

**An Exercise in Political Misery**

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### **Abstract**

Although the United States of America likes to portray itself as a nation centered around freedom, prosperity, and equality, it has failed to meet any of these standards. Its long history of inequality is largely the fault of the capitalist system which the country operates on. This system has facilitated the continuation of an oligarchical political system, also referred to as the elite class. Through their wealth, the elite class have been able to influence the proceedings of the American government to rig the system in their favor. They are responsible for the litany of laws, regulations, and systems which unfairly target the poor as well as those which operate on favoritism for the rich. This relationship between the rich and the government makes it so that America cannot honestly be called a democracy. In a democracy, every citizen would have the same amount of influence on the government as their peers. This influence would be independent of the financial situation of a citizen. The democratic system is what Americans should seek to work towards via intensive, nonviolent organization of the people. However, before America can become a democracy it must first be rid of the capitalist system which facilitates the control of the elite class and ensures inequality. That system should ideally be replaced with socialism or at least a system with socialist principles. While democracy and capitalism clash with each other due to their opposing foundations, a socialist system would compliment democracy and ensure a freer and more equal America economically and politically.

### **An Exercise in Political Misery**

If the average American is asked what kind of country the United States is, it is likely that they will say that it is a democracy. Yet when the American system is examined more closely, this answer makes little sense. While it is true that every American is granted the right to vote when they turn eighteen, these votes do not all carry equal weight. From gerrymandering to cognitive tests, the United States has a long history of implementing discriminatory practices that prevent certain groups from having a real effect on government. These practices make the American political system inherently unequal, which is in direct conflict with the core values of democracy. These issues are not hidden either, many Americans are aware of this. Despite this, their answer to this question will more often than not be that the United States is a democratic country. This is because that response is ingrained into the minds of Americans from a very young age. The inner workings of America are presented as idealistic and simple. Everyone has one vote, those votes all have the same value, and the candidate with the most votes from the people is who wins the election. Americans are offered no nuanced perspective of this system, which in turn creates a stunted political vocabulary in Americans. Due to this, many believe that no alternative answer exists. America is a democracy; it has always been a democracy. That lack of knowledge is a disservice to the American people, because as much as the American government may want its citizens to believe democracy is the only answer to this question, it is not.

Political theorists have come up with three alternative answers to this question besides the typical answer of democracy: pluralism, hyperpluralism, and elite class theory. Pluralism and hyperpluralism come closer to addressing the core of how America operates politically. Pluralism argues that the government is influenced by a variety of different political groups.

These groups utilize collective action in order to push the government into passing or blocking laws in accordance with what the members of the group want. Building off of this theory, hyperpluralism suggests that too many groups are currently active. These groups clash with each other so much that they have created a stalemate between opposing political sides, which in turn causes a lack of governmental action. These two theories correctly diagnose part of the issue with the American governmental system. There are many groups, such as the NRA or big pharmaceutical companies, which have a significant influence on governmental proceedings. However, these explanations fail to address the true nature of these systems and their influence: money.

Elite class theory, on the other hand, is able to most accurately explain how the United States government actually works. Elite class theory proposes that America is essentially an oligarchy. There exists a small group of very wealthy people who are able to use their wealth to influence the government and ensure that the rest of the country has little influence on the government. The elite class works very hard to deceive the average American into believing they live in a democratic country. That deception is what has created a country in which political division has ballooned out of control. By convincing average Americans that they hold equal amounts of power, the elite class has successfully distracted the rest of the country. Since Americans are too busy fighting with each other to band together, the elite class can continue to wield disproportionate amounts of power and mold American society in accordance with their ideals.

The ideals of the elite class will only ever serve them. For the rest of the country, they spell disaster. The only way to ensure that the standard of living for Americans will improve is to shift into a new status quo entirely. A real form of democracy, in which every vote matters

equally regardless of money would improve American quality of life. The country will finally be molded by the will of the people, rather than the will of those with the most money. Therefore, policies which help a majority of people will have a higher likelihood of passing than they currently do. In order to reach that system, America will first need to shift away from capitalism towards a more equitable economic system, preferably socialism. Similar to democracy, socialism is based on “collective ownership...and administration”. The difference is that this value is applied to “means of production and distribution of goods” rather than political organization, according to Merriam-Webster. The similar foundations of these two systems would lead to a society in which the political and economic organizations cannot destabilize each other. Instead, they would reinforce one another and ensure that the freedoms of American citizens are more thoroughly protected. Switching to such a system would require the American people at large to have a more comprehensive understanding of their own government than currently exists in American society.

### **Democracy and Capitalism: An Unhappy Marriage**

In the same manner that American citizens are taught that America is a democracy, they are also taught that America is capitalist. Democracy and capitalism are presented as the best political and economic combination possible. Americans are told both systems are the root of the freedoms that they supposedly enjoy. Class mobility, according to this doctrine, is more achievable under capitalism than any other economic system. Under it, anyone can become rich or just work their way out of poverty. This leads to the claim that capitalism is based on the ideal of freedom. Therefore, democracy, a system also purported to be based on freedom, presumably works perfectly alongside it. Americans are constantly told how each and every one of them can have the same effect on the government. They are fed the narrative that their votes all have an

equal amount of importance, and the representatives they vote for will abide by the values held by a majority of the American people.

However, as previously mentioned, America is far from a democracy, which leaves Americans with the task of figuring out how their government actually operates. In order to answer this question, two methods of examination have formed. Institutional analysis keeps itself confined to American institutions. It analyzes the American government in a vacuum instead of in the context of how capitalism operates on a global scale. By ignoring the effects of capitalism, institutional analysis refuses to challenge any form of a capitalist economy. It assumes that democracy and capitalism truly are the best systems. Structural analysis, on the other hand, does take global capitalism into account. It delves deeper into how such a system has shaped the American government. This level of depth allows structural analysis to question the claims about capitalism and democracy that institutional analysis accepts. Due to this, the question of what government the United States operates under can only be answered through a structuralist approach. An institutionalist view offers little clarity on the way our government operates because it neglects to mention the larger context of global capitalism which, when more closely examined, can be identified as the root of the erosion that America's supposedly democratic process has been experiencing for decades.

A big issue with institutional analysis is that while it utilizes a correct definition of democracy, that being a system where "responsibility for the exercise of [government] powers rests with a majority of the people" (Shay, 2023), through its neglect of capitalism, it assumes that this definition can be used to describe both systems. Through this definition, institutionalists come to conclusions that have been proven false through numerous studies on the American government and economy, chief of which being "capitalism is a necessary condition for political

freedom” (Friedman, 2003). Although institutionalists may be willing to concede that a capitalist economy is prone to unequal and predatory conditions, they still defend it as the best system currently available. According to them, capitalism’s basis in the value of freedom is what facilitates a free society. To say this shows their failure to look outside of the relationship between democracy and capitalism they are told exists. That failure leads them to support this claim with evidence that does not hold up under scrutiny. The ideas they propose not only ignore the ways in which capitalism disables the democratic process due to confirmation bias, but also only look for evidence that proves a point which has prematurely been deemed correct. One such piece of evidence is the claim that the wealthiest countries tend to be democracies and therefore capitalism must exist for democracy to exist. This is backed up by looking at countries that are “at the top of GDP rankings” (Bailey, 2007), a source which in itself is biased. The GDP, or Gross Domestic Product, ranks countries based solely on the amount of money they make off of their exports and domestic product sales. That only matters in a capitalist economy. Therefore, the countries which rank the highest on the GDP will be capitalist or at the very least utilize capitalistic principles in their economy. Looking solely at the top players of capitalism has a built-in bias that accepts capitalism wholeheartedly. At the same time, this evidence mistakes a correlation between the countries at the top of the GDP and democracy with cause and effect.

There are other factors that lead to a society in which most democratic countries tend to be capitalist other than an inherent harmony between the two systems. Namely, powerful capitalist countries historically have interfered in countries that try to switch to alternate economic systems. The United States is especially guilty of this, having been involved in many “forced regime change[s] and military coups in Latin America ” (Bensaid, 2018) due to the region’s history with socialist and communist movements. The fact that such extensive

intervention is necessary to prevent a switch to an alternate economic system immediately calls into question the supposed perfect marriage between democracy and capitalism. Beyond that, it disproves the claim that capitalism must exist for political freedom to exist. It suggests that the opposite may be true since agencies such as the CIA must infringe the political freedoms of Latin Americans in order to prevent a movement away from capitalism. This leads to a society where the people fundamentally disagree with their economic system, meaning their political beliefs have been discarded. They are not politically free; they are held back by pro-capitalist interference. Latin Americans' lack of political freedom leads to the need to question institutionalist claims. How can a system based on freedom possibly require so much infringement on the freedoms of others to survive? The answer is that the primary value of capitalism has been incorrectly identified. It is not freedom, it is greed.

