

America and Changing The Status Quo

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Abstract

This essay will analyze the platforms put forth by the two candidates in the 2016 presidential election and examine why the two not only rely on the same principles- benefitting only those with wealth and power- but why the system favoring the two major parties restricts any sort of change to the status quo that helps the people which it governs. It will expand on the fact that Trump will not be able to fundamentally change the political and economic aspects of a system that is built in order to favor the oligarchs that rule it. Though America claims to be a democracy, its capitalist nature reveals that the corruption of both Democrats and Republicans such as Trump and Clinton may simply be a continuation to the list of politicians who restrict change, endorse corporations, and conform to the American power structure. Third party candidates, though willing to make a change, are restricted by the system and thus not able to. This essay will prove that Trump will not be able to fix an already corrupt structure or 'democracy' in which both Democrats and Republicans dominate and hamper the economy from making any type of beneficial change.

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Introduction

The United States government has continually been dominated by a two party system; one that increasingly pushes its citizens to choose between two parties that are considered to be radically different. Despite very few occurrences with the potential win of a third party, both Democratic and Republican parties have dominated presidential elections as first and second place. This system hampers the ability for third parties to gain influence in national government without personally funded campaigns to satisfy expensive requirements. In a system in which candidates run in districts in a winner-takes-all elections, voters quickly realize that a vote for a weak candidate or party is a wasted vote, thus allowing the major parties to gain power (Kamarck, 2016). These two parties believe in democracy and capitalism as the most advantageous form of economic and political prosperity. This inevitably leads to a nation led by wealthy capitalists of either party, but both built upon corporations that do not concern themselves with the needs of its people.

The 2016 presidential election has called people to further question the nature of our government, and questions whether or not it is a true democracy. Many Americans do not believe we are accurately represented by those who we elect, and in fact, we are living under a 'plutocracy' - a nation governed by those wealthier than us. Despite a change in major parties, our economy stays the same; dominated by an oligarchical system with virtually no independent effect when it comes to ordinary citizens. When economic elite preferences and views of organized interest groups are accounted for, the preferences of average Americans are shown to have an insignificant and miniscule impact on public policies (Mounk, 2018). The current state of our economy is caused by the system itself, making little to no difference between Clinton and

Trump, as all candidates are built upon the same foundation of belief that will only result in benefits for the people. Voting upon what is thought of as the 'lesser of two evils', in itself, contributes to the corruption or reproduction of the system. If people keep voting for either or, then the system will continue. Thus it may be better off to vote a third party candidate possibly more beneficial to its citizens. However, even with a third party candidate, the status quo will not change due to the system and not only its 'prevention' of having third parties winning the election, but its inability to make change specifically for the people. The Electoral College does not believe that the people should have the responsibility of choosing an effective president, and essentially wanted a mechanism to keep the popular vote as near useless in the political system. The same political system of the United States is built in a way that prevents candidates, such as Trump, Clinton, and other third party candidates from making any change to the status quo- as studies will show that they are all built upon the same core beliefs in terms of what they believe will 'benefit' America.

The History

The outcome of the 2016 presidential election itself has indubitably further partitioned the Democratic 'liberal' left and Republican 'conservative' right. The political compass has shown to be a useful tool in identifying one's political ideologies. On the X axis, you have economic ideologies. On the left is collectivist (communism at far left) and right is individualist (true capitalist). On the Y axis, there are social policies, or basically, how much freedom the individual citizen has. Moving down the spectrum means more freedom, the bottom meaning true anarchist, and the top of the Y axis meaning less freedom- a dictatorship. According to the book 'The Partisan Sort,' some scholars argue that this partition of Democrats and Republicans is voters following elites to 'ideological poles' (Kam, 2009). This, also known as 'elite

polarization', has led to far less centrists, and rather more ideologically extremes, leading to an increasingly bimodal electorate with few 'moderate' political ideologies, ultimately causing voters to adopt to their ideal outlook of their same party elites. Despite this apparent increase in elite polarization and voter's belief in being strictly on the left or right of the spectrum, many argue that it was not much different in the past; Democrats and Republicans still take similar positions on issues (Dreger, 2018). When it comes to changing the United States and its policies as a whole for the benefit of the people, neither candidate is able to take quick and affirmative action, no matter the party.

