

**The Reality of America's Government**

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### **Abstract**

Out of the four main theories of government, one ruled by a democracy, an elite class, pluralism, and hyper-pluralism, America is viewed as a democracy. However, that could not be further from the truth. A democracy implies that everyone's voice is heard, and nobody is left ignored. However, the United States is none of that and has only ever charaded as one. In reality, it is an oligarchy that is ruled only by the wealthy one percent, or in other words, an elite class system. American citizens, however, are often not aware of this and simply follow what they are told by the institutions that surround them. This is why an educated and informed populace is not only important but is necessary for a functioning nation. With this, America's current oligarchy could be replaced with a democracy that will be beneficial for all.

## **The Reality of America's Government**

America, since its creation, has been considered to be a democracy by all citizens within and outside of the nation. Democracy, or the voice of all, accounts for all ideals in a group of citizens and listens to their wants and needs. However, America has never truly been a democracy for the people. Since its beginning, it has struggled with listening to the voices of marginalized people and completely disregarded minorities. Today, many of these struggles can still be witnessed in America's legal system, where the rights of few are prioritized over the rights of many.

Others, in more recent times, consider America to be a pluralist country. This means that it is ruled by multiple groups and makes decisions based on the main voice leading each of these groups. However, while there are many political groups in America, their voices and main ideals are ignored and gone unheard. Some argue that this is because America is not a pluralist country, but a hyper-pluralist one. A hyper-pluralist system is paralyzed by too many voices all vying for a word in edgewise. But, because there are too many groups that sprout up to counteract the voices of a previous one, the legal system is rooted in place because to make one group happy would mean to make another unsatisfied.

Above all of these, however, is one system that describes the United States the most closely, and elite class system. This is the idea that all of American politics, and for that matter worldwide politics, are controlled and managed by the wealthy class. If they want something changed or postponed, through money they will be able to do so. America is ruled by elitism because by looking at the state of the political and economic system, it is clear who has more rights. The elite are able to buy their way out of courts with lawyers, find loopholes in the government with expensive knowledge, corrupt government officials with money, and much

more. Recently, in order for someone to even be able to run for president, they must campaign to the entire country. And, because of how our government is structured, campaigning is extremely expensive and not a viable option for the average citizen. Having a country run solely by people who gained their positions through money and power leads to a system that only benefits that specific class with little to no hope for the rest.

### **A Structuralist Approach to American Institutions**

The question of America's democratic status has occupied the minds of Americans for decades. With some people claiming America a democracy fit for all citizens and others claiming otherwise, it is imperative that American citizens are knowledgeable on the subject of America's system status. This knowledge, however, requires research, and the research essential to adequately answering this question is not only complicated, but the choice of how to conduct said study is a question in itself. An institutional approach to the debate would include government intervention of information and the separation of the economy and the ruling system. Furthermore, it is a simplified approach compared to a structural approach, which would examine all assets of the government and come to its personal conclusions based on all gathered information. For these reasons, a structural approach to answering the question of whether or not America is a democracy is necessary in order to achieve unbiased, in-depth perspectives and nuances.

While the simplification of complicated subjects, such as politics, helps more people to understand the system of governing that they are under, it is often too oversimplified. This oversimplification then leads to misunderstandings and disagreements, because neither side fully understands the topic they are discussing. This is because institutional sources, like school textbooks, "focus on one institution (as opposed to multiple institutions) and at one point in time

(as opposed to how an institution develops over time)” (Steinmetz, 2019). This one-dimensional way of viewing the government completely ignores any other potential factors that affect the government and its ruling. Mass media, journalism, public opinion, and more all have heavy effects not only in law making, but in ruling as well. Sources such as these usually fail to draw connections between the government and the economy, even though both are heavily intertwined. Oftentimes, capitalism will interfere with the government due to the fact that “giant corporations now control such key industries as energy, telecommunications, steel, autos, home appliances, many food products, and so on” (Alperovitz, 2006). These corporations can make decisions within these industries that have the potential to shape the lives of millions of working citizens within those lines of work. The government allows this because of the money they earn from said corporations. Ignoring their realm of control is nigh impossible due to the sheer amount of power large companies hold over America’s metaphorical head. In relation to democracy, capitalism will leech off of its ideologies in order to gain advantage over citizens. With this said, some institutional viewpoints acknowledge this inseparable connection between democracy and capitalism, but they claim instead that the two are inherently linked and need each other to thrive. One article claims that “countries at the top of the GDP per capita rankings are, in fact, democracies” and because America has the highest ranked GDP per capita in the world, the author “concludes that the theory that capitalism leads to liberty is far from being disproved” (Bailey, 2007). However, this fails to acknowledge that correlation does not equal causation and, as a structural perspective addresses, it is incorrect in its conclusion. They claim instead that “Capitalism, as we can see across the globe, is compatible with all different kinds of political regimes: liberal democratic, communist, autocratic — and now illiberal democracies, too” instead of just democracy (Amico, 2020). This shows that a simplified approach, as seen

