

**Always ‘We the Rich and Powerful’ and Not ‘We the People’**

Amelia McCall

Department of Social Science, College Park High School

United States Government

Teacher – John Kropf

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### **Abstract**

The United States government is a fickle thing. It seems like every two to four years we are fighting for our lives in elections when in reality nothing will really be all that different. The one thing that all Americans know to be supposedly true is that we live in a democracy that is the foundation of the beautiful land of the free and home of the brave. This is nothing more than a dream, a fantasy that has been told to us since the country's founding to allow the elite class of people in America to prosper off of others' misfortunes. America is not a true democracy. There is no voting to drastically change things. The people running the government are happy with their spot at the top and are protective of the capitalist society that makes democracy a thing of dreams. The country we live in is not built for drastic equalizing change, and we will have to fight tooth and nail to get what we want, which is a true participatory democracy; to finally be "We the people" and not "We the rich and powerful".

### **Always ‘We the Rich and Powerful’ and Not ‘We the People’**

*“I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.” - James Baldwin*

Growing up as a kid in America, it is damn near impossible to escape the barrage of messaging saying that we are living in a great democracy and that we are the freest nation. We are the birth of modern democracy. We are responsible for all free countries in the world. We were taught that our vote matters, and that our opinions mean something. America is a democracy, and that’s that. Any other theory is null and void because the people in charge say so, end of story.

Well into the 21st century, that messaging is getting harder and harder to believe. The rich seem to keep getting richer and the poor poorer. We have been taught our whole lives that there is only one correct answer to the question, what kind of government do we have, but the answer doesn’t seem to fit quite right. Sure, the people of a certain town have a great say in who their mayor is, but as you go up the political ladder “We the people” have less and less power to influence anything being decided.

There are four theories of the American government: Democracy is the first and most advertised, next comes the elite class, hyperpluralism, and pluralism. The elite class theory is just what it sounds like. It says that the country has two ruling bodies: the ruling class, the people with the money, and the politicians, the people who get bought by the people with the money. These groups can and do disagree, but the one thing that they all agree on and protect with everything they have is the status quo. They want things to stay the same and for them to remain the only people in power. Lower-class Americans should not be able to have a say in the decisions being made. Pluralism is the idea that the country is run by different interest groups who ultimately have the power to shape public policy. People are able to find a group that aligns with their political, economic, and social views, and through that group create change for the U.S. Hyperpluralism is considered to be a perverted form of pluralism. It is the theory that there

are too many groups pressuring the government to adopt their policies. One group will always be favored over another, and that is not democracy. There are too many people focusing on too many different things for the government to actually be productive.

When looking at the state of the U.S. now, it is pretty easy to say that people are not satisfied and do not feel listened to. There are far too many people in our country living with far less than what they are worth, and there seems to be nothing we can do about it. So, is America a democracy? No, no it is not. America is ruled by an elite class that thrives off the 99% being too hyperpluralist to actually demand change in an effective manner.

In the world that we live in, the politicians who represent us do not actually represent us, they represent the rich and the powerful. Capitalism makes it damn near impossible to have a real democracy because there will always be a small number of people at the top who control everything. Politicians and the ruling class work together to keep the status quo; they want Americans to blame each other for their woes and not realize that the status quo that we live in is the problem, keeping the rich rich and the poor poor.

### **Corrupt Corporate Capitalists Debase Democracy**

*“Capitalism is against the things that we say we believe in - democracy, freedom of choice, fairness. It's not about any of those things now. It's about protecting the wealthy and legalizing greed” – Michael Moore*

Without capitalism, we would not have the birth of America. The founding fathers wanted democracy and believed it could only be achieved through adopting capitalism as our economic system. While always having its flaws, capitalism was the right system at the time of America's conception for the people conceiving it. However, when we look deeper using a structural approach, we see that it was laying the foundation for the death of the very thing the founding fathers claimed they wanted. Democracy cannot survive nor thrive in a capitalist system; therefore, America today is not a true democracy. Despite the Constitution's first words being “We the people”, it was never made to apply to every American citizen. The men creating

the country already had large amounts of capital, and financial assets, so they were able to have a say in what the country would look like and wanted to keep the power they had.

