



Written by [Kurt Hyde](#) on October 21, 2016

Dictators Dictating Elections

When subjugating countries that have traditionally held elections, it's easy to understand why would-be dictators commit election fraud: They rig the elections so they are guaranteed to win. The manner in which they rig elections to favor themselves or their parties is often not so obvious. Also a little more obscure is why dictators bother to hold elections once they are in power and why they sometimes even implement electoral processes when the countries they rule didn't hold elections in the past.



How to Manipulate Elections

When despots or corrupt politicians try to consolidate power for themselves, one of the ways that they accrue influence is to rig elections so that they seem to obtain control legitimately, thereby reducing the likelihood of a popular uprising. This is an especially favorable method of consolidating power when the press is either under the direct control of the government or has similar ideological leanings as the ruling elites.

Within days of Adolf Hitler being appointed German chancellor on January 30, 1933, a move to which Paul von Hindenburg (then the president of Germany) acquiesced because there was no majority party in government and the government was in a state of upheaval, the Nazis issued a decree that not only forbade public meetings where the government might be brought into contempt, but granted themselves power to shut down any newspaper that might bring the government into contempt. Of course, the Nazi definition of contempt was any criticism of Adolf Hitler or the National Socialist German Workers' Party, aka the Nazi Party. Hitler then set about creating the conditions for total control, and that included rigging German elections.

Hitler and his cronies used every means at their disposal to propagandize the people to vote the way the Nazi Party wanted them to, to get people to the polls, and to make sure that vote tallies ended up in Hitler's favor.

The August 20, 1934 edition of the *New York Times* detailed how the Nazis coerced participation in the election of the day before, on a vote where the German people were asked to vote Yes on consolidating power in Hitler's hands by making him both president and chancellor. (Hitler was already chancellor and had assumed most powers; if he became president he would not only be the head of government, but also the head of the state):

All past efforts in getting out the German vote were eclipsed in this election. During Saturday night a huge final poster was plastered on billboards everywhere. It said:

Your leader [Hitler] has traveled 1,500,000 kilometers by airplane, railway and motor car in the cause of Germany's rebirth. You have but to walk 100 meters to your voting booth to vote "Yes".

Hitler not only heavily pushed voter participation, but also reminded the German people they were supposed to vote Yes.



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The *Times* article also explained that some coercion was employed to increase voter participation.

All over Germany means were taken to get the Sunday late-sleeping population out of bed early. The polls opened at 8 o'clock, but in Berlin Storm Troops, Hitler Youth Troops and Nazi labor union groups took to the streets as early as 6 o'clock to wake the populace by shouting at them to do their duty. Many of these groups had bugles or drum corps and an occasional band was heard.

In Munich twenty-five brass bands started marching through the city about the same hour with the same object. At Frankfurt-am-Main Storm Troops' bands played at the most important street intersections all morning.

The Nazi election cacophony continued until the bitter end. Nazi election results were announced by loudspeakers blaring in the streets, some of them mounted on trucks or cars. The announcements were accompanied by organized celebrations.

Even after Hitler was invested with almost unassailable power, to maintain the façade that he was merely fulfilling a mandate of the people, Hitler held referendum ballots that he ensured he'd win.

There was a variety of ways that Hitler assured referendum successes.

One method was to phrase the ballot in such a way that citizens were convinced it was their patriotic duty to agree with the referendum. A November 12, 1933 referendum on withdrawing Germany from the League of Nations not only included 10 paragraphs explaining why the German people should vote Yes, but worded the question as if it were a solemn pledge. The November 13, 1933 issue of the *New York Times* translated the question as:

Dost thou, German man or German woman, approve of the policy of thy Reich Government, and art thou ready to acknowledge this policy as the expression of thy own viewpoint and will, and solemnly to pledge thyself to it?

Because Germans were treated very harshly under the Versailles Treaty imposed upon them by the Allies at the end of World War I, this particular ballot question faced little danger of failing. Even though Hitler had already announced he would pull Germany out of the League of Nations on October 14, he wanted as much popular backing as he could generate. The measure was approved by 95.1 percent of the voters.

Doings by Dictators

If government propaganda and control of the ballot wording were not enough to get the correct election result, more dastardly methods were available, methods that have routinely been employed by dictators and by governments striving to become totalitarian in practice, if not in name.

