

America's Broken Status Quo:

Can Democratic Capitalism Be Saved?

Kimberly Martinez

Diablo Valley College

Abstract

This essay will examine the views of the 2016 presidential candidates and expand on the question: how different will our political and economic system, the status quo, be after November's election? American's are distressed, to say the least, over the final two choices for the next president. 81 percent of American's, regardless of their party affiliation, "believe the power of ordinary people to control our country is getting weaker every day as politicians of both parties fight to protect their own power and privilege" ("Overwhelming Majority of," 2016). Ultimately, as long as America allows crony capitalists to increase the debt and serve their agendas over the good of the people, the status quo will remain intact. Sadly, the economic system our founding fathers deemed best is destroying the political system we believe is best. Therefore, it will take an uprising of the 99 percent to create significant change and free the government of corruption.

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Introduction

In school, students are taught that Western society is governed by the philosophy that few must be sacrificed for the good of the many. Politicians tell the people that this enables them to continue having the freedoms that our ancestors secured for us, though our own government continuously puts the good of the corporation above the good of its people. As a result, the public's trust has continuously dwindled over the last four decades, rising from 31 percent in 1952 to 53 percent in 1996 (Sifry, 2000, 24). Instead of a true democracy, we live under an oligarchy, where money hungry capitalists lead our nation without any interest in creating equality for all. Therefore, the rich only get richer and the poor only get poorer. Though many Americans are accepting of the status quo that our government rules by, there is growing distress over the lack of any of the 99 percent's voice in decisions made for them by the politicians they elect into office. With the U.S. presidential election coming to a close, tensions are also arising as a result of the consensus among the American people in its distaste of both candidates. Instead of voting for the candidate they believe in to support their ideals, the people are now forced to pick the least of two evils. Seeing that both Trump and Clinton are driven by crony capitalist ideals, regardless of who wins in November, this one election won't change the status quo. It will take an uprising of the 99 percent, the people, to change the status quo. Seeing that the political economy is based on a "pay to play" system, where the low and middle class are financially unable to hold office, there will never be true democracy in America while there is capitalism (Ennis, 2014). Furthermore, this is a popular thought among both Republicans and Democrats, with "84% of all Americans believing that political leaders are more interested in protecting their power and privilege than doing what is right" ("Overwhelming Majority of,"

2016). Though we have a good democracy on paper, it no longer works to serve the people as our founding fathers intended (Ennis, 2014). As a result, revolutionary change in our political and economic framework is necessary in order to stray from the status quo.

American democracy is centralized around its election process. It is also one of the few democracies that utilizes numerous elections each year to continue governing the nation. Not only are citizens allowed to elect specific people for office, but they are also given the power to remove them. This is similar to the check and balances system in place in American government. If they prove to no longer be fit to hold office, the people are given the power to “check” their politicians and replace them. Moreover, compared to other nations, America’s democracy has expanded its electorate to include all races and genders. This was finalized in the 19th century with the Nineteenth and Twenty-sixth Amendments, when woman and anyone that had reached the age of 18 were given the right to vote. This did show significant growth in American society, turning away from its racist, gender stereotyping past. According to writer Robert Heineman, America’s voter turnout is low compared to European countries, partly because there are specific groups of people that tend to vote consistently. For example, though age does not seem to affect the number of votes cast, education and wealth does. Those who stayed in school longer to learn about politics and the importance of voting in elections, showed a larger turnout. When looking at specific political party affiliations, Republicans were slightly more likely to vote than Democrats. Although the importance of voting is continuously made known to the people, there is a disconnect in the actual turnout in elections. This rate has been consistently decreasing over the past decade, starting at a rate of 60% in 1960 and dropping to 50 to 55% in the 90’s. Heineman quoted Howard Reiter in his book, *American Government*, stating that this drop can be correlated to the lack of interest and distaste in politics from the lower class. Furthermore,

there are a number of other reasons why the voter turnout can decrease, including: lack of media coverage, lack of competition between candidates, and minor elections. In the 2016 presidential election, turnout can go either way. Seeing that many American's are so disappointed in the candidates and having to choose the best of two undesirable options, voter turnout could be low. On the other hand, out of distress for the state our nation is in, considering these two candidates making it this far, voter turnout could also increase drastically (Heineman, 1995).