Capitalism only promotes and supports democracy if everyone has an equal opportunity to acquire and maintain capital. From the very beginning, that was never the case. The slaves in America, the ones that were only considered 3/5ths of a person, were never allowed to earn money, let alone invest it if they even lived long enough to see the end of the Civil War. The indigenous people of the Americas were given population-decimating diseases and forced out of their lands, with no chance to engage in the “free market” and own property. The definition of a democracy is “a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections” (Miriam-Webster, 2023). There is no reasonable way that definition can be applied to America back then, let alone today. When representation hinges on who pays the most money, and who can be bought, there is no situation where a true democracy is upheld because capitalism is more biased and unfair today than it was at the country’s founding.

It is irresponsible to think that America today is a democracy, and while it has more liberties than many other countries in the world, the idea that we are free and have a say in the country that we live in because of the capitalist economy that we are forced to survive in is foolish. This essay will present a structural approach to the question of whether or not democracy can thrive in a capitalist system. Examining the structure of how the government is run and seeing how it has changed to fit into the world we live in today is a better approach than an institutional one which only really looks at how the government is supposed to be running and doesn’t take into account how those institutions have changed from their original design. While you could argue that the institutions of government that we have today are designed to thrive in a capitalist system, looking at the structure of how they have shaken out says otherwise.

The first point that can be made in favor of using a structural approach to answer the question of whether or not democracy can survive in a capitalist system is that we, in America,

do not have elections that change anything or reflect the true interests of the people that they are supposedly serving, despite what the institution of elections was supposed to do. Elections cost money. That is a plain and simple fact. That being said, the amount of money that is spent on convincing people that a candidate will create lasting and meaningful change is staggering and quite honestly gross. In the 2019-2020 election alone “presidential candidates raised and spent \$4.1 billion in the 24 months of the ... election cycle” (Federal Election Commission, 2021). The entities in this country that have the money to support this scale of spending are the corporations that have a lot to lose if things don’t go the way that they want in those elections. Because of this, and the support that the corporations provide, the people who lead the Democratic and Republican parties are people who will be lenient with these entities and listen to them more than they will listen to their constituents. In 1974 congress passed the Political Reform Act of 1974 which would require “the truthful and accurate disclosure of campaign contributions and expenditures during elections.” (Independent Expenditure Committees, 2020). This act was supposed to regulate the amount of money that was spent on elections and require the candidates to be forthcoming on the amount of money that they accept from an outside party, usually large corporations and people with an unethical amount of wealth. This “regulation was supposed to restore confidence in government, yet the percentage of Americans who trust their government to ‘do what is right most of the time’ is half what it was before the 1974 act, and campaigns themselves seem nastier and less informative” (Smith, 2006). The American people do not trust their government to do what is right. The structural approach says that if we let the corporations contribute monetarily more than they already do, the government would become even more entrenched in the wiles of capitalism. The institutional approach says that if corporations can back campaigns, then the people would be more informed in their choice of president because they would have more money to spend on reaching their audience. In reality, regular voters have only heard what the corporations want them to hear, which is

good for the corporations, but blinds the rest of the citizens to the reality of who they are voting for.

The effects of the 1974 act were eventually rolled back in 1995 with the *Federal Election Campaign Act* and later the Supreme Court decision, *Citizens United v. FEC*. This decision rolled back the existing regulations on corporate funding for campaigns even further. It was a 5-4 decision and was decided under the notion that it violated the 1st amendment, saying that regulating the amount of money spent also regulates the free speech of the candidate. This decision still affects the US to this day because “we are left with a campaign finance system where wealthy special interests can use unlimited secret spending to drown out the voices of everyday Americans” (Lyon, 2022). A true democracy makes sure that everyone’s voice is heard. People may not get their way all the time in a democracy. In fact, a lot of times they will not, but their opinions and comments are all given an equal platform on which to be heard. With the Supreme Court decision in 2010, we have gotten further and further from that idea of a true democracy. When corporations are allowed to spend as much as they want for a campaign, and candidates need money, we see a shift between caring about the opinions and well-being of the American people to caring about the opinions and well-being of the corporations that fund the candidate.

We as citizens of a democracy deserve to have a say in who is in our government and deserve to have our interests represented, but “the candidate-selection and policymaking processes belong primarily to the top 10 percent of Americans that own 73.2 percent of American wealth” (Street, 2006). When voting outcomes are ultimately decided by the people with the most capital who want to keep that capital, it is not a true democracy. We may have a choice as to who we vote for president, but those choices were put before us, having already been chosen by the people who have more money, and therefore more power than us. We, as common citizens, have the urge and the drive to do something about the issues that we face today. And while “the will to act politically is necessary, [it is] not sufficient, to affect political outcomes”

(Urie, 2023). When candidates can be bought and paid off by the highest bidder, the people who never had the opportunity suffer. Because of how skewed toward the entities with pre-existing capital the capitalist system of today is, regular people do not have the opportunity to get their foot in the door. Most of the wealth in America is held by a top few and the people who are not in that top few have an extremely hard time getting capital. The elections that these everyday people vote in hoping to change the world in which they live, mean little to nothing because of the wealthy people that want to keep regular people poor so they can keep getting their way.

