

Elections: Absenteeism, Boycotts and the Class Struggle

By [Prof. James Petras](#)

Global Research, June 27, 2017

Region: [Europe](#), [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Introduction

The most striking feature of recent elections is not ‘who won or who lost’, nor is it the personalities, parties and programs. The dominant characteristic of the elections is the widespread repudiation of the electoral system, political campaigns, parties and candidates.

Across the world, majorities and pluralities of citizens of voting age refuse to even register to vote (unless obligated by law), refuse to turn out to vote (voter abstention), or vote against all the candidates (boycott by empty ballot and ballot spoilage).

If we add the many citizen activists who are too young to vote, citizens denied voting rights because of past criminal (often minor) convictions, impoverished citizens and minorities denied voting rights through manipulation and gerrymandering, we find that the actual ‘voting public’ shrivel to a small minority.

As a result, present day elections have been reduced to a theatrical competition among the elite for the votes of a minority. This situation describes an oligarchy – not a healthy democracy.

Oligarchic Competition

Oligarchs compete and alternate with one another over controlling and defining who votes and doesn’t vote. They decide who secures plutocratic financing and mass media propaganda within a tiny corporate sector. ‘Voter choice’ refers to deciding which pre-selected candidates are acceptable for carrying out an agenda of imperial conquests, deepening class inequalities and securing legal impunity for the oligarchs, their political representatives and state, police and military officials.

Oligarchic politicians depend on the systematic plundering Treasury to facilitate and protect billion dollar/billion euro stock market swindles and the illegal accumulation of trillions of dollars and Euros via tax evasion (capital flight) and money laundering.

The results of elections and the faces of the candidates may change but the fundamental economic and military apparatus remains the same to serve an ever tightening oligarchic rule.

The elite regimes change, but the permanence of state apparatus designed to serve the elite becomes ever more obvious to the citizens.

Why the Oligarchy Celebrates “Democracy”

The politicians who participate in the restrictive and minoritarian electoral system, with its predetermined oligarchic results, celebrate 'elections' as a democratic process because a plurality of voters, as subordinate subjects, are incorporated.

Academics, journalists and experts argue that a system in which elite competition defines citizen choice has become the only way to protect 'democracy' from the irrational 'populist' rhetoric appealing to a mass of citizens vulnerable to authoritarianism (the so-called '*deplorables*'). The low voter turn-out in recent elections reduces the threat posed by such undesirable voters.

A serious objective analysis of present-day electoral politics demonstrates that when the masses do vote for their class interests - the results deepen and extend social democracy. When most voters, non-voters and excluded citizens choose to abstain or boycott elections they have sound reasons for repudiating plutocratic-controlled oligarchic choices.

We will proceed to examine the recent June 2017 voter turnout in the elections in France, the United Kingdom and Puerto Rico. We will then look at the intrinsic irrationality of citizens voting for elite politicians as opposed to the solid good sense of the popular classes rejection of elite elections and their turn to extra-parliamentary action.

Puerto Rico's Referendum

Ballot papers are seen at a polling station in Puerto Rico (Source: Public Radio International)

The major TV networks (NBC, ABC and CBS) and the prestigious print media (New York Times, Washington Post, and Financial Times) hailed the '*overwhelming victory*' of the recent pro-annexationist vote in Puerto Rico. They cited the 98% vote in favor of becoming a US state!

The media ignored the fact that a mere 28% of Puerto Ricans participated in the elections to vote for a total US takeover. Over 77% of the eligible voters abstained or boycotted the referendum.

In other words, over three quarters of the Puerto Rican people rejected the sham '*political elite election*'. Instead, the majority voted with their feet in the streets through direct action.

France's Micro-Bonaparte

In the same way, the mass media celebrated what they dubbed a '*tidal wave*' of electoral

support for French **President Emmanuel Macron** and his new party, 'the Republic in March'. Despite the enormous media propaganda push for Macron, a clear majority of the electorate (58%) abstained or spoiled their ballots, therefore rejecting all parties and candidates, and the entire French electoral system. This hardly constitutes a 'tidal wave' of citizen support in a democracy.

During the first round of the parliamentary election, President Macron's candidates received 27% of the vote, barely exceeding the combined vote of the left socialist and nationalist populist parties, which had secured 25% of the vote. In the second round, Macron's party received less than 20% of the eligible vote.

In other words, the anti-Macron rejectionists represented over three quarters of the French electorate. After these elections a significant proportion of the French people - especially among the working class - will likely choose extra-parliamentary direct action, as the most democratic expression of representative politics.

The United Kingdom : Class Struggle and the Election Results

The June 2017 parliamentary elections in the UK resulted in a minority Conservative regime forced to form an alliance with the fringe Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), a far-right paramilitary Protestant party from Northern Ireland. The Conservatives received 48% of registered voters to 40% who voted for the Labor Party. However, 15 million citizens, or one-third of the total electorate abstained or spoiled their ballots. The Conservative regime's plurality represented 32% of the electorate.

Despite a virulent anti-Labor campaign in the oligarch-controlled mass media, the combined Labor vote and abstaining citizens clearly formed a majority of the population, which will be excluded from any role in the post-election oligarchic regime despite the increase in the turnout (in comparison to previous elections).

Elections: Oligarchs in Office, Workers in the Street

The striking differences in the rate of abstention in France, Puerto Rico and the UK reflect the levels of class dissatisfaction and rejection of electoral politics.

The UK elections provided the electorate with something resembling a class alternative in the candidacy of **Jeremy Corbyn**. The Labor Party under Corbyn presented a progressive social democratic program promising substantial and necessary increases in social welfare spending (health, education and housing) to be funded by higher progressive taxes on the upper and upper middle class.

Corbyn's foreign policy promised to end the UK's involvement in imperial wars and to withdraw troops from the Middle East. He also re-confirmed his long opposition to Israel's colonial land-grabbing and oppression of the Palestinian people, as a principled way to reduce terrorist attacks at home.

In other words, Corbyn recognized that introducing real class-based politics would increase voter participation. This was especially true among young voters in the 18-25 year age group, who were among the UK citizens most harmed by the loss of stable factory jobs, the doubling of university fees and the cuts in national health services.

In contrast, the French legislative elections saw the highest rate of voter abstention since

the founding of the 5th Republic. These high rates reflect broad popular opposition to ultra-neo liberal **President Francois Macron** and the absence of real opposition parties engaged in class struggle.

The lowest voter turn-out (72%) occurred in Puerto Rico. This reflects growing mass opposition to the corrupt political elite, the economic depression and the colonial and semi-colonial offerings of the two-major parties. The absence of political movements and parties tied to class struggle led to greater reliance on direct action and voter abstention.



Class struggle (Source: Medium)

Clearly class politics is the major factor determining voter turnout. The absence of class struggle increases the power of the elite mass media, which promotes the highly divisive identity politics and demonizes left parties. All of these increase both abstention and the vote for rightwing politicians, like Macron.

The mass media grossly inflated the significance of the right's election victories of the while ignoring the huge wave of citizens rejecting the entire electoral process. In the case of the UK, the appearance of class politics through Jeremy Corbyn increased voter turnout for the Labor Party. However, Labor has a history of first making left promises and ending up with right turns. Any future Labor betrayal will increase voter abstention.

The established parties and the media work in tandem to confine elections to a choreographed contest among competing elites divorced from direct participation by the working classes. This effectively excludes the citizens who have been most harmed by the ruling class' austerity programs implemented by successive rightist and Social Democratic parties.

The decision of many citizens not to vote is based on taking a very rational and informed view of the ruling political elites who have slashed their living standards often by forcing workers to compete with immigrants for low paying, unstable jobs. It is deeply rational for citizens to refuse to vote for within a rigged system, which only worsens their living conditions through its attacks on the public sector, social welfare and labor codes while cutting taxes on capital.

Conclusion

The vast majority citizens in the wage and salaried class do not trust the political elites. They see electoral campaigns as empty exercises, financed by and for plutocrats.

Most citizens recognize (and despise) the mass media as elite propaganda megaphones

fabricating 'popular' images to promote anti-working class politicians, while demonizing political activists engaged in class-based struggles.

Nevertheless, elite elections will not produce an effective consolidation of rightwing rule. Voter abstention will not lead to abstention from direct action when the citizens recognize their class interests are in grave jeopardy.

The Macron regime's parliamentary majority will turn into an impotent minority as soon as he tries carry out his elite promise to slash the jobs of hundreds of thousands of French public sector workers, smash France 's progressive labor codes and the industry-wide collective bargaining system and pursue new colonial wars.

Puerto Rico's profound economic depression and social crisis will not be resolved through a referendum with on 27% of the voter participation. Large-scale demonstrations will preclude US annexation and deepen mass demands for class-based alternatives to colonial rule.

Conservative rule in the UK is divided by inter-elite rivalries both at home and abroad. 'Brexit', the first step in the break-up of the EU, opens opportunities for deeper class struggle. The social-economic promises made by Jeremy Corbyn and his left-wing of the Labor Party energized working class voters, but if it does not fundamentally challenge capital, it will revert to being a marginal force.

The weakness and rivalries within the British ruling class will not be resolved in Parliament or by any new elections.

The demise of the UK, the provocation of a Conservative-DUP alliance and the end of the EU (BREXIT) raises the chance for successful mass extra-parliamentary struggles against the authoritarian neo-liberal attacks on workers' civil rights and class interests.

Elite elections and their outcomes in Europe and elsewhere are laying the groundwork for a revival and radicalization of the class struggle.

In the final analysis class rule is not decided via elite elections among oligarchs and their mass media propaganda. Once dismissed as a 'vestige of the past', the revival of class struggle is clearly on the horizon.

Featured image: Proletarian Center for Research, Education and Culture

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Prof. James Petras](#), Global Research, 2017

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Prof. James Petras](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca