

# The Accountability Enigma

The Association to Improve Government, in its [Mission Statement](#), expresses the objective to require secret ballot voting by all political bodies at all levels of government. This concept is described in more detail in its [Position Paper](#) outlining the concept and how this change would eliminate political corruption.

The initial reaction of most individuals, when presented with this idea, is fairly consistent.

It is typically expressed in the following key points:

1. The electorate has the right to know how their elected representatives vote on any issue.
2. Knowing their voting record will allow individuals to decide whether to support them in the next election.
3. Politicians must be held accountable
4. Secret ballot at the governmental level would hide this knowledge from the electorate

The existing political process operates accordingly and all political levels of government have an open ballot procedure for almost all issues brought to a vote. This is a generally accepted principle for all democratic governments on a global basis.

The Association's position is that this specific aspect of the governmental process actually causes most of the problems that the electorate abhor about the political process. This opinion is based on well-understood principles of human nature and are especially connected to the subject of Group Dynamics.

There is little doubt that today's society is disenchanted with politics at a global level. This paper is aimed at highlighting the pros and cons of the issue of secret vs open ballot in all political bodies and suggest a solution that might improve government at local, state, national and global levels.

## Open Ballot

1. The electorate would know the actual vote of any representative on any issue.
  - a. This would allow the public to evaluate the overall performance of their representatives
2. The electorate can find out how their elected representative actually voted on any issue.
  - a. This would help decide whether or not they would support the candidate in the future
  - b. Support could be their vote, their volunteering, financial contribution, etc.
3. Groups with a specific agenda can find out how elected representatives actually voted on specific issues.
  - a. Political Parties (ex: Republican, Conservative, Democratic, Labor, Liberal, Libertarian, etc.)
  - b. Special Interest Groups (ex: Unions, Corporations, PACS, Pro Life, Pro Choice, Free Traders, Protectionists, Environmentalists, NRA, Religions, etc.)
  - c. This would help the Group decide whether or not they would support the candidate in the future
  - d. Support could be influencing the vote of their members, actively providing volunteers, significant financial support, assigning political position, promising support on other issues related to the representative's objectives, etc.
4. Other organizations can find out how elected representatives voted on any issue.
  - a. The Press would be able to report and editorialize on the voting record of any & all representatives
5. Individuals, Groups & the Press have the power to reward/punish representatives based on how they voted
  - a. Individuals could vote in or vote out the candidate in the future (ie: loss of job for representative)
  - b. Groups could support or work against specific candidates based on their voting record
  - c. Support by individuals, groups could be verified against the voting record of the representative
  - d. Vote buying/selling is possible and verifiable
  - e. Bribes, threats, coercive actions can be verified as to effectiveness
  - f. Parties can reward/punish member for conformance

6. Representatives would have to consider all consequences when voting on any issue
  - a. Their sense of what is right & wrong about the issue is a factor
  - b. Their estimate of how their constituency will react is a factor
  - c. The actions their party might take are a significant consideration
  - d. The reaction of their financial supporters must be considered
  - e. The expected reporting by the news & editorial press will have to be considered
  - f. The impact on the polls & public opinion
  - g. Other deals in the mix like supporting one issue to gain support for another are at stake
  - h. The actions of Special Interest groups, protestors, etc. become consequential
  - i. Whether their friends & family will be proud/ashamed of their vote

### **Secret Ballot**

1. The electorate and all groups would know the outcome of voting on any issue.
  - a. This would allow the public to evaluate the overall performance of their representatives
2. The electorate cannot find out how elected representatives actually voted on any issue.
3. Groups with specific agenda cannot find out how elected representatives actually voted on specific issues.
4. Other organizations cannot find out how elected representatives voted on any issue
5. Individuals, Groups & the Press do not have the power to reward/punish representatives based on how they voted
6. Representatives, when voting on any issue would have to consider the following:
  - a. Their sense of what is right & wrong about the issue in question

### **The Enigma**

The public's sense that they have "The Right to Know" how their representatives vote is a position that is historically normal and universally accepted. This requirement puts all representatives in a situation where dealing with specific issues of governance on their own merit becomes impossible. The representative that doesn't take into account all the peripheral consequences of his vote will simply not survive in the political environment.

His party actually has a position called the "Whip" to make sure he conforms to their position. Special Interest Groups control huge financial and media power to punish him should he not conform to their position. The Press and Public Opinion exert significant influence and power over his future. In almost every vote, his job, livelihood and future are at risk. This is clearly a position of duress in which both legal and illegal coercion exist.

The public's sense that they are protected from coercion in a public election because of a secret ballot is also a position that is normal and universally accepted. This was not the case historically until the late 1800's when secret ballot in public elections became the law of the land in most democratic countries. Before that, only the powerful classes even participated in voting. The powerful few controlled all aspects of government.

Today, open balloting at the governmental level continues to allow powerful people and special interest groups to control government. The Association to Improve Government would like to change this by establishing a movement that will require secret balloting for all political bodies at all levels of government.

You can be part of the solution. Visit the Improve Government [website](#), review the concept and join the Association to Improve Government.