If we look at pro-capitalist and institutional arguments, “the beauty of a capitalist economy, we are told, is that people who work hard can get rich without making others poorer” (Macfarlane, 2020). The idea that we can rise above our economic class through hard work is an idea that is intrinsically tied to capitalism. Before our current economic system, we had feudalism. Almost all of the lower class lived on land that was owned by a lord, and part of any of the crops or goods that were harvested or made on that lord’s land would go to the lord. This system was in place for hundreds of years; then people got fed up with it, and capitalism was born. While that is a very simplified version of the events, it gets the point across that people were sick of the life that they were forced to live. People did not like that they could not move into different social classes, and the class that they were born into was the one that they would usually die in. Capitalism was supposed to fix all of that, but if you look at the United States today from a structural viewpoint, most of the people born into a social class die in that social class, and we still have people at the top who control everything. The heads of corporations must do everything in their power to remain there. In the world today “capitalists must block employee majorities from undoing the workings and results of the capitalist economic system and especially its characteristic distributions of income, wealth, power, and culture” (Wolff, 2020). In modern-day workplaces, the employees severely outnumber the employers. Through the eyes of democracy and the idea of majority rules, if there is a problem at the said workplace, all the employees would have to do to change it is to vote to have it changed. This is not



something that is common today. People who own corporations want to maintain their station in the capitalist system, and so they take away the freedoms and rights of their workers, wanting them to stay poor so they have to continue to work there for less than they are worth, all so that the people at the top can get more and more money and capital. Being forced to work in a workplace where you have very little say, in your need to afford food, housing, and other necessities, offers very little room for the success that you were promised if you just “worked hard”.

In a true democracy, freedom of choice is something that is stressed. You should be able to choose what you do with your life as well as what you choose not to do. People are forced into these soul-sucking, mind-numbing jobs because they have to be. Quality health care in America is not available to all people because “big tech companies like Amazon or Facebook can attract star talent by offering compelling benefits, including health care” (Nguyen, 2021). Healthcare, something that a lot of people would argue is a human right, is not supplied to the American public because private companies want to be able to offer it so that people will come and work for them. Even though it costs the companies a vast amount of money to provide said healthcare, they still want it to be privately funded because it makes people come and work for them (Duncan, 2023). In using a structural approach to look at how capitalism compels people to take away the natural rights of people who have less than them, one can realize that “the constant pressure in capitalism to generate income is a form of coercion that differs from having a gun pointed at your head, but in essence, it has the same results. Without fully realizing it, we've all been trapped within a prison that has been meticulously constructed to make it feel like we are exercising free choice when in reality we're just choosing between different ways of not starving to death. We're all compelled into the market whether we like it or not” (Duncan, 2023). Even in our everyday lives, the democratic system that we have been told that we live under is not surviving under capitalism.

Capitalism and corporate greed are not things that the American public is ignorant of. All people want stable, well-paying jobs and a lot of them can't get these jobs because of corporate greed. In a 2006 focus group, "68 percent of the people viewed corporate greed as an 'equally important' or 'more important' cause of working families' economic woes than big government—nearly half say corporations are the 'more important' cause." We, as a people, are aware of how much companies have screwed us over. We want something to be done about it; we want to be protected in our right to live a meaningful life. "79 percent of Democrats in the groups [that were mentioned earlier], 67 percent of Republicans, and 74 percent of ticket splitters say the economic and human impacts of these corporate behaviors are serious enough to warrant purposeful government intervention" (Hightower, 2006). Most Americans want roughly the same thing: our government to do something about the way that we have been living, and to make it so that we return to a more democratic state where the people, not corporations, are listened to. But that is not very likely to happen, nor has it truly happened in the history of the United States of America. It takes a lot more money, time, and effort on the side of the government to listen to its people and implement important and lasting change than to just listen to the people running the companies the people work at. Workers have to work extremely hard to ensure that their rights: a livable wage, decent working conditions, and stability, are being given to them. We can see this clear as day with something as recent as the WGA strike in LA where the Writers Guild of America and the Screen Actors Guild were on strike for 146 days just so that they could ensure that their writers and actors could earn a livable, and sustainable wage in the age of streaming (Frank, 2023). Strikes are proven to work, despite how grueling and harsh they can be. The American people have to fight tooth and nail to get the rights that they deserve, but that shouldn't be their job. The government should protect the rights that are given to the American people in the Constitution, but it does not because capitalism has corrupted it. The government says it cares about the average working person, and claims to want to make positive change for them, but "why would politicians meet with workers when they can