The origins of American democracy may have started from the American Revolution- it was able to create economic prosperity and 'equal' opportunities for those that the society believed were eligible. Though it did not succeed in granting political equality for all slaves, Native Americans and women, it created an economic world in which a democracy was able to be established. The society became far from democratic- it remained aristocratic and hierarchical, solely based on personal interests, remaining as a personal structure of politics while the common people constantly voted wealthy figures into authoritative positions. With further origins from the Roman representational republic and the signing of the Magna Carta, the United States was also able to make way for liberalism and the idea of sovereignty - thus creating a 'democratic republic'. The establishment of a true political party system most similar to our system with institutions associated with plans for running government only began its development in 1828. During this time, Andrew Jackson became the face of the 'democratic Republicans' in opposition to the national Republicans (Holt, 2003). A progressive movement went into motion in the years that followed. This movement ultimately lessened party's hold over the electoral system itself, and prompted a reform that allowed for 'candidate centered

politics', allowing them to use media and election strategies to take their message to the public directly without the intervention of parties. The creation of American parties and political party competition sparked anti-party organizations of those with the thought that these parties represented minority interests; it was not for the good of the public. When it comes to understanding the United States political system today, it works as a single member district plurality vote, while favoring a two party dominated system. "The system works against smaller parties, as statistical analyses of different democratic countries show" (Heinemann, 2003). Election laws, made by the two major parties themselves, ensure the unlikely victory of a third party candidate.

The United States has created the opportunity for Americans to elect officials into government yet also allowed those to take part in the election process by proposing an issue to be directly voted against or for in a referendum; an 'initiative' some states provide. However, when it comes to congressional politics, often times even democratic presidents, such as Clinton have had difficulty in not only leading with congress, but congress itself isn't able to see themselves as responsible for their states or districts. According to Heinemann, the party discipline inherently demands the need of greed and power. The U.S Congress plays a role in such principles, and both Democrats and Republicans alike "cross party lines on votes". Congress procedures protect the body and individual legislators, inhibit a progression of change, not allowing opposing change from the public in the slightest measure.

2016 Presidential Political Platforms

The truth of the two-party system is that there is no clear difference fundamentally between them. Freeman states, in his book 'The Political Culture Of The Democratic and Republican Parties', that despite commentators' belief that the two parties are completely

separate entities in name, programs, coalition components and type, the reality is that no systematic comparison has been clearly established. The truth of a two-party system is that both parties take millions from insurance companies and endorse corporate donors. Essentially, both parties benefit from gerrymandering, and both are heavily invested in the idea of capitalism and maintaining America's global empire (Tylt, 2016). America today, despite its rise in individual parties, mainly consists of both left and right wing parties.

What is believed of left wing groups - Democrats in particular, is that they promote economic policies benefiting middle income families, and reduce income equality to foster economic growth and believe in progressive taxation. The 2016 Democratic platform is claimed to be a progressive platform for unity, cooperation, empowerment, along with economic fairness against inequalities, removing barriers, fighting against climate change etc. The Democratic party has changed greatly- from originally supporting slavery and opposing civil rights to supposedly making its strongest belief equality on all fronts. Before undergoing dramatic ideological realignment, democratic parties in the 1930s had favored greater government intervention in the economy and opposed government intervention in the private non economic affairs of citizens (Amadeo, 2018). In its policies, the Democratic and Republican party may not be the same- their political philosophies do not differ fundamentally. Though it is not to say that their opinions on political issues are not different; it only means that the implications of their solutions to social issues indicate that their views on the function of government fall under the same classification (Tillberg, 2013). They view government as a way to serve their own self interest and enforce their own view of morality. The difference between the two parties is not how they perceive the government's role, but rather their standards of value.