The goal of capitalists is to acquire more capital. Capital typically refers to “a resource that provides for increasing wealth through direct investment or capital project investments” (Hargrave, et al., 2024). More often than not capital is money, although it can also refer to resources such as a building or labor. The pursuit of increased capital more often than not requires an extreme form of individualism. This aspect of capitalism is often misrepresented by the claim that the individualist aspect simply causes a freer society in which everyone is in charge of their own economic future. In reality, the individualistic nature of capitalism rewards those who are willing to put the rights and safety of other people below their want for more capital. The very beginning of capitalism bred this sense of greed through colonization and slavery. The practice of destabilizing a society and then forcing its members to work for their captors' ties back to the core tenet of capitalism: wealth accumulation. We still feel the effects of these systems today in the form of the wage gap. A 2022 study found that on the basis of gender,



“American women typically earned 82 cents for every dollar earned by a man”. This statistic only becomes more troubling when race is considered, in which case the study found that “Black women earned 70% as much as White men and Hispanic women only earned 63% as much.” (Kochhar, 2023). This disparity is a remnant of the practice of slavery in the United States. In order to justify the unpaid labor they received, European capitalists created a racial hierarchy that had no basis in reality. They deemed Africans subhuman, which stripped them of their right to be compensated. Those same capitalists and their descendants continued to create similar hierarchies for other minority groups. The line of logic that they presented boiled down to “if women are weak and emotional, it is right for men to control their bodies and wealth; if blacks are childlike pagans, it is right for whites to ensure their physical and spiritual survival through enslavement and conversion” (Hoschchild, 1995). Not only did this defense strip marginalized groups of their economic rights, but it also stripped them of their democratic rights. Even after abolition, Black Americans were barred from voting or holding office for a substantial amount of time. Many other ethnic minorities were also excluded from political participation. The capitalistic want for wealth undermined the ideal of allowing the people to have an effect on their government that is intrinsic to democracy. Through finding success via these predatory tactics, the capitalist elite was born. Their influence continues to permeate throughout the American societal structure through their use of capitalism as a tool to ensure a true democracy cannot form.

Even though in modern day America voting rights and the right to compensation are granted regardless of race, gender, or class, capitalists still continue to find ways to violate the core tenets of democracy. A famous example of this is the working conditions inside Amazon warehouses. Injury rates of Amazon employees were found to be “close to twice as high as the

company's competitors and in one case five times as high." Amazon put worker productivity over worker safety because more productive workers led to more money for Amazon. In some cases, workers were fired for speaking up against their working conditions (Sainato, 2023).

Amazon executives undermined their employees' democratic rights to life and liberty.

Employees had their standards of living significantly altered through serious injury, and their freedom of speech was stifled in the wake of said injuries. Instances such as this expose the paradoxical nature of a democratic, capitalist society, a paradox that institutionalism is unable to examine. The higher-ups went directly against democratic values yet were rewarded by the capitalist economic system. Unsafe working conditions allowed Amazon to push their employees to their limits in terms of productivity, and it put more money in their pockets. Their disregard for their workers was directly responsible for their success under capitalism. They were rewarded for their greed with more money and more success. Each additional dollar they gained through predatory practices proved how capitalism undermines the freedoms that capitalists claim it provides and which democracy seeks to foster.

Unlike structural analysis, institutionalist analysis can only work in theory. The most influential institutionalist collective, the American education system, is a prime example of this. Federally approved education about the American government is a tool of the capitalist machine. In order to protect the class division found outside of the classroom, students inside the classroom are kept relatively uneducated about capitalism. For example, the definition of capitalism given by Magruder's American Government Interactive textbook describes capitalism as a system that "does not rely on government to decide what items are to be produced, how much of any particular item should be produced, or how much any item is to sell for" (Shay, 2023). This definition is too simple, neglecting to mention how capitalism operates in real life.

Some aspects of the definition are blatantly untrue when applied to the American form of capitalism. Time and time again, government officials have interfered in the production, distribution, and pricing of items. Former president Ronald Reagan's administration "forced Japan to raise prices for chips to guarantee U.S. producers a share in Japanese markets" (Chomsky, 1998), an action that contradicts the textbook's definition of capitalism. It claims that capitalism ensures the economy will be left alone by the government, but that is the exact opposite of what Reagan did. He interfered with the pricing decided by Japanese businesses to give American businesses a leg up in the market. If the textbook definition was truly how capitalism worked, that would never have happened. Failure to mention occurrences such as this is intentional. It is an attempt to prevent Americans from becoming too doubtful of the system. These doubts, of course, still form. It is nearly impossible not to become doubtful while living in a society that endorses the idea of mass participation in government only in theory and not practice. Fortunately for powerful capitalists, the way capitalism is presented in the classroom does prevent a significant portion of American people from identifying capitalism as the root of their apathy. Around 65% of Americans hold "a positive view on 'capitalism'", an opinion which no doubt was formed by the way capitalism was presented to them. This practice transfers to alternate systems of economics, such as socialism. Very little focus is placed on socialism, and it is often presented by the American education system as dangerous or unrealistic. That description has led to a generally negative opinion on socialism for around 55% of American adults. Despite this, a fourth of the Americans surveyed were unable to defend their position beyond insisting that socialism was simply "bad" (PEW Research Center, 2019). With a lack of traditional education on the inner workings of capitalism, Americans are often shown by experience with our cutthroat economic system that democratic principles of fairness, group

participation, and collaboration must be completely disregarded in the name of survival. It has created a culture of competition, in which “my success implies your failure” (Hochschild, 1995). There are only so many jobs offered at any given time, which becomes an issue when basic necessities for survival can only be accessed through corporations. Institutions such as privatized insurance accessed through an employer make it so that only those who serve the capitalist machine the best will have their needs met. The absence of robust government systems that care for the people leads to a society in which its members need to outperform each other in order to gain access to medical care, shelter, and food. Such a dichotomy inevitably breeds a social dynamic between differing races, classes, and genders in which they begin to blame each other for the failings of a capitalist system.

