



# A Nanny State Idiocracy: When the Government Thinks It Knows Best

“Whether the mask is labeled fascism, democracy, or dictatorship of the proletariat, our great adversary remains the apparatus—the bureaucracy, the police, the military.”—*Simone Weil, French philosopher*



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It’s hard to say whether we’re dealing with a [kleptocracy](#) (a government ruled by thieves), a [kakistocracy](#) (a government run by unprincipled career politicians, corporations and thieves that panders to the worst vices in our nature and has little regard for the rights of American citizens), or if we’ve gone straight to an [idiocracy](#).

For instance, an animal welfare bill introduced in the Florida state Legislature would ban the sale of rabbits in March and April, prohibit cat owners from declawing their pets, [make it illegal for dogs to stick their heads out of car windows](#), force owners to place dogs in a harness or in a pet seatbelt when traveling in a car, and [require police to create a public list of convicted animal abusers](#).

A Massachusetts law prohibits drivers from letting their cars idle for more than five minutes on penalty of a \$100 fine (\$500 for repeat offenders), even in the winter. You can also be [fined \\$20 or a month in jail for scaring pigeons](#).

This overbearing Nanny State despotism is what happens when government representatives (those elected and appointed to work for us) adopt the authoritarian notion that the government knows best and therefore must control, regulate and dictate almost everything about the citizenry’s public, private and professional lives.

The government’s bureaucratic attempts at muscle-flexing by way of overregulation and overcriminalization have reached such outrageous limits that federal and state governments now require on penalty of a fine that individuals apply for permission before they can grow exotic orchids, host elaborate dinner parties, gather friends in one’s home for Bible studies, give coffee to the homeless, let their kids manage a lemonade stand, keep chickens as pets, or braid someone’s hair, as ludicrous as that may seem.

Consider, for example, that businesses in California [were ordered to designate an area of the children’s toy aisle “gender-neutral” or face a fine](#), whether or not the toys sold are traditionally marketed to girls or boys, such as Barbies and Hot Wheels. California schools are prohibited from allowing students to access [websites, novels or religious works that reflect negatively on gays](#). And while Californians are free to have sex with whomever they choose (because that’s none of the government’s business), [removing a condom during sex without consent](#) could make you liable for general, special and punitive



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damages.

It's getting worse.

Almost every aspect of American life today — especially if it is work-related — is subject to this kind of heightened scrutiny and ham-fisted control, whether you're talking about aspiring "[bakers, braiders, casket makers, florists, veterinary masseuses, tour guides, taxi drivers, eyebrow threaders, teeth whiteners, and more.](#)"

For instance, whereas 70 years ago, one out of every 20 U.S. jobs required a state license, today, [almost 1 in 3 American occupations requires a license.](#)

The problem of overregulation has become so bad that, as one analyst notes, "getting a license to style hair in Washington [takes more instructional time than becoming an emergency medical technician](#) or a firefighter."

This is what happens when bureaucrats run the show, and the rule of law becomes little more than a cattle prod for forcing the citizenry to march in lockstep with the government.

Overregulation is just the other side of the coin to overcriminalization, that phenomenon in which everything is rendered illegal and everyone becomes a lawbreaker.

As policy analyst Michael Van Beek warns, the problem with overcriminalization is that there are so many laws at the federal, state and local levels that we can't possibly know them all.

"It's also impossible to enforce all these laws. Instead, law enforcement officials must choose which ones are important and which are not. The result is that they pick the laws Americans really must follow, because [they're the ones deciding which laws really matter,](#)" concludes Van Beek. "Federal, state and local regulations — rules created by unelected government bureaucrats — carry the same force of law and can turn you into a criminal if you violate any one of them... if we violate these rules, we could be prosecuted as criminals. No matter how antiquated or ridiculous, they still carry the full force of the law. By letting so many of these sit around, just waiting to be used against us, [we increase the power of law enforcement,](#) which has lots of options to charge people with legal and regulatory violations."

This is the police state's superpower: it has been vested with the authority to make our lives a bureaucratic hell.

That explains how [a fisherman can be saddled with 20 years' jail time](#) for throwing fish that were too small back into the water. Or why police arrested a 90-year-old man for violating an [ordinance that prohibits feeding the homeless in public](#) unless portable toilets are also made available.

The laws can get downright [silly](#). For instance, you could also find yourself passing time in a Florida slammer for such inane activities as singing in a public place while wearing a swimsuit, breaking more than three dishes per day, [farting in a public place after 6 p.m. on a Thursday](#), or skateboarding without a license.

However, the consequences are all too serious for those whose lives become grist for the police state's mill. A few years back, police raided barber shops in minority communities, resulting in barbers being handcuffed in front of customers, and their shops searched without warrants. All of this was purportedly done in an effort to make sure that the [barbers' licensing paperwork was up to snuff.](#)

In this way, America has gone from being a beacon of freedom to a locked-down nation. And "we the



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people,” sold on the idea that safety, security and material comforts are preferable to freedom, have allowed the government to pave over the Constitution in order to erect a concentration camp.

We labor today under the weight of countless tyrannies, large and small, carried out in the so-called name of the national good by an elite class of governmental and corporate officials who are largely insulated from the ill effects of their actions.

We increasingly find ourselves badgered, bullied and browbeaten into bearing the brunt of their arrogance, paying the price for their greed, suffering the backlash for their militarism, agonizing as a result of their inaction, feigning ignorance about their backroom dealings, overlooking their incompetence, turning a blind eye to their misdeeds, cowering from their heavy-handed tactics, and blindly hoping for change that never comes.

The overt signs of the despotism exercised by the increasingly authoritarian regime that passes itself off as the United States government (and its corporate partners in crime) are all around us: censorship, criminalizing, shadow banning and de-platforming of individuals who express ideas that are politically incorrect or unpopular; warrantless surveillance of Americans’ movements and communications; SWAT team raids of Americans’ homes; shootings of unarmed citizens by police; harsh punishments meted out to schoolchildren in the name of zero tolerance; community-wide lockdowns and health mandates that strip Americans of their freedom of movement and bodily integrity; armed drones taking to the skies domestically; endless wars; out-of-control spending; militarized police; roadside strip searches; privatized prisons with a profit incentive for jailing Americans; fusion centers that spy on and collect and disseminate data on Americans’ private transactions; and militarized agencies with stockpiles of ammunition, to name some of the most appalling.

Yet as egregious as these incursions on our rights may be, it’s the endless, petty tyrannies — the heavy-handed, punitive-laden dictates inflicted by a self-righteous, Big-Brother-Knows-Best bureaucracy on an overtaxed, overregulated, and underrepresented populace — that illustrate so clearly the degree to which “we the people” are viewed as incapable of common sense, moral judgment, fairness, and intelligence, not to mention lacking a basic understanding of how to stay alive, raise a family, or be part of a functioning community.

In exchange for the promise of an end to global pandemics, lower taxes, lower crime rates, safe streets, safe schools, blight-free neighborhoods, and readily accessible technology, health care, water, food and power, we’ve opened the door to lockdowns, militarized police, government surveillance, asset forfeiture, school zero tolerance policies, license plate readers, red light cameras, SWAT team raids, health care mandates, overcriminalization, overregulation and government corruption.

In the end, such bargains always turn sour.

We relied on the government to help us safely navigate national emergencies (terrorism, natural disasters, global pandemics, etc.) only to find ourselves forced to relinquish our freedoms on the altar of national security, yet we’re no safer (or healthier) than before.

**We asked our lawmakers to be tough on crime, and we’ve been saddled with an abundance of laws that criminalize almost every aspect of our lives.** So far, we’re up to [4,500 criminal laws and 300,000 criminal regulations](#) that result in average Americans unknowingly engaging in criminal acts at least three times a day. For instance, the family of an 11-year-old girl was issued a [\\$535 fine for violating the Federal Migratory Bird Act after the young girl rescued a baby woodpecker from predatory cats](#).



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**We wanted criminals taken off the streets, and we didn't want to have to pay for their incarceration.** What we've gotten is a nation that boasts the highest incarceration rate in the world, with [more than 2.3 million people locked up](#), many of them doing time for relatively minor, nonviolent crimes, and a private prison industry fueling the drive for more inmates, who are forced to provide corporations with cheap labor.

A special report by CNBC breaks down the national numbers:

One out of 100 American adults is behind bars — while a stunning one out of 32 is on probation, parole or in prison. [This reliance on mass incarceration has created a thriving prison economy](#). The states and the federal government spend about \$74 billion a year on corrections, and nearly 800,000 people work in the industry.

**We wanted law enforcement agencies to have the necessary resources to fight the nation's wars on terror, crime and drugs.** What we got instead were [militarized police decked out with M-16 rifles, grenade launchers, silencers, battle tanks and hollow point bullets](#) — gear designed for the battlefield — more than 80,000 SWAT team raids carried out every year (many for routine police tasks, resulting in losses of life and property), and profit-driven schemes that add to the government's largesse, such as [asset forfeiture](#), where police seize property from “suspected criminals.”

According to *The Washington Post*, these funds have been used to buy guns, armored cars, electronic surveillance gear, “[luxury vehicles, travel and a clown named Sparkles](#).” Police seminars advise officers to use their “[department wish list](#) when deciding which assets to seize” and, in particular, go after flat screen TVs, cash and nice cars.

In Florida, where police are no strangers to asset forfeiture, police have been carrying out “[reverse](#)” [sting operations](#), where they pose as drug dealers to lure buyers with promises of cheap cocaine, then bust them and seize their cash and cars. Over the course of a year, police in one small Florida town seized close to \$6 million using these entrapment schemes.

**We fell for the government's promise of safer roads, only to find ourselves caught in a tangle of profit-driven red light cameras, which ticket unsuspecting drivers in the so-called name of road safety while ostensibly fattening the coffers of local and state governments.** Despite widespread public opposition, [corruption and systemic malfunctions](#), these cameras — used in 24 states and Washington, D.C. — are particularly popular with municipalities, which look to them as an easy means of extra cash.

One small Florida town, population 8,000, [generates a million dollars a year](#) in fines from these cameras. Building on the profit-incentive schemes, the cameras' manufacturers are also pushing speed cameras and school bus cameras, both of which result in hefty fines for violators who speed or try to go around school buses.

As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), this is what happens when the American people get duped, deceived, double-crossed, cheated, lied to, swindled and conned into believing that the government and its army of bureaucrats — the people we appointed to safeguard our freedoms — actually have our best interests at heart.

The problem with these devil's bargains is that there is always a catch, always a price to pay for



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whatever it is we valued so highly as to barter away our most precious possessions.

We've bartered away our right to self-governance, self-defense, privacy, autonomy and that most important right of all: the right to tell the government to "leave me the hell alone."

#### ABOUT JOHN & NISHA WHITEHEAD:

*Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His latest books [The Erik Blair Diaries](#) and [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) are available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Whitehead can be contacted at [johnw@rutherford.org](mailto:johnw@rutherford.org). Nisha Whitehead is the Executive Director of The Rutherford Institute. Information about The Rutherford Institute is available at [www.rutherford.org](http://www.rutherford.org).*



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