Despite the supposed assumption of Democrats being endorsed in helping the 99%, in reality it may be entirely the opposite. Bill Clinton and Barack Obama allowed for a shift in power away from people and towards corporations, thus conforming to and confirming the cycle of the American power structure. The core of that structure includes political leaders of both parties, their operatives, fundraisers, major media, top executives, trade associations, etc. along with wealthy individuals who invest in politics. This power structure in the 2016 election cycle allowed for Hillary Clinton and Republican parties deep bases of funders, well-established networks of political insiders, experienced political advisers and massive amounts of political name recognition (Reich, 2016). Moreover, her campaign had the support in the general election of both Democrats and Republicans, and not surprisingly, America's largest corporations. According to Reich, though economic indicators may be up, Americans still feel a sense of insecurity when it comes to the links of wealth and power, declining wages, with the largest economic gains primarily going to the top 1%. This shows that these economic gains have translated into political power for both parties with corporate subsidies, tax loopholes, favorable trade deals- all reducing wages for the working class yet increasing profits for those in power and all due to capitalism combined with wealth and power. This power structure, as described, shows that though the Democrats may have once represented the working class, over the last three decades the party has been taken over by fundraisers, bundlers, analysts, and pollsters who have focused instead on raising campaign money from corporations and getting votes from upper middle-class households than working for the good of the people.

The swinging between two 'failed parties' thus shows that Democrats and Republicans may be complicit partners, both using suppressing tactics while gerrymandering elections. According to 'the pulse', the difference between Hillary and Trump is nonexistent; both

candidates use the Federal Reserve, deficits, entitlements, and invade our privacy (Klein, 2016). Due to this, any sort of change from both parties will not present a major change to the state of our economy. The viewpoint of limited government from libertarians is that nothing is prompting the government to take action for the people, protecting liberty, or cut spending. The government's inability to make effective action is the reason for the rise in tyrannical type structures that do not allow for a change in the status quo. "It's super nationalistic populism versus socialism. That is so removed from what we need to be doing. We need to remove ourselves from tyranny," Ron Paul states in the article. Essentially, the Democratic party is built upon the same fundamental foundation that allows the emergence of tyrannical structures with limited power to the people in a so-called democracy. Hillary Clinton has claimed, according to the populist charade, that she has fought for racial justices and children protective services; yet data reveals no actual progress was made by Clinton for the labor force. Although Clinton was able to lobby women in management positions, she was unable to help blue collar workers. The 'racial injustices' fought by Clinton may inherently be false, as during the 1990s, Hillary praised the enforcement for more severe punishments in prison. The legislation in actuality hurt many lower socioeconomic African Americans, thus prompting others to question Clinton's honesty. She also had joined and supported the conservative group of shaming abused women, only to defend this, along with a legislation hurting working class peoples and benefitting banking industries, as necessary for a 'proper economy' (Webb, 2016).

In Noam Chomsky's speech "The Common Good," Chomsky describes the study called 'the crisis of democracy,' in which *liberal* nationalists, had actually claimed that there was too much democracy, and a system would only work with an obedient population. The corporate sector or 'trilateral scholars' believed that the rise in demands of minorities in the political arena

is responsible for the ‘indoctrination of the young,’ and thus demanded more moderation in democracy (Chomsky, 2013). The fact that liberals were involved in such matter, as presented by Chomsky, shows the corporate assault on public education- students are expected to be prepared for passive obedience in the eyes of liberals and conservatives alike.

