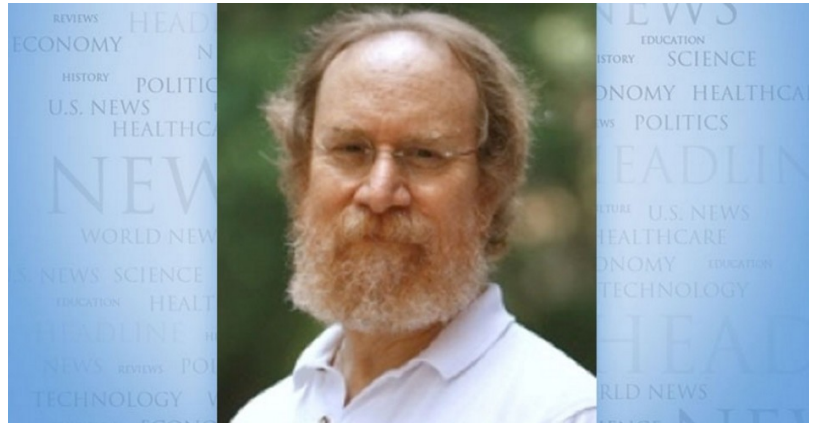




Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on November 9, 2012

## The Election's Unanswered Question

Thank goodness the tedious presidential campaign is over. It was enough to put a caffeine freak into a coma. If all you cared about was the horse race, you missed how anemic the past year was. Rhetoric aside, the differences between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney were virtually inconsequential; big government was never in doubt. That being the case, Obama's four-year record went largely unexamined.



But didn't Romney spend the last year blasting Obama's record? Superficially, yes. But that's all.

The American people reelected a president (barely) without a full airing of how he spent his first term. This does not bode well for the next four years and beyond.

Romney couldn't call Obama to account because he fundamentally agreed with most of what the president did. He could hardly have substantively criticized Obama's fiscal record: Romney had little specific to say about cutting the government's deep-in-deficit budget, and he even proposed to leave education and other federal spending intact. While Romney talked about cutting income-tax rates, he emphasized that he had no intention of cutting government revenues, which represent resources extracted from the private economy. He proposed only revenue-neutral tax "reform."

While Romney promised to "repeal and replace" Obamacare, the architect of Massachusetts' Romneycare was hardly in a position to offer a fundamental critique. The insurance mandate is the linchpin of Obamacare, but since Romneycare has the same mandate, what could the Republican candidate say? His weak federalist defense



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of state mandates versus national mandates sounded more like a rationalization. Moreover, Romney doesn't understand what is wrong with America's overpriced health-care system: the pervasive, monopolistic government privilege and regulation in the medical and insurance industries at both the state and federal levels. There is no free market in health care — something Romney does not get. As a result, he made the fatal mistake of implying that a partial repeal of Obamacare is all that is needed.

He also endorsed economic regulation, just to a vaguely lesser extent than what Obama favors. That only muddled the message. Romney showed no sign of understanding the relationship between regulation and privilege, which usually go hand in hand. So it's not enough to favor deregulation; a true advocate of the free market favors "de-privileging" as well.

The biggest pass Obama got was on foreign policy and civil liberties, where his record has been horrendous. Of course, Romney could make no principled criticism because he basically approves of the record, though he claimed Obama hasn't been aggressive enough.

Now, as we prepare for a new Obama term, let's recall that record: continuing occupation of Afghanistan; murder by drone, even of American citizens, without due process; participation in civil wars, even if it means being on the same side as al-Qaeda; indefinite detention without charge or trial, even of American citizens; opposition to lawsuits by victims of government torture; maintenance of the prison at Guantanamo; the inhumane treatment of Pvt. Bradley Manning, accused of revealing evidence of U.S. war crimes and other wrongdoing to WikiLeaks; unprecedented suppression of



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whistleblowers; warrantless surveillance;  
and much more.

While it would have been too much to expect Romney to slam Obama's militarism and insults to the Bill of Rights, shouldn't the establishment news media have shown some interest? They did their usual disservice to the American public by being a mouthpiece for the governing elite's permanent regime, which remains in place no matter which division of the uniparty is nominally in power.

Whatever you think of the outcome of this election, one big question remains: How would the independent-minded, "fiscally responsible and socially accepting" part of the electorate — which is said to decide presidential elections — have responded to a major-party candidate who called for radically smaller government, a noninterventionist foreign policy, and strict respect for civil liberties across the board?

You might think the Libertarian Party candidate, Gary Johnson, who got only 1 percent of the vote, answered that question, but like any third-party candidate, he faced insurmountable impediments to success.

Thus there's one message that is yet to be heard by most voters. Until it is heard, we won't know how it would be received. There just might be a constituency for freedom out there.

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