

**The Real American Government**

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## **Abstract**

The United States continues to let the world know they are a democracy and the people who resign in the U.S. have the right to choose and vote for who they want. They continue to serve the notion they are a democracy on a silver platter, branding it where everyone can see. But what the people fail to realize is that what they've been served is false. The United States is not a democracy but instead an oligarchy. With capitalism as their economic system, it has always been destined for democracy to fail. The two systems conflict intensely; capitalism allows an elite class to grow in power, claiming the top 1%. The greed that stems from this economic system is eating away at the "democracy" the United States claims to have and instead boosting a group of elites to power, forming an oligarchy under the people's noses. Stunting any growth within the country and instead creating a pathway to failure.

## The Real American Government

The *Declaration of Independence* talks about the concept that the U.S. is a popular sovereignty, and that the government is there for the people. It outlines the blueprint for the U.S. governmental system that strives for individual liberty and public order (Democratic ideals..., n.d.). The U.S. claims that they are a democracy, but is that the case? As we look at the four theories of American government, you might find that our government is not what it seems.

The first of the four theories is the democratic theory. The democratic theory further dissects the understanding and meaning of democracy. Within a democratic government, the citizens are the ones who influence the policies passed within our government. We, the people, elect our government officials. Then, these government officials are supposed to represent us and decide what's for the people. In theory, if our government officials did not meet the people's standards, they should have the power to make the changes needed.

The second theory is pluralism. Pluralism is “the holding of two or more offices or positions (such as benefices) at the same time” (Pluralism Definition & Meaning, 2023). It is the idea that the power should be divided among various groups and not to single elites or elite groups because diversity benefits society (*Pluralism | Ideology...*, 2023). Power is centered within groups, so when you aren't part of a group, then you do not have a say within this society.

Additionally, the following theory is hyperpluralism, an exaggerated and extreme version of pluralism, where the idea of multiple groups becomes so politically influential that the government cannot function. The political system becomes so complex that governing becomes almost impossible, causing democracy to become disrupted (Longley, 2021).

Lastly, elite class theory expands on the idea that society is split into multiple classes, consisting of an elite class and the working class. The elite class is a small group of people like

CEO's and wealthy businessmen. This class holds all the power in this society because they have access to all the resources they require and have control over politics, economics, and the media (Milton, 2023).

If the people within the United States were to take a closer look at what type of government they have, they would find that the U.S. is not what it seems. The United States would fall under an elite class theory. The 1% who own more money than a third of our country's wealth continue to control our government. The elites have all the power in our government; they can fuel candidates' campaigns, making their opinions more valuable than the average citizens because they have what our candidates need and want: money. With their resources, they can cheat the system, appealing to our leaders and, in return, keeping the power among themselves. Upon further analyzing the status quo and how our economy and politics interact, we find that our government is run by the elite fueling our beloved capitalist system.

### **Can Democracy and Capitalism Work Together?**

The United States claims they are a democracy that thrives under a corporate capitalist system, but is this true? Two main ways this is approached are institutional and structural. "The institutional approach in political science is the method that focuses on various governmental systems. This studies how power is regulated in a particular political system, i.e. through duties, rights, economic organization, and, to some degree, cultural codes and values" (What Is the..., n.d.) This approach is used in schools and textbooks to educate the people. But is it genuinely showing the role that capitalism has in the economy? It does not teach the other essential parts of how a country functions. Who is actually in charge when running our government? Is it the people we elect or the businesses that fuel our economy?

The second way it can be taught is the structural approach. “The Structural Approach is a significant tool when analyzing political systems. It frames the social, economic, legal, and political connections that shape a society. By delving into these relationships, you gain a deeper understanding of the functions and consequences of different political structures” (Structural Approach..., n.d.). This approach focuses on how our economics and our politics are intertwined with each other. It further dissects how our government functions and how one thing affects the other—teaching a more effective and in-depth way of how economics and politics are intertwined and about the conflict between having a democracy and using a capitalist system.

The institutional point of view touches on politics and economics separately. When teaching the subject within schools, US politics and economics do not intertwine. Within *Magruder’s American Government*, there are very few instances where it covers democracy and capitalism, the political and economic systems the US claims to have. The book talks very little about capitalism and democracy. Only really providing the definitions, “Capitalism is an economic system in which individuals are free to own the means of production and maximize profits. Many aspects of capitalism will be familiar to you because the United States and most other nations in the world today have adopted this economic system” (Shea, 2023). The institutional approach teaches about democracy and capitalism separately. Not once does it explain the effects that economics and capitalism have on one another or the amount of interaction between them.

Additionally, *Magruder’s American Government* only talks about capitalism twice, never talking about the effect that it can have on the U.S. government—pushing the idea that capitalism and the economic system should be taught separately. According to *Magruder’s American Government*, “In a democracy, supreme political authority rests with the people. The

people hold sovereign powers, and government is conducted only by and with the consent of the people” (Shea, 2023). It paints democracy as a system by the people for the people, a type of system that people would want because it gives the people representation. Pushing the idea that our country is run under a democratic system and run by the people.

While the structural approach analyzes the dynamic nature of the US government and capitalism interaction, it makes it so people perceive a political system as a complex system where one change can potentially disrupt or reinforce convergences (Structural Approach..., n.d.). The U.S. claims to be a democracy, a country where the people have the power. But for a long time, the idea of who holds power within our government has been clouded. Your average U.S. citizen isn't very knowledgeable about the U.S. government. “The nationally representative poll of 1,000 members of the American public found troubling gaps in their knowledge of American history and government, as well as constitutional rights” (ABA Survey..., 2019). “Most Americans would likely be surprised to know that, according to a respected international poll taken in 2022, far more Chinese (83%) perceive China to be democratic than Americans (49%) perceive the US to be. And while culture war rationales were amongst the choices available to Americans to explain the difference, they chose ‘corruption’ (78%), ‘corporate control of the political system’ (72%), and the ‘power of Big Tech’ (66%) as the leading explanations for the dearth of democracy in the US” (Urie, 2023). Some American citizens believe that corporations and oligarchic powers have affected ‘our democracy,’ if you take your time to look into it, they are not wrong.

“This problem has long been a blind spot for liberal theory”. The will to act politically is there but not strong enough for people to act on it and produce outcomes. If our economic power was distributed widely, you could say the U.S. is a republic, a representative democracy. The

U.S. is a representative democracy. We have the people vote for candidates who represent the people. But do these representatives have the people in mind? “Eligible voters do elect representatives, but those elected represent the interests of corporate executives and oligarchs, not the people. ‘Capitalism’ ties the political ambitions of the rich to the wellbeing of the rest of us in the national mythology. After all, why would politicians meet with workers when they can meet with the owners and bosses who are imagined representing the interests of workers”. Our politicians are constantly pleasing wealthy businessmen and not caring for the people of this country, leading all the money (power) to grow within one group. Hint: it’s not your average person. Over the past five decades, the U.S. has directed incomes and wealth to a small group of people (Urie, 2023). Democracy is supposed to be a system of compromise and majority decision-making (Kocka & Merkel, n.d.). But our current government is not like that. ‘Our democracy’ is put into the hands of a couple of rich businessmen. That doesn’t appear like a democracy; it sounds more like an oligarchy.

### **The Sackler Family**

The Sackler family were drug-dealing criminals. They dealt with Oxycontin, killed over half a million Americans, and destroyed millions of lives. They are close to obtaining a deal with the states where if they give the states \$4 billion over nine years, they will be able to keep the \$10 billion of profits they made. Additionally, no one from this incident will go to jail. At the same time, Jessica Reznicek was sentenced to eight years in prison for damaging an oil pipeline. She believed the pipeline was contributing to climate change and threatened the water supply of Iowa. Jessica did not make any money, and no one died, no one got hurt. Even though she did that for the better of the planet and people, she was still sentenced. Exxon wasn’t fined, and they continued to release toxins. He was able to do this because, with his company making billions of

dollars, he had multiple senators in his back pocket. This is just one of the incidents where capitalism can find a way into our government. Because these people are billionaires, they hold so much power within their hands. Because they are billionaires and their crimes were against your average citizen, nothing will happen; they will retire to one of their mansions (Hartmann, 2021).

