

10 Good Reasons Not to Vote

or

In Defense of Not Voting

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Prevalent Moral Presumptions

In voting, you practice

- responsibility
- public spiritedness
- social consciousness
- virtue

In not voting, you display

- irresponsibility
- apathy
- selfishness
- cynicism
- egoism

I wish to challenge these presumptions.

My talk is mainly about voting for office seekers (not Props. or Bond issues).

Motivations Behind Voting

(Besides fear of being called “irresponsible,” etc.)

- **to be part of a public ritual**
- **to participate in social affairs**
(somewhat like rooting for a sports team)
- **to practice social concern and consciousness**
- **to support particular causes**
- **to identify with recognize parties, movements, or personalities**
- **to define oneself to oneself**
(the act of voting validates one’s opinions to oneself)

I don’t denounce or disparage these goals.

I question whether voting is a good way to pursue or fulfill these goals.

My Political Opinions

- I want to *depoliticize* society, to shrink govt. The key to good government is limitations on it (democracy is insufficient and dangerous when limits are neglected).
- Of the candidates, I think the best are the Libertarians.
- *R vs. D*: Usually there is not much difference, but 8 times out of 10 I would prefer the R. I prefer Bush to Gore.
- I've voted once in my life (in 1980).

A CANDID LOOK AT VOTING

- 1) Should I vote if I feel ignorant about the issue?
SCU committees example
Cancer patient example
If I am relatively ignorant, why should I pollute the determination process with my superficial opinions?
- 2) Why voting isn't a very meaningful accountability mechanism or expression of anything, especially in our Winner-Take-All System:
 - A. We vote on huge packages, not individual issues
 - B. For the ordinary voter:
 - a) the only way for her vote to affect the outcome is to break a tie
 - b) her chance of breaking a tie is less than 0.0000001 percent
 - c) everyone really knows this

Result: *The Not-Worth-Knowing-Better Problem*: We don't find it worthwhile to incur the great costs of learning about public issues, since we can't appreciably affect the outcomes anyway. *Politicians know that voters are not cognizant of the issues, and respond accordingly.*

THE MAJOR RESULT: Two parties competing for the most votes from a population of 200 million little-informed souls who face little accountability for how they vote. Platitudes, Prevarication and Political Opportunism.

Centrism: The two ice cream sellers. David Boaz's analysis of the House.

This analysis indicates pandering, platitudes, and prevarication. Explains the common views of politicians:

Politicians are animals who sit on a fence and keep both ears to the ground.
— American saying

. . . that insidious and crafty animal, vulgarly called a statesman or politician, whose councils are directed by the momentary fluctuation of affairs.
— Adam Smith

Whenever a man has cast a longing eye on offices, a rottenness begins in his conduct.
— Thomas Jefferson

Some Evidence of Centrism

Various Ratings by Organizations:

traditional (modern) liberal:	Americans for Democratic Action
conservative:	American Conservative Union
taxpayer-conscious:	National Taxpayer Union
free competition:	Competitive Enterprise Institute
conservative/libertarian ratings:	Republican Liberty Caucus

David Boaz, Cato Institute Did His Own Libertarian Rating

Examined the voting on 12 bills in the House in 1999.

Issues included corporate welfare, space station spending, export subsidies, Internet censorship, flag desecration, gay/unmarried adoption ban, civil asset forfeiture, and others.

RESULTS:

Overall average score: 47

Ave. Republican score: 52

Ave. Democrat score: 41

Source: <http://www.libertysoft.com/liberty/features/86boaz.html> (This posting does not include all the tables that appeared with the article in the May 2000 issue of *Liberty* magazine.)

Okay, so politics is full of compromise, but

Why not hold your nose and vote for whoever you think is the better of the two?

