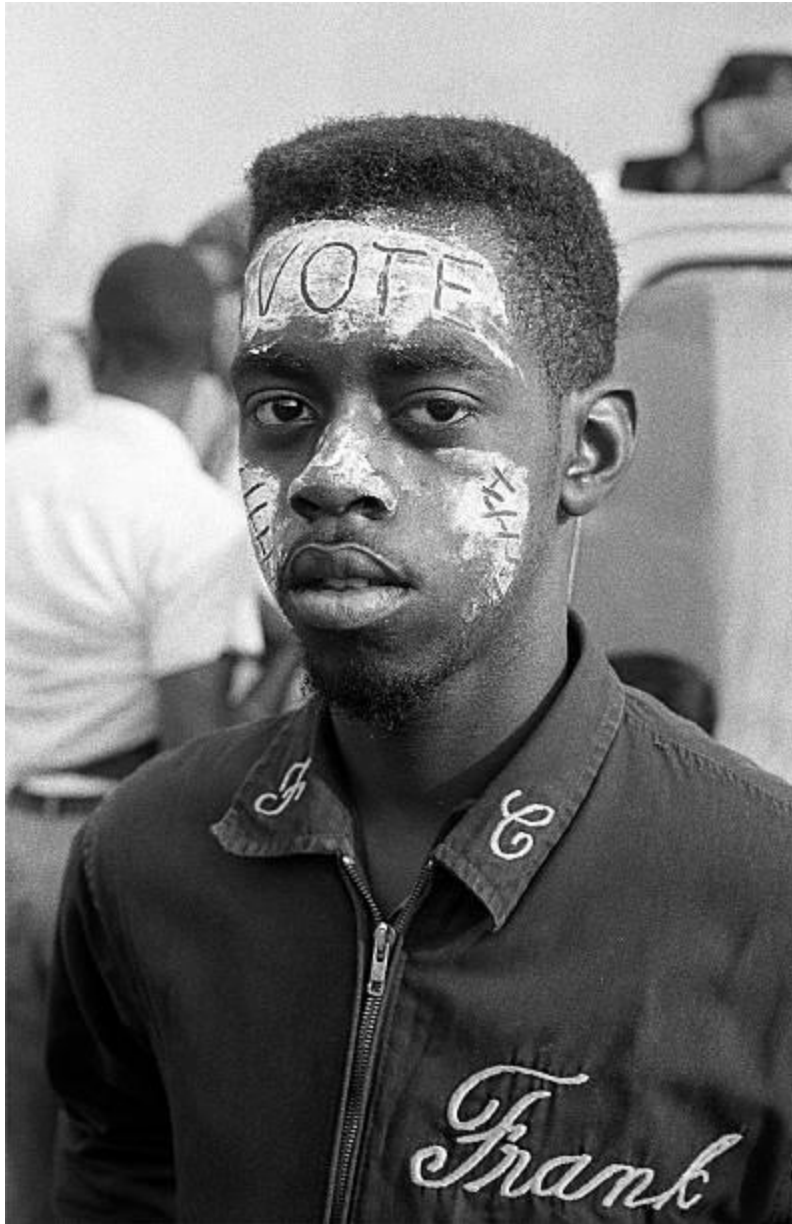




Why Do I Vote?

By John Bell, September 2026

Why do I vote when I think the political system is corrupt and broken, when I know that money controls elections, when I don't trust most elected officials to be truthful most of the time, when I know many of them sell out their principles to their desire to get re-elected?

Why do I vote when I think that the current political system does not serve the needs of the 99% very well, when the two parties are in bed with moneyed interests?

Why do I vote when I feel frustrated and disappointed that most Presidents and their administrations have abandon the folks on Main Street while Wall Street financiers get richer?

Why do I vote when I don't believe the government as it's currently structured can solve the problems I most care about; when I think that Congress and Washington are out of touch with the people and in bed with the corporations; when what I really want is deep democracy, mass action in the streets, a huge people's movement for fundamental change, for liberty and justice for all?

I vote because....

I vote because it's not one or the other. It's both deep democratic movement-building at the local level, and it's using the right to vote to try to elect people more in sync with my values and vision.