meet with the owners and bosses who are imagined to represent the interests of workers” (Urie, 2023)? It’s easier and more lucrative for the government to listen to heads of companies and corporations than the people working for them.

In true capitalism, the government would not interfere with the economy, a true “free market” as they say; but what happens when the economy interferes with the government? The people at the top of the capitalist system want to stay at the top of the capitalist system, and the way for them to do that is to control the government. Therefore, using a structural approach, and reviewing other opinions on the matter, it is clear that democracy cannot thrive in a capitalist system. When the average citizen in America does not have a vote that matters, nor a job that offers any stability or opportunity for growth which leads to people not truly being able to choose where they work, that is not a democracy. This country was never made to be a truly thriving democracy. The institutions may seem like they would lead to that conclusion, but when a closer look is taken at the structure of the institutions of government, the capitalist corruption and bribed brokenness become apparent. Capitalism feeds greed and self-interest despite its claims “to create innovation and creativity, but all it does is kill [them]” (Duncan, 2023). When you have people who are only looking out for themselves and their monetary interests as opposed to the interests of humanity and a nation as a whole, you are bound to not have a true, thriving democracy. Those people do whatever they can to take democratic power from less advantaged people to maintain the capitalist economy and their place in it. When you have people who matter more to the government than other people purely based on how much money they have, which you can see is the case in the U.S. today through a structural approach, it proves that democracy cannot thrive in a capitalist system.

### **Biden’s Bluffing and Trump’s Trickery**

*“The status quo is the only solution that cannot be vetoed” - Clark Kerr*

As we all know, very few Americans are actually satisfied with their government. We as a country have seemingly become so polarized and divided that each side demonizes the other.

With claims like “Biden is a communist” and “Trump is a fascist” being thrown at every turn, and debates meant to address serious issues plaguing the U.S. being turned into a battlefield of off-topic and unimportant insults, it is hard to imagine that a “status quo” is within the realm of possibility when describing the state of our country. And yet, there is absolutely a norm and steady state of affairs where the U.S. government and economy are concerned.

When talking about the “status quo”, it is important to know what all it entails: “poverty, wealth inequality, racial wealth inequality, income inequality, wage stagnation, the cost of higher education (and student loan debt), homeownership (and racial inequality), corporate taxation, taxation of the rich, union density, incarceration rates (including by race), labor force participation rates, healthcare costs, climate change, and life expectancy” (Poole, 2019) just to name a few. All these things are common knowledge to the average American. I cannot remember a time when I didn’t know that people go into crippling debt just to be able to afford a higher education, something that they are told will help them get a better-paying job, and I have always known that white women “earned 82 cents for every dollar a man earns” (Dowell, 2022), and that it is far worse for women of color.

The question at hand is whether this status quo will change depending on who wins the 2024 election if it turns out to be Biden v. Trump again. Taking into consideration the platforms that each of them is choosing to stand on, what each of them did and did not accomplish during their respective presidencies, and the change, or lack thereof, to the status quo from other switches of the political party in the past, it can be concluded that no, the status quo will not change all that much whether Biden or Trump wins. This, however, is a very narrow view of what is a very complex and deep issue. So we must take into account other relevant factors that play into this, which include but are not limited to: the opportunities that each man would bring to different groups of people, their limited power, and whether or not democrats keep their weak hold of the US Senate, or, conversely, the Republicans maintain their floundering control of the House, and the threat that young people pose to our government as we know it. Biden and

Trump are both only one man in a system that is much bigger than them, despite one of them likely winning the 2024 presidency. Neither is likely to change the status quo all that much, but that doesn't mean that it won't change in one way or another if one of them is elected.

The best place to start when tackling a question as big as this is to look back and see what each president promised to do during their term and whether those changes actually came into play with a lasting impact on the country. After looking at what they did and did not do to improve the conditions in the U.S., it will make it much easier to infer whether or not they will alter the status quo in the future.