Similar to its predecessor of feudalism, capitalism “has not yet done away with class antagonisms” (Marx, et al., 1848). The differences in standards of living between Americans depending on the social groups to which they belong have been an increasingly popular topic of conversation for American political figures and citizens alike. Depending on the person, worsening circumstances for Americans are caused by anything from the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic to mass immigration. For the most part, any discussion on the role that capitalism may play in this circumstance is nonexistent among more mainstream politicians. This is completely intentional. As American linguist Noam Chomsky points out, “emptying people’s minds of the ability, or even the desire, to gain access to cultural resources- that’s a tremendous victory for the system” (Chomsky, 1998). Politicians are complicit in the system of capitalism that dismantled democracy, and their arguments are inherently institutional. They look only at the United States’ political and social spheres for an answer to Americans’ woes, rather than looking to the larger context of global capitalism which informs our institutions. This negation ensures the people are

more concerned with fighting one another than they are with fighting the system, and it helps capitalists remain in power. It distracts them with answers that, depending on the source, sound like they could be plausible despite the fact they are too narrow to be proper explanations. That distraction is what allows capitalism to thrive while democracy shrivels. A truly democratic America is the last thing capitalists want because in such a system they would be vastly outnumbered. The 99 percent would have a much louder voice than the one percent because democracy operates on majority rule. American society would cater to the needs of the majority. They would be the ones deciding how the government operates, therefore the country would likely be passing laws that help employees and hurt the profits of billionaires. This has made it necessary for capitalists to assume control of American democracy to ensure their wealth remains unthreatened.

Capitalists work very hard to guarantee that the average citizen has much less control over the government than they do. Despite the fact that Americans are repeatedly told by political leaders that the government takes into account their wants, needs, and morals, many Americans find themselves increasingly disillusioned with the people in office. A 2015 study found that 79% of Americans “believe that most Congress members are ‘out of touch with average Americans’”, an opinion no doubt influenced by the sheer amount of pro-business legislation which has been passed by lawmakers. Institutional analysis is particularly ill-equipped to discuss this trend, because of its acceptance of the status quo. Americans feel that members of Congress are out of touch because they have proven time and time again that democratic principles mean very little to them. They allow external factors such as bribery to influence the way they govern, something that Americans have become more and more irritated with. Compared to Americans in 1994, American adults are now “more likely to see Congress as

focused on the needs of special interests” (Dugan, 2015). The ability to bribe government officials can only exist in a society in which there is an extremely wealthy class. Capitalism is the only economic system which not only facilitates this but encourages it. The American government is overrun with lobbyists because the economic system the country runs on creates an environment where extreme class disparity becomes the norm. A large gap between the richest and the poorest members of society means that they are inherently not equal to each other. The rich will always have more power and influence than the poor. This influence will often be used for selfish purposes, ones that come from a selfish instinct that capitalism rewards. Capitalist interference in government is becoming harder to ignore, but that doesn't really matter to capitalists. Their influence has allowed them to ensure it is just as hard for Americans to do anything about it.

American institutions of government have become just as much of a capitalist establishment as any corporation. Capitalists “spend about \$2.6 billion a year on reported lobbying expenditures” (Drutman, 2015) in order to keep politicians under their thumb. If the candidate whom these donors financially backed wins their election, the donors can then ask the candidate for favors once they are sworn into office. These favors often come in the form of loosened regulations or increased government backing for said corporations. Politicians comply with these demands in order to prevent the loss of campaign money. Campaign money is integral to the success of a campaign, especially campaigns for federal office. The amount of influence rich donors have over office translates to the candidates they endorse. Candidates with the most money tend to be the most successful, meaning that any candidate who wants success needs to take raising money seriously (Cowan, 2011). This system effectively turns congresspeople into corporate lackeys. They may run on promises of policy changes for the people, but if their

