

The True Face of the American Government

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Abstract

The United States portrays itself as a perfect democracy, in which individuals are represented equally, and citizens are able to have a voice in society. However, the current status of this democracy remains questionable. With the economic system of capitalism put in place, our “democratic” country becomes ruled by an elite class of the top 1% who are able to hold the government in their hands and control legislation. Furthermore, the status quo of our country will continue to remain the same even with the change in the presidency. As a result, many of our country’s foreign and domestic issues, most notably the inequality in wealth distribution, will still be prevalent in society. With the country slowly declining into a weakened state, alterations to how we currently approach problems may be necessary.

The True Face of the American Government

The United States has been and will continue to be considered a democracy by many Americans. However, to better understand if this holds true, we should examine the four theories of the American government. These four theories explain the differences in how our government is governed.

The first of the four theories is the traditional democratic theory. This is the common approach that is often taught in schools. Under a democratic nation, the citizens are able to influence policies passed within the government and they are able to have a say in further decision making. In addition, the citizens are able to elect government officials, and these officials are supposed to represent the people and decide what is best for them.

The second theory is pluralism. Pluralism, in theory, is a term that describes how several bodies of influence compete for power and authority. Rather than having one individual or group hold positions in office, power is instead divided among multiple groups of elites. These groups tend to persuade officials to pass policies that support them, the minority, which in turn damage the majority of citizens.

The third theory of the American government is hyperpluralism, which is a more hyperbolized description of pluralism. These two theories hold the same general meaning, but with hyperpluralism, too many groups of power cause the government to malfunction. The government becomes damaged as it has to abide by multiple groups at once, and as a result, governing is nearly impossible.

The last theory is the elite class theory, which emphasizes that society is composed of an elite class and a working class. The elite class includes all of the wealthy businessmen and CEOs

who hold most of the power in society. They have control over the economy, the media, and political affairs.

All of these theories can be applied to the American government to some extent, but one is more viable than the others, and that is the elite class theory. The top 1% of millionaires and billionaires hold most of the money within our country. They have a clear priority over the average citizen, and when it comes to decision making, the government will heed to their desires. These wealthy elites can basically cheat the system because they have a larger say in which policies are passed and they are able to keep power among themselves. With further analysis of the status quo and the relationship between our economy and politics, it is clear that the government is controlled by an elite class which further stimulates the capitalist system.

The Dismantling of Democracy

“The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell.”

- Confucius

Throughout our history, America has been considered a democracy, where power rests with the people and where all men are created equal. The economic system that runs alongside democracy is capitalism, a system that emphasizes private interest and a supposed free market. But can these two systems coexist in a country that claims itself to be free and for the people? To better understand the current state of the government, we should examine the two governmental approaches: the institutional approach and the structural approach.

When analyzing the government through the institutional approach, capitalism and democracy are seen as separate entities. The economy has little to no control over what the government does and instead, the government is formed through laws, taxes, education, and a constitution. This approach - which seems correct especially when it is backed up by school

textbooks - fails to provide the broader context surrounding our economy and the government. Institutionalists deny the many blatant negative effects regarding capitalism and conclude that capitalism and democracy function perfectly together. On the other hand, the structural approach believes that the government makes laws and actions based on the influence of wealthy figures and corporate powers. This pays closer attention to how capitalism has impacted the government and provides a much larger context compared to the institutional approach. When examining the reality of how capitalism has stripped away the main principles of democracy within our society, it is evident that the institutional approach is not a viable way of analyzing our government. Therefore, the structural approach is the only accurate analysis.

One of the main constraints on American democracy is the lack of a fair process in decision making, which is continuously hindered by capitalism. This is proven by the rampant influence of lobbyists. The democratic notion of each individual having equal say in society is immediately thrown out the window because capitalism allows for a heavy bias towards lobbyists over the everyday person. "Democracy has become enfeebled largely because companies, in intensifying competition for global consumers and investors, have invested ever greater sums in lobbying, public relations, and even bribes and kickbacks, seeking laws that give them a competitive advantage over their rivals" (Reich, 2009). Lobbyists have a clear priority over the typical citizen. Rather than making decisions that benefit the vast majority, policymakers are passing laws that only help the few individuals with the most money. This takes a huge hit on America's self-proclaimed democracy, because one of democracy's core values is that individual rights are recognized equally. However, it appears that the government purposefully favors the rights of corporate powers at the expense of the citizens. One recent study shows how Americans are becoming more dissatisfied with corporate influence. "In the

