is the first line of defense when it comes to securing your base: fortifying your immediate lines.

Second, understand your rights. Know how your local government is structured. Who serves on your city council and school boards? Who runs your local jail: has it been coopted by private contractors? What recourse does the community have to voice concerns about local problems or disagree with decisions by government officials?

Third, know the people you’re entrusting with your local government. Are your police chiefs being promoted from within your community? Are your locally elected officials accessible and, equally important, are they open to what you have to say? Who runs your local media? Does your newspaper report on local events? Who are your judges? Are their judgments fair and impartial? How are prisoners being treated in your local jails?

Finally, don’t get so trusting and comfortable that you stop doing the hard work of holding your government accountable. We’ve drifted a long way from the local government structures that provided the basis for freedom described by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*, but we are not so far gone that we can’t reclaim some of its vital components.

As an article in *The Federalist* [points out](#):

| *Local government is fundamental not so much because it’s a “laboratory” of democracy but because*

*it's a school of democracy. Through such accountable and democratic government, Americans learn to be democratic citizens. They learn to be involved in the common good. They learn to take charge of their own affairs, as a community. Tocqueville writes that **it's because of local democracy that Americans can make state and Federal democracy work**—by learning, in their bones, to expect and demand accountability from public officials and to be involved in public issues.*

To put it another way, think nationally but act locally.

There is still a lot Americans can do to topple the police state tyrants, but any revolution that has any hope of succeeding needs to be prepared to reform the system from the bottom up. And that will mean re-learning step by painful step what it actually means to be a government of the people, by the people and for the people.