

# Democracy Is War by Other Means

*Written by Dan Sanchez.*

Democracy is war by other means. Superficially, it is waged with ballots instead of bullets. At the end of the day, those ballots become bullets. Elections load real guns and aim them at real people. If you disobey the commandments handed down by elected officials, beefy men with shaved heads and Ray-Ban sunglasses will come to take you away. If you resist them, hot lead will fly. Elections are scrambles for control over the service weapons that propel those rounds. In such contests, every faction is trying to point the gun barrels at someone else.

One faction democratically seizes power and influences policy. Members of vanquished factions are shot, caged, or looted at a higher rate. Some of this loot becomes the spoils of war for the victorious: government checks and freebies of various kinds. But then a coalition of aggrieved factions wins the next election, and the tables turn. The expropriators are expropriated until power changes hands again. All take turns as victims and victimizers in an endless round of reciprocal violence.

In this war, all sides are net losers, save one: the government.

That is because “war is the health of the State.” When Randolph Bourne coined that phrase, he was referring to military warfare, and World War I in particular. But the reasoning behind his maxim also applies to the formalized civil war that is democracy.

## **The State and War**

For Bourne, the State and the government are two different things. The government is a ruling organization that is distinct from the populace it rules. The State is much *more* than that, and much *less*.

*More* in that it includes everyone in the country. It is a mystic union of the entire populace, including both rulers and the ruled. It is the many becoming one and acting as one. *E pluribus unum*.

*Less* in that it is imaginary. The State is a fiction that exists only in the minds of its believers. It is a superstition, an incoherent concept, because the many cannot act as one. Only individuals act. Individuals act similarly when they obey the same commandments. But it is still the individuals who are choosing such obedience.

The State is a make-believe entity to which over-awed believers ascribe preferences, will, and agency: essentially, a god. True believers in this god (“patriots”) slavishly adhere to its

preferences. They swallow the confused, incoherent notion that the State exists as a manifestation of their own collective will that works for their own collective benefit. The church and its god are one. This superstition that, in some vague sense, they are only enslaved to themselves makes such bondage easier to accept.

In other words, the State is a herd mentality: an inclination in a person to renounce his individuality and subsume himself into a herd, a pack, a tribe, a horde, a gang, a cult, a collective. The believers revere and defer to their own “togetherness” as if it were a god. *Deutschland uber alles*.

War is the health of this deified herd called the State because a state of war is a state of desperation, of flight or fight, of primal terror and hate. In such a besieged frame of mind, individuals dismiss the moral principles of civilization as unaffordable luxuries. The human soul regresses to unthinking indulgence in base animal impulses, renouncing civility for the law of the jungle. Toward enemy populations, it is eat or be eaten, kill or be killed, capture or be captured, plunder or be plundered.

Other human beings are no longer deemed useful as voluntary partners in creative work, mutually beneficial trade, and friendly company. Instead, they are either fellow conscripts or enemies.

Insiders are considered useful only insofar as they are dutiful members of your herd, your pack, your tribe, your horde, your gang, your cult, your collective: only insofar as they contribute to the strength in numbers necessary to overrun, eat, kill, capture, and plunder outsiders.

Refractory individualists who fall out of line are shamed and coerced into conformity. Failing that, dissidents are ultimately shunned as heretics, rogues, outsiders. “*If you’re not with us, you’re against us.*” And outsiders are excluded entirely from the moral community. They are considered menaces and only useful as prey, as slaves, as sources of loot.

In times of war, the pack must swarm in tandem; the herd must stampede in unison. In order for a collective to work coherently and deliberately toward a single war effort, it needs not only regimentation, but leadership. So people under siege seek a leader of the pack, a shepherd of the flock. This leadership is sought in the government.

But even an oligarchy can prove too fractious for coherently prosecuting a war. So the people ultimately long for a single strongman, a dear leader, a führer.

This is why governments are so eager to embroil their subjects in wars. The exigencies of war trigger bestial antagonism and collectivism that drive people to flock to the government’s feet like sheep and bleat to be shorn of their liberties.

## Democracy as War

Democracy is a form of warfare. What sets it apart from other forms is that it is a civil war of legal plunder.

Legal plunder is a term coined by Frédéric Bastiat. We might also add legal murder and legal kidnapping. These activities, which we rightly regard as crimes when committed by anyone else, become uniquely legitimized when committed by agents of the imaginary State-god. Robbery becomes taxation, kidnapping becomes incarceration, murder becomes foreign policy.

Before the rise of democracy, legal plunder was simple and stark. The government was a distinct clique that “legally” plundered the people. The rise of democracy blurred the distinctions between rulers and the ruled and thus disarmed popular resistance to the regime. With democracy, the plunder became highly participatory. Bastiat called it “universal legal plunder.”

By supporting the welfare state and high taxes, the less-rich plunder the affluent and the rich. By supporting industry regulation, protectionism, and subsidies, rich producers plunder their less-rich consumers and competitors. Bastiat said, *“The State is that great fiction by which everyone tries to live at the expense of everyone else.”* And everybody plunders by proxy via the same middleman: the government, which gets a cut of every pile of loot. So the government has a strong material incentive to pit its subjects against each other.

And it’s not just plunder. In the wars on terror and drugs, for example, Americans murder foreigners by proxy and cage their neighbors by proxy, all in order to “feel safer.”

What we have with an interventionist democratic state then is a Hobbesian state of affairs: a formalized proxy civil war of all against all. This kind of war is the health of the State, too. Democracy has the same impact on the human psyche as military war, only more low-grade and chronic.

Since lives and livelihoods are on the line, political battles also induce desperation. The desperate times offer an excuse for desperate measures: for excluding political enemies from the moral community. Non-violent drug offenders can be buried alive in prison for decades. Christian bakers can have their finances and lives ruined for exercising their right to refuse service. All’s fair in politics and war.

In order to overwhelm political enemies, voters resort to the same kind of rank tribalism as do jingoists. Instead of nations, the relevant collective “herds” are political parties, interest groups, “movements,” etc. Partisans shout down any disloyal dissent emerging from within their ranks.

Political violence is mob violence. The larger the crowd, the more anonymous its violence. And the impunity of anonymity, like the impunity of authority, unleashes man's capacity for evil. Under the shielding anonymity of the lynch mob and the voting booth, any atrocity is on the table.

Partisans vilify members of enemy political tribes. To prosecute their inter-tribal warfare, they become reliant on the government apparatus, which they use to inflict and defend against proxy violence. Never mind that it is that very institution that enables and emboldens others to hurt them: that pits all sides against each other. All factions are so preoccupied with using the government against each other, they are oblivious to the fact that the machine of power is their true and common enemy.

Partisans, like patriots, clamor for leadership in order to be herded toward the sole objective of defeating the political enemy. They rally behind and take marching orders from their political leadership.

Democratic politics is a vital power ritual for the government. It makes the government all-important, all-relevant, all-preoccupying; this is especially so during election season. Each side's enemy candidate is demonized as an existential menace who can only be warded off by throwing all support behind your party's candidate. *"Candidate X is not perfect, but we must stop Candidate Y!"*

If your candidate wins power, you become doubly loyal to the regime to keep the enemy herds down. If your candidate loses, you become doubly determined to help your tribe regain its grip on the levers of power. Dismantling the machine is the last thing on your mind.

Using democratic politics to foment civil strife is how the government divides and more fully conquers its subjects.

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