first presidential contest after the *Citizens United* decision, 84 percent of Americans agreed that corporate political spending drowns out the voices of average Americans, and 83 percent believed that corporations and corporate CEOs have too much political power and influence. This aligns with more recent research showing that 84 percent of people think government is benefitting special interests, and 83 percent think government is benefitting big corporations and the wealthy” (Kennedy, 2017). It has become clear to many Americans that this favoritism towards those with money needs to stop. Capitalistic policies are reducing the citizens’ influence over government policies. How can America truly be considered a democracy if only those with wealth get a say in decision making? These events highlight the ongoing fall of our democratic state to capitalism.

Elections have become another victim to capitalism, where corporations have continued to pour more money into them than ever before. This promotes the problem where candidates who have less resources available are placed at an immediate disadvantage. “American reformers express widespread popular sentiment when they describe U.S. elections as de facto “wealth primaries.” American candidates without vast financial resources or access to such resources can generally forget about being taken seriously in money- and media-driven campaigns” (Street, 2006). Elections have become a competition for who has the most money. Those with more money are able to hold enormous rallies and display their messages on a global scale. On the other hand, candidates with less money have smaller campaigns and are quickly overshadowed and forgotten about in elections. Wealthy candidates end up having the most power and influence, even when their proposed policies are not promising. Third-party candidates are never really considered in elections because they tend to run smaller campaigns. Only the Democrats and the Republicans, the two parties which are usually funded the most, are considered options.

In other words, capitalism is cutting out third-party candidates as options in elections even when it is possible that their policies are superior to the two main political parties. Those who are elected for office should be chosen because they are competent enough to make positive changes, and not because they simply have the most money. When elections are controlled by money, candidates who obey corporate powers triumph and democracy continues to deteriorate. This is because elections themselves are a core principle of democracy. Power rests with the people and representatives are elected by citizens. However, a democratic election fails to take place when the only representatives we can elect are the ones who are guided by money.

Another concerning issue within America is the widening gap between the rich and the lower classes. “Back in that same 1976, the always helpful World Inequality Database reminds us, the 40 percent of Americans in the nation’s statistical middle held just over a third of America’s wealth, 33.7 percent. The top 1 percent’s considerably smaller share that year: 22.6 percent. Today’s story? Our richest 1 percent hold just about 35 percent of our nation’s wealth, our middle 40 percent less than 28 percent” (Pizzigati, 2024). Capitalism allows multi-millionaires and billionaires to accumulate most of the wealth. The CEOs of big companies can cut off thousands of workers from payrolls and instead use underpaid workers to do the labor. This causes companies to produce more and increase their stock prices at a smaller expense. As a result, the CEOs will thrive with their millions in stock gains while the workers are barely able to provide for their families (Hightower, 2006). Ultimately, this economic inequality becomes a direct threat to political equality. In a perfect society where, political equality is ensured among everybody, each individual has an equal standing in the eyes of the government. But if you were to take a janitor who works at the local middle school and the CEO of a growing tech company, who do you believe would have more political power? Of course, the latter would. To put it

simply, those who were able to grab a slice of the economic pie are going to have more power than those who did not, which is naturally undemocratic.

Furthermore, capitalism allows workers to be mistreated and stripped from their rights. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, workers are forced to work for meager wages that aren't adequate enough to feed families. Yet, this is not the only issue that workers face. Not only does capitalism push workers further down the income bracket, it also allows for workers to be abused, injured, and in serious cases killed. "Contract law was used to deny compensation to injured employees and withhold back pay from workers who wished to quit undesirable jobs. Workers were killed or maimed because of inadequate safety measures, without employers being held liable. By these and other measures, the law promoted a state-supported redistribution of wealth against the weakest groups in society. Such were the blessings of the "free market"" (Parenti, 1996). In order to maximize profits, companies are able to institute the bare minimum of safety procedures. They can spend less on protective equipment, proper tools, and other measures that ensure the safety of workers. This is because, "The corporation is a legal shield, granting its owners an extraordinary protective privilege that no other business owners are allowed" (Hightower, 2006). When workers are harmed or killed, companies are exempted from being held liable. Capitalism serves as a barrier to protect businesses rather than the workers. To put it differently, capitalism's main priority is to create profits for businesses and corporations at the sacrifice of workers. "When we say that a corporation did well, we mean that its shareholders did well. The company's local community might be devastated by plant closings. Employees might be shouldering a crushing workload. Still, we will say, "The corporation did well" (Kelly, 2006). The workers are forced to perform all of the hard work which benefits the company. Their lives are constantly placed at risk, and they are granted little to no compensation if they were to