financial backers object, they will immediately turn their backs on the people who voted for them. This is because they do not feel they have a responsibility to represent the average person. The people are not the ones who give them the majority of their campaign money, the uber-wealthy are. Lobbying is necessary for capitalism's survival. As American economist Richard D. Wolff notes, "most capitalists opposed and long resisted extending suffrage beyond the rich who possessed capital" (Wolff, 2020). This has long been the practice of capitalists as a response to how outnumbered they are by the rest of the population. In order to get around the democratic principle of majority rule, they pay to pretend they are the majority. Money is a resource that influential capitalists have ensured stays in their hands for the most part. A capitalist society leads to a class that can buy out politicians, so that any sort of legal change the people are in favor of must be approved by them first, thereby disabling democracy. A society cannot be both democratic and capitalist because of this. One will always cause the other to become obsolete. The prevailing system tends to be capitalism because capitalism allows for a highly coveted resource, typically money, to become the highest valued thing in society. By placing money above all else, it rewards people who are willing to fight dirty. Capitalism also forms a small group of people who possess lots of capital, capital which can then be used to snuff out aspects of democracy which would cause them to lose money.

Congresspeople in the pockets of capitalists will defend their actions through arguments such as "Members of Congress...have a responsibility to listen to lobbyists" (Hamilton, 2006). These arguments stand on the ideology of corporate personhood, a standard created by a Supreme Court ruling that gave corporations rights previously only given to people. These rights include the right to "spend money in candidate elections" (Totenberg, 2014). The Supreme Court decided it falls under free speech. Although this ruling may be the legal understanding of what

corporations can and cannot do, it is important to note that corporate personhood is a result of Supreme Court justices putting money over the wellbeing of the people. To use it as a defense for corruption in Congress ignores the fact that it is little more than a byproduct of the very corruption that congresspeople are trying to claim does not have a significant effect on the government. It attempts to shoehorn the value capitalism places on money into the principles of democracy. By equating corporations to people, they then become included in the democratic ideal that the government should serve the people. Yet the fact of the matter is that corporations are not people. A corporation is an unfeeling, unthinking concept. While democratic politicians do have a duty to serve the people who create a corporation, the corporation itself is simply a social construct. To say a corporation is a person is like saying a building is a person. A building, much like a corporation, is not alive. It has no use for the services which a democratic government should provide. Pretending that they do obstructs the needs of the actual American people.

Corporate personhood is not an outlier in legislation, in reality, policy tailored to the ruling class is more common than the kind which is truly democratic. The Supreme Court has a history of rulings that favor companies and corporate profit. Large corporations are able to bend the Supreme Court to their will, they have “pushed for rights and challenged external rules and regulations that create responsibility”, and these demands have been met with “a friendly stance” by the Supreme Court. A prime example of this is the cases of *Cargill, inc v. Doe* and *Nestle USA, inc. v. Doe*. Both cases dealt with the use of child labor to manufacture products, and both cases ultimately concluded with the Supreme Court ruling in favor of the companies. The arguments utilized by both companies were strikingly similar, boiling down to the defense that the plaintiff’s claims of human rights abuses could not be applied because the alleged abuses



took place outside of the United States. Had an ordinary citizen used such a defense, it would have been immediately disregarded. The defendant would have been found guilty, or at the very least the judge would not accept the defense as valid. Yet, since corporations used this defense, the capitalist Supreme Court accepted it. Although supporters of corporate personhood claim it gives companies the same rights as people, what it really does is give them privileges above people. Corporations are “empowered with rights and unburdened from responsibilities” (Pollman, 2021). They have ensured that they have very little accountability, the fact that they have the ability to bend the law to their will means that they can grant themselves a standing above it.

Corporations skirt around the ways in which capitalist principles of greed clash with democratic principles of freedom by creating a society in which only those with significant capital get to enjoy true freedom. A Princeton study of the effectiveness of government under democratic principles found a startling disparity between the average American and the top capitalists. The opinions of the average citizen have “little to no independent influence” while the uber-wealthy “have substantial independent impacts” (Gilens, et al, 2014) on legislation. This is to be expected, considering the previously discussed relationship between lobbyists and politicians. Nonetheless, it is extremely disturbing. Our government has been made useless to the people by capitalist interference. The education system and savvy politicians can spout the idea that our votes all carry the same value as much as they want, but the reality is that this idea is far from the truth. In America, your political voice is directly related to the depth of your pockets. The only way to get the government to enact the change you want to see is to outbid your opponents. For the common person, that is nearly impossible.

