

One Nation Under Greed: The Profit Incentives Driving the American Police State



By John W. Whitehead & Nisha Whitehead | [The Rutherford Institute](#)

“When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men in a society, over the course of time they create for themselves a legal system that authorizes it and a moral code that glorifies it.” – Frédéric Bastiat, French economist

If there is an absolute maxim by which the American government seems to operate, it is that the taxpayer always gets ripped off.

Not only are Americans forced to [“spend more on state,](#)

municipal, and federal taxes than the annual financial burdens of food, clothing, and housing combined,” but we’re also being played as easy marks by hustlers bearing the imprimatur of the government.

With every new tax, fine, fee, and law adopted by our so-called representatives, the yoke around the neck of the average American seems to tighten just a little bit more.

Everywhere you go, everything you do, and every which way you look, we’re getting swindled, cheated, conned, robbed, raided, pickpocketed, mugged, deceived, defrauded, double-crossed, and fleeced by governmental and corporate shareholders of the American police state out to make a profit at taxpayer expense.

The overt and costly signs of the despotism exercised by the increasingly authoritarian regime that passes itself off as the United States government are all around us: warrantless surveillance of Americans’ private phone and email conversations by the FBI, NSA, etc.; SWAT team raids of Americans’ homes; shootings of unarmed citizens by police; harsh punishments meted out to schoolchildren in the name of zero tolerance; drones taking to the skies domestically; endless wars; out-of-control spending; militarized police; roadside strip searches; privatized prisons with a profit incentive for jailing Americans; fusion centers that collect and disseminate data on Americans’ private transactions; and militarized agencies with stockpiles of ammunition, to name some of the most appalling.

Meanwhile, the three branches of government (Executive, Legislative and Judicial) and the agencies under their command—Defense, Commerce, Education, Homeland Security, Justice, Treasury, etc.—have switched their allegiance to the Corporate State with its unassailable pursuit of profit at all costs and by any means possible.

By the time you factor in the financial blowback from the COVID-19 pandemic with its politicized mandates, lockdowns, and payouts, it becomes quickly apparent that we are now ruled by a government consumed with squeezing every last penny out of the population and seemingly unconcerned if essential freedoms are trampled in the process.

As with most things, if you want to know the real motives behind any government program, follow the money trail.

When you dig down far enough, you quickly find that those who profit from Americans being surveilled, fined, scanned, searched, probed, tasered, arrested, and imprisoned are none other than the police who arrest them, the courts which try them, the prisons which incarcerate them, and the corporations, which manufacture the weapons, equipment, and prisons used by the American police state.

Examples of this legalized, profits-over-people, government-sanctioned extortion abound.

On the roads: Not satisfied with merely [padding](#) their budgets by issuing speeding tickets, police departments have turned to asset forfeiture and [red light camera](#) schemes as a means of growing their profits. Despite revelations of corruption, [collusion](#), and fraud, these money-making scams have been being inflicted on unsuspecting drivers by revenue-hungry municipalities. Now legislators are hoping to get in on the profit-sharing by imposing a [vehicle miles-traveled tax](#), which would charge drivers for each mile behind the wheel.

In the prisons: States now have quotas to meet for how many Americans go to jail. Increasing numbers of [states have contracted to keep their prisons at 90% to 100% capacity](#). This profit-driven form of mass punishment has, in turn, given rise to a [\\$70 billion](#) private prison industry that relies on the complicity of state governments to keep the money flowing and their [privately run prisons full](#), “[regardless of whether a](#)

crime was rising or falling.” As *Mother Jones* reports, “private prison companies have supported and helped write ... laws that drive up prison populations. Their livelihoods depend on towns, cities, and states sending more people to prison and keeping them there.” Private prisons are also doling out harsher punishments for infractions by inmates in order to keep them locked up longer in order to “boost profits” at taxpayer expense. All the while, prisoners are being forced to provide cheap labor for private corporations. No wonder the United States has the largest prison population in the world.

In the schools: The security industrial complex with its tracking, spying, and identification devices has set its sights on the schools as “a vast, rich market”—a \$20 billion market, no less—just waiting to be conquered. In fact, the public schools have become a microcosm of the total surveillance state which currently dominates America, adopting a host of surveillance technologies, including video cameras, finger and palm scanners, iris scanners, as well as RFID and GPS tracking devices, to keep constant watch over their student bodies. Likewise, the military-industrial complex with its military weapons, metal detectors, and weapons of compliance such as tasers has succeeded in transforming the schools—at great taxpayer expense and personal profit—into quasi-prisons. Rounding things out are school truancy laws, which come disguised as well-meaning attempts to resolve attendance issues in the schools but in truth are nothing less than stealth maneuvers aimed at enriching school districts and court systems alike through excessive fines and jail sentences for “unauthorized” absences. Curiously, none of these efforts seem to have succeeded in making the schools any safer.

In the endless wars abroad: Fueled by the profit-driven military-industrial complex, the government’s endless wars are wreaking havoc on our communities, our budget, and our police forces. Having been co-opted by greedy defense contractors,

corrupt politicians, and incompetent government officials, America's expanding military empire is bleeding the country dry at a rate of more than [\\$32 million per hour](#). Future wars and military exercises waged around the globe are expected to [push the total bill upwards of \\$12 trillion by 2053](#). Talk about fiscally irresponsible: the U.S. government is spending money it doesn't have on a military empire it can't afford. War spending is bankrupting America.

In the form of militarized police: The Department of Homeland Security routinely hands out [six-figure grants](#) to enable local municipalities to purchase military-style vehicles, as well as a veritable war chest of weaponry, ranging from tactical vests, bomb-disarming robots, assault weapons, and combat uniforms. This rise in military equipment purchases funded by the DHS has, according to analysts Andrew Becker and G.W. Schulz, "[paralleled an apparent increase in local SWAT teams](#)." The end result? An explosive growth in the use of SWAT teams for otherwise routine police matters, an increased tendency on the part of police to shoot first and ask questions later, and an overall mindset within police forces that they are at war—and the citizenry are the enemy combatants. Over 80,000 SWAT team raids are conducted on American homes and businesses each year. Moreover, government-funded [military-style training drills](#) continue to take place in cities across the country.

In profit-driven schemes such as asset forfeiture: Under the guise of fighting the war on drugs, government agents (usually the police) have been given broad leeway to seize billions of dollars worth of private property (money, cars, TVs, etc.) they "suspect" may be connected to criminal activity. Then—and here's the kicker—whether or not any crime is actually proven to have taken place, the government keeps the citizen's property, often divvying it up with the local police who did the initial seizure. The police are actually being [trained in seminars on how to seize the "goodies"](#) that are on police departments' wish lists. According to the *New York*

Times, seized monies have been used by police to “pay for sports tickets, office parties, a home security system and a \$90,000 sports car.”

Among government contractors: We have been saddled with a [government that is outsourcing much of its work to high-paid contractors](#) at great expense to the taxpayer and with no competition, little transparency, and dubious savings. According to the *Washington Post*, “By some estimates, there are [twice as many people doing government work under contract than there are government workers](#).” These open-ended contracts, worth hundreds of millions of dollars, “now account for anywhere between one quarter and one half of all federal service contracting.” Moreover, any attempt to reform the system is “[bitterly opposed by federal employee unions](#), who take it as their mission to prevent good employees from being rewarded and bad employees from being fired.”

By the security industrial complex: We’re being spied on by a domestic army of government snitches, spies, and techno-warriors. In the so-called name of “precrime,” this government of Peeping Toms is watching [everything](#) we do, reading everything we write, listening to everything we say, and monitoring everything we spend. Beware of what you say, what you read, what you write, where you go, and with whom you communicate, because it is all being recorded, stored, and cataloged, and will be used against you eventually, at a time and place of the government’s choosing. This far-reaching surveillance carried out with the complicity of the Corporate State, has paved the way for an [omnipresent, militarized fourth branch of government](#)—the Surveillance State—that came into being without any electoral mandate or constitutional referendum. That doesn’t even touch on the government’s bold forays into biometric surveillance as a means of identifying and tracking the American people from birth to death.

By a government addicted to power: It’s a given that you can always count on the government to take advantage of a crisis,

legitimate or manufactured. Emboldened by the citizenry's inattention and willingness to tolerate its abuses, the government has weaponized one national crisis after another in order to expand its powers. The war on terror, the war on drugs, the war on illegal immigration, asset forfeiture schemes, road safety schemes, school safety schemes, eminent domain: all of these programs started out as legitimate responses to pressing concerns and have since become weapons of compliance and control in the police state's hands. Now that the government has gotten a taste for flexing its police state powers by way of a bevy of COVID-19 lockdowns, mandates, restrictions, contact tracing programs, heightened surveillance, censorship, overcriminalization, etc., "we the people" may well find ourselves burdened with a Nanny State inclined to use its draconian pandemic powers to protect us from ourselves.

These injustices, petty tyrannies, and overt acts of hostility are being carried out in the name of the national good—against the interests of individuals, society, and ultimately our freedoms—by an elite class of government officials working in partnership with megacorporations that are largely insulated from the ill effects of their actions.

This perverse mixture of government authoritarianism and corporate profits has increased the reach of the state into our private lives while also adding a profit motive into the mix. And, as always, it's we the people, we the taxpayers, we the gullible voters who keep getting taken for a ride by politicians eager to promise us the world on a plate.

This is a far cry from how a representative government is supposed to operate.

Indeed, it has been a long time since we could claim to be the masters of our own lives. Rather, we are now the subjects of a militarized, corporate empire in which the vast majority of the citizenry work their hands to the bone for the benefit of

a privileged few

Adding injury to the ongoing insult of having our tax dollars misused and our so-called representatives bought and paid for by the moneyed elite, the government then turns around and uses the money we earn with our blood, sweat, and tears to target, imprison and entrap us, in the form of militarized police, surveillance cameras, private prisons, license plate readers, drones, and cell phone tracking technology.

All of those nefarious deeds by government officials that you hear about every day: are your tax dollars at work.

It's *your* money that allows government agents to spy on your emails, your phone calls, your text messages, and your movements. It's *your* money that allows out-of-control police officers to burst into innocent people's homes, or probe and strip search motorists on the side of the road. And it's *your* money that leads to Americans across the country being prosecuted for innocuous activities such as growing vegetable gardens in their front yards or daring to speak their truth to their elected officials.

Just remember the next time you see a news story that makes your blood boil, whether it's a police officer arresting someone for filming them in public, or a child being kicked out of school for attending a virtual class while playing with a toy gun, remember that it is *your* tax dollars that are paying for these injustices.

There was a time in our history when our forebears said "enough is enough" and stopped paying their taxes to what they considered an illegitimate government. They stood their ground and refused to support a system that was slowly choking out any attempts at self-governance, and which refused to be held accountable for its crimes against the people.

Their resistance sowed the seeds for the revolution that would follow.

Unfortunately, in the 200-plus years since we established our own government, we've let bankers, turncoats, and number-crunching bureaucrats muddy the waters and pilfer the accounts to such an extent that we're back where we started.

Once again, we've got a despotic regime with an imperial ruler doing as they please.

Once again, we've got a judicial system insisting we have no rights under a government that demands that the people march in lockstep with its dictates.

And once again, we've got to decide whether we'll keep marching or break stride and make a turn toward freedom.

But what if we didn't just pull out our pocketbooks and pony up to the federal government's outrageous demands for more money?

What if we didn't just dutifully line up to drop our hard-earned dollars into the collection bucket, no questions asked about how it will be spent?

What if, instead of quietly sending in our checks, hoping vainly for some meager return, we did a little calculating of our own and started deducting from our taxes those programs that we refuse to support?

As I make clear in my book [*Battlefield America: The War on the American People*](#), if the government and its emissaries can just take from you what they want, when they want, and then use it however they want, you can't claim to be anything more than a serf in a land they think of as theirs.

This is not freedom, America.

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