Biden is running on a very similar platform as he did in 2020. This is all well and good, but his lack of success on his first campaign promises, and actions flat out going against what he claimed to want to do have diminished faithfulness in his ability to deliver on these promises. In 2022, "Congress enacted the Inflation Reduction Act in August 2022, the largest piece of climate legislation in U.S. history" (Lashof, 2023). Among other things, this act included a "\$1 billion grant program to make affordable housing more energy efficient", "grants and tax credits to reduce emissions from industrial manufacturing processes, including almost \$6 billion for a new Advanced Industrial Facilities Deployment Program to reduce emissions from the largest industrial emitters like chemical, steel and cement plants", and "more than \$20 billion to support climate-smart agriculture practices" (Stevens, 2022). This act was a huge step forward in the right direction to solving our imminent climate crisis, and if you were to just look at that it would be proof enough to say that Biden will change the status quo.

But just like with a pendulum, a huge swing in a certain direction leads to another in the completely opposite one. In March of this year, the Biden administration approved the Willow Project. This approval will lead to tens of thousands of more acres in Alaska being used for oil drilling. This project, if completed, will lead to a "release [of] an additional 9.2 million metric tons of carbon pollution into the atmosphere each year" not to mention the massive amount of infrastructure that will need to be built in the near pristine natural landscape of the drilling site.

The approval put \$8 billion into the pockets of the gas and oil industry, one of the main contributors to the worsening state of our climate (Turrentine, 2023). Yes, this project will create more jobs, but that is what the Inflation Reduction Act was supposed to accomplish without worsening our climate position. Yes, the Biden administration has made significant strides in fixing the climate crisis, but it has also fallen into the same pattern that most of its predecessors fell victim to: giving money to short-term solutions that will hurt us in the long run. Projects like the Willow project will keep popping up, taking away trillions of tax-payer dollars and using them to fund environmentally disastrous, non-sustainable, lucrative companies that simply want to keep their place in the economy. There are so many more examples of this, the President saying he will do one thing and doing it, but then doing something that will make the progress he made near null and void. The bottom line here is that with one swing in a certain direction and one swing in the opposite, the average leads to there being little growth in the areas that were promised to be drastically changed. The status quo in terms of the climate crisis has remained relatively unchanged, despite Biden claiming he wanted to make progress in this area.

Biden is not the only president to fall victim to this trend of promising something, but not delivering. Trump was just as bad, if not slightly worse. There are the obvious campaign promises that were never, in a million years, going to succeed, i.e. “The Wall”, but there were also ones that were a little less mocked in the mainstream. In 2016 when Trump won the presidency, he promised tax cuts to all people. From the billionaires to the middle class to the poorest people in America. This did not happen. There were tax cuts, but the middle class did not see them to the extent that they were promised.

During his presidency, Trump was able to pass the “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act” or “TCJA”. This act was intended to, as the name implies, cut taxes and create jobs. Despite the stated goal, “in general, higher income households receive[d] larger average tax cuts as a percentage of after-tax income, with the largest cuts as a share of income going to taxpayers in the 95th to 99th

percentiles of the income distribution. On average, in 2027 taxes would change little for lower and middle-income groups and decrease for higher-income groups. Compared to current law, 5 percent of taxpayers would pay more tax in 2018, 9 percent in 2025, and 53 percent in 2027” (McClelland, 2022). One of the main Republican arguments for this discrepancy is that “the lower corporate rate and temporarily expanded business spending will spur investment in the United States, leading to more capital, and more productive workers. As worker productivity rises, firms will boost wages. All of this would happen gradually over the long term” (Sawhill, 2018). If this sounds eerily familiar, it’s because it is. It is the exact same argument that Reagan used to explain his “trickle-down economics”, and later the same exact economic strategy that Bush used. “According to trickle-down economics, Reagan’s and Bush’s tax cuts should have helped those at all income levels. But the opposite result took place: income inequality worsened. Between the years 1979 and 2005, the bottom fifth saw a 6% rise in after-tax household income. While this on its own seems great, it’s important to note that the top fifth experienced an 80% increase in after-tax household income. The income of the top 1% tripled, showing that prosperity was trickling up rather than down” (Finance Monthly, 2023). It has been proven time and time again that this economic theory does not work. Big corporations do not use the money to create a better economy for everyone. They use it to “[Add] profits primarily to buy back shares and boost dividends, not to invest” (Sawhill, 2018). The companies use the money they do not have to pay in taxes to make themselves wealthier not to pay people more, or give back to their communities. Once again, the status quo is unchanged. Trump made no real progress in any direction to the government as we know it. The middle class is just as worse off as they were before, and the rich just keep getting richer at the expense of the less fortunate.