here, often jumps to conclusions for the sake of simplification, which is an error that, if gone too long unresolved, will result in the spread of false information to those researching from an institutional method of study.

The government, however, prefers history and law to be taught in a simplified manner. This way, citizens will be less knowledgeable on important political subjects and less likely to vote for an official out of office or create mass change within the system. To keep this order, the government and “some state constitutions even empower state authorities to select textbooks and educational materials. Besides constitutional authority, state governments also have authority to legislate in this area, or they can authorize officials to establish, select, and regulate curriculum” (FindLaw, 2018). This regulation has prevented the spread of opposing information and can be used to skew details and result in any desired direction. Because authors of textbooks know their book will only get chosen if they write about the positives of the system, there are no incentives by the institutions to write about opposing forms of governance. This is why textbooks end up with the same repetition of the government is good, and all other forms of governing are bad. And it has worked. One study found that young Americans “are 10-30 percent less likely to know stories unfavorable to their political party” and even less when it is not related to mainstream news (Angelucci, 2020). For citizens, only knowing information retained by their own political party gives them less knowledge on how to deal with differing opinions. They will most likely agree with whatever they are told to agree with, never branching out and discovering new information about the world around them. This is good news for the government, because if less people have ideals that deviate from the social quo, less change will happen. This lack of change then leads to the same small group of people reaping the same benefits they have had control over for decades.

However, this has also led to an increase in distrust between American citizens and the government. One study detailed how they “found that just one in four young adults trust the federal government...[and] found young adults perceive government leaders as disconnected from communities, have low levels of political engagement or activity, and have a skeptical view of the role of government and of working for the government as a vehicle for change” (Grimshaw, 2022). Because the government is able to control what young people read, institutional books and lectures are more often than not a form of controlled information that is cherry-picked for public use. After the initial release of public statements, there is often more information that is revealed within the situation long after the fact. As the public learns more about the government’s previously hidden knowledge, the distrust between them grows larger, and the American administration almost always downplays the extent of their lies in an effort to control the situation. A structural approach would not attempt to cover up this blatant distrust between citizen and official, and instead would point it out as a problem, saying that when there is high public distrust, “members of Congress are less willing to allocate funding” and “the public is less prone to support and cooperate with the administrative state” which “damages every aspect of government” (Morgan, 2019). Structuralists want the public to be aware of their situations and surroundings, which is why they have no qualms with pointing out the downfalls in America’s ruling system. America, however, does not want to admit to this problem, which leads to more and more citizens beginning to question the government’s different motives. With structural research, citizens are better equipped to push back on and point out unfair governance.

Even with all the facts to support it, the government has ignored these claims of potential biases they show when selecting information for Americans to view. If people want to delve further into their understanding of America’s supposed democracy, an institutional standpoint

would claim that everything is well and “the people are citizens of the democratic state, not its subjects... This relationship of citizen and state is fundamental to democracy. In the words of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson in 1776: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...” (Bureau of International Information Programs [IIP], 2013). However, a structuralist would claim that the declaration itself was not written on the basis of democracy, and the institutionalist view is ignorant of that. Instead of blindly trusting the word of those in charge, they are willing to speak out against their lies and reveal the truths of America’s foundation. One article talks about how “America was built by the labor of enslaved people. It was also built on stolen lands and the genocide of indigenous peoples” (Ostler, 2020). And, while a textbook may briefly note how this is true, they will often brush aside the severity of the situation in order to focus on the freedom and independence gained by America. In fact, recent rulings in North Dakota have begun to ignore the concept of widespread racial discrimination altogether, because “the law now is saying that whenever a teacher talks about racism, they may only describe it as a product of an individual's own biases or prejudices. They cannot describe it — even when the facts command them to — as something more endemic or embedded within American society” (Gross, 2022). Many other states are predicted to follow this example of the removal of “critical race theory” in classrooms, as well as other topics such as sexism, sexuality, and gender. These egregious teachings would never have been introduced into education if those making the laws and regulations researched slavery and the history of America from a structuralist perspective. This is because a structuralist has no incentive to hide any information away from the public, and as a result is oftentimes a more trustworthy source of data.

An institutional view on capitalism and democracy is not much better. One government textbook points out that “in theory, a democratic government promotes individualism and the freedom to act as one chooses, instead of being controlled, for good or bad, by government. Capitalism, in turn, relies on individualism” (Krutz & Waskiewicz, 2021). This claim supports the reasoning that capitalism and democracy are similar in how they work, and thus work together to promote individualism. However, these forms of individualism are inherently different. Democratic individualism supports the decisions made by citizens to cast certain votes and believe in personal ideologies. On the other hand, capitalism’s individualism only supports those already in the system and, unlike a true democracy, decimates the lives of those who do not have the same opportunities as those at the top of the system. Another article claims that “for capitalism to flourish, it needs the heady and stimulating oxygen that democracy provides. When capitalism respects the intrinsic dignity of simply being human, the demos is an exciting place to be: one where all can flourish” (Alton, 2023). However, capitalism almost never respects the “dignity of simply being human” and instead grants power to those who abuse the system and destroy those who are unable to take advantage of it. Never does it praise humans for being simple, because it always requires more competition and fighting in order to win. In addition, this argument is also flawed, because it does not touch on the harmful effects capitalism has on democracy. Capitalism feeds off of democracy, using it and its citizens to grow itself, disproportionately funding the 1% while leaving the other 99% behind. Institutional claims do not go further into what capitalism is and how it affects democracy, even though it greatly affects the lives of American citizens, who are told time and time again that they are living under a democratic system. These blatant lies are harmful to the younger generation of Americans, and so they need to be taught this information through a structural view, in other words, a view that

will not obscure the effects of capitalism and will be willing to explain the delicacies of America's political system in much greater detail.

The oversimplified misinformation spread by institutional organizations and perspectives only aid in further alienating American citizens from their government. Every incentive hidden within government-selected textbooks, articles, websites, and more damages the integrity of the nation and the people's trust in it. Structural teaching has the knowledge and potential to properly teach American citizens about their government. With no incentives to skew data, a structuralist's main goal is to spread awareness and create change in the political sphere, for true change has not occurred in many decades. If enough people take the time to educate themselves on the American government, their role as a citizen, and what they can do to enact change in the current system, they have the ability to make the world a better, more accepting place for all. Institutionalists ignore the intricacies in teaching politics, in favor of keeping things the way they are, but a structuralist is not afraid to speak their thoughts, free of whatever the government may want of them, and this is a goal all American citizens should have.

### **The Illusion of Change to the Status Quo**

To determine whether or not the status quo will change depending on the next elected president, it must first be defined. The status quo is the current and usual state of affairs the country abides by. Currently, the United States is economically run as a capitalist nation and politically viewed as a democratic one. However, the state of the United States' democracy has been put into question as the government continually creates laws and systems that benefit an oligarchy as opposed to a democracy. America is an oligarchy ruled by a select group of people and that not every voice in the United States is heard and followed through. With this said, whether America is viewed as a democracy or not, the existing system represents the status quo

and it will not change if either Biden or Trump are reelected. A popular political tool, known as the political compass, allows average citizens to find where they reside on a grid that measures a libertarian viewpoint with an authoritarian one and the left with the right. Both Biden and Trump, when tested and placed on the compass, end up extremely close to one another in the authoritarian-right segment of the graph. This occurs because although the two have differing viewpoints concerning social expectations and laws, they share many of the same political and economic ideals because they have the same incentives as a part of the one percent, have little control when compared to the other branches of government, and share the same political and economic ideals. Unless a president who does not satisfy these terms is elected, the status quo as America knows it today will not change as it has no incentive to. The systems in place directly undercut and demoralize the average citizens of America while not so secretly benefiting the wealthy ruling class.

The capitalist status quo supports the elite class by removing the rights of the poor through a series of policies approved and passed by the wealthy class. This same system makes it near impossible for this disadvantaged majority to change the system as a whole to better benefit themselves. The wealthy ruling class can prevent this change despite the upper-upper class only making up less than one percent of the American population, thus why they are called the one percent. The rest of the population is split between the middle and working class, which, due to little money and power, have little influence over the system as a whole. In fact, Biden and Trump themselves are heavily involved with the prestigious upper class in America with a net worth of 10 million and 2.6 billion respectively (Alexander, 2023). Because of this, both Biden and Trump have had no financial and sensical reason to uproot this harmful system and lose a vast amount of their wealth. In addition to this, a great amount of their colleagues, sponsors, and

advisers shares this amount of wealth as well and highly discourage the removal of the existing capitalist system.

A socialist or communist economy may better benefit the country as a whole depending on its needs. But as it is, the economically poorer classes have little to no power over the economic system as a whole if they decide to shift away from a capitalist system. And, even if they did have control, 57% of Americans would rather keep the capitalist system in place because, according to research conducted by the Pew Research Center, “Americans see capitalism as giving people more opportunity and more freedom than socialism” (Doherty & Oliphant, 2022). However, this public view is steadily shifting as the younger generations take more power and enact their voting rights. The average person is also left purposefully uneducated on matters such as these so that the ruling class has no competition or public outcries. To anyone in the American schooling system, it is clear that “American high schools on the whole do a very poor job educating students about basic economic and financial literacy” (Czelusniak, 2020). And if new members of the public are unable to properly take care of their own financial needs, it is highly unlikely that they will know the intricacies of capitalism and why it needs to change. This also creates a system that keeps the same families in power while the poor are locked out. This recycled wealth is yet another reason the capitalist system will not be removed any time in the near future. Biden and Trump have successful careers that they will likely pass on to their heirs that have the same incentives to do the same as they grow older.

In addition to their incentives, the presidents themselves end up having less power over the system as a whole when it comes to determining and changing the status quo. Only making up one of the three branches of government, it is highly likely that, even if Biden or Trump wished to, they would not be able to make any substantial change. For example, if the president

were to attempt to enact a law that shifted the power from governing officials to the people in order to create a more democratic state, the legislative branch would likely “override his veto by passing the bill again in each chamber with at least two-thirds of each body voting in favor” (“The Legislative Branch”, 2010). These congressmen and women depend on a capitalist and oligarchical system to stay in power because of the money they require for campaigns and elections but cannot do so without the support of many corporations. These same corporations support the status quo that helped them to power and wish to stay that way for as long as possible. Even if members of Congress would rather not depend on corporations and their ideals, they often have no choice for, as Eric Lipton, an investigative news reporter, put it in an interview, “there's an incredible pressure on them to just constantly be asking for money. And it's unfortunate. And, you know, as I was saying it creates a sort of perverse incentive to try to not alienate the same industries that they're supposedly regulating” (Gross, 2014).

Both Biden and Trump have made their stance on America’s political system clear. They want democracy, and they blame each other for its continued downfall. In a campaign speech held in Iowa, Trump claims that “Joe Biden is not the defender of American democracy, Joe Biden is the destroyer of American democracy” (Riccardi & Price, 2023). On the contrary, Biden in a political speech as well said “MAGA is the threat to the brick and mortar of our democratic institutions” (Milligan, 2023). Although clearly separated in who they think is to blame, they still want the same thing for America, a democratic system. This means that if either are elected, the political portion of the status quo will not change from an oligarchical one to a democratic one. This is because they already believe America will be a functioning democracy if they are in charge and will make no effort to change it otherwise. In fact, a majority of older generations of Americans themselves view America as a democracy already, while younger generations are

concerned over its supposed democracy (Helmstetter & Fraser, 2023). With the older generations making up most of the votes in the United States, their opinion is often viewed as more valuable. If either candidate spoke out against the common belief, they would likely be ignored and even despised for their seemingly outlandish opinions. While not expressly stating that America is a democracy, Cornel West, a third-party presidential candidate, urges the for ideals “driven by everyday people raising critical questions and striving for a needed ‘democratic awakening’” (“Cornel West Speaks”, 2011). This shows that while Biden and Trump are firm believers in democracy under their lead, other significant candidates in the 2024 election are not as sure.

Economically, they agree on many of the same things. The United States’ current status quo, using capitalism as the main form of economy, is the correct choice for the country. Trump, with all his past business expenditures is an unequivocal capitalist who “treats the presidency as his personal business from which to profit” and “is a hereditary capitalist who is behaving in such an unprecedented way in the presidency” (Nimtz, 2019). This is an aspect of himself that he translates into presidency and wishes to further in terms of laws, bills, and more. When Trump was president, and if he will become president again, the status quo will not change from a capitalist one. Much of the same will occur if Biden is reelected as he too believes in a capitalist system as opposed to a socialist or communist one. The difference here is that he supports a different form of capitalism, for “Joe Biden is reviving democratic capitalism” which was “was replaced by corporate capitalism, organized to serve the monied interests” (Reich, 2023). Biden’s democratic capitalism, however, still falls under the current status quo and will not make any great amount of change to the system as a whole if it is implemented. In spite of this, many people still believe Biden is not capitalist but instead socialist. If this were true, him being elected would represent a great change in the status quo, however, it is not true. This was pointed

out by self-proclaimed socialist, Ben Burgis, where he notes that “hardly anything [Biden]’s done since assuming the presidency — or even anything he’s *advocated* doing — comes close to the short-term policies advocated by socialists” (Burgis, 2022). Both candidates view capitalism as the proper system to live under and will refuse to change it in any major form if they are elected as next president.

When it comes to the next candidates, Trump is more likely to gain support if he openly supports the capitalist system. This is because “more than eight-in-ten Republicans (84%) have a negative impression of socialism; a 63% majority has a *very* negative view. Nearly two-thirds of Democrats (65%) have a positive view of socialism” as according to the Pew Research Center (Hartig, 2019). Biden, on the other hand, has to keep his support of capitalism private due to the number of Democrats who support political stances that are not capitalism. Biden has created a “‘diverse cabinet’ and abstract calls for national unity, [which] pay lip service to ‘woke’ ideas” which is all done “to give the impression of change while leaving capitalism’s fundamental social and property relations intact” (Peterson, 2021). With this tactic, Biden is able to gain more supporters without having to make any substantial changes to his policies. This means that whether Biden or Trump win, the status quo will stay the same.

If Trump manages to remove Biden from office in the next election, Americans can expect much of the same in terms of the status quo. While socially America may see many changes in its policies, the United States will stay a capitalist, oligarchical system with false hope in its change. In order for Americans to truly see change in the political and economic system, they must elect a president who is open about their intentions and truly wishes to change the system for the better. As of right now, however, neither candidate represents any notable change in policy. This is shown visually through their close proximity to the political compass and

through their many similar economic policies. From an outside perspective, the former and current presidents seem to share little to no ideals, but in reality, they have the same ideas, but just go about them in a different manner. This brings into question the stark divide that occurs between the two main political parties in America. As violent arguments continue to thrive in our political climate, it would be logical to assume that the two sides share vastly different views. However, with both Biden and Trump sharing many of their political and economic ideas, it casts doubt on how many differences there truly are between Democrats and Republicans. For example, when placed onto the political compass, both parties tend to fall in very close proximity to one another. This is why it is important now more than ever for American citizens to speak out about what they believe in and to vie for tangible change in the current corrupt and harmful status quo.

### **Conclusion**

America is a corrupt, oligarchical system that masquerades as a democracy to please the people. As of right now, the elite class system only harms its citizens and paves no path for future generations. This is the current status quo that Americans live under, and unless a large amount of change can be achieved by the people, there is little chance for any substantial modifications to the status quo.

However, this does not mean that America will never change. Education represents a great start to many revolutions throughout time. If people were taught the truth in American governance through a structural approach, the reality of the United States' failing democracy would quickly become evident. With this knowledge, citizens from all over the nation would have the power to speak out against the elite class that holds them down. Currently, a majority of the population is taught, if at all, that America is a fully functioning democracy. They get this

information through repetition from politicians, institutionalized school education, and various points of views from friends and family. In addition to education, the drive and desire for a new status quo must be felt and pursued by Americans. If people knew the truth of the system, it would not be hard to gather enough Americans together to fight the inequality that runs rampant in the United States.

America should be ruled as a democracy, not by an elite class. Citizens deserve to have their voices heard because this is their home just as much as it is the wealthy's. Decisions right now are not made in the public's best interest, because the ruling class has no incentives to do so. The ninety-nine percent of Americans, made up of the working and middle class, have no control and say over the actions of those in charge. They have no money to campaign and no power to hold over others.

Change will not be immediate, for the current system is so deeply rooted and controlled by money, that people will have to unravel its intricate involvement in politics. However, with proper education and enough time, there is a tangible opportunity for citizens to gain power and equality for all. As it is right now, America will collapse under its current ineffective system. It is clear that change needs to happen soon in order for the people of America to thrive as one democratic group of united people.

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