Would-be or already entrenched totalitarians employ a number of tricks to manipulate elections: They may establish arbitrary controls that allow them to schedule, reschedule, or even cancel a vote, depending on what works better for them, or they may use their power to write and re-write the rules of the vote count at any time, even after the ballots are cast.

They sometimes word a ballot in such a way that if they don't win, it won't be decisive, but if they do win, they can claim a mandate. This has been done in the past and there's a possibility of a modern-day replay regarding the recent Brexit vote, wherein the British voted to exit the EU. As reported in *The New American* for August 8, 2016:

Right now the elites are moving to sabotage the Brexit, using pages ripped from their playbook that



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have worked in the past. The most obvious ploy, which is being promoted by many influential figures, is to call for a revote, a tactic that has paid off repeatedly for the Eurofederalists. When Danish voters rejected the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, for instance, they were forced into a revote the following year. And after being subjected to a months-long campaign of sustained threats, bribes, promises, and propaganda, they caved in and adopted the Maastricht accord. In 2005, French and Dutch voters turned thumbs down on the proposed EU Constitution, providing one of the biggest defeats in the Project's history. That obstacle was overcome by the globalists, however, with the simple maneuver of relabeling the EU Constitution as the Lisbon Treaty and imposing it as treaty law. When Ireland, the only country that held a national referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, rejected it in 2008, they were subjected to a revote the following year. Again, after much threatening, bribing, and politicking, the outcome was reversed.

Then there are old-fashioned scare tactics, intimidating voters. Acts of intimidation can range from physical attacks to threats to withhold ration coupons or loss of jobs. Any service for the people that is performed by the government can be abused in this manner. There were times when the Nazis spread rumors that the ballots were secretly numbered and that the Nazi election officials would have ways of finding out how people voted.

Acts of physical intimidation can be accomplished by government employees, such as the police (especially nationalized police), or political activists. In either case, the government harshly enforces even the tiniest infractions by the ruling class's opponents, while either looking the other way as the dictator's minions perform acts of intimidation or performing intimidation themselves.

One example of voter intimidation by government was done to members of the Polish Peasant Party, the opposition to the communists in post-World War II Poland. It was described by U.S. Ambassador to Poland Arthur Bliss Lane in his book *I Saw Poland Betrayed*:

Three thousand of the party were arrested at Poznan and prevented from voting. And arrests of other party members were reported throughout Poland.

Whether psychological or physical intimidation is employed, it is unarguably successful. The utility of voter intimidation can be found in the vote by Jewish people on the question of making Hitler both chancellor and president, thereby granting Hitler dictatorial powers. The August 20, 1934 issue of the *New York Times* highlighted the wide range of differences in the Jewish vote at different locations. (Nazi persecution of the Jews was already in motion the year before in 1933, with the paramilitary SA — the Brownshirts — attacking Jewish shops, the Nazis forcing Jews out of jobs at newspapers and the civil service, and Germans encouraged to boycott Jewish shops.) The election results from the internment camp at Dachau, a concentration camp for political prisoners that opened in 1933, indicated the treachery employed:

Interesting also are the following results. The hospital of the Jewish community in one district cast 168 "Yes" votes, 92, "Noes" and 46 ballots were invalid. The Jewish Home for Aged People in another district cast 94 "Yes" votes, four "Noes" and three invalid ballots. This vote is explainable, of course, by fear of reprisals if the results from these Jewish institutions had been otherwise. It is paralleled by other results outside Berlin.

In all Bavaria Chancellor Hitler received the largest vote in his favor in the concentration camp at Dachau where 1,554 persons voted "Yes" and only eight "No" and there were only ten spoiled ballots.



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The vote total for all of Germany in this election was 88 percent voting Yes, 10 percent voting No, and 2 percent of the ballots being invalid. The 99 percent “approval” by the prisoners in the concentration camp at Dachau is explainable only in terms of intimidation or electoral fraud.

Of course, when all other avenues of election manipulation are exhausted and a vote is still in question, the final line of defense for dictators is electoral fraud. Dictators are infamous for their behind-closed-door vote counts. Sometimes dictators try to make it appear as if the behind-closed-doors vote counts are honest by establishing a process for observers to apply for permission to watch the votes being counted. But even if granted permission to observe the vote count, observers may be allowed to witness only portions of what goes on behind closed doors. In such cases, even an honest observer can accomplish little more than achieve a false sense of security.