The Republican Party, in the United States, originally stood against the extension of slavery and desired for slavery’s complete abolition. During the 20th and 21st centuries, the party has become associated with laissez-faire capitalism, low taxes, and conservative social policies. The first presidential nomination, John C. Fremont was elected, thus replacing the Whig party in opposition to the Democratic Party. During the 1920s, when Woodrow Wilson was elected as the Democratic Party candidate as opposed to Roosevelt, Republican conservative and pro-business policies were actually more attractive to the people than Wilson’s brand of idealism and internationalism, thus allowing the Republican Party to dominate elections of several of the following years (Britannica, 2018). Although the founders did not recognize the right of territories and states to practice slavery, the modern Republican Party supports states’ rights against the power of the federal government in most cases, and it opposes the federal regulation of traditionally state and local matters, such as policing and education. Due to the fact that the Republican Party is highly decentralized just like the Democratic party, it encompasses a variety of opinions on issues.

The Republicans advocate reduced taxes as a means of stimulating the economy and advancing individual economic freedom. They tend to oppose extensive government regulation of the economy, government-funded social programs, affirmative action, and policies aimed at strengthening the rights of workers (Nuccitelli, 2017). However, some favor increased government regulation in non-economic lives of citizens. The Republican party tends to

emphasize and support a strong national defense with a more aggressive international policy. Though Republicans may supposedly care about strengthening the military and dealing with tomorrow break down more than Democrats do, a closer analysis of Pew data reveals that when analyzing the American agenda of “top priorities,” it is shown that the first priority of both Democrats and Republicans alike is defending against terrorism, and that is prioritized over improving reducing health care costs, employment situations, and even the educational system (Galston, 2015).

During Donald Trump’s inauguration, he spoke of a place in which poverty could be eliminated, and the crime of gangs and drugs could be gotten rid of with solutions he would propose. Yet according to most people’s beliefs, this is another policy proven to be unachievable as seen by Trump’s policies. Donald J. Trump is the first president elected with no prior experience as a politician, military leader, or having held a senior government post. Though polls predicted Trump’s overwhelmingly significant defeat, along with the fact that he had to lowest approval rating, Trump was able to beat Hillary in the 2016 election. In terms of the economy, typical measures that are taken in order to judge the state of it include a measure of jobs, wages, inflation, debt, and often times inequality. In today’s economy, there seem to be an increased amount of available jobs along with people of various specialized skill sets, a good stock market, and tame levels of inflation.

Though it may be controversial, Donald Trump may have actually contributed to the economy’s growth in some ways-but the question is to what extent is his economic policies helping the majority of America. When it comes to factory jobs, as Trump has prioritized, an estimate of 196,000 manufacturing jobs have been created (Bloomberg, 2018). This may be due to tax cuts and absence of regulations- potentially helping the U.S businesses. Trump has

highlighted falling employment and rising stocks, and he also regards trade deficits as a sign for economic weakness. However, from January to October of 2017, the trade deficit has been has been 12% higher, particularly with China under Trump's candidacy. In addition to deficits in trade, the argument that Trump has led to an increase in income is not a direct correlation. As trends show, it is simply a steady continuation since 2014 (Yglesias, 2018). In order to reiterate this perspective, Iglesias states that the transformation in perceptions is out of step with the underlying reality. Essentially, the basic truth is that while the economy displayed steady growth over the past 12 months, the same was true of the 72 months or so that came before that.

Even though the United States currently has a record number of job opportunities for those including minorities such as the black and Hispanic community as well as those who were not able to attain a college degree, it could be true that the effect of Trump's tax cuts was simply that it prompted companies to give one-time bonuses. Even though this is real money for employees, it isn't a directly correlated wage bump. According to the Congressional Budget Office, under Donald Trump, America's annual government budget deficit will hit \$1 trillion by 2020, and it's expected to stay that high for years to come (Bennet, 2017). It's mainly driven by the tax cut Trump pushed hard for and signed in December. On top of that, Trump pushed for more government spending, especially on the military, and he has refused to make any changes to Medicare or Social Security, which many say must be fixed in upcoming years- or else the debt will become unsustainable.