A few years after the TCJA passed, the pandemic struck, and everything became uncharted territory. But even during a global pandemic, Donald Trump was unable to shift the status quo. With the TCJA not helping the middle class the way he said it would, one would

think that the former president would make sure that the aid he handed out during a global crisis would actually go to the people that it was advertised to help. This was not the case. In March of 2020, Trump signed into law the CARES Act. This was meant to bring the economic relief the country needed after the initial hit of Covid. “The CARES Act authorized direct payments of \$1,200 per adult plus \$500 per child for individuals making up to \$75,000, heads of households making up to \$112,500, and couples filing jointly making up to \$150,000” (The Investopedia Team, 2023). This seems like a great step in the right direction, but the act was trillions of dollars. A lot of the funds allocated within it ended up going to the already rich companies. “The stimulus checks were meant to get average Americans through the lockdown, but those \$1,200 payouts were small change compared with the billions in tax breaks the CARES Act handed out to the country’s wealthiest” (Sloan, 2020); once again the lower and middle classes were cheated out of well-deserved and essential aid in favor of the wealthy.

On top of measly payouts for the middle class, the CARES Act didn’t even see to it that the funds they were giving were allocated properly. As we all know, COVID-19 made our already floundering healthcare system take a major hit, and the act was supposed to help mend that, but a “May 13 Kaiser Foundation study found that hospitals with the lowest share of revenue from private insurance received half as much per hospital bed as their counterparts with the highest share. ‘All things being equal,’ the study found, ‘hospitals with more market power can command higher reimbursement rates from private insurers and therefore receive a larger share of the grant funds under the formula HHS used’” (Abramson, 2020). There has always been a disparity in the healthcare available to people of different classes in the U.S.—that’s the status quo—and Trump not even being able to fix that during a crisis, one that should have been a wakeup call to the elites in our country, is just further proof that he, as a president, is unable to change the status quo, and in reality, simply feeds it more.

It is not just Trump who has done this, practically ignoring the people who need help the most and giving that aid to people who are the furthest from needing it; “both parties ignore the



burgeoning corporate welfare subsidies, handouts, giveaways, and bailouts turning oceans of inefficient, mismanaged, and coddled profit-glutted companies into tenured corporate welfare Kings” (Nader, 2021). It is something that is deeply ingrained in our government, and neither Trump nor Biden is going to do much to fix it.

Clearly, these two presidents have not been able to do much in terms of altering the status quo in their respective 4 years in office. The evidence above, believe it or not, is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to that swinging pendulum of legislation that fails to change things. However, there is another approach one can take when looking to see whether or not the status quo will change with Biden or Trump in the 2024 election. One glance at how similar the presidents actually are in the vast spectrum of differing political ideologies will tell you that, politically and economically, nothing will really change with either of them.

When one thinks about different political views in the U.S., Democrats and Republicans are the first and only things that come to mind. This, however, is a very narrow and one-dimensional way to look at our political spectrum. We can view the political spectrum as a graph. The x-axis is the economic scale, and the y-axis is the social spectrum. To the left (left-wing): progressive economic policies that favor taxing the rich, strong business regulations, and government spending. To the right (right wing): conservative economic policies that favor reducing taxes, and limiting government spending and intervention. Going up (authoritarian): supports the state having more importance than the individual, and places power in the hands of the elite. Going down (libertarian): supports individual freedoms and holds that equality and distributed power are of the utmost importance. “A single-axis model conflates liberal and conservative ideologies with right-wing and left-wing stances, excluding the nuances that can exist in someone’s political ideals ... Instead of having to have left-wing mean liberal and right-wing mean conservative, the political compass proposes that we are better off measuring political ideologies on two separate axes: a right/left economic axis and an authoritarian/libertarian axis” (The Decision Lab, 2020).

The differences between the two main parties in the U.S. seem so large that one cannot possibly fathom that not much would change between one president and another. When we look at The Political Compass, however, we see that this is not the case. Trump and Biden are both in the top right corner to the far-right side, with Biden being one square to the left of Trump and two squares down (The Political Compass, 2023). This means, as explained in the paragraph above, that both men hold conservative economic policies and are very authoritarian; Biden is just a little less of each as compared to Trump, but when the whole spectrum is taken into account, the difference is almost negligible. Especially when you consider that Bernie Sanders, a man many believe could have beaten Trump in 2016 if he had been picked as the democratic nominee (Phillips, 2020), is near the middle but ever so slightly leaning towards the left and on the line between authoritarian and libertarian. He is about as far left as you can go and still have a modicum shot at winning the presidency. Sanders is absolutely not the end-all-be-all in liberal ideology. In fact, “in other western democracies he would sit squarely within the mainstream social democratic parties that regularly form governments or comprise the largest opposition” (The Political Compass, 2020). Should Bernie have been elected, there would have been a massive shift in the ideology held by the Executive Branch. This was not the case, however, and instead, we are left with two options that, according to the compass, are very similar. Most of the lawmakers in our country, both former and current, are all up in that right corner. Biden has lived there for his entire career; “he’s been an unswerving upholder of the status quo. Despite recent attempts to reinvent himself to accommodate the ascendant progressive wing of the party, Biden remains at heart an unimaginative conservative who, among much else, was a driving force for the catastrophic invasion of Iraq” (The Political Compass, 2020). While there is definitely a noticeable difference between the people who voted for either Biden or Trump, there really isn’t much difference between the two men themselves. This lack of difference in their ideologies makes it very unlikely that the status quo that we live in will change.

Beyond Biden and Trump, there is just not much difference between the two parties. Trump and Biden are products of a system that heavily favors the grossly wealthy, and wants to keep America the way it is. We are told so often that Democrats and Republicans are vastly different beasts. When you take the most radical of the respective parties, i.e. AOC for the Democrats and Marjorie Taylor Green for the Republicans, and give them the loudest voices, it can definitely seem like the difference between the two is night and day. Socially the parties are becoming very different, but economically and politically, the two main contributors to the status quo, are more like dusk and dawn, essentially the same. "Since 1970, the United States has experienced six-party changes in the White House, five party changes in control of the Senate, and four in the House of Representatives. It has also experienced seven recessions (and recoveries). Yet on critical indicators of economic, social, and democratic health, our index shows little improvement and, in many cases, substantial deterioration over this period" (Poole, 2019). We have had roughly the same problems in the U.S. for decades: the war on drugs, inflation, healthcare, human rights, and debt to name a few. How much progress have we actually made on any of them?

Yes, Biden forgave student loan debt, but he was only able to do it for a little while, and now all the people have to start making those payments again, and all new students entering and trying to obtain higher education still have to pay obscene amounts of money just to attend, so there was no real progress made there.

Yes, Trump was able to lower taxes for a small amount of time, but that time has passed and now the middle class has to pay more taxes than they did before while the wealthy continue to get tax breaks.

Biden has big talk about taxing billionaires, but when all is said and done, he still fills their pockets full of money, just like Trump, and all the presidents before him. "Both Parties sped [the] bailout of over \$50 billion to the airline industry during Covid-19, after the companies had spent about \$45 billion on unproductive stock buybacks over the last few years

to raise the metrics used to boost executive pay” (Nader, 2021). It is just like Biden said when he was first trying to obtain the Democratic nomination, ““We can disagree in the margins, but the truth of the matter is it’s all within our wheelhouse and nobody has to be punished. No one’s standard of living will change, nothing [will] fundamentally change,”” (Axelrod, 2019).

Each party wants to appeal to people of lower social status because they know that’s how they can win and continue to hold power in office. But this country’s government is not meant to truly serve the people who can’t afford to buy a voice in Congress. Obviously, there are people in government who try their hardest to make actual, lasting change, but they are outnumbered by officials who seemingly could not care less about the well-being of the people who cannot line their pockets with millions of dollars of bribe money. Both parties are filled with corrupt people in them that continue to uphold the status quo. “The Democratic party is not a vehicle for class struggle, after all. Like the Republican party, it is designed to preserve the privileges of an elite. Its biggest donors, like the Republicans, are drawn from Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and the arms industries. The political battle in the United States is between two parties of capital united by far more than divides them” (Cook, 2021). Trump and Biden are men who have not, and will not break out of this mold. If we can expect anything from them for certain, it is that they will always favor the rich, just like most of the other people in their parties.

With all of that being said, if there was a change in the status quo it would not come from either of the men themselves. So far, we have looked at what would change politically and economically, and have concluded that the answer is not much, but something that will change is the social environment in the U.S., and that can lead to a significant change in the status quo.

Trump is a man who has concluded that the best way for him to gain public approval is to make a sect of citizens in the U.S. the problem for all of our woes and then stir the pot to make all of his followers hate them. While they have never fully been accepted as ‘true Americans’, especially not after 9/11, Muslims, and Middle-eastern people in general, felt this to the full extent possible. Along with Mexican immigrants, Trump villainized them to no end, and

“Trump’s own blatantly anti-Muslim rhetoric has emboldened people to act on their prejudices, and hate crimes against Muslims have soared. In sum, Trump has created the most Islamophobic administration our country has seen” (Patel & Levinson-Waldman, 2017). Trump is a master at making a group of people into a scapegoat for the entire country. He has called Muslims “rapefugees.” It’s obvious that “Trump is an Islamophobic bigot. As president, his words matter. He is using them to spread hatred” (Klaas, 2019). It is words and statements like this that divide the U.S. more than it already is. Trump is reckless in his speech, and when misinformation and hate speech come from people in authority, it has more effect on the American people than if an average Joe were to say them. When we all hate each other, the likelihood that we will stop and look beyond ourselves to work together to actually change things is very slim.

Biden, while being an old rich white man and not representing most of America, has been mostly able to avoid villainizing parts of America. The man chooses his words more carefully when he does not stumble over them and is able to not insight new hatred. The research presented about Biden does not paint him in the best light. Despite this, with him as the president, one can rest easier knowing that a lot of social liberties are not in immediate danger. It is clear that Biden has not done enough to combat racism, wealth inequality, corruption, and more in this country, but having a president who is not actively trying to make his constituents hate one another is something that will help change the status quo. The less time we spend hating each other, the more time we can spend working together to force politicians to actually make change for the better.

This country has been stuck in its ways for so long, that the possibility of something changing is almost unimaginable. We are told from a very early age to “be the change that we want to see in the world”; well, it is hard to be that change when it seems like everything is working to keep things the way that they are. Trump will not “make America great again” and Biden will not “finish the job” that he has barely even started. Both feed into and continue the

status quo because it works for them. The members of Congress who are being paid off by Big Pharma and other corrupt industries in America are not going to change the status quo because they get rich off of it. It's a bleak way to look at America, but it is a situation that does not seem to be repairing itself and has not since the country's founding. At the end of the day, people will vote for who they think can feed their family, but in reality, neither option is more likely than the other to succeed in that. So, Biden or Trump? There is not all that much of a difference. I know which one I would rather vote for, but when all is said and done, no matter who ends up winning the 2024 presidency, promises will not be kept, the rich will keep getting richer, and it will be up to us to actually change things in the ways we want them to be changed.

### **Conclusion**

America is not the democracy that we have been told that it is. Elites rule us, and capitalism keeps us from having our voices heard. We are divided into too many factions to make any real progress. However, it does not have to stay like this. We may have an elitist government but that is not the government that we want, and we can see the status quo slowly starting to shift. The leaders of our country might not want it, and will probably actively fight against it, but there is no denying the powerhouse of young people that is starting to rise up in the country.

Most politicians holding office right now are controlled by greed and the wealthy people in our country are more than happy to fill their pockets in order to keep their status. If left to their own devices, these people would happily maintain the status quo and leave the rest of us to flounder. This has been true since the country began. When you boil it down, from Coolidge to Cleveland to Carter to Clinton not much has changed. If we let the country be, and let things go the way that they have been, it would eat itself. But nobody wants that to happen. Since the country began, people have been trying to change it. We all want America to succeed and have a true democracy.

2020 was a wake-up call. It lit a fire under our collective butts and made us realize how badly things need to change. Since then, the young people in our country have been taking a far more active role in the political scene. From millions of them mobilizing to stop The Willow Project to a near unanimous agreement that we do not want to fight in useless wars, Gen-Z has woken up with a fire in their eyes.

It will be by no means easy to change the country that we live in. If history is anything to go by, it will be a long, bloody, and brutal battle. This country is not built for change. It likes itself the way it is, and a disturbance to that will not be taken well. But Young people have seen the devastating world that we live in today, and they are angry about it. It might take over a hundred years to change what we all know and do not love, but it will be changed. We want a participatory democracy, one that actually listens to the majority, one that is not simply in place to keep the top 1% at the top, and if we learn to work together, that is what we will eventually get.

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