

# **Voting for President in America: History is Trying to Tell Us Something**

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*[Also related: ["Do Your Civic Duty and VOTE!"](#)]*

History is trying to tell us something about the role of elections in the United States. Let's recall the highlights of how our last twelve elected presidents campaigned and then subsequently acted in office. After refreshing our memory about these events we will see why the arguments often cited for why we should vote for president don't hold water if history has anything to say about them.

\* **Franklin D. Roosevelt**, when running for president in 1940 for his third term in office, promised the American public he had no plans to involve the United States in a world war. At the same time, it is now well known, FDR was doing everything he could (including placing an embargo on U.S. oil to Japan) to deliberately cause Japan to launch a first strike against the U.S. He knew that only a Japanese first strike could neutralize the huge isolationist movement (that was supported by both the left and the right) and get the U.S. into the war, which was his intention from the beginning.



\* **Harry S Truman**, upon taking over as President on FDR's death in 1945, concluded WWII by telling Americans one of the biggest lies in history: that the purpose of dropping nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was to save American lives. It is now known that Truman was well informed that the Japanese had offered to surrender on just one condition—that

the emperor remain on the throne. Truman in fact did allow the emperor to remain on the throne, which proves that his purpose in dropping those nuclear bombs had nothing to do with saving American lives. He lied because he knew that Americans would have been appalled at the use of nuclear bombs for any other reason.



Truman launched the Cold War against Communism immediately at the close of WWII. The Cold War's actual purpose was to use the pretext of defending people against Stalinist type dictatorships to justify U.S. support for equally anti-democratic and anti-working class regimes in Europe and Asia. The "Truman Doctrine" was based on the thinking of George Kennan, who wrote the following in U.S. State Department Policy Planning, Study #23 February 24, 1948:

"[W]e have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population....In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and

resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity....To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives....We should cease to talk about vague and...unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better. ... We should recognize that our influence in the Far Eastern area in the coming period is going to be primarily military and economic. We should make a careful study to see what parts of the Pacific and Far Eastern world are absolutely vital to our security, and we should concentrate our policy on seeing to it that those areas remain in hands which we can control or rely on."

These are the reasons why Truman sent military and economic aid to the Greek monarchy to help it suppress the organizations fighting for democracy and equality, in particular the EAM, which in 1944 had been the largest anti-fascist resistance organization in Europe with 1.8 million members (when the total Greek population was only 7.5 million.) Truman did not share these actual reasons with the American public any more than his actual reasons for using nuclear weapons. He knew Americans would be appalled.



\* **Dwight D. Eisenhower** ran for president in 1952 as a Republican harshly critical of Truman's Democratic Party on the question of how (not whether) to wage the Cold War against Communism. Arguing about which candidate would wage the "war against Communism" better is the kind of debate Americans were offered in election campaigns at

this time. Neither candidate would say what the actual purpose of the Cold War was. There was no real substantive difference between Eisenhower and the Democratic Party as far as using the Cold War as a pretext for attacking pro-working class struggles throughout the world and hiding this truth from the public. In 1953 Eisenhower had the [CIA overthrow](#) the democratically elected president Mossadegh of Iran. In 1954 Eisenhower provided military aid to the Guatemalan Army to overthrow its elected president because he was making reforms favoring farm laborers who were in debt slavery to companies like United Fruit Company. In 1960 Eisenhower [ordered the assassination of Patrice Lumumba](#), Congo's first democratically-elected Prime Minister. Lumumba's crime? After winning independence from Belgium, which had notoriously exploited the people and resources of Congo, he opposed the Belgian-backed secession of the mineral-rich Katanga province. Truman and Eisenhower were so similar in their anti-working class aims that when Eisenhower had

not yet decided to run for president as a Republican, Truman tried to persuade him to run as a Democrat and even offered to serve as his vice presidential candidate if he did.

Eisenhower initiated the U.S. Vietnam War by telling Americans the Cold War lie that the U.S. government fought Communism out of concern for the welfare of ordinary people. Vietnamese people, led by the Communist Ho Chi Minh, defeated the French colonial military forces in 1954 and negotiated a settlement in Geneva that called for national elections to take place in 1956. Eisenhower admitted that Ho Chi Minh would easily win such an election, and he refused to let it happen. Instead he set up the dictator, Ngo Dinh Diem, to rule the south of Vietnam and suppress the peasant organizations that were aiming to improve the lives of peasants. The subsequent U.S. invasion of Vietnam was all about protecting pro-American dictators in South Vietnam. Now that the Communists rule all of Vietnam, American corporations like Nike are all

too happy to set up their sweat shops there, and they have the blessing of both the U.S. and Vietnamese governments to exploit their workers horribly. This illustrates that the Cold War was never motivated by a concern for ordinary working people.