The American election system has a clear process, differentiating it from other democracies. It starts with getting nominated in the primary election. During this phase, a candidate seeks the nomination of its party by first selling themselves to the public. The candidate seeks to make his or herself known, in hopes of being recognized among the people and guaranteeing a nomination under the party. Once nominated, the candidate then starts campaigning for the general election, where the candidate is the sole representative of the party. Here he or she looks for donations, fundraises, and speaks on how he or she can make a difference if given the chance to hold office. Since the 1960's, campaigning has changed, now focusing on the candidate instead of the party affiliation. This can get expensive, however, with candidates having to market themselves and pay for their own air time, etc. This also creates an unfair playing field for those that cannot afford these tactics. Although many would assume that candidates seek to convert voters to their party, most candidates end up focusing on securing the votes of those who are already members of the party. When it comes to weighing the votes, American elections utilize a "one person, one vote" system, where each person's vote is given the same consideration. The system also uses single member districts, where there can only be one representative for each district no matter the population. Though these are the correct ways to weigh votes, gerrymandering can occur, where parties try to manipulate the district lines in

their favor. When weighing votes in presidential elections, voters do not elect the winner with their votes, but instead their votes choose a representative, called an elector. The elector will then pick the winner. Each state is given two electors to represent the number of senators per state and an elector for each representative. Therefore, California, with 54 electors, holds the most weight in a presidential election and should be given extra attention from the candidate in order to increase his or her likelihood of winning (Heineman, 1995).

Since 2001, the Political Compass has given the people a unique take on political ideology, utilizing a 62 question online survey. It's an easily accessible resource, allowing citizens to compare the political ideals of specific countries, as well as important public figures today with those of the past. The survey also gives the people an idea of where they stand on the Political Compass. Depending on the answers to both simple and controversial questions, he or she will be placed along a graph with an economic scale along the x axis and a social scale along the y axis. If the answers were along the lines of libertarian ideals, the person will be classified on the bottom half of the graph, and if the answers were more aligned with authoritarian ideals, the person will occupy the top part of the graph. By categorizing based on social and economic factors, a more thorough analysis of individual's, such as Stalin or Gandhi, can be done. For instance, by including the social aspect, Stalin is then classified as an authoritarian leftist. He was an outspoken dictator with authoritarian views, compared to Gandhi who was also open about his views but instead represented the importance of every human being. Therefore, Gandhi is represented as a libertarian leftist. This Political Compass survey can be especially useful tool for the public to gauge an opinion on the 2016 candidates. Going off speeches, voting records, and manifestos, both Trump and Hillary can be classified as Authoritarian rightists. However, Trump's outspoken nature and racist comments puts him higher on the social and economic

scale, close to where Hitler stands, while Hillary is closer to Thatcher. In contrast, Jill Stein, leader of the Green Party, is on the bottom left libertarian spectrum. By looking at the political compass, not only can voters understand their own ideals better, but those of the candidates as well. This will be especially enlightening and important for the upcoming election (Brittenden, 2016).

Since Reagan's presidency, American's government has been made up of two vastly different political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. Although more and more American citizens are becoming "independents," out of dissatisfaction with its representatives, these two parties continue to hold the most representation in our government. The left wing, consisting of liberal Democrats, believes that the government should and can act for the good of the public. Therefore, being that the rich can afford to take care of themselves, those who are less fortunate actually need the help of the government to have the same chance to achieve the "American dream." On the other end, the right wing, made up of conservative Republicans, believes that the government should stay out of the nation's problems (Flanders, 2007). For example, with Reagan's presidency, elites shifted their opinion on higher education. This resulted in colleges charging more for school and the government giving less to students. Though the elites today benefited from cheap education in the past, students today are suffering as a result of a poorly built financial aid system. When this 1% is continuously driven by greed, taking from the poor and giving to the rich, we are allowing capitalism to destroy a large part of the 99%: the middle class. However, seeing that there is still considerable poverty in this nation, as a result of these cold ideals, there is a growing need for a new party to be established. Not only would this benefit the 99%, allowing for at least the basic needs to be met for all citizens, the 1% would benefit as well. For instance, not only would crime rates likely decrease

dramatically, but the general approval rating of the US government would increase. Though these parties have their differences, 84% of both Republicans and Democrats can agree that there is a dire need to defeat the corruption and crony capitalism in our government and that without this, we can't have a successful democracy ("Overwhelming Majority," 2016).

By going farther right and left on the political spectrum, other parties exist that take the Democratic and Republican ideals to the extreme. These specific third parties have helped increase attention to the most important political and social issues, including the opposition of monopolies and the protection of the environment (Flanders, 2007). Parties that are farther left on the spectrum include the revolutionary ideology, which is considered radical and communist. This group specifically believes that there are only two types of people in the world: the 99% and the 1%. This group has been created as a result of the anger over the continuous corruption in our status quo, where the 99% continue to work harder and longer for less in order to keep the 1% rich. However, on the far right, the libertarians believe in individual freedom. Seeing that Libertarians believe in the bare minimum of government influence on the people, they are therefore the way republicans would be if they were not taken over by corporations. For example, Republicans were the ones that pushed to bail out the banks during the economic crash in 2008 in order to protect the free market. As a result, the 99 percent had to pay for this in taxes, stirring anger in the American people from this abuse of the democratic capitalist system.

In the 2016 election specifically, both Trump and Hillary have an underlying agenda, despite the goals they say they have for the nation. They are especially dedicated towards keeping the status quo, as it benefits them both in the long run. It protects Hillary's biggest investors, the corporations, and Trump from business reform. Although Trump is more outspoken with his beliefs, pushing to build a wall along the border and to prevent Muslims from

entering the US, Hillary is just better at hiding hers. Furthermore, she often switches her opinions if it will achieve her goals, seen recently in her dramatic change in stance on same sex marriage. Though Trump is detested for his racist remarks, he is at least open with his opinions and sticks to them. However, Hillary's flaws are now being shown to the American people, creating a distrust in her ability to honestly lead the nation. However, seeing that she comes from a powerful political family, she is not held accountable for her actions, whether they be hiding work related personal emails from the government or taking money from huge corporations. Though America looks to the first woman president as its saving grace, the underlying corruption was not fixed when the first African American, Obama, held office. These are merely band aids for the bigger problem (Kimberley, 2016).

Although many third parties are out championing their causes, most have to fight to have their opinions heard by the people. In past elections, corporate money's influence in politics has kept these third parties from seeing little to any news coverage. For example, Ralph Nader, the Green Party's presidential candidate in the year 2000, was on forty-four state ballots, raised nine million dollars in campaign funds, and received 150,000 volunteers who believed in his cause, though he only received 2.8 percent of the 100 million votes. Therefore, seeing that he was well loved for his many years as the country's leading voice of the people, he should have been had his time in the debates and had the same chance as his rich competitors. We need someone who can represent the majority of the people: the 99%, however, with money in politics, these candidates don't stand a chance. Writer Sifry (2003) suggests two options for dealing with the reality that America faces: "submit to the dominating power of big money in both major parties" or "abandon the national electoral playing field – the one place where the largest number of Americans participate in politics." Many liberals will say that we need to just continue changing

the driver, so to speak, and not through a revolutionary change. Seeing that greedy capitalist are unlikely to change their ways and let the 99% have a say in government, the system as a whole is likely fragmented beyond repair. Without any regulation on these capitalists, the middle class does not stand a chance. We will continue to pay for their actions, just as the we did when we bailed out the banks. However, as the corruption in America's two party duopoly reaches more of the people, there has been a staggering increase in support of the plight of third party candidates in response (Sifry, 2003). If this continues, the people could topple the duopoly on the electoral college by installing competition in the market. In the upcoming election, if organized people stood behind candidates such as Dr. Jill Stein, who seeks to expose the failure of American's capitalist democracy, we could potentially have enough power to change the status quo. Not only does she expose the impact of "predatory banks and fossil fuel giants" in our elections, but she also brings to light the danger the human species faces involving our possible extinction. As the polar ice caps continue to melt, pollutants continue to spread in the air we breathe, and more and more people face poverty, not only will the American people be affected, but it will soon cause a global crisis. Dr. Stein also exposes the lack of credibility in both the Democratic and the Republican party, suggesting that the people gather in order to find a way to "build an unstoppable force" to transform the system we have now. There is a lot of power in numbers, so if the 99% rose up and took a strong stand against the crony capitalism in place, their voices would be heard. Though the third party candidates can speak for and represent the people, while the two parties continue to collaborate in redistricting and locking others out of the debates, no real work can be done to further the cause (Empire Files, 2016). Ultimately, it is important to listen to activists, such as Stein, exposing these truths. If we cannot stabilize our

environment, how can we expect to survive in order to save our economic and political framework from this continuous corruption in America's government?

According to an article in Washington's Blog, 76% of American's, both Democrats and Republicans, believe that America can no longer be a successful if corruption and crony capitalism remains in the government ("Overwhelming Majority of," 2016). The people are not only disappointed in our current political leaders and system, but especially in our 2016 presidential candidates. With the change in focus from the parties to the candidate in elections, the balance of power has shifted. With a lack of transparency in the donations to a candidate's race, it is hard to tell if one is abusing the system. Voters have become increasingly discouraged, lacking trust in the political process and decreasing the turnout rate in elections. As long as corporations are seen as people, and therefore their donations not regulated, the danger of candidates selling policy outcomes in return will only continue (Vandewalker & Weiner, 2015). However, Ian Vandewalker, counselor for the Brennan Center's Democracy Program, does make a good point in saying that these real concerns over corruption in party fundraising "must be balanced against the reality that party institutions do play a salutary role in our democracy." Political parties do play a large role in our democracy, such as working to bring candidates together with their supporters and increase voter turnout. Vandewalker also suggests reforming the political parties by increasing their transparency in order to better serve the people and decrease state and federal regulations on smaller parties (Vandewalker, 2015). This would help the parties, that normally cannot afford expensive marketing tactics, to reach the people and have a fair shot against the duopoly parties. Although it would be best to have an even playing field where the third parties could have a shot at reaching the people, something good may have still come out of Trump and Bernie making far in this election under the duopoly parties. It shows an

opportunity for the people to rise up against the status quo now that Trump has been able to break from the standard Republican orthodoxy that benefits corporations over its workers and Bernie instituting a “mobilized backlash from the left” (Fukuyama, 2016). If enough American’s get angry and join together in support of just practices and a true democracy, the status quo could topple.

Conclusion

All in all, regardless of whether Trump or Hillary wins this November, the status quo will not change. There will be no “new day in America,” with a greedy businessman or untrustworthy, power hungry Clinton in office. At the moment, the American people are so disconnected from the country’s political sphere, that they rely on others to attend to these affairs. As a result, our democratic capitalist society has turned into an oligarchy, serving crony capitalists over the people. As the people fail to stand up against America’s fragmented system, it has been easy for the wealthy 1% to corrupt the system with their own selfish intentions. In order to break away from the corruption, to start, we need to have third parties represented on the ballots in all 50 states instead of 20. This would help draw attention to the parties serving the specific causes that need immediate attention and build the man power necessary to take on the 1%. Second, money needs to be taken out of politics. As long as money is equivalent to free speech, these crony capitalists will always have a monopoly on the system. In the case of Trump, he says what many fed up American’s want to hear, but we cannot bring jobs back to America when we live in a system where our government lacks power over corporations. Hillary has these corporations in her back pocket, indebted to them for their donations, so it is unlikely any change will occur under her rule as well. Ultimately, if the 99% wants to see a change in the status quo,

they will have to get motivated and rise up against the money hungry capitalists leading the nation.

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