Despite the fact that Americans are taught to believe otherwise, it is clear democracy and capitalism are anything but complimentary. The very foundations of these systems can only work against each other. One is based on a respect for the collective in regard to the way a nation operates. The other is merely concerned with the individual. Its values ignore the collective at best and sabotage it at worst. To ensure that the United States of America has any chance of surviving the dire political, social, and economic straits in which the country has found itself in, it is crucial for Americans to understand this. Such an understanding can only come through the lens of a structural analysis of government. Through their narrow focus, institutional viewpoints operate under an assumption that is blatantly false, therefore they will never be satisfactory in the political debate about the true nature of the government. In some ways, this explains why government sanctioned textbooks utilize an institutionalist lens. A government rife with capitalist lap dogs will naturally encourage its citizens to accept the status quo as the best possible outcome of government. The existence of an overwhelming majority of citizens who seek to understand the inner workings of their government threatens the existence of the current government structure. This circumstance is exactly why it is so important for anyone wanting to understand the American government to do so through a structural lens. Without capitalism, the American government would operate much differently. In fact, had it not been for capitalism, it is possible that the American government would follow the ideals of democracy more closely. Without a motive to cater to the small rich class, the American government might have sought to serve the majority of Americans. Instead, the harsh realities of a capitalistic society have proven to be corrosive to democratic ideals. American politicians have been sold off to the highest bidders, preventing them from taking into account the very people whom they claim to be serving.

Capitalist rule may sound as if it is an unchangeable condition of the American government, but to purport this is exactly what the elite class wants. They jump through all of these hoops and enact these laws for a reason; the richest class knows they are the minority. That is why they must destroy democracy. If America truly was a democracy, they would lose all of their power. The elite class is well aware of the power that the rest of America is capable of holding over them. The most effective way to fight the elite class is to use what little democratic power the people have now in order to expand the American political system into a true democracy. In order to achieve this, Americans must be strategic in every political decision that they make. Voters must work together as a collective, rather than believing that their vote exists in a vacuum.

That level of class consciousness will take lots of work to achieve. Although Americans are beginning to more fully understand the dark underbelly of the elite class through a variety of factors, years of indoctrination cannot be undone in a matter of months. While coming to the conclusion that the system is broken is relatively easy once disaster strikes, it is much harder to carve out a path towards a better future. America should be a democratic country, but in order to achieve that goal capitalist interference must fall. The problem currently is that our system is so overrun with capitalists and their sympathizers that a true democracy cannot form. Therefore, the only way to achieve a true democracy is a peaceful, calculated movement which is built from the ground up. That organization will take time, and it needs to begin as soon as possible if America is to become a true democracy. Otherwise, the infighting which the elite class has so carefully crafted will cause America to implode on itself.

## **The Election Everybody is Dreading**

The failures of the American capitalistic, faux-democratic system have finally led the nation to an election in which the vast majority of people do not particularly like either candidate. This is far from surprising, considering how little the government seems to care about the will of the people. The fact that the two leading candidates for the 2024 election, current President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, are both capitalist shills makes perfect sense in a system where rich capitalists have more power than the common person. Yet, the 2024 election is shaping up to be one of the most heated elections in the nation's history. It seems that the only thing both sides can agree on is that the election of the candidate which they dislike most will lead to the destruction of American society as it currently stands. Is that actually true?

In order to properly answer this question, one must consider the current American status quo. The status quo is defined as "The existing social, economic, and/or political system or current power relations." by Oxford Reference. For the United States of America, that means capitalism paired with an oligarchy disguised as a democracy. Neither Biden nor Trump are interested in the replacement of American capitalism. They, just like most other politicians, have the interests of their donors as their first priority. Those interests will always be in service of maintenance of capitalism, since it is the system which gave these donors the power over politics they now possess. Although they may think of each other as polar opposites, Trump and Biden are very similar in this way, but that does not mean they are the same.

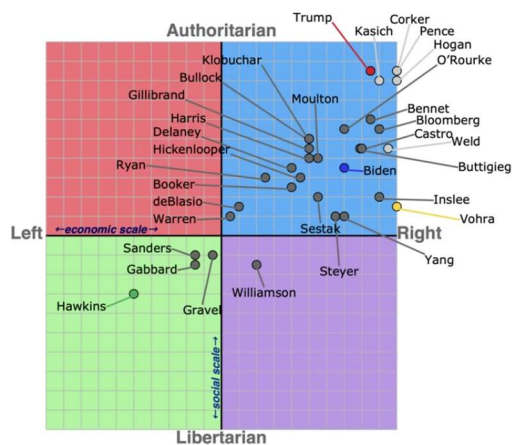
While Biden's tenure as president was ultimately disappointing to many of the people who voted for him in 2020, a second Biden term would be nowhere near as detrimental to the country as a second Trump term, nor would it affect the status quo as dramatically. Biden is willing to uphold the status quo. However, any sort of acceleration to it that he would provoke

would be far slower than the shifts which Trump would be able to make. Exemplified by his previous term, Trump's policies may not shift the economic status quo away from capitalism, but they will likely worsen it. His policies have the power to propel the American economy into a hyper capitalist state much faster than the policies of Biden. In terms of the political status quo, Trump is a capitalist lap dog who could very realistically go off-leash. His proclivities towards facism mixed with his own ego can shift America from a plutocracy to a dictatorship. This would also come with significant losses in the rights of many marginalized groups. Such accelerations will make it harder for Americans to successfully reform the failing American political system.