\* **John F. Kennedy**, elected president in 1960, came to the conclusion, after narrowly averting thermonuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis, that the Cold War with the Soviet Union had to be ended. He discovered that the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, felt the same way. The two men determined to end the Cold War. Kennedy enlisted public support to pass the nuclear test ban treaty against intense opposition from powerful people in the military-industrial complex, and he ordered the military to make plans to leave Vietnam. The people with real power in the United States did not want the Cold War to end because it was useful to them in so many ways, from enriching them with profits



from weapons contracts with the government to providing a pretext to overthrow governments that were not to their liking in places like Iran. They viewed Kennedy as, literally, a traitor to their class. The CIA, acting on behalf of these people, [assassinated](#) Kennedy, and the Cold War continued. (This is extremely persuasively documented by James Douglass in his book, [JFK and the Unspeakable](#) and also in David Talbot's [The Devil's Chessboard](#) and [here](#).)

\* **Lyndon B. Johnson**, when running for president against Barry Goldwater in 1964, accused Goldwater of being a warmonger who would "send American boys to fight an Asian



war." LBJ promised he would not do that. After the election, LBJ did exactly that. The stand-up comic version goes like this: "Back in 1964 they said if I voted for Goldwater, American boys would be sent to fight an Asian war, and they were right. I did vote for Goldwater and

American boys were indeed sent to fight an Asian war.”



\* **Richard M. Nixon** ran for president in 1968 with a promise that he had a “secret plan” to end the, by then, extremely unpopular Vietnam War. In 1969, after winning the election, Nixon—a Quaker, don’t forget—launched secret bombing raids of Cambodia that escalated the war even further, provoking outrage by Americans opposed to the war and a student demonstration in Ohio at which the National Guard killed four Kent State University students.

Nixon was famous for being an anti-Communist, a conservative and, among those who were in the know, an anti-Semite. But as president he surprised the world by going to China and ending the cold war between the U.S. and China. He also was arguably the most liberal president of that century: he initiated Affirmative Action, strongly supported Head Start and similar “war on poverty” programs, and even considered having

the government provide a guaranteed minimum wage. And Nixon was as staunch a supporter of Israel as any other American president.

\* **Jimmy Carter** was famous for being a liberal and a humanitarian. He campaigned on a pledge to make government “competent and compassionate.” But what did he do after being elected president in 1977? Carter increased military aid to Indonesia’s President Suharto who used it to occupy East Timor and to kill 200,000 East Timorese. Carter also backed Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and the Shah of Iran, both notoriously anti-democratic and brutal rulers. Carter similarly backed the murderous Somoza regime in Nicaragua and had the U.S. Army School of the Americas train 250 Salvadoran officers and non-coms for El Salvador's brutal and violently repressive military that blew up every union meeting place and opposition newspaper as it killed opposition leaders.





\* **Ronald Reagan** ran for president in 1980 with a campaign brochure that said, “What about inflation? It's a disaster, because the government continues to spend billions of dollars more than it takes in.” What did Reagan do as president? Federal spending grew by an average of 2.5 percent a year, adjusted for inflation, while Reagan was president. The national debt exploded, increasing from about \$700 billion to nearly \$3 trillion.

Reagan campaigned that he would lower taxes. Most of those who voted for him no doubt hoped that he would lower their own taxes. In fact, while wealthy Americans benefited from Reagan's tax policies, blue-collar Americans paid a higher percentage of their income in taxes when Reagan left office than when he came in.