- As we have said, the motivation behind voting is identifying with and supporting social ideals and goals. But I don't find either party worth identifying with. *Why not Repub?* Too statist. *Military spending*. Big Govt Rockefeller Republicans (Nixon, George Bush, Bob Dole). *Nationalist Republicans* (Pat Buchanan, Jesse Helms). *Coercive conservatism*: gay marriage or adoption, Internet censorship, prohibitionism.
- In identifying with one of the two major parties, you slip into feeling great anxiety about short-run politics rather than thinking carefully about what would be really right in the long run. Consider George Bush's hints on school vouchers. I'm for separation of school and state. I'm for cutting federal spending, not by 8 percent, but by 80 percent. I don't want to forget that!
- You slip into stereotyping yourself — say, as a Republican. And of thinking of the Democrats as “the other,” or the enemy. You stereotype your opponents as well as yourself by thinking in terms of broad, meaningless categories (“liberal,” “conservative,” etc.). The stupidity of the major parties rubs off on whoever associates with them or identifies with them.

When you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect. — Mark Twain

- In participating, you slip into attributing more significance or legitimacy to the choice between tweedledum and tweedledee, and begin to think that elections meaningfully express some collective will of the people. You buy into the myth of popular sovereignty and consent, that we are the government and the government is us. This is very dangerous.

Government is not reason, it is not eloquence. It is force. Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearsome master.

— George Washington

It would be dangerous delusion were a confidence in the men of our choice to silence our fears for the safety of our rights; that confidence is everywhere the parent of despotism. Free government is founded in jealousy and not in confidence; it is jealousy, and not confidence which prescribes limited constitutions, to bind down those whom we are obliged to trust with power.

— Jefferson (from the Kentucky Resolutions, 1798)

How about “Voting Your Conscience”?

John Wesley:

“Act as if the whole election depended on your single vote, and as if the whole Parliament (and therein the whole nation) on the single person whom you now choose to be a member of it.”

SLIDE: Third Parties Are Dangerous to Their Own Respective Causes.

If Libertarians gained ground, that might push the Repubs, not toward libertarian positions, but *away* from libertarian positions.

Promoting the LP would aid the Democrats.
How would that serve my conscience?

Third Party Are Dangerous to Their Own Respective Causes

Third Party Spoilers:

Popular votes (millions)

1860:	Abraham Lincoln (Republican)	1.9	(40%)
	Stephen Douglas (Democrat)	1.4	
	John Breckinridge (Dem - South)	0.8	
	John Bell (Whig)	0.6	
1912:	Woodrow Wilson (Democrat)	6.3	(42 %)
	T. Roosevelt (Progressive)	4.1	
	William Taft (Republican)	3.5	
	Eugene Debs (Socialist)	0.9	
1992:	Bill Clinton	44.9	(43%)
	George Bush	38.8	
	Ross Perot	19.7	

In each case, the guy who came in either second or third would have come in first if the other losing guy stayed out of it.

Alternative Systems

which do not necessarily result in inane centrist duopoly:

- 1) Proportional Representation.
Example: Sweden.

- 2) Ranking candidates/Approval voting. That way I could vote Libertarian *and* Republican. The Libertarian Party could grow without injuring the Republican Party.

Sweden: Vote Percentage by Party, 1998

(current proportions in the Riksdag conform to these numbers)

Social Democratic Party	36.4 percent
Moderate Party	22.9
Left Party	12.0
Christian Democrats	11.8
Centre Party	5.1
Liberal Party	4.7
Green Party	4.5
other	2.6

In many county and city governments (including Stockholm), the Moderates have the most seats.

The Moderate Party is Sweden's most libertarian party. They generally favor privatization, deregulation, spending cuts, and tax cuts. The younger Moderates are generally pro-immigration and favor choice in alcohol, drug use, etc.

If I lived in Sweden I would vote (for the Moderates). For me, that would be a meaningful and enjoyable form of social and intellectual activity.

Alternative Means of Supporting Political Goals:

- email communication: chat rooms, forwarding messages, etc.
- letters to the editor
- reading good books and periodicals, and talking about issues
- participate in clubs, public lectures, reading groups
- bumper stickers
- signing petitions

Compared to voting, these means of expressing and exploring social goals are:

- more accountable and show greater responsibility
- better defined
- more personally meaningful

Conclusion:

Different people can *responsibly* come to entirely different conclusions about whether to vote.