The New York Times for March 30, 1936 described how reporters were allowed to see the votes being counted in the German election of the day before, but “correspondents were kept at a distance by the presiding official.” Despite the distance some of the reporters started noticing discrepancies in how the votes were being counted, and soon after the correspondents were told to leave.

And there’s always the old trick of appointing observers who are loyal to a dictator rather than the candidates or the people.

Transporting ballots adds additional opportunities for fraud. Ballot boxes can easily be swapped while in transit or while sitting in an incoming processing area. There’s an opportunity to lose ballot boxes or just add ballot boxes full of votes. Also, the observers, if they are allowed to witness, can easily be confused regarding which boxes of ballots are being counted.

Transporting ballots to other locations before counting was one of the tricks used in the Polish referendum of June 30, 1946 (which was actually three referendum questions that basically asked whether the Polish people supported communism) and the Polish election of January 19, 1947.

Ambassador Lane wrote:

The most venal phase of the referendum procedure was in the counting of ballots. The law provided that they be counted at the polling places in the presence of representatives of all parties. But high government officials and the Security Police gave illegal orders to the electoral authorities to remove the ballot boxes, before the tabulation of votes, from the polls to the district commissioner’s headquarters.

Another dirty deed, very closely related to behind-closed-door vote counts, is keeping precinct vote totals secret from the public while forwarding them to the central election administration. This gives the powers at the top the final opportunity to review the vote totals and adjust them as necessary to achieve the desired outcomes. It also serves a psychological purpose as the powers at the top make the pronouncements of election results.

These methods were used in Hitler’s referendum of March 29, 1936, where the Nazis claimed that 99 percent of the voters approved of Hitler’s plan to remilitarize the Rhineland, a Western area of Germany that was temporarily occupied by Allied forces and demilitarized under the Versailles Treaty.

The *Dallas Morning News* reported what German newspapers would not have been allowed to print:

In fact, the results were known long before the people even went to the polls. Burglars broke into the Ministry of Propaganda last week and stole the results, presumably compiled weeks in advance on the basis of previous elections.



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The devil is the details, so it is said, and suppression of detailed information about elections is another tool in the dictator's tool bag for cheating at elections. Among such details to be suppressed are the total number of ballots cast and how many ballots were invalid. Such details were considered public information in German elections in the 1930s, so some German voters attempted to show resistance to Adolf Hitler by casting spoiled ballots.

One example was the German parliamentary election of November 12, 1933, where the Nazis were the only political party allowed on the ballot. The next day's *New York Times* reported:

The vote on the Nazi-nominated Reichstag, where a negative vote was impossible, showed 43,007,577 ballots cast, of which 39,655,288, or 92.2 per cent, endorsed the list and 3,352,289, or 7.8 per cent were defective.

This was not the only Nazi election where the spoiled ballots or No votes were an embarrassment to the Nazis. The Nazis reacted in a number of ways, one of which was a directive by the Ministry of Propaganda to no longer keep track of spoiled ballots.

Hitler's Hypocrisy — The Anschluss Election

Though Hitler was infamous for vote manipulation, when Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg tried to use similar tactics to reject Germany's annexation of Austria, Hitler almost literally threatened Schuschnigg at gunpoint to make the election more favorable to his scheme.

One of Hitler's personal triumphs was the annexation of Austria into the Third Reich in 1938. Hitler had successfully intimidated Schuschnigg into agreeing to appoint a number of Nazi sympathizers in his government, and the Nazis were active politically in Austria, especially among the young people. Schuschnigg attempted a counter-move. His strategy was to outfox Hitler at his own game: referendum elections. Schuschnigg called for a referendum election to have the Austrian people vote to remain independent.

On March 9, he announced that a referendum on the question of annexation would be held on March 13, giving only four days notice. Then he planned to manipulate the ballot in other ways, as was documented in the March 10, 1938 issue of the *New York Times*:

The official voting paper will be a slip eight centimeters by five (about three by two inches), with the word "yes" on one side. These papers in all cases will be counted as yes votes even if the word is crossed out and another — even "no" — is written on it. Partly torn voting slips, provided they contain the word yes, will also be counted as yes votes.