\* **George H. W. Bush** ran for president in 1988. He promised “a kinder and gentler nation” and he promised, “Read my lips: no new



taxes.” What happened? The Budget Enforcement Act of 1990 did raise taxes and George H.W. Bush signed it into law. As for a kinder and gentler nation, President Bush made it much less kinder and gentler for American workers by signing the North American Free Trade Agreement treaty in December, 1992. This treaty (that Clinton would soon sign into law) was a frontal attack on American workers’ job security. Nor was President Bush kind and gentle towards the men drafted into Saddam Hussein’s military forces, whom Saddam ordered into Kuwait after Bush’s ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, gave him a green light to do so, as documented at <http://whatreallyhappened.com/WRHARTICLE5/ARTICLE5/april.html>. In “The Massacre of Withdrawing Soldiers on ‘the Highway of Death’” Joyce Chediac writes:

“I want to give testimony on what are called the "highways of death." These are the two Kuwaiti roadways, littered with remains of 2,000

mangled Iraqi military vehicles, and the charred and dismembered bodies of tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers, who were withdrawing from Kuwait on February 26th and 27th 1991 in compliance with UN resolutions. U.S. planes trapped the long convoys by disabling vehicles in the front, and at the rear, and then pounded the resulting traffic jams for hours. "It was like shooting fish in a barrel," said one U.S. pilot. The horror is still there to see." [ <http://deoxy.org/wc/wc-death.htm> ]



\* **Bill Clinton** was famous for being a liberal who could “feel our pain.” Clinton’s 1992 campaign for president focused on the theme: “It’s the economy, stupid.” People voted for Clinton hoping that he would make their lives more economically secure. Black leaders endorsed him and Toni Morrison after his election even called him “the first black president.” Before the election Clinton promised that if elected, he would not sign a bill

implementing NAFTA unless it included additional agreements that protected labor. But the bill he signed gave us a NAFTA that has enabled countless employers to threaten workers that their jobs would be sent to Mexico unless they accepted deep cuts in pay and benefits. President Clinton also, to the dismay of his liberal supporters, “abolished welfare as we know it” to rip apart the social safety net in the U.S. Furthermore, Clinton launched a bombing and sanctions attack on Iraq that caused more than a million Iraqi deaths, half of them children under five years old whose deaths his Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, famously said “were worth it.” And he bombed civilians Serbs. But he was a liberal, so the anti-war movement leaders gave him a free pass.

\* **George W. Bush** campaigned in 2000 against "nation building" and then, when elected, made re-building Iraq the cornerstone of his administration (with the philosophy



that to make an omelet one must first break eggs). He never campaigned on the theme that he would tell a whopping lie (WMD) to hoodwink Americans into supporting an invasion of Iraq-- but he did just that.



\* **Barack Obama**, before running for president in 2008, [said in 2003 that](#) single payer was the only rational approach to health care but it would not be obtainable until a single-payer advocate was in the Oval Office, and then when he moved into that Oval Office he did not even let single payer be considered.

When he was a community organizer in Chicago Obama attended meetings of Palestinian-Americans and endorsed their demands for equal rights against Israeli denial of them. But as president Obama acts as if he didn't even know that the Palestinians had any just grievances about denial of their rights. This is because the ruling class strategy entails keeping Americans in the dark about the true reasons Palestinians are



angry at Israel, and telling them the lie that it is just because of their anti-Semitism, which leads them (and Muslims in general) to be fanatical anti-American/anti-Jewish murderous terrorists, against whom to safeguard ourselves we must obey our rulers so that we will win the war against terrorism.

As a candidate Obama was a harsh critic of G.W. Bush's violation of civil liberties. As President, Obama makes those concerned about civil liberties long for the good old days of G.W. Bush: Obama doesn't just torture Americans as Bush did, he now kills Americans (and non-Americans) with drones with no judicial oversight whatsoever. Bush tapped our phones without a warrant, but Obama [eliminated habeas corpus](#) and [authorized the law](#) that allows the military to imprison Americans with no trial--indefinitely. And unlike Bush, Obama began killing not only innocent foreign people but also innocent [U.S. citizens](#) (Anwar al-Awlaki and Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, Mr. Awlaki's 16-year

old son) and other U.S. citizens without any due process or any "it's an emergency" excuse.

While G.W. Bush invaded Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama—the Nobel Peace laureate—has launched military attacks not only in Iraq and Afghanistan but also Pakistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### **Should One Vote for the Lesser Evil?**

Voting for the lesser evil is impossible if there is no lesser evil to vote for. This was the case, historically. Anti-war candidates such as FDR, LBJ and Nixon (with his secret plan to end the Vietnam war) turned out to be pro-war candidates. If there were really a pro-war candidate running against an anti-war candidate, then a person who was opposed to the war at question and felt this single issue was more important than any other issue could vote for the anti-war candidate as a lesser evil. But when even

the “anti-war” candidate is really pro-war, it is impossible to vote for the lesser evil—there is no lesser evil to vote for.