I vote because protests and movements eventually have to move to have political power. All of our best community efforts, protests, movement-building, and innovations won't hold if we don't move to have the power to protect and expand them. Take my former program, YouthBuild (www.youthbuild.org), which I helped found and build for 30 years. The YouthBuild federal appropriation, which is the biggest source of funding for the local YouthBuild programs, is totally at the mercy of who gets elected to Congress. From year to year, the YouthBuild staff and young people have to continually win support of their federal elected officials. Without officials who supported it, the opportunities would have disappeared. Elected officials have power over our day to day lives.

With Trump as President we see clearly that he has used the office to enrich himself and his family, roll back regulations to benefit corporations, reduce taxes for wealthy people, flaunt the law, attack the press, undermine democracy, all while producing very little for working folks, low income people, the developing world, or a healthy environment. Trump eliminated regulations protecting the environment, and is spending our tax dollars on wars, invasions, and ballrooms. He and his administration seem to have little regard for the law or the Constitution.

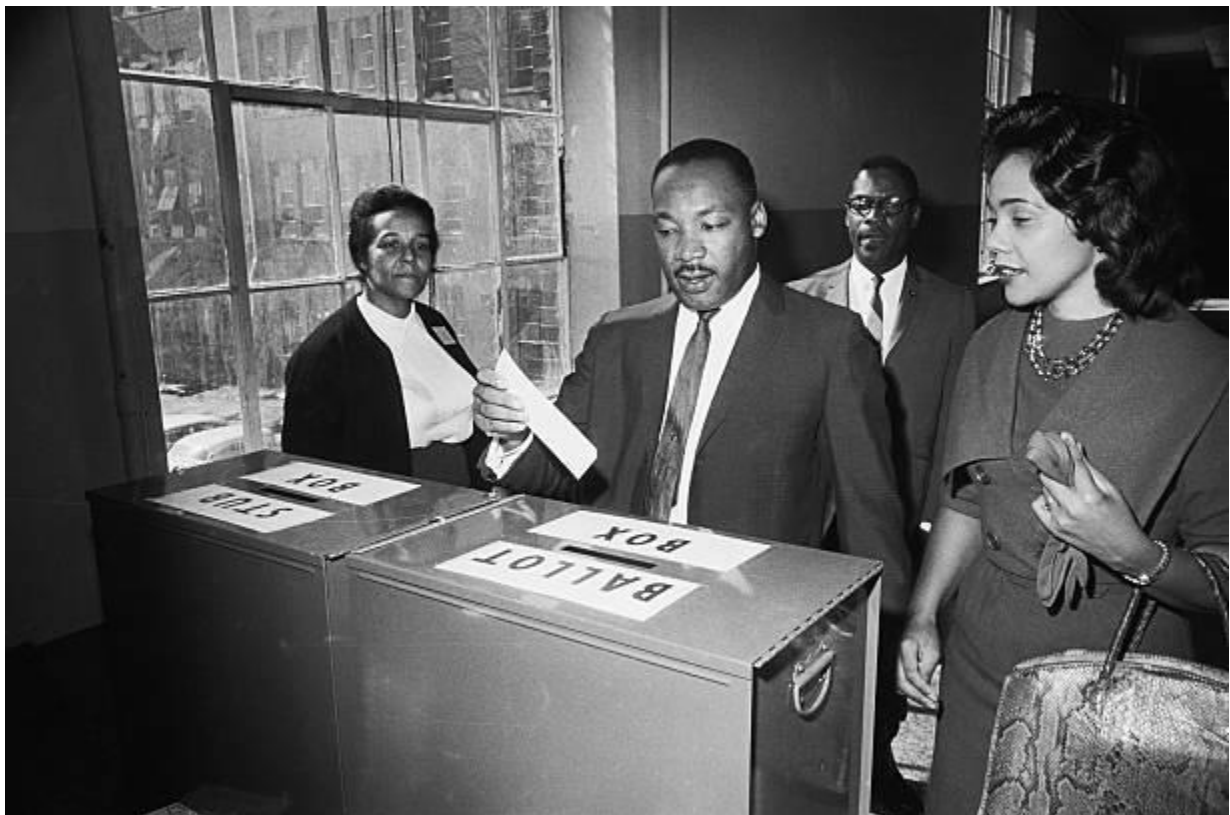
At minimum, if we care about curtailing ICE cruelty, stemming inflation, stopping the slide to authoritarianism, preventing the confirmation of another Supreme Court Justice, and protecting our precious environment, we must vote to help elect candidates who care about these issues. As Van Jones says: "This is the sobering reality: we cannot get everything we want in the voting booth. But if we don't vote at all, we can still lose everything we have. We must take elections seriously. As corrupt as the system has become, we simply cannot refuse to play the game even as we work to change it."

