Voting is an Act of Violence

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Voting is the most violent act someone can commit in their lifetime.

This little noted anomaly about voting is directly related to the modern conception of the State as an entity deriving its grant of authority to act from the consent of the governed. The aura of legitimacy surrounding the government's actions is enhanced by the perceived role of voting as an expression of the "people's will." Whether non-threatening or violent, the authority for each and every one of the government's actions is presumed to flow from the consent of the people through the electoral process. School children are told this from their earliest years.

The idea the State derives its power to act from the consent of the people sounds romantic. Few people, however, are aware that by definition the State's power is for the specific purpose of engaging in acts of violence. No grant of power is necessary for anyone, or any organization to act peacefully. This is no secret among scholars, and sociologist Max Weber's definition of the State is considered one of the most authoritative:

"A state is a human institution that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory… The state is considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence."[1]

The legitimizing impact of voting on the government's exercise of power intimately involves voters in the use of that power. Which means that non-voters tend to delegitimize the exercise of a government's power as an expression of the "will of the people." So if no one voted in an election or only a small percentage of people did, the government couldn't profess to be empowered to act as an agent of the "people's will." Without the protective cover provided by voters, the government would have no pretense to act except as a law unto itself.

Consequently, the government's actions and the voters who legitimize them are linked together. Thus at a minimum, voters are spiritually involved in every act engaged in by the government. Including all violent acts. This involvement in the government's violence isn't, tempered by the nominal peacefulness of a person's life apart from voting. By choosing to vote a person integrates the violence engaged in by the government as a part of their life. This is just as true of people that didn't vote for a candidate who supports particular policies they may disagree with, as it is for those that did. It is going through the motion of voting that legitimizes the government to act in their name, not who or what they vote for.

[1] "Politics as a Vocation," Max Weber, in "From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology," edited by C. Wright Mills, Oxford University Press, NY, 1946, p. 78.

This means that the violence perpetrated by any one person pales in scope or significance when compared to that which is authorized to be taken by the government in the name of those who vote. The combined ghoulish violence of every identifiable serial killer in American history can't match the violence of even one of any number of violent actions taken by the government as the people's representative. A prominent example of this is the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq after the Gulf war in 1991. These sanction prevented Iraq from rebuilding its destroyed sanitation, water, and electric power infrastructure that were specifically targeted by the U. S. military for destruction. Supported and enforced by the U. S., these sanctions are credited by UNICEF and other organizations with contributing to the gruesome deaths of an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 children a month for over 8-1/2 years.[2] All voters share in the government's contribution to the unnecessary deaths of these children caused by disease and a reduced standard of living. So the over half-a-million deaths of innocent children in Iraq in the years after 1991's Gulf war are on the blood stained hands of every voter in the U.S.

The same dynamic of voter involvement in government atrocities is true of the many hundreds of civilian deaths caused by the bombing of Yugoslavian cities in the spring and summer of 1999 that the United States participated in. This was a small scale recreation of the atomic bombing of the non-military cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Hundreds of thousands of innocent women, children and old people were killed from the initial bomb blasts and the long-term effects of radiation exposure.[3] Those bombings had been preceeded by the U.S. military's killing of many hundreds of thousands of non-combatants during the firebombings of Tokyo, Hamburg, Dresden and Berlin. All of those people were killed in the name of the voters that had elected the Roosevelt administration in 1944 by a landslide. Voting, like a missile fired at an unseen target many miles away, is a long-distance method of cleanly participating in the most horrific violence imaginable.

So declining to vote does much more than cause a statistical entry on the non-voting side of a ledger sheet. It is a positive way for a person to lower their level of moral responsibility for acts of violence engaged in by the government that they would never engage in personally, and that they don't want to be committed in their name as a voter. Non-voting is a positive way for a person to publicly express the depth of their private belief in respecting the sanctity of life, and that violence is only justified in self-defense.

The social sphere in which most people live is notable for the level of peaceful cooperation that normally prevails in it. The majority of people strive to better their lives by working together with other people in the pursuit of their mutual self-interest.[4] This community spirit of non-violent cooperation supported by non-voting, stands in sharp contrast to the societal violence endorsed by the act of voting,

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[2] See e.g., "Sanctions of Mass Destruction," John Mueller and Karl Mueller, Foreign Affairs, May/June, 1999. vol. 78. no. 3, pp. 43–53; and, "U, S. Weapons of Mass Destruction Linked to Deaths of a Half-Million Children," in "Censored 1999: The News That Didn't Make the News — The Year's Top 25 Censored Stories," Peter Phillips and Project Censored, Seven Stories Press, NY, 1999, pp. 43–46.

[3] See e.g., "Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb," Ronald Takaki, Little Brown & Company. Boston, 1995; and, "Hiroshima in. America: A Half Century of Denial," Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, Avon, NY, 1996.

[4] See e.g., "The Evolution of Cooperation," Robert Axelrod, Basic Books, New York, 1984; "Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity," John H. Holland, Perseus Press, 1996; and, "Reputation: Studies in the Voluntary Elicitation of Good Conduct," edited by Daniel B. Klein, University of Michigan Press, 1997.

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