Before any meaningful analysis of the impending election can begin, it is important that there is a complete comprehension of the circumstances surrounding it. Most importantly, it is important to understand how the disablement of democracy by capitalism has affected third parties. Currently, the most politically active American citizens are fairly radical. In 2020, "about 85% of adults in the two groups at the ends of the political spectrum voted.", and on social media sites those who hold more moderate positions were found to be less likely to post political content (Blazina, 2022). Under a truly democratic system, this demographic shift would lead to a broader range of political candidates. Yet America still only has two main parties. This stunting of the American political spectrum is entirely intentional on the part of the elite. Through placing value on the dollar over the well-being of citizens, capitalism has ensured that the voices of the people are second to the voices of donors. With the money they accrued, capitalists became "the hegemonic power-- by controlling the mass media, winning elections, producing parliamentary majorities, and disseminating an ideology in schools and beyond that justifies capitalism." (Wolff, 2020). Such interference has resulted in the current selection of candidates, which have

vastly different views from the average American. Namely, they tend to be more pro-business. This disparity can best be seen through The Political Compass.

The Political Compass is a graph created in order to address “inadequacies of the standard political measure” (The Political Compass, 2023). It utilizes the left-right spectrum which the average person is familiar with as its x-axis but introduces the libertarian-authoritarian spectrum as its y-axis. The existence of two axes allows The Political Compass to not only address social beliefs, but also to address economic beliefs. Through this lens it becomes increasingly clear how small the American political spectrum truly is.



As pointed out by political YouTuber Second Thought, “when you take [American politicians] voting records and plot them on a chart like [The Political Compass], it becomes apparent there’s really not much separating most of the candidates.” (Second Thought, 2020). Such a great divide between the people and their representatives is causing a significant amount of trouble for the two biggest American political parties, especially for the Democrats. Luckily for Republicans, the narrowness of the American political spectrum skews right and authoritarian. This makes it easier for a candidate like Donald Trump to pander to his base. Among Trump’s base, 7 percent expressed favorable opinions of Neo-Nazis in 2017. While this

number may seem low, it is high when compared to the rate of 4 percent among White Americans in general. This statistic also rises to 12 percent among “people who strongly approve of Trump’s performance.” (Saletan, 2017). This correlation has continued into the 2024 election. Trump understands his voter base, which is what drives him to do things such as quoting Hitler in his campaign speeches (Fischler, 2023). He can do this without being kicked out of the Republican party in part because his shift towards the far right still occupies the same quadrant of the political spectrum which Republicans do. It is not as big of a shift as it would be if he were to suddenly begin quoting a figure like Karl Marx. For this same reason, Democrats would have a much harder time appealing to left-leaning Americans who are becoming more radical even if they tried. To do so would necessitate leaving their quadrant of The Political Compass. More importantly, It would mean forsaking the status quo, something they have made it clear they are unwilling to do.

Democrats are no strangers to using underhanded tactics in order to aid corporate lobbyists. Former President Bill Clinton did exactly that when he signed the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act into law. Although the law was meant to help disabled workers, lawmakers included a provision which “allowed the foreign subsidiaries of [the businesses affected by the act] to extend the income tax-free status of foreign earnings from the sale of securities, annuities, and other financial holdings”, despite it having nothing to do with the supposed intentions of the act (Bartlett, et al., 2000). In his statement about the provision, Clinton said that he was “pleased to sign [it] into law” (Clinton, 1999). When Democrats take these positions, they alienate many left-wing Americans, 41 percent of whom hold “anti-corporate sentiment[s]” as of 2022 (Dunn, et al, 2022). A result of this is the destruction of the vote. The act of voting has become less and less of a mechanism for the people to express their

political opinions than it should be under a real democracy. Ideally, a person should be able to vote for a candidate who closely aligns with their own values and beliefs. That ideal has been thoroughly squashed by capitalism, which has ensured that payment will have a bigger effect on the careers of politicians than the people who vote for them. In its place is a standard which thoroughly reinforces the idea that “voting for a president is not an exercise in personal expression and it is not like seeking your true love or dream candidate” (Zimmerman, 2023). Politicians have shown time and time again that they will always be more influenced by corporate donors than the laymen. In fact, their allegiance to capitalists is expertly manufactured by capitalists themselves.

The lack of variety among candidates is created by the sheer number of lobbyists that have become involved in the American electoral process. The amount of power which rich capitalists have over the government allows them to block politicians who hold the people above the elites from being successful. This can be seen in the way that American politicians have reacted thus far to the global recession which began in the late 2010s and was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. In the face of slowed manufacturing, rising interest rates, and mounting inflation, American politicians “consistently avoid any critique of the capitalist system and its internal structure for generating yet another economic downturn in its long, long history of doing that repeatedly” (Wolff, 2019). This avoidance shows how much control capitalists have over politicians. In the same way that CEOs may avoid certain topics in order to keep shareholders happy, politicians avoid discussing the failures of capitalism to keep their financial backers happy and willing to give them millions of dollars. A politician’s job has become more akin to that of the average office manager than a civil servant. Their self-censoring is just another branch of the elitist system that the United States operates on.



