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## Free Not to Vote

Friday, October 17th, 2014 by [Allen Mendenhall](#) posted in [Politics](#).



The 2014 U.S. midterm elections are coming up, and I don't intend to vote. A vote is like virginity: you don't give it away to the first flower-bearing suitor. I haven't been given a



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good reason, let alone flowers, to vote for any candidate, so I will stay home, as well I should.

This month, my wife, a Brazilian citizen, drove from Auburn, Alabama, to Atlanta, Georgia, on a Sunday morning to cast her vote for the presidential election in Brazil. She arrived at the Brazilian consulate and waited in a long line of expatriates only to be faced with a cruel choice: vote for the incumbent socialist Dilma Rousseff of the Workers' Party, for the socialist Aécio Neves of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party who is billed as a center-right politician, for the environmentalist socialist Marina Silva of the Socialist Party, or for any of the other socialist candidates who were polling so low that they had no chance of victory. Brazil maintains a system of compulsory voting in addition to other compulsory schemes such as conscription for all males aged 18.

Logan Albright [recently wrote](#) about the folly of compulsory voting, support for which is apparently growing in Canada. He criticized the hypocrisy of an allegedly democratic society mandating a vote and then fining or jailing those who do not follow the mandate. He also pointed out the dangers of forcing uneducated and uninformed citizens to vote against their will. This problem is particularly revealing in Brazil, where illiterate candidates have exploited election laws to run absurd commercials and to assume the persona of silly characters such as a clown, Wonder Woman, Rambo, Crazy Dick, and Hamburger Face, each of which is worth googling for a chuckle. The incumbent clown, by the way, was [just reelected](#) on the campaign slogan "it can't get any worse." Multiple Barack Obamas and Osama bin Ladens were also running for office, as was, apparently, [Jesus](#). The ballot in Brazil has become goofier than a middle-school election for class president.

Even in the United States, as the election of Barack Obama demonstrates, voting has become more about identity politics, fads, and personalities than about principle or platform. Just over a decade ago, Arnold Schwarzenegger became the Governor of California amid a field of second-rate celebrities while a former professional wrestler (the fake and not the Olympian kind of wrestling) Jesse "the Body" Ventura was winding up his term as the Governor of Minnesota. Today comedian Al Franken holds a seat in the United States Senate. It turns out that Brazil isn't the only country that can boast having a clown in office.

No serious thinker believes that a Republican or Democratic politician has what it takes to boost the economy, facilitate peace, or generate liberty. The very function of a career politician is antithetical to market freedom; no foolish professional vote-getter ought to have the power he or she enjoys under the current managerial state system, but voting

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legitimizes that power.

It is often said, “If you don’t vote, you can’t complain.” The counterpoint is that voting ensures your complicity with the policies that elected politicians will enact. If you don’t vote, you lack complicity. You are not morally blameworthy for resisting the system that infringes basic rights or that offends your sense of justice and reason. You have not bestowed credibility on the government with your formal participation in its most sacred ritual. The higher the number of voters who participate in an election, the more legitimacy there is for the favored projects of the elected politicians, and the more likely those politicians are to impose their will on the populace by way of legislation or other legal means.

Refusing to vote can send a message: get your act together or we won’t turn out at the polling stations. Low voter turnout undermines the validity of the entire political system. Abstention also demonstrates your power: just watch how the politicians grovel and scramble for your vote, promise you more than they can deliver, beg for your support. This is how it ought to be: Politicians need to work for your vote and to earn it. They need to prove that they are who they purport to be and that they stand for that which they purport to stand. If they can’t do this, they don’t deserve your vote.

Abstention is not apathy; it is the exercise of free expression, a voluntary act of legitimate and peaceful defiance, the realization of a right.

There are reasonable alternatives to absolute abstention: one is to vote for the rare candidate who does, in fact, seek out liberty, true liberty; another is to cast a protest vote for a candidate outside the mainstream. Regardless, your vote is a representation of your person, the indicia of your moral and ethical beliefs. It should not be dispensed with lightly.

If you have the freedom not to vote, congratulations: you still live in a society with a modicum of liberty. Your decision to exercise your liberty is yours alone. Choose wisely.

**Allen Mendenhall is a Mises Canada Emerging Scholar. He is a staff attorney to Chief Justice Roy S. Moore of the Supreme Court of Alabama, an adjunct professor at Faulkner University, and a doctoral candidate in English at Auburn University. His book is *Literature and Liberty: Essays in Libertarian Literary Criticism*. Visit his website at [AllenMendenhall.com](http://AllenMendenhall.com).**

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