Voting for the lesser evil is also impossible if one has no clue from campaign promises what a candidate will actually do if elected. How, then, can one possibly know which candidate is the lesser evil?

Those who voted for Truman and Eisenhower did not know they were voting for a man who would commit mass murder with nuclear weapons for a purpose he refused to divulge, or for a man who would use rhetoric about defending freedom against Communism to support dictators as brutal as any Communist but more conducive to U.S. corporations' profits.

Liberals who voted for what they believed was a liberal Clinton got cuts in the social safety net, and the NAFTA attack on workers. Conservatives who voted for what they believed was a conservative staunch anti-Communist

Nixon got an end to the cold war against Communist China and one of our most liberal presidents domestically.

Jimmy Carter no doubt seemed like a lesser evil candidate because he was such a humanitarian guy. How could voters have known that he would execute a foreign policy of backing the most brutal and murderous dictators in the world and help them to kill hundreds of thousands of people?

Ronald Reagan persuaded many blue collar former Democratic Party voters to vote for him because he would lower their taxes. Instead he raised them.

Voters opposed to raising taxes thought George H.W. "Read my lips: No new taxes" Bush was their lesser evil man. They were wrong.

Those who voted for Obama because he was for single-payer health care, or because he supported Palestinian human rights, or because he was better on civil liberties than the Republican or

because he was less of a warmonger found out later that they really hadn't had a clue when they were in the voting booth what they were actually voting for.

The voters in American presidential elections have never been able to vote for an actual lesser evil, only for a candidate they wrongly thought was a lesser evil. In truth they voted for complete unknowns.

Voting for the candidate one believes to be the lesser evil is a bad idea because that candidate might very well be the one not only willing (they're all willing!) but best able to implement evil. "Only Nixon could go to China" is an important historical lesson. It means that the politician who has a reputation for opposing some policy is precisely the one best able to implement that policy. This is because the leading figures in society who oppose that policy are loath to attack "their own guy" even when he implements the hated policy. Thus only Clinton could "end welfare as we know it" or bomb

Serbian civilians without liberal leaders so much as saying Boo; only Nixon could initiate Affirmative Action; only Obama the Constitutional law professor could destroy the last vestiges of American Constitutional rights. And while Republican G.W. Bush failed to privatize (and hence undermine) Social Security, Democrat Obama may very well succeed.

Be afraid of the "lesser evil"; be very afraid!

Should One Vote According to the Candidate's Religion or Personality?

Nixon was a Quaker, one of the most pacifist religions, and yet he carried out one of the most murderous wars ever in Vietnam and Cambodia. He was also an anti-Semite and yet a strong supporter of Israel. Anybody who voted for him because of his Quaker religion or his personal anti-Semitism would have been a very disappointed voter.

## What Explains the Disconnect Between Candidates' Campaign Promises or Personalities, and their Actual Deeds Once Elected?

Politicians, even presidents, do not determine government policies. These policies are determined by the [ruling class](#)--the very wealthiest people in society, and the top corporate managers and lawyers and intellectuals to whom they pay very high salaries for loyal service and advice. The ruling class crafts policies in exclusive think tanks open only to them, such as the Council on Foreign Relations, the Brookings Institute, and the Committee for Economic Development, supplemented by elite gatherings such as the one at Davos, Switzerland and others that are not reported on by the press.

Any candidate serious about becoming president of the United States knows that the only way to succeed is by persuading the ruling class that, when elected, he or she will be willing and able

to implement these government policies and ensure that the public will go along with them. The amount of money donated by the upper class to their election campaign fund and the amount of favorable corporate-controlled media coverage a candidate gets is a measure of how well he or she has persuaded the ruling class that he or she is willing and able to do the job expected of them: get the public to go along with policies determined by the ruling class.