get injured. In the end, as long as the corporations receive their big paychecks, all is well. In a country that prides itself on the democratic nation that “all men are created equal”, the exploitation of workers serves as a clear contradiction to this supposed democracy. All individuals are not created equal when workers are endangered and overworked while the business owners get to lay back and watch the money pour into their bank accounts. This abuse of workers proves to be another example of how capitalism has stolen our democracy.

It should be clear by now that the systems of democracy and capitalism are not able to coexist. These two systems which define our government and economy simply strive to achieve different goals. “Democracy’s priorities are equality before the law, the right of each citizen to govern the decisions that govern his or her life, the creation of a civilization based on fairness and equity. Capitalism’s priorities are inequality of return, profit for the suppliers of capital, efficiency of production and distribution, the bottom line” (Street, 2006). Capitalism and democracy cannot function together when one emphasizes inequality and the idea of self-gain, while the other seeks fairness and equality. To mend this broken relationship, the two need to be balanced in a way that benefits all individuals while limiting corruption and bias within the government. Some effective actions that must take place moving forward include higher wages for the lower classes, improved working conditions, and less government influence so that corporate powers have less impact on laws. By establishing these new policies, America finally begins to step in a direction towards a true democracy.

As a result of the growing inequalities and injustices brought on by capitalism, the roots of democracy which define the American government have slowly withered away. We are taught through textbooks that democracy and capitalism are separate and compatible. This institutional approach, however, fails to include the harm capitalism has inflicted on democracy. On the

contrary, the structural approach views democracy and capitalism alongside each other, and ultimately provides a greater analysis on America's current democratic status. Through structural analysis, it is evident that capitalism and democracy fail to coexist due to the growing influence of lobbyists over government officials, the widening gap of inequality, and the rapid decrease of freedom among workers. Capitalism is an economic system which naturally undermines democratic values. Capitalism does not provide fairness, equal representation, or respect for human rights. As capitalism continues to grow and control our country, it is safe to assume that without any sort of intervention or change, a democratic America will become another wish that fails to come true.

The Unchanging Reality of our Government

Presidential elections are always the main event. The country comes together to observe an array of candidates until, finally, the people cast their votes to elect the person they see as best fit for the job, and a new president is chosen. These elections are extremely important for the condition of our country. The president must be somebody who is competent and promising, or in other words, someone who can lead the country in a positive direction. However, there seems to be a constraint on how much each new president is capable of changing the country. That is to say, that they are limited by the country's status quo - a term that describes the basic principles that the United States is conformed to. Economically and politically, we are defined as a capitalist and democratic state. These two systems will always remain the foundation of our government and economy regardless of who is elected president. Whether they are democratic, or republican, each candidate will generally have the same ideals and policies.

Now that the 2024 presidential election has come to an end, it is decided that Republican candidate Donald J. Trump will be back in office for a second term. To many Democrats, this

shocking outcome is a disaster that will likely result in the collapse of our democratic regime. But does much change with Trump as president rather than Harris? The short answer is no. In reality, both Trump and Harris would continue to follow the status quo. The United States would remain a democratic country with a capitalist economy put in place. The status quo simply does not change with each new president. Nonetheless, change is not impossible. As the country continues to fall into unprecedented debt, crime continues to rise, and other economic and social issues spread, it is possible that alterations to the status quo will be set in place. With Trump back in office, will he be the one to challenge the status quo?

To first understand how the outcome of this election will affect the status quo, we should examine the political viewpoints and standings of Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. The political compass is an online tool that is used to situate people on a grid which is representative of their political and economic approaches. The grid has 4 quadrants with one axis ranging from libertarian to authoritarian and the other axis ranging from left to right. When placed on the grid, both Harris and Trump end up in the same quadrant: the authoritarian right category. Essentially, this signifies that although they may differ in many of their attitudes, they both ultimately have the same political and economic ideals. Both presidents are still confined to the status quo. They will both abide by the capitalist principles that satisfy the top 1%, and they will continue to approach general issues in a similar manner. A country with Trump as president will not stray too far away from a country with Harris as president.

Let us now take a look at their approaches to specific foreign and domestic issues. With the ongoing tensions between Israel and Gaza, the debate between how Harris or Trump would have addressed the matter is relevant. However, it appears that both sides had a similar approach to the conflict. “While the moderators engaged in scaremongering about Vladimir Putin, Harris

and Trump both went out of their way to express devotion to Israel. Harris claims she is working for a ceasefire in Gaza while simultaneously promising to continue allocations of weapons and money for Israel. She repeated calls for a two-state solution which Israel has repeatedly rejected and added threats against Iran for good measure. Trump dispenses with pretense and says he is and will remain Israel's guy." (Kimberley, 2024). In reality, both Harris and Trump had similar ideas as they both saw Israel as an ally. No matter who won, Israel would have been backed by the Americans and the war would spiral into further chaos. This displays a continuation of our status quo. During Joe Biden's administration, which was backed by Harris as Vice President, the Democrats did not seek to end the conflict between Gaza and Israel as it provided profits to the U.S. With Trump back in office, the war will likely continue just as it did with Biden. "US president-elect Donald Trump has vowed to bring peace to the Middle East. But his return to the White House is likely to bring Gaza only more death and destruction. He is already showering Israel with statements of blanket support and overstaffing his administration with some of the most uncompromising pro-Israeli hawks" (Shehada, 2024). The status quo of continuing the war in Gaza would not have changed regardless of if Trump or Harris won because both sides simply see benefits with the ongoing war. As a result, the status quo regarding foreign policy and the war in Gaza continues.

In regard to domestic issues, such as poverty and the inequalities in wealth distribution, Trump and Harris would have both followed the current status quo. The United States is a country that strictly follows the economic system of capitalism. Capitalism, however, is a system that inadvertently creates economic inequality between the working class and the elites. "Under the economic system of capitalism, to earn money to survive, workers must sell their labor power to produce goods and services for the bosses who own the means of production. Workers are

never compensated for the full value of what they produce; in some industries they are paid only a tiny fraction of it. The difference between the value workers add to a product and the lower wages they are paid becomes the profits that make up most of the billionaires' accumulated wealth" (Piette, 2023). No matter who is voted into office, capitalism will remain intact and the top 1% will reap all of the benefits. Elections are practically pointless if you believe that a new candidate or president will create changes to this current system. Those who are placed in government positions, including the president, will always prioritize the welfare of the elite class before the working class. Therefore, affluent companies and corporations will never have to worry about their profits because it will always be guaranteed despite whoever is in power. "Millions of people become emotionally invested in candidates who use red meat to generate support from their respective constituencies while defense contractors, big pharma executives, and oil company oligarchs sit back and watch, knowing that they will get what they want regardless of the outcome" (Kimberley, 2024). This status quo that is guided by capitalism represents a continuous reality, where the wealthy will always triumph at the expense of the workers. Even with the past election, not much would have changed regardless of who won because both Trump and Harris are simply slaves to the elite class, or rather, slaves to capitalism. "The real issue with Kamala Harris is that, just like Biden, she is a corporate Democrat through and through with a record of pushing policies that are anti-working people and pro-billionaire" (Hubbard, 2024). If Harris won the election, she would continue to employ regulations that would benefit the millionaires and billionaires. Similarly with Trump now in office, he too will likely set forth similar policies. Capitalism is the groundwork of our economy and country as a whole. Each president will always conform to this system because it is what our country has been built on. Democrats and Republicans alike both struggle to break free from the shackles of

capitalism and as a result, wealth disparities between the rich and the poor continue to rise, and poverty becomes even more prevalent in society. Thus, the status quo regarding wealth inequality and capitalism remains unchanged.

With capitalism set in place, the working class is forced to choose between the democratic or republican party, even though neither party has substantial positive impacts on their situation. “The larger part of the U.S. employee class has not (yet) been won over by the Republicans. It has stayed, so far, with the Democrats. Yet aggravated social divisiveness has settled everywhere into U.S. culture and politics. It frightens many who stay within the Democratic Party, seeing it as the lesser evil despite its “centrist” leaders and their corporate donors” (Wolff, 2024). The working people simply follow the party that is less damaging, because both democrats and republicans are controlled by corporate power and the status quo. But this reality begs the question: Why are third-party candidates not viable options? Well, the truth is, they actually are. “In disturbing contrast, consider Jill Stein and the Green Party, with a platform that includes demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza; not taking money from AIPAC or war-profiteer lobbyists; ending Israel’s occupation of Palestine and, my God, supporting equality and security for all people in Palestine and Israel” (Koehler, 2024). Third-party candidates such as Jill Stein often propose promising solutions to real world problems. These solutions can be drastic and entirely different from the ones suggested by the democrats and republicans, primarily because third-party candidates tend to stray away from the status quo. On the other hand, the two major parties usually do not create extreme policies that are too different from the status quo, because such attempts are risky and unpopular as they are not what the citizens are used to. With this in mind, third-party candidates are still never successful in elections as many see them as “wasted votes.” Rather than voting on somebody who could end

these ongoing wars, mass killings, and rampant poverty, citizens will vote for the “lesser evil” of republican or democrat. Voting for third party candidates could actually create real change and a different kind of future. It would deviate from the status quo that is responsible for many of these issues. But since third-party candidates are typically irrelevant in elections due to their lack of power and influence, this potential future and change is bound to never happen. Consequently, the status quo remains intact as the two major parties who continue to enforce it remain in power.

It has been established by now that for the most part, President Donald Trump will not create major changes to the status quo. With each new presidency, little has been accomplished when it comes to improving many of the concerns of domestic issues. “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. 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). Issues previously mentioned such as poverty, inequality in wealth distribution, crime, violence, and others have been prevalent in our society for decades. Even with the constant changes to our legislative and executive positions, improvement has been minimal, and to some extent, conditions have worsened. Trump will likely not break this pattern but considering the current population of the Congress and the Judiciary, it may not be impossible. “When he comes to power in January, he will have the benefit of a judiciary stocked with his own appointees... What’s more, Trump will be abetted by a unified Congress held by a party that is more compliant than before” (Wise, 2024). Trump’s new presidency is backed by a primarily Republican following which will heed to Trump’s proposals. As a result, there will be fewer opposition, and things will mostly go in Trump’s favor. With the ongoing domestic issues needing to be addressed, Trump and his loyal backing

may create drastic changes within the system for better or for worse. Of course, none of this is guaranteed, but it does suggest that Trump could diverge from the status quo.

Ultimately, the 2024 presidential election would not have made any remarkable changes to the status quo regardless of who won. Kamala Harris and Donald Trump are two individuals who are both confined to the economic and political systems that define our country. No matter the result, the country would have largely remained the same. Capitalism will always triumph, the Democrats and Republicans will remain in power, and changes to worsening affairs will proceed to be virtually impossible. The country continues to diminish into an enfeebled shell which lacks the ability to change and break free. Therefore, adjustments must be made towards the status quo to fix this issue, and with Trump now in office, this opportunity for change is possible, though not promising. But at the end of the day, who knows what will happen. We will just have to sit back and watch where these next four years take us.

Conclusion

Based on the relationship between capitalism and democracy as well as the continuation of America's status quo, it is clear that the United States is deviating away from a democracy. Instead, it has become a country ruled by an elite class which the government favors over the everyday citizen. A true democracy would follow the voice of the people and allow them to make appropriate decisions within the government. However, our country does not align with these interests. The government prioritizes the wealthy elites by abiding to their greedy desires and letting them have the first say in policymaking. As a result, our country delves deeper into a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Furthermore, capitalism is an economic system that simply cannot work alongside a democratic government. The two systems have contradicting goals which ultimately hinder each other. With capitalism set in place, the individual elite's

triumph over the large majority of working- and middle-class citizens, and a democracy which prioritizes equality among men dwindles out of existence.

A democratic government, in theory, is a great form of governance for our country. The issue is that greed and money are often placed before anything else, and as a result, democracy does not function properly. For a democratic system to truly flourish, an economic system that coincides with the values of democracy must be placed alongside it. Capitalism, however, is obviously not the answer, and a new economic system must be put in its place. By having an economic system that supports and cooperates with our political system of democracy, a United States that is actually free and “for the people” will become a successful reality.

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