This happens because, within our government, the people we elect to represent the people are not representing the people. When the working class is not represented and present in our legislatures, tax policies become more favorable to businesses and wealthy businessmen. Worker protection is weaker, and economic inequality increases. “Government *by* the upper class promotes government *for* the upper class — and makes life harder for the classes of Americans who can least afford it” (Carne, 2014). Rich businessmen run our government with no one but themselves in mind. When these businessmen have enough money and power, they can control the government; over many decades, several public policies have been beneficial and responsive to those at the top of the income distribution, not at all to the bottom 80% (Amico, 2020). They strive to increase their profits under this hierarchical system of capital owners, leaving the rest of the country to struggle to survive.

The competition that capitalism creates sparks innovation and economic growth. It produces many benefits, but these benefits are not shared equally. Many countries deal with social and economic inequality because of it (How Economic..., 2021). Capitalism is a very selfish system that is all about what you, as an individual, can do and achieve to increase your profits. “Their decisions allocate large portions of those net revenues to themselves as shareholders’ dividends and top managers’ executive pay packages. Their incomes and wealth thus accumulate faster than the social averages”. It is a system that makes it convenient for the



owners and managers to gain wealth, and it's not as friendly to the average worker. "The owners and their top managers then use their disproportionate wealth to shape and control the macro-economy and the politics interwoven with it" (Wolff, 2020). It is a system driven by greed and selfishness that distributes wealth to a small group of people while everyone else suffers and is left with nothing, not at all what democracy is for.

The United States is structured in a way that it is to attempt to give its citizens a comfortable, affordable lifestyle. Whether this structure provides this is up for debate. As it is, it seems obvious that democracy and capitalism conflict with each other; these systems are quite actually the opposite of one another. Democracy is "rule by the people" (History & Society: Democracy, 2023). While capitalism is "based on private ownership" (McCarthy, n.d.). One is for the benefit of the people, while the other is for a person's gain. It's a competition that makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. Capitalism influences our government. When looking at our government on the surface, many people assume the politicians that they vote into office are the ones who run our government, but that just is not true. "But long historical experience has demonstrated that minorities, financially and economically powerful, tend to exert an influence over the affairs of the state completely disproportionate to their numerical strength". It is further proving that the United States is not a democracy. The people do not have a say in what happens within our government. It is the wealthy businessman that sits at the top who controls what happens. It simply proves that the existence of real equality for all is not compatible with capitalism as it exists now (de Roussy, n.d.).

During our time in the education system, we are taught under the institutional approach, where the United States is a country that flourishes as a democracy under a capitalist system. Upon further research, this appears to be false. Using the structural approach, democracy, and

capitalism are two different systems that conflict with each other greatly. Democracy is a system giving power to the people instead of one person or small groups. In contrast, capitalism has a small group of people who hold all the power. The employers, a small group of rich businessmen, can distribute the revenue they make in any way they see fit. Leaving the workers, the majority of people, with very little. Capitalism makes it so that the rich businessmen have so much power that they can even influence our government and what goes on inside. This is not apparent when just glancing at our government, but upon further inspection, you see what actual influence the small group of men have, showing that it is not the people who hold the power. Therefore, democracy cannot thrive under a corporate capitalist system.

### **America's Status Quo**

As 2024 approaches, like every four years, the people begin to awaken for our next election. The people stir, and the war to elect the next president begins. With this chaos comes the belief that electing a new president will result in significant changes, whether the president is Republican or Democratic. As 2024 approaches, it will again be a standoff between President Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Again, like in the last election, the citizens of the United States believe that electing either of these individuals will significantly affect our government and society.

However, as it has been for multiple years, the political and economic hardships the United States faces have yet to change with each president that we elect. With our elections, the Democratic and Republican parties continue to dominate politically, and we have yet to see any significant changes. Upon further analysis, it has been seen that there is nothing wrong with the status quo; the status quo itself is wrong. "Since 1970, the United States has experienced six party changes in the White House, five party changes in control of the Senate, and four in the

House of Representatives. It has also experienced seven recessions (and recoveries). Yet on critical indicators of economic, social, and democratic health, our index shows little improvement and, in many cases, substantial deterioration over this period” (Poole, 2019).

Throughout the years, the people of the United States believe that democracy and capitalism are the political and economic systems that our country is run under. Assuming that this makes America “great,” but upon further research, this does not seem to be the case. This status quo: “The existing state of affairs, especially regarding social or political issues” (Wehrle, 2023), seems to be running our country slowly into the ground, causing more and more disturbances in every aspect of how this country functions. These systems the U.S. claims to use when running the country are a mask hiding the systems that are used to run the country. As Republicans and Democrats dominate the political scene, we will see no significant changes in how our government is run; our systems remain the same.