Those wishing to vote no must write the word no on a piece of paper the same size as the official slip. Anything added to the word will invalidate the vote. Blank slips will be counted as affirmative votes.

Hitler responded immediately by threatening military action. By the evening of March 11, Schuschnigg resigned, citing his desire to avoid bloodshed. His referendum was postponed. *The New York Times* for March 13 printed a translation of Hitler's proclamation. Hitler strongly criticized Schuschnigg's electoral tactics, saying:

The methods of this plebiscite were to be singular. A country that had had no elections for many years, and that lacks all facilities for listing rightful voters, announces an election to take place within barely three and one-half days.

There are no proper electoral lists, no ballots. There is no check of the electoral body, no obligation



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to keep the poll secret, no guarantee of impartial conduct of the elections, no safeguard for the correct counting of the votes, etc.

Hitler added:

Armed troops, infantry divisions and S. S. [Hitler's elite guards] formations on the ground and the German air force in the blue sky — called by the new National Socialist Government in Vienna — will constitute the guarantee that the Austrian people at last will have the possibility, within a very brief period, of holding a real plebiscite over their own future and with it their own destiny.

Not surprisingly, once the Nazis were firmly in control of Austria, the referendum was rescheduled for April 10, and they rigged the election to their own liking. They worded the ballot to bias the vote. The circle for a Yes vote was centered and was larger than the circle off to the side for voting No. The secret ballot was compromised, and other tricks were used to achieve a 99-percent Nazi win.

Consolidating Power Via Elections

Hitler, like many dictators, was willing to put questions on governing to the people, as long as he was assured that the people would vote the way he wanted them to. Many totalitarian regimes — or want-to-be totalitarian regimes — found elections useful not only as a type of psychological warfare to dishearten opponents, but to expand their powers more fully into all areas of people's lives and more firmly tighten their draconian grip on their hapless subjects.

As was mentioned earlier, elections can be used to legitimize power, and "legitimacy" can be a very powerful tool. Very few dictators call themselves dictators. They generally prefer to portray themselves as protectors of their people. Of course, they claim to be acting on the behalf of the people. When critics point out their oppressive tactics, dictators typically paint themselves as well-intentioned leaders who are perhaps a little overprotective.

Any and all glimmers of legitimacy, of course, are used for their full propaganda value. Government schools will portray the leader as the rightful "great protector," the legitimate choice of the people — most government schools (even in America) don't teach discernment between rigged elections and honest elections, and especially not those schools in dictatorships.

Legitimacy is also used to motivate and brainwash national police forces. While more sadistic people in national police forces will typically enjoy oppressing the people as legalized bullies, those of higher moral character might be inclined to balk at taking oppressive measures unless they recognize the leader as the proper authority. Even most torturers are not sadists, but "patriots."

Dictators also use elections for other self-serving purposes. Elections are a great opportunity for a dictator to identify those who might oppose him. If an opposition candidate is allowed on the ballot, and sometimes the dictator even sponsors his opposition candidates, the dictator's minions can observe from the sidelines or work within the opposition campaign to compile a list of persons to be watched. If all the citizens are required to have a national ID card, which is common in dictatorships, that makes it easy for government agents to track these people indefinitely, even if they move to a new area.

Even when there is no opposition candidate in an election, dictators' minions can watch the people's reactions to either forced or strongly encouraged participation. Non-enthusiastic persons can be placed on a list of people to be watched. This can also be an opportunity to use the government schools to monitor parents via their children by measuring how supportive the parents are to having their children participate in the political rallies that are associated with elections. Once an individual is identified as



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non-enthusiastic, those in charge can choose whether to schedule a visit by government officials or just keep monitoring the person.

Joseph Stalin used elections as part of his Great Purge of potential communist competitors, double-crossing them. In 1937, Stalin temporarily allowed for multi-candidate elections and genuinely secret ballots in some of the labor union elections to unempower other communist leaders. Wendy Z. Goldman wrote in *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin*:

More than 70 percent of factory committee members were replaced, 66 percent of the 94,000 factory committee chairmen, and 92 percent of the 30,723 members of the regional committee plenums.