Even with the increased debt due to Trump's demand for increased spending on protection of the United States, economical factors show not much has changed in terms of the status quo. "Trump has deep roots in the existing system, as system that the Clinton machine has helped create" (Moser, 2016). Hillary's dedication to the status quo is proved in that she believes

in the system in the way that it is constructed, which shows she is extremely invested in the system itself and how it benefits her.

There is no doubt that Trump, as President, is more outspoken in his beliefs on foreign interactions, and has oppressive beliefs of a wall, a travel ban on Muslim countries, and pushes forward with his harder line on even legal immigration. This makes it considerably harder for those wanting visas, as it sparks fear for not just those who seek better job opportunities here but are illegal residents, but also legal business immigration cases. What is often times ignored is that our immigration system has been challenged going back long before the current presidential administration. The 1996 Immigration Reform Act signed by President Bill Clinton effectively debilitated the rights of millions of immigrants following the incident of 9/11. The Obama administration oversaw record-breaking deportation, including around 2.5 million immigrants removed and a vast expansion of family detention (York, 2018). President Trump's anti-immigrant actions and views during his first year in office are set apart from previous immigration crackdowns in that it has been marked by a host of efforts to frighten, again, both legal and undocumented immigrants.

Trump's change on the political system- his openness and use of media that allows us to see true beliefs and radical transparency, has allowed others to point out blatant racism, sexism, etc., and in this way, Trump is breaking from the "offend no one" style of political discourse. According to 'The Conversation', Trump is remaking the American body politic behind the scenes with radical changes such as defence, taxation, and regulation. "Trump speak allows for the open discussion of the many problems America and the world is facing but are usually only spoken about in whispers behind closed doors." (Lam, 2018). What Trump's candidacy is doing is that it is contributing greatly to the amount of people willing to discuss on political issues and

legislative decisions. However, these *same* problems of policy has existed in the past- but only now have they been openly discussed to such an extent, due to Trump's directive policies and nature.

What has stayed constant during Trump's presidency thus far is his unfiltered messages and approach of governing by communicating directly to his constituents by means of Twitter and political rallies. His mannerisms are much different from the fundamental 'politician speak' commonly used by candidates running for President in the late 20th century in most industrialized democracies. The classical politician-speak refrains from publically offending anyone, which could tip or derail a legislative agenda and could internationally put the country's allies at risk. Candidate Trump, and now President Trump, made a break from this 20th-century tradition by speaking to Americans and the world in a plain-spoken, and at times explicit manner that all democracies have come to expect of their politicians. Trump's more erratic, directive nature, and possibly more 'rightist' perspectives, specifically, has caused people to speak out against what they believe is wrong. Though rightfully so, this has caused people to turn a blind-eye to the same ongoing injustices in the government that has happened with earlier candidates, both Democrats and Republicans (Weglarz, 2016). In fact, though Hillary presents herself as having strong liberal beliefs, the reality of it is that she is able to draw attention to her current stance on political issues as opposed to her past actions- which prove her current positions completely false and that both candidates aren't different from the status quo. In other words, while Trump's policies are extreme and unjust in their own ways, Hillary is willing to hide her past conservative like positions to ensure her votes.

Third Party Candidates in Presidential Elections

Third party candidates, on the other hand, are guaranteed to lose the election due to the Electoral College, and once again, the system itself. Since 1920, in fact, only three third-party candidates—Robert La Follette in 1924, Strom Thurmond in 1948 and George Wallace in 1968—have been able to win even a single electoral vote. Ross Perot, ran twice for the presidency- his 19% showing in 1992, despite temporarily dropping out of the race, was the strongest third-party candidacy since Theodore Roosevelt. “No third-party or independent candidate has come close to winning the presidency, largely because the electoral rules in the U.S create barriers that these parties have been unable to surmount” (Bartlett, 2010). Despite his lead in terms of the popular vote, his loss shows that the Electoral College does not trust the people to make such an executive decision, even if a high popularity for the third party candidate is shown. Jill Stein, in the 2016 election, ran for the green party and presented both democratic and republican ideals while advocating for environmental regulations. However, due to the electoral college and a lack of votes, this was not possible. Yet even with the third-party candidate, the system would not allow a win in the third-party candidate, nor will Jill Stein be able to make a major change to the status quo, partially due to a lack of support in the government. This corruption in the system is one that has existed throughout history, a system that is favorable for Democrats and Republicans alike.

Presidential candidate, Ralph Nader, ran in 2000 for the Green Party. Though he was able to get 44 state ballots, 9 million to fund his campaign, and hire and mobilize campaign workers, he was unable to reach above 2.8 percent in terms of votes. Essentially, even with being an extremely progressive third party candidate, the two major parties continued to dominate the elections, making it increasingly difficult to oppose them. In a ‘one-party system shared by two parties’ as described by Sifry, third parties may be a viable choice in solving the country’s

problem in different ways. The state electoral laws are established to protect such a system in American policies and prevent the radical change to a third party candidate. “Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore agreed on everything from eliminating the federally guaranteed floor beneath poor mothers and children.” (Sifry, 2003). History has shown that the major parties have agreed upon the overall direction of America, making no change and allowing no change in terms of political and economic systems.

The ability of third party candidates to change the status quo is hampered greatly by the government. In fact, the perverse reality of a third party is that the major party that agrees with it the most is also the most threatened by its existence. Congress is structured by the parties- Congress does not want to help an executive whose success is a threat to their chance of ever being in the majority again (Klein, 2014). This goes to show that a third party will not fix what is already broken in American politics. Though third parties force the system to confront issues that they may otherwise ignore, such as Ross Perot, this is the same reason why the system will not allow the change to happen.

Conclusion

Following the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump has unmistakably provoked the vast majority of Americans in his policies and his perspectives on the rightful way to fix the socio-economic problems in America. Despite the common assumption that right wing groups led by Trump completely oppose Democratic parties led by Clinton, the statistics show that both parties prioritize the same issues as the biggest benefits ‘for the people.’ In this way, Trump does not change a system that is so deeply-rooted in its concerns for those in power in contrast to the people who are supposed to have the biggest voice in a so-called democracy. The power structure that has been created solely allows for economic gains for those in power. And despite

Trump's belief that he can implement 'great' change to America and help issues such as decrease unemployment rates, the only major change shown by his candidacy is the revelation of America's people that something must be done regarding such policies. The unlikeliness of a major change in 'status quo' is particularly high, as the core ideals of elections and candidates rely upon the same principle. Though Trump's policies can be pointed out as extremely right-wing by his views on issues like illegal immigration, it should be noted that Obama deported more illegal immigrants than any President in U.S. history and prosecuted more whistleblowers than any other President. This year's primary season and recent election pulled the curtain back to expose for the world to see the total bankruptcy of both our parties and of our corporate media, all of which are owned by the oligarchy which rules us. Great change is not possible, and though people recognize that a change must occur, it cannot be achieved by even the most controversial of leaders such as Trump- due to the fact that his policies actually do not change massively from those of opposing parties. The possibility of change may be present in the rise of third-party candidates, such as Jill Stein, yet even those policies are not completely opposed to a system of capitalism that keeps the people- particularly the working class, as an inferior group with little say. The democratic capitalist society that we live in has been structured to benefit the capitalists along with the 1% , and this structure has made it impossible for any massive change. With the government's increasing debt and the troubles of the working class, America seems to be gridlocked in a broken political system. The status quo is not shaken by Clinton or Trump, and fundamentally, the society will continue to function in a way that will keep a small group of people in charge under an oligarchy that makes decisions that work to prevent changes to a flawed system rather than help those who should benefit from it.

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