Whether they realize it or not, Americans are aware of this. A 2023 study conducted by PEW Research Center found that “Just 4% of U.S. adults say the political system is working extremely or very well.” Additionally, “Nearly three-in-ten (28%) express unfavorable views of both parties.” (Nadeem, 2023). While these people may not be able to articulate their discrepancies with the American political system using political jargon, what they are likely to describe are circumstances that can be attributed to capitalism, such as recessions which famously cause “dissatisfaction with politicians and parties in power when they occur” (Wolff, 2019). In fact, any limitations which Americans may experience when attempting to describe their gripes with the government using correct terminology is in itself a byproduct of the elitist system and how it keeps citizens uneducated on the inner workings of government. Under a real democracy, that dissatisfaction would likely manifest itself in a strong multi-party political system. At one point, it did lead to something similar.

Despite the fact that third parties have little influence in the political landscape today, throughout American history third parties have been instrumental in many monumental policy changes. Third parties influenced “the abolition of slavery, women’s right to vote, the direct election of U.S. senators, initiative and referendum powers, the progressive income tax, shorter working hours...and unemployment insurance.” (Sifry, 2023). They centered their political beliefs around issues which the major parties had accepted as the unchanging status quo. Third parties were able to do this because they had an advantage which major parties did not, that being they were not major parties. This lack of standing allowed third parties to be more radical, because they were not beholden to the capitalist system. This, coupled with the fact that Americans are becoming increasingly more radical and less pro-business, should have led to a robust third-party system in the United States. The interest for a third-party system certainly

exists, especially among left-wing Americans who feel “no progressive will be allowed to be the presidential nominee of the Democratic Party.” (Rall, 2020). Yet here voters are in 2024, being asked again to vote for candidates from the two mainstream parties. When faced with this paradox, it becomes clear that the idea America is a democracy is a lie. The United States is an oligarchy, the members of which are to blame for the lack of democratic ideals which exist in the American political system.

In order for a candidate to launch a successful campaign, they need to have a certain amount of money. Campaigning is expensive, politicians spend money on things such as venues for fancy dinners in order to get their message heard, ad space on prominent news channels or social media sites, and the salaries of campaign employees. In the 2020 election, the total cost of the election came up to 16 billion dollars (OpenSecrets). Such a high barrier of entry has made it so that politicians are forced to depend on large donations in order to stand a chance in elections. That dependence allows donors to infiltrate the government. The power which they receive from this standing allows them to reinforce the need for donors in the political landscape. Most importantly, it allows them to weed out candidates which they are not fond of. As American journalists Donald L. Bartlett and James B. Steele note, “if you know the right people in Congress and in the White House, you can often get anything you want” (Bartlett, et al. 2000). Capitalists did get exactly what they wanted when Democratic and Republican lawmakers took steps to restrict the reach of third-party candidates, such as tightening ballot access laws to keep third party candidates off of ballots (Sifry, 2003). These changes are in the interest of capitalist donors and capitalist donors only. They restrict the voice of the people in favor of keeping corporations in power. It is yet another way in which the wealthiest Americans combat the reality of how vastly outnumbered they are.

Defenders of the current electoral process argue that financial influence is simply a feature of a democratic system. They say that, especially in an economically capitalist country, democracy “it costs money to communicate”, which therefore justifies the role of money in government. Furthermore, they argue that the amount of money spent on campaigns is vastly overblown, citing that the total amount spent on presidential elections “is less than the amount spent on potato chips" nationwide (Smith, 2006). While both of these facts may be true by themselves, to use them to continue the lie that America is a democracy is entirely misleading. The status quo upholds the need for money in elections in order to sustain itself. Due to this status quo, money is often needed for meaningful communication. That condition is not due to the nature of communication in itself, nor the nature of democracy. Rather, the need for money has been created by our capitalistic system. Placing value on capital above all else will inevitably lead to a society in which every facet of life requires money. In a true democracy, communication in the context of elections would be relatively costless, if not free. This is because a real democracy values the voice of the people over their worldly possessions. The very nature of being a living, breathing person entitles citizens to the right to participate in government. Any citizen would be able to access information on candidates, or even run themselves, regardless of their economic status. The barriers which prevent that are not just the natural conditions of a society, they are the byproducts of a failing economic system. Under this line of reasoning, the potato chip defense is similarly misleading. Potato chips are something which society has generally agreed must be bought. There is no way to obtain a potato chip without some exchange of money somewhere down the line. Therefore, the sheