

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of a Just Government

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Abstract

After winning its independence from the British monarchy, the United States established itself as a democracy made by the people, for the people. In a country that's citizens are guaranteed the basic and fundamental rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", one would imagine that individual freedom would be the most sacred and upheld value of the United States' ethos. Over the course of its history, however, the United States has devolved into a state of disarray, corrupted by corporate interference and one-sided capitalism, in conjunction with a representative democracy that is only representative of corporate America, not the American public. Under the guise of a democratic nation that provides every citizen with an equal opportunity to prosperity, the United States government covertly operates under the condition of keeping the top one percent comfortable, a status quo it has tirelessly worked to maintain for decades. In the face of the true American government, a corrupt corporate oligarch, one must ask themselves a very serious question: What type of government is needed in order for the American people to truly flourish.

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of a Just Government

When determining what kind of government the United States of America actually operates under, debate sparks regarding four different possibilities. The democratic theory of government suggests that the United States abides by true democratic principles, and that the country is governed by its citizens. The pluralist theory puts forth that the United States has become full of politically diverse groups, so much so that the possibility that any of these groups will dominate the others is nonviable. Pluralism's more extreme variant, Hyper-Pluralism, suggests that if the many political factions within the United States amass enough manpower, these groups will be capable of obtaining power over the country. The final theory of government, the Elite Class theory, proposes the idea that rather than by the people, the United States government is controlled by corporate America and the top 1% of American society.

Though arguments can be made about each theory's accuracy when describing the United States government, the Elite Class theory of government undoubtedly holds more ground than its contenders. Though many key points suggest that corporate America plays a huge role within the U.S. government, two of the most damning sources of evidence come from the nation's economy and its presidential elections. When structurally analyzing American capitalism's relationship with democracy, alongside a critical observation of the U.S. presidential election and the actions taken by those in office, a strong, bountiful relationship between corporate America and the United States' government becomes alarmingly explicit. By means of a corporate rigged economy paired with corporate rigged elections, the United States of America has done an amazing job at maintaining a status quo that keeps the elite class of America in power over the working-class majority. In maintaining this status quo, the United States has established itself as a corporate oligarchy where a few controls the many.

Structurally Debunking Capitalism's Alliance with Democracy

Since its conception succeeding the revolutionary army's victory against Great Britain, the United States has been considered a democracy in which all men are created equal, and therefore are given equal say in how their nation is run. Alongside this system of government, the U.S. has also been run under capitalism, a laissez-faire economic system in which free markets compete with one another for prosperity. But throughout its development as a country, the United States has shown signs of deterring away from its democratic roots. Under its modern day standing as a capitalistic superpower, "[t]he top 1 percent now garners for itself more income each year than the bottom 100 million Americans combined" (Alperovitz, 2006, p. 1-77). How can the United States claim to give equal political power to its citizens while being so divided economically? This proposition is often argued by two opposing sides, with structuralists suggesting that the relationship between capitalism and democracy is much more complex than the idealized alliance that institutionalists often perpetuate. In reality, capitalism makes little room for democracy with its classist nature. By design, the system under which the U.S. operates grants political power to those that can afford it, not those who are granted it by virtue of being a citizen.

Using the structuralist approach, we can identify how capitalism affects the freedoms granted by democracy. Instead of power belonging to the people, it has become increasingly more evident that true political power lies in the hands of the elite. In the last few decades, the U.S. has directed its attention towards its corporate sponsors and has prioritized bestowing upon them ultimate political power (Urie, 2023b). In a compilation of expert opinions created by Amico (2020), Archon Fung, a Professor of Citizenship and Self-Government at Harvard, states that "Democracy is a system of government in which people make laws and policies together as

equal citizens. But under capitalism, capitalists tend to like to make the laws and policies” (para. 15). While fundamentally the United States’ democratic foundation makes way for political equality, it will never reach its full potential due to the power imbalance posed by capitalism. CEOs, corporations, and name-brand organizations are the entities responsible for a majority of government funding, and therefore their vote and propositions are put before those of the common citizen.

Capitalism is a system that operates via survival of the fittest; strong businesses continue to grow and smite their weaker competition in the process. The problem in correlating this with democracy is that the power gained via economic competition is not distributed fairly between business owners and the working class. Through a structuralist scope, it can be observed how unfair this division between employer and employee is. Instead of the majority that is the working class receiving fair amounts of revenue relative to their labor, it is the overarching and minority elite who accumulate large profit, and thus it is this minority who is granted the power awarded to those who stand at the top of the capitalist-food chain (Wolff, 2020). Consequently, it is this same minority that also receives the political power needed to make real changes in society. Under capitalism, the working class are given very little opportunity to climb the economic ladder, and therefore are held back from truly participating in government.

Although the wealth circulating throughout our nation has for years been steadily concentrated, some people believe that growth of the economy in America equates to better living conditions for the middle and lower class (Boyer, 2006). This is, however, a false narrative, and, in reality, an increase in national wealth simply means that corporations are receiving more profit, whether that be from the labor of their employees, or through global trade, while the working class is left unaccounted for. The reason why corporations are able to

concentrate the nation's wealth is because they are, as mentioned previously, kept safe by the government from being beaten out by competition. Because the wealth in America is distributed only amongst big corporations and businesses, citizens are not given a fair opportunity to adequate monetary gain, especially by U.S. standards. In the first quarter of 2021, the top one percent controlled almost forty-two trillion dollars while the bottom half of America controlled roughly three trillion (Leonhardt, 2021).

With the money that large corporations are able to accumulate under capitalism, they can fund the political elements they deem beneficial for their profits, and thus use their economic power to influence the government and mold laws to their liking (Reich, 2009). Instead of the peoples' vote making a difference, it is the money which our nation receives from these various businesses that ultimately influence the policies that are established and the decisions that are made. Instead of capitalism being kept on a completely different plain than that of American democracy, it has instead festered itself into every aspect of our social, economic, and political lives. Rather than a competition for wealth, citizens have found themselves in competition for political power.

The very politicians whom we as a democracy "elect" to run our nation are in all reality chosen by the large businesses that fund them. From a structuralist perspective, the influence that corporations have over electoral outcomes becomes very evident. Political parties prioritize identifying with their sponsors rather than U.S. citizens, and the policies of these parties are themselves based on what appeals to aligning businesses, not what benefits the average American (Tabb, 2006). This, in turn, is why our government opts to defy true capitalistic principles by bailing out heavy-hitting corporations. Capitalism supports free-markets, and as such supports businesses that fail to be wiped off the map. The 2008 bank bail-out, however,

tells a much different story about American capitalism, one that proves corporations are not held nearly to the same standard that average Americans are (Giglio, 2022). The reason why the banks were not left to dwindle after a crash caused by their own fraudulent practices is because the banks were big contributors to the republican party and president George W. Bush, which in turn justified their salvation via tax-payer money.

In the age of corporate dominion, big businesses prioritize their profits over what actually benefits society and the environment we live in (Bakan, 2006). Democracy is a system that promotes the citizenry's control over all aspects of life, and thus we the people are to be given a say in what is good for our environment and what is not. With American capitalism, citizens are given little say in the policies that are passed to support corporate operations, harmful or not. One of the biggest problems that face the United States as a result of corporate corruption can be seen in the nation's healthcare system, which through reports are shown to be supported less economically when a nation is corrupt (Griffin & Mackinnon, 2021). Under the policies that are implemented by corporations in order to keep business running smoothly, citizens are subject to lackluster care from institutions that were intended to be accessible and entitled to all. The money that flows from these corporations and into the government results in things such as healthcare being neglected so that businesses receive the support they require in order to maximize profit.

The lengths to which corporations are willing to go in order to keep their businesses thriving contribute to the debilitation of popular sovereignty (Street, 2006). In the age of modern-day American capitalism, decisions made by the government can be seen as beneficial to corporate America, not the nation's citizens. It is these decisions, policies, and regulations that have made way for globalization, a system implemented in polar contrast to the public's best

interest. International trade between capitalist nations is a system that benefits owners of participating corporations and businesses, but not the employees of these establishments or the citizens who live amongst them. Instead of promoting fair competition between businesses in return for profit, globalization has introduced an entirely new system under which unknowing citizens are subject to economic turmoil at any given moment as a result of businesses losing in competition with international opponents (Fernando, 2023). What really makes this a blow to sovereignty is the fact that globalization is not something commonly supported by the public and is in fact a system spoken out against due to the threat it poses to our own nation's economic well-being. As a result of globalization, funding for public services amongst other things are set aside in place of corporations keeping up with international competition and doing so by any means necessary (Street, 2006).

In addition to sidelining the funds necessary for public-based institutions to operate as intended, globalization has also made way for an even larger rift between social and economic classes. While the top one percent have already been mentioned, their role in corporate America and to what extent they can manipulate it is equally important to note when discussing their power over America's lower classes. While it is not guaranteed that all members of the one percent are owners of big corporations, the concentration of stock holdings suggests that they do receive money from these businesses and in turn entrust a lot of their wealth within them (Domhoff, 2006). Though it is a given characteristic of capitalism for the upper class to hold stakes when it comes to economic competition and to be a part of the monetary cycle, their ability to participate in corporate affairs gives them an advantage over lower class citizens. In doing so, the upper class are provided with the power to interfere with corporate relations and are given authority that no one else otherwise would not be granted. Correlating to their economic

power and involvement with big businesses, the upper class are granted political power in the form of what businesses they choose to support, and what party these businesses fund. Through a chain of wealth distribution, money from the one percent eventually finds its way in office.

From a structural perspective, it would appear that government positions are often bought or at least supported by the wealth of the upper class. Rather than politicians being elected by the vote of the people, they are funded into office, under the condition that they abide by the corporate quota. This can be seen in the amount of money that politicians spend to support their campaigns, with presidents enlisting millions and even billions of dollars towards their run for office, most of which is provided by the top one percent (Lewis, n.d.). While an institutional analysis of American democracy would suggest that our president is elected based on the popular vote of the Electoral College, through a structuralist lens it becomes clear that money plays an equally large role in who is placed in charge of the country.

What does this all mean for America, and, more importantly, democracy? The relationship between capitalism and democracy is a tricky thing to dissect, due to how often they are analyzed by two polar perspectives. On one side, institutionalists argue that capitalism creates a strong middle class (Bailey, 2007) and promotes economic equality amongst the people to coincide with their political equality. On the other side, structuralists closely examine the corruption that plagues American capitalism, turning it into an unfair system where corporations hold concentrated dominion over the working class.

Because of the inequalities brought about by capitalism, both social and economic, the pillars that hold up the foundation of American democracy begin to crumble, and, as some scholars argue, have already been reduced to rubble. The reason why it is important to approach the question of whether or not the United States is a democracy from a structural perspective is

because through this perspective you are given insight into the division of classes and power created by capitalism. While its conceptual intent may have been to promote equality amongst citizens via an equal playing field on which everyone has the chance to achieve prosperity, capitalism as we know it has done little to give the working class a fighting chance. Structurally speaking, capitalism and democracy are not compatible with each other, particularly in their current state, because American capitalism rewards the rich who, because of the inability of the middle and lower class to significantly rise financially, maintain their wealth and use it to their advantage for political power. Instead of pretending that capitalism and democracy match with one another and benefit off of the other's policies, the structural approach aims to expose capitalism's corrupt nature and the threat it poses to true democracy.

A Race to Maintain the Status Quo

In concept, the United States presidential election is an outlet for American citizens to choose a leader whose policies they agree with, and who they believe will effectively run the country. Over the course of its history, however, the presidential election has shown signs of drifting away from its intended purpose. What was once competition between politicians with differing ideals has now mutated into a scream fest between two "politicians" who, on the surface may seem different, are actually more alike than the American public has been led to believe. It appears that 2024 will see a rematch between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, two individuals who the media tends to categorize into completely separate and opposing political factions. As it would turn out, however, Donald Trump and Joe Biden do not differ much from one another in their political stances. For decades it has been made more and more evident that the United States has one goal in mind; that is, to keep the elite class comfortable despite what negative effects it may have on the lower classes of American society (Segelken, 2013).

Considering how similar our two candidates for the 2024 election truly are, one must not imagine too hard that the chances of this status quo being altered are slim.

Though the American public has been persuaded by both sides of the political spectrum to blame the other for the United States' flaws, it would appear that this manufactured conflict is a guise to cover up the "political incapacity of either party to legislate in the public interest" (Urie, 2023a). Despite the narrative that our presidential candidates differ in their beliefs, outlets such as the political compass, designed to determine one's political identity via survey, help visualize how narrow the line between "democrat" and "republican" has become. By analyzing results taken from the 2020 presidential election, it can be observed how both Joe Biden and Donald Trump are categorized as being right-wing authoritarian, with Donald Trump scoring only a few paces ahead of 2020 president elect Joe Biden (The Political Compass, 2020). Instead of what is commonly glorified as a competition between completely different candidates, the presidential election has devolved into two members of practically the same party competing for the authority to fund and support the corporations that they favor (Knapp, 2022).

Rather than politicians using their power to instill the policies that won over their voters, the presidency has become a figurehead where the president is controlled by the corporations that put him in office (Urie, 2020). This relationship between the United States government and corporate America has played a huge role in maintaining the country's economic and political status quo, that being to keep the 1% up top. These two elements of the economy and the government work hand in hand to ensure that the top 1% maintain power, with politicians being put into power according to who corporate America deems useful. During his presidency, Donald Trump and his administration bailed out hundreds of oil companies, a majority of whom had been major monetary contributors to the Republican Party (Moore, 2020). Similarly, Joe

Biden approved an eight-billion-dollar oil operation, the Willow Project (Turrentine, 2023), despite his “ambitious U.S. goal of achieving a carbon pollution-free power sector by 2035” (The White House, 2023). In this instance, it becomes evident that Biden and Trump’s goals may align with one another more than was previously thought.

This revelation poses a confusing question: If both parties are so similar, why does the divide between democrat and republican appear to be so great? From a baseline understanding the answer may be obvious; neither side agrees with one another on their policies and beliefs. Though this is true to an extent, the fact of the matter is that what is disagreed upon between democrats and republicans often has little to do with their respective party’s overarching plans and goals for the country. Oftentimes the public is put against one another over the most relatively minuscule issues, meanwhile our two (what we can now identify as nearly identical) parties work almost harmoniously behind the scenes to deal with the real issue at hand: maintaining a corporate oligarchy (Johnstone, 2020). These issues are often perpetuated by either side to amass followers and entice conflict amongst rival party members, with the end goal being that one side will overwhelmingly vote for their party simply for the sake of not giving the opposition a chance in office (Pemberton, 2018).

For further evidence regarding how conglomerated both the Republican and Democratic party have become, take Dr. Cornel West as an example. Having announced his running for president in the summer of 2023, Dr. Cornel West is by all definitions a liberal, yet opposes the idea of campaigning as a Democrat. This is because similarly to most American intellectuals, Dr. West sees the Democratic party, and likewise the Republican party, for what they really are; corrupt, corporate backed organizations with almost identical agendas (McCarley, 2023). The American presidency has become so thoroughly saturated with corporate interference that

candidates who align with either major political party are not able to identify with it, because their titles no longer hold weight in comparison to true democratic and republican principles.

While it is easy for the Democratic party to blame Donald Trump for the United States' problems, one must acknowledge the harrowing economic deterioration that this country has been experiencing long before the Republican Party assumed office in 2016. Since the early 1970s, the top 1% of Americans have amassed even more wealth for themselves, meanwhile the impoverished classes of American society have fallen victim to a static poverty rate of 13% (Poole, 2019). Since 1970, two Democratic Party members have held office, and both accomplished little to alleviate the rapidly increasing state of economic inequality within the United States. With this in mind, it's hard to place the blame entirely on the Republican party for the hardships experienced by working class America, furthermore when considering how similar the Democratic and Republican Party align. What is being observed is the responsibility to maintain the status quo being exchanged between both parties, and the means by which either party does this are their only differing qualities.

In addition to maintaining an economic constant throughout the United States, Joe Biden and Donald Trump also share a fondness for surveillance. While Trump found himself constantly outed as an unhinged tyrant by fellow politicians, Joe Biden could be found bragging about his involvement with the Patriot Act of 2001 (Cook, 2021). As homage to the act which was passed as a result of the September 11th attacks, Joe Biden proposed a new bill in 2021 that aimed to increase the amount of surveillance used in the United States as a guise to prevent future domestic terrorist attacks (Savage, 2021). Similarly, the Trump Administration sought the green light to allow the National Security Agency to reactivate its Call Records Program, a program through which the agency could gain access to the American public's phone records (Savage,

2019). These two instances, involving two supposedly different factions of the United States government, help illustrate how similar both the Democratic and Republican parties operate.

The American government, in a sense, has become conditioned to accommodate corporate needs, lest they be penalized with a decrease in funding, which could be detrimental to the party in office (Genovese, 2002, p. 162-166). This predicament has resulted in both parties becoming indentured servants to the big businesses that fund them. Because appealing to corporate America is the main goal of both the Republican and Democratic Party, both factions' policies revolve around maintaining tender relations with big party donors. It is by means of "lobbying, exerting media influence, funding nonprofits, sponsoring think tanks, [and] paying speaking fees" (Teachout, 2018) that corporations dominate the American government, and because of their contributions and overall involvement within affairs, both domestic and international, that the politicians in office are made obligated to bend to corporate America's will.

Due to how deep corporations have nested themselves within the nooks of the American government, little wiggle room has been left behind for the American public to actually have a say in what goes on in the country. In an article written by Thomas Ferguson, the Director of Research at the University of Massachusetts, Ferguson cites data gathered by two researchers, Benjamin Page and Martin Gilens. In their data, taken from nearly 2,000 cases in which policies were proposed by the public, the pair concluded that the American public has almost no influence over policy making in the United States (Ferguson, 2020). The public's ever-dissolving influence over the nation's policies is a direct result of corporate America integrating itself into office through years of donating to campaigns and familiarizing itself with both parties. Because

of how prominent corporate support for both the Democratic and Republican Party are, corporate America has solidified its position as the puppet master of the United States government.

To prevent third parties from interfering with government-corporate affairs, both major parties have resorted to essentially bullying third party candidates out of running, whether it be via lawsuits or outright prohibition from public debates (Nader, 2021). These actions taken by the two major parties have made the possibility of a third-party candidate holding office impossible, which is essential to maintaining the United States' economic and political status quo. Because a third-party candidate may pose a threat to corporate America in that they may challenge its corrupt involvement in the United States government, the possibility of a third party, anti-corporate candidate holding office must be smited before it's conception. By doing this, corporate America eliminates what little opposition exists towards its hold on the American government.

Despite what public members of either party tend to believe, both the Democratic and Republican party have more shared beliefs than they do differing. In both their economic and political policy making, the two major parties make apparent in their affairs a tireless effort to maintain the status quo in the United States. Unlike the opposing political teams that the Republican and Democratic party are portrayed as, both work in conjunction with corporate America to sustain the top 1% 's power over the nation. The once conflicting ideals of both parties have since devolved into a common, corporate goal for both the Democratic and Republican party. No matter what slight change in policy is made by the party that holds office, little is ever done by either side to place a halt on corporate corruption within the United States' government. The only differences between the Democratic and Republican Party, rather than their political beliefs, are which corporations paid for their seat in the White House.

Upon analyzing this data for what it is, a foreseeable change in the political and economic status quo of the United States seems anything but possible. If Joe Biden is elected for a second presidential term, public members of the Democratic Party will be under the false pretense that the nation is being further rectified of Trump's past wrongdoings, meanwhile little will be accomplished in actually righting the wrongs bestowed upon the working classes of America under the rule of the corporate oligarchy. The re-election of Donald Trump would lead to a similar outcome, though corporate America's affairs with the United States' government will be concealed under the guise of Joe Biden and the Democratic Party's wrongs being resolved. Essentially, either party will blame the other for the country's issues, all the while engaging in the very same behavior that the opposing party was villainized for. The year 2024 will not see a battle between Democrat and Republican in an effort to make America great again, but instead will see a fight between big business to keep America the same.

Conclusion

After reviewing numerous pieces of data ranging from raw statistics to the frightening outlooks held by scholars, how merged big business and the United States government have become is now all too clear to be ignored. What was conceptualized by our Founding Fathers as a land for the free and home for the brave has manifested into a corrupt corporate machine, fueled by purchased policies and figure-head politicians. For decades the United States has flaunted itself as a republic for big business, not for the people. To put an end to the corporate oligarchy's death-grip on the nation, the American people must be afforded the right to truly vote for the politicians whom they believe are effective candidates for the position. No longer shall corporations be able to rely on government bailouts when a bad business move is made. No longer shall presidents be bought by corporations and placed in power to do the elite class's

bidding. The American people must fight for the right to have a say in what goes on in their nation, just as was intended since the country's conception. To end corporate America's reign, a true democracy must be established within the United States. Under this government, big businesses will have to suffer the consequences of business mistakes. The elite class, regardless of their monetary status, will possess no more political power than the common man. With an equal say in government, the American public will be able to establish policies that benefit the people, incorrupt policies that guarantee the right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

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