The policies that the ruling class decides to implement have nothing to do with the personal beliefs of the candidates, or the lies and promises they tell to get votes. The policies are determined by what the ruling class believes will best protect or strengthen their power over society, given the prevailing circumstances. If in the near future the ruling class is confronted with a huge and growing revolutionary movement (as was the case in the 1930s when FDR was in office), and if it thinks that a New Deal type response would weaken the revolutionary movement more than,



say, violent repression, then a President Romney or Obama would likely implement the former response; and if the ruling class thinks the opposite then the president would likely implement the latter response. It will matter not a bit whether the president is Romney or Obama.

Politicians dare not tell the public the real reasons for what they do because they know the public would be appalled to find out. This is why FDR denied his real intention to get the U.S. into the European war (his real motive is explained in [\*The People as Enemy: The Leaders' Hidden Agenda in World War II\*](#) by this author), why Truman lied about why he dropped nuclear bombs on Japanese cities, why Truman lied about the real purpose of the Cold War and why Eisenhower lied about why he extended the Cold War to Vietnam. Voting for a candidate because of what he or she says in the campaign is like deciding what used car to buy based on the claims made by the salesman in the car lot.

## But What if a President Goes Against the Ruling Class and Does What He Thinks is Right Instead?

John F. Kennedy changed his views dramatically after the Cuban Missile Crisis and went against the ruling class in trying to end the Cold War. The ruling class used the CIA to assassinate Kennedy for his betrayal of their class. Presidents are just not allowed to go against the ruling class for long, and it is exceedingly rare for one to even try.

## If the President Doesn't Determine Policy then Why Do We Have Elections?

The electoral process is a method by which the ruling elite persuade people not to make a revolution. It does this in two main ways. First, like the farmer who dangles a carrot in front of a donkey, it dangles in front of us every four years the alluring prospect of obtaining a real say in government policy by merely voting. Second, it tells people who know a revolution is necessary

to give up hope about ever being able to make one, because the elected leaders, we are told, "have the support of a majority of Americans, as proven by the fact that they won a majority of the votes."

## Electing Good Politicians is NOT the Way Good Reforms Were Won in the Past

We're told that the way to get good changes in the laws is to elect good politicians who will then vote for these good changes. But that is absolutely not the way it works in real life.

The way to see how good laws get passed is to consider the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The members of Congress who voted to pass that act were mostly racists--the same racists who had voted for racist policies earlier. And no, they did not change from being racists to anti-racists. What made them vote for the Civil Rights Act was the "in the street" militant actions of the Civil Rights Movement. These racists didn't vote to abolish Jim Crow because they had become anti-

racist; they did it because the movement "in the street" that was growing increasingly revolutionary made them afraid of what would happen if they did NOT vote to end Jim Crow. (Additionally, the politicians were concerned that the Soviet Union, just by reporting the ugly truth about Jim Crow, was scoring tremendous propaganda victories against the United States, another reason that had nothing to do with "electing good politicians.")

Similarly, the notorious pro-Vietnam-War Richard Nixon withdrew U.S. troops from Vietnam ignominiously in 1975. Why? It wasn't because he became a peacenik. It was because the anti-war movement "in the streets" (especially the [refusal](#) of GIs in Vietnam to fight the Viet Cong!) forced him to end the war.

Likewise, the current laws and Supreme Court interpretations of the Constitution that let us enjoy certain kinds of free speech, such as the right to give a public talk on a public sidewalk, only came into existence when large numbers of

people (mostly the "Wobblies" of the Industrial Workers of the World) [broke the law](#) by giving such speeches and filling up the jails. It had nothing to do with electing "pro-free speech" politicians.

Should We Vote for President?

No. There is no good reason to vote for president. The electoral process is not a way for voters to have a say in government at all. Voting for president only enables the ruling class to claim undeserved legitimacy for a government that serves it, on the grounds that the politicians, who in fact obey the ruling class, are following the will of the people expressed in a democratic election. Even in the rare case when a president, after getting elected, decides to go against the ruling class, he or she will be assassinated, as happened to John F. Kennedy. When millions of Americans see the elections for the fraud they really are and start to organize a revolutionary

movement for genuine democracy, then and only then will we be on the road to having a real say in our society.

For discussion of how to build a revolutionary movement, and why it is possible, please see [Thinking about Revolution](#) and visit [www.PDRBoston.org](http://www.PDRBoston.org) .

[Read here](#) an article by a Nobel laureate describing how the people of Chile thought they had voted the rich out of power but then discovered that the rich don't give up power just because of an election; they murdered Allende and imposed a brutal dictatorship instead.