Even though the United States claims to be a democracy, a place where the people have a voice, and their voice can produce change, if they were to dive deeper into how our government functions, they would realize that the power is in the palm of a small group of elites. When people think of oligarchies, their mind tends to drift to big bad places with an authoritarian type of rule. An area with “blind submission to authority and the repression of individual freedom of thought and action” (Lindstaedt & Pereira, n.d.). They fail to realize that authoritarianism does not always have to be that extreme. In the United States, the people like authoritarianism in a way where there is order. They like following a particular set of rules. Within the United States, we have so many different types of elaborate laws that everyone follows in their day-to-day life. These laws that people follow day to day inflict authority. Even though most people do not realize it, we as a country are an oligarchy with authoritarian rule.

However, even though our political status quo is different from what we claim it is, that is not true with our economic status quo. The United States claims that we run under a capitalist system, and that in itself is accurate. We are capitalist in the way that we allow private ownership, and we do not want the government meddling where they do not belong, meaning that the government has limited action in the free market. That said, it gives the top 1% a lot of power. They can build up their corporations and obtain a lot of wealth, which translates into power. By doing this, we put a majority of the United States money into the elite class's grasp, which in return turns starts to form our democracy into the oligarchy we see today.

### **The Political Compass**

The political compass is a tool that shows where someone lies politically, which is a range between authoritarian and libertarian, and where someone lies economically, more left or right wing. When we analyze our current and former presidents, Joe Biden and Donald Trump, we realize that they both end up on the same quadrant of the political compass, quadrant one, showing that they both have authoritarian and right-wing views (The Political Compass, n.d.). Though they aren't in the same place on the compass, the difference is so small that they hold the same ideals.

These past years it has been conditioned by the people to polarize these two parties, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. The mass media has a role in this; the many biased news stations and personal posts sway people's opinions on the parties. Painting a picture that these parties are so different from each other that they could never have something in common. We continue to view Democrats and Republicans as two separate parties; in actuality, they are not. "They're a single ruling party comprised of two large feuding factions which continually re-balance power and divvy up the spoils between themselves through a burlesque of

“representative democracy” rigged, by force of law to preclude meaningful competition” (Knapp, n.d.). These two parties have dominated the political scene since the 1850s, and we have not seen any change. Each year, it is apparent that either Democrats or Republicans will win, and that is typically decided by how much money can be obtained. When our president is decided by how much money they can obtain, we start to see the roles that the top 1% has within our government. They provide money to our candidates, and our presidents feed into their wants and needs instead of the people. Considering these aspects, it becomes more apparent that we are not a democracy. We are an oligarchy, a “government by the few, especially despotic power exercised by a small and privileged group for corrupt or selfish purposes” (Oligarchy | Definition..., 2023).

### **The Reelection of Donald Trump**

“Politicians from both parties exploit voters who don't do their homework on voting records and let the lawmakers use the people's sovereign power (remember the Constitution's "We the People") against them on behalf of the big corporate bosses” (Nader, 2021). The United States loves to tell its people they have a choice when electing their presidents, that they can vote for whoever they like. But in reality, that is not the case. If Biden only served one term in office and Trump got reelected, to many people's disbelief, not much would change; the status quo would remain the same. Back in 2020, when Biden was elected, we continued to see no change in our status quo. Over the past few years, the term “Bidenomics” has come up. It was a term the democrats created to describe the administration policies that have taken place over the past few years. They branded it as something “new,” but we have yet to see any change in spending, regulations, and cronyism. It is apparent that Biden has yet to produce change; he claimed to cut the spending deficit. However, evidence of this is false when “his allies in a unified Democratic

Congress have enacted \$5 trillion in new spending over the decade”. Additionally, Biden has claimed to build up the middle class to provide more for the people. But to no one's surprise, real wages continue to fall each month, and inflation has raised interest rates and mortgage rates. (deRugy, 2023). While people love to claim that Trump is a no-good capitalist-loving businessman, we do not see much of a difference with Biden. Time and time again, Biden has yet to prove that he is for the people; we see with his actions his true goal is to make more money.

To many people's surprise, the world would not end if Trump got reelected. There would only be minor changes compared to when Biden was in office. We see where Trump's actual goals lay after he got elected. It was stated that “He ran on a less interventionist foreign policy, when he wasn’t bragging about being “the most militaristic” candidate and promising to “rebuild” an already bloated military.” While he was in the presidency, he never hid his true intentions. He was a businessman at heart, through and through. Many of Trump's actions during his presidency were noted not to help the people but instead hurt them. He ran tax cuts that were only supposed to be temporary, but “the bill doubled the standard deduction for two years while eliminating the personal exemption permanently — Congress made things permanent later.” He would continue to make the elite class richer in a scheme, “the State and Local Tax deduction cap,” which “more than eclipsed by the tariffs he levied on American buyers of foreign goods to “protect” the American industries with the most effective lobbyists” (Knapp, 2021).

When Trump was in office in 2016, he enacted the GOP 2017 tax act. This tax act “was the largest corporate tax reform in a generation, lowering the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 21 percent, temporarily allowing full expensing for short-lived assets (referred to as bonus depreciation), and overhauling the international tax code” (McBride & Durante, 2023). As expected from businessmen, Trump enacted this act that aids the rich who fund his party and

benefits corporations and his wealthy supporters (Strauss, 2020). Upholding the status quo, instead of providing aid to the poor, he enacts an act that will slowly increase inflation, leaving the poor poorer and the rich richer.

### **Third-Party Views**

While both Joe Biden and Donald Trump are running for reelection, many people are concerned that by more people voting for third-party candidates, they are siphoning the votes away from Joe Biden, and I will tell you why this is false. Recently, colored, LGBTQ+, and working-class communities have been unmoved by Biden's presidency so far. People's dislike towards our president is not the fault of Cornel West, a third-party candidate. In our upcoming election, it is believed if Cornel West is not on the ballot, then President Joe Biden will have a significantly more significant opportunity to win reelection. But it is not Cornel West's fault for Joe Biden's actions if Biden cannot get the people's votes. People must accept that everyone is entitled to their beliefs and should vote for who they want (Griffen, 2023).

Looking at Democrats, Republicans, and third parties, it is evident that if people want change in the United States, electing a third-party candidate would be the best choice, so why do democrats and republicans always end up in office? In these modern times, why are third-party candidates never elected? With how our electoral system is set up, it is destiny for our third parties to fail. Two parties dominate our political system. It takes a lot of effort to step out of the norm. They often end up taking shortcuts provided by the parties to simplify their decision-making. "On average, for a voter to consider voting for the third-party candidate, they have to reject 4 things. Not 2 of 4, but rather all 4. They have to reject both parties' candidates *and* both parties, then and only then will they consider a third party. Then the voter has to find a third-party candidate they consider to be legitimate and finally, vote for them" (Patton, n.d.). Under

these circumstances, it is almost impossible for anyone to vote for a third-party candidate. The education provided by our schools makes it so the average citizen is uneducated when making these crucial decisions, like voting, aiding the continuity of our status quo.

### **Conclusion**

With the power that the elite class possesses, it is false to say that the United States is a democracy ruled by the people. The amount of power and influence that the elite class has made it so the government is not for the people. The elite firmly grip our government, providing them with the necessary resources. Which then enables our government to fuel their greedy desires further. In return, keeping the people in poverty and further widening the gap between classes.

This scale continues to tip further daily, favoring the rich and leaving the poor with nothing. These effects continue to ripple throughout communities, leaving many in financial distress and creating more injustices for those in need. When we chose capitalism as our economic system, this country was doomed to fail. Capitalism is a selfish system that focuses on one's interests. It is a system that only rewards a few and leaves the rest crawling for scraps. This system was never bound to work with democracy. When comparing the two, they are complete opposites. A system built on greed and a system built on uplifting others and making sure everyone is heard. They were never bound to work together, and they were doomed from the start.

With greed fueling our nation, we can never be a democracy. Our presidents continue to fuel the top 1% for them to maintain their positions. They fuel this oligarchical system to keep the power among the 1% because if our economy begins to decline, then so will the influence that the president has. They choose to focus on our economy and remain on top militarily than



the well-being of the people living in the country. They are furthering the gap between the poor and the wealthy and creating unrest. Slowly destroying itself from within.

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