Of course, Stalin didn't allow the relatively honest elections to threaten his position. The only people to be swept from office were lower-level bureaucrats whom Stalin found to be expendable.

Too, it should be asked, "How many people under Soviet rule in 1937 saw the temporary implementation of a little honesty in Stalin's elections, mistook it for genuine reform, and made themselves visible to Stalin's henchmen?"

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of elections to dictators is the infliction of emotional defeat and despair on their people. Establishing an electoral process whereby the dictator always wins and his opponents always lose is a good start. But there's more. Fraudulent election results with 99-percent pluralities can be more than disheartening to a freedom-loving subject, but wrenching, as such numbers display the power of a dictator: A dictator has placed additional obstacles, such as electoral fraud, for his opponents to surmount. The message the dictator wants to send to those who oppose him is hopelessness.

Another psychological weapon to weaken the resolve of any opposition is forced participation — forced compliance. Mandatory voting has greater psychological impact if there's only one choice allowed on the ballot and a voter must knowingly participate in a fraud.

Joseph Stalin used electoral psychology too. Prior to an election held on December 24, 1939, propaganda pamphlets were distributed encouraging participation. The front depicted a ballot being cast, and inside, the pamphlets encouraged participation, telling voters to "Vote for the party of Lenin and Stalin. Vote for the candidates of the Communist and nonpartisan block." When Stalin ran elections, he designed a system whereby the people's choices did not matter. Either by excluding opponents from being on the ballot or by fraudulent vote counts behind closed doors, Stalin always won.

Warning for America

Recent trends in American elections indicate movement toward manipulated elections, rather than toward more transparency and honesty. Some of the manipulative electoral procedures that are becoming more widespread in American elections include:

Behind-closed-doors vote counts: Virtually unknown in America 100 years ago, they are now the norm in most states. Secretive vote counts are sometimes accomplished by not allowing public access as the votes are counted, by onerous procedures for people to apply to be poll watchers, or by having computers count the votes with no voter-verified paper trail. Volunteer poll watchers from the group True the Vote have reported great difficulty in becoming poll watchers.

Behind-closed-doors vote accumulation and totaling, once unheard of in America, are now being openly used. In this year's Iowa caucuses, the Republicans and Democrats both boasted of using "secure



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reporting” for forwarding the results of the caucus votes. Most media outlets reported on this with a positive spin, focusing on the impressive technology with which results were tabulated. The New American online, reporting from Iowa on the day of the caucuses, asked,

Why should publicly disseminated information be transmitted securely? If everyone has a right to know this information, why should it be secured?

And evidence of fraud is apparent. In 2012, private individuals, such as Edward True in Appanoose County, Iowa, and Pastor Matt McDonald in Belfast, Maine, compared the actual vote totals from their vote counts in their Republican caucuses to the official totals and found discrepancies. In both cases Ron Paul lost votes.

Leading or confusing ballot wording: Playing with the language on the ballot has become a common procedure as well. In the November 3, 2015 election in Houston, Texas, where the bathroom ordinance was on the ballot, the proponents of the measure wanted it to simply state that they wanted to keep men’s rooms for men and women’s rooms for women. But when it went to voters here is what appeared on the ballot:

(Relating to the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance.) Are you in favor of the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance, Ord. No. 2014-530, which prohibits discrimination in city employment and city services, city contracts, public accommodations, private employment, and housing based on an individual’s sex, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, familial status, marital status, military status, religion, disability, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender identity, or pregnancy?

The final vote was 61 percent for the advocates of retaining men’s room for men and women’s rooms for women, but it required a great effort to promote “Vote No on Houston Proposition 1” to overcome the confusing wording on the ballot.

Honesty Still the Best Policy

Just because a country holds elections doesn’t mean it is a free country. Analyzing the sham elections of totalitarians can reveal much of how despots have used elections as a tool of tyranny, a mere façade of self-determination for the people.

Those who wish to stop the erosion of liberty in America and restore constitutional rights must learn the lessons of how dictators use dishonest elections to gain and maintain power, and apply those lessons of history to make certain it doesn’t happen here.

Photo showing Hitler casting his ballot in the Anschluss election of April 10, 1938: AP Images

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