

## Totalitarianism for Dummies

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The genius of America's totalitarian system of government is that it is not totally total, and sometimes not very totalitarian at all. It is just total enough. Truly total government—"Your papers, citizen," stop-and-frisk, permission needed to travel from city to city—might spark revolt. By contrast, a sufficiency of totalitarianism, but not an excess, keeps the populace in adequate torpidity. Thus done astutely, totalitarianism is hardly noticed.

The founder of this philosophy was that rascal, Abe Lincoln. As we have all heard in what has become almost a cliché, he said, "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." He wisely did not add, "...but you can fool enough of the people enough of the time."

Lincoln's Principle of Sufficiency is the First Pillar of Practical Totalitarianism. The Second Pillar is reliance on the private sector for effectuation. This gives the government plausible deniability. For example, Google has all your email for decades back, This is annoying but not truly alarming. If the federal government (openly) collected emails, conservatives would shriek about...totalitarianism. But Google isn't the government—is it?

The Third pillar: A press not too noticeably controlled, with enough apparent difference of opinion to simulate savage debate of ideas—without touching on any important ones. For example, Rachel Maddow rattles that Trump is a Russian agent while Rush Limbaugh, the Rachel Maddow of the Right, demurs furiously. This allows people to be excited and engaged without endangering either Wall Street or the military budget.

Hermetic control of information isn't needed, and would be noticed. Most people get most of their news from the lobotomy box. Anything that doesn't appear on the flickering screen doesn't exist for most, and these are enough. It is thus possible to suppress information not by suppressing it, but by ignoring it.

We have now listed the fundamentals of American government. Now let us examine the use and intersection of these principles here and abroad.

China is typically offered as practicing the blackest totalitarianism, the implicit contrast being with the enlightened democracy enjoyed by Americans. For example, we are told that In China, everything you say or do is monitored. Obviously China is a most terrible place. Who could doubt it?

By contrast, in America, cameras are everywhere, all email is recorded, every bank transaction, credit-card purchase, who you called by telephone and when, and of course criminal records. Depending on location, traffic lights photograph your license number if you run a light (and for all you know, if you don't), license-plate readers check for stolen vehicles and (perhaps) delete legal plates. Cell towers know approximately where you and Google Maps knows to within a few feet. Locations can be cross-checked with those of other phones to see who you were with. Now face-recognition comes along.

Since little of this is directly done by the federal government, we do not live in a surveillance state. After all, none of the entities involved would share their information with the feds—would they?

In China, we are told, there is no freedom of expression. Well, actually there is, as long as you don't say the wrong things about the wrong things. In America we have freedom of speech. It says so in the Constitution.

Well, we have freedom of speech as long as we don't say the wrong things about the wrong things. We all know what we can't say and who we can't say it about. In many places, certainly in the media where you might influence others, you can lose your job for saying things that upset blacks, Jews, feminists, homosexuals, LBGQXYZs, Hispanics, or Muslims. In the media you cannot say anything in favor of the Second Amendment, against abortion, about black crime, against the military budget or the wars. You cannot doubt accounts of such events as the Trayvon Martin adventure. On the web, sites can be and increasingly are "deplatformed" by the social media.

But as these are not formally part of government, we have freedom of speech. See? No unelected dictator decides what we are permitted to know or say. Mark Zuckerberg does.

This is very different from China in that...in that...wait. I'll think of something.

Here we come to the Fourth Pillar of Sufficient Totalitarianism: Repetition, repetition, repetition. In *Mein Kampf* (now removed from Amazon) Adolf said that propaganda should not be entrusted to intellectuals. They are, he said, easily bored, like sophisticated ideas, and constantly want to change the message.

Instead, he said, keep it simple enough for the masses to understand, and say it over and over and over, and they will come to believe it. More precisely, enough will come to believe it. The rest doesn't matter. This is much cheaper than kicking in doors at three a.m. and doesn't arouse potentially dangerous resentment.

RussiaGateRussiaGateRussiaGateChinaDidItChinaDidItChinaDidItIranIsEvilIranIsEvilIranIsEvilGoYoBeginningAndRepeat

We are told, over and over and over, that America is a democracy and virtually choking on freedoms. We are told three times in a half hour during the Super Bowl, that we need to buy a sandwich from Subway. Same principle, exactly. It works.

And so, unlike China where democracy does not exist and people have no influence, we have democracy but no influence. This is much slicker.

For example, if you oppose the interminable wars, what party do you vote for? There are neither antiwar parties nor serious candidates. Who do you vote for if you want to cut the goiterous military budget? If you are against torture? If you oppose a militarily aggressive foreign policy?

Can you influence what your children are taught in school, what is in their textbooks? If you are against the ongoing enstupidation of education, or against the pulling down of statues? Against affirmative action? The list could go on.

Thank God we don't live in China. Their government works, ours doesn't, but at least we have our freedoms.

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