I vote because billionaires, the Trump supporters, and the influential right wing extremists are using all their resources to try to elect candidates who will gut the social safety net, eliminate constraints on big corporations, and increase the gaping wealth divide. If we pull out of the electoral game, we leave the winnings to them. And it won't be pretty.

I vote because I want good partners in government at all levels, in my town, state, and country. Who is on the town council, the county sheriff, in the state legislature, the state attorney general, my Congressperson and Senators matter as much as the President because they are making policies, appointing judges, passing laws, and deciding budgets that affect me and you, whether we are following it or not. So, I want a say in who gets to do all that. There are many dedicated and decent public officials at all levels who need support inside the government.

In upcoming midterm elections, I will make sure my vote counts to elect Democrats, even though they won't do everything I wish could be done to create a safe and caring world for all.

I vote because the right to vote for most people was hard won. People struggled and died for the right to vote. Over the years, the right to vote slowly expanded. First to landless white male citizens, then black men, then women, then immigrant citizens, then Indigenous folks, then young people 18-21. I honor those who went before me. By not voting I feel I would dishonor my ancestors.



I vote because it's one of the tools in our toolbox, one of the powers we have, but only if we use it.

Jesse Jackson, after the Democrats lost to Ronald Reagan in 1980, gave a stump speech about David and Goliath, saying that the unregistered voters are “rocks just laying around” that we, as David, need to pick up and use. He said Reagan won Massachusetts by 2500 votes, where there were 100,000 unregistered students, 50,000 unregistered blacks, and 50,000 unregistered Hispanics. Reagan won 8 southern states by only 182,000 votes, where there were 3 million unregistered blacks. He won Pennsylvania by 300,000, where there were 600,000 unregistered blacks and 400,000 unregistered students of all races. “Reagan won Pennsylvania by the margin of despair,” he said. “Rocks, just laying around.” More recently, Trump won in 2016 by a total of 87,000 spread across three states, that swung the electoral college votes to him. In 2020, across the five swing states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Georgia, Biden beat Trump by a total of only 178,000 votes—very close. And in those same states, there were 5 million eligible voters who chose not to vote. Rocks, laying on the ground.

Rev. William Barber, head of the Poor People's Campaign, reminds us that in 2024, 90 million eligible voters did not vote, and if just 15% of those would re-engaged and votes, it would tip the balance in elections that are often won by a few votes. If young people, low-income folks, or people of color voted in larger numbers, then a) candidates would actually take them seriously, b) they would determine the outcome of elections, and c) they would know they have power and influence. With that organized electoral force, we could start running candidates ourselves, challenge the corporate supported candidates, gradually gain ground and gradually be able to get money out of politics, enact a fair tax structure where the wealthy pay their fair share, and make laws and fund programs that benefit the people, and protect the environment.

I vote because if I sit out the election because I feel the systems stinks, is not perfect, offers little choice, is corrupt, and won't make any difference, then I am letting my feelings of despair, disappointment, and powerlessness fool me into thinking I'm being smart, when actually I'm being a fool, because I am helping things stay the same or get worse. If I say to myself that “what's gonna happen is gonna happen” and I don't vote, then I have no right to complain if what happens hurts me or my family or my community or the planet. I can't guarantee that if I vote things will go my way, but at least I'm in the game. If I opt out of the game, then I'm weaker and even more likely to lose.

I vote because, as Winston Churchill once said, “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms.” Gandhi, Dr. King, Jr, and Mandela all knew that any government functions only with the consent of the people. In a democracy, voting is one way we can actively give consent or show our opposition. In the 2016 Presidential election, Hillary

Clinton lost to Donald Trump in Michigan by the equivalent of one (1!) vote in each district. A sobering reminder that voting, or not voting, can make all the difference.

Our individual and collective power is desperately needed in the short term to show we are in the game and will not quit, and in the long term to transform our society to one that is good for all people and the planet.

Please vote! And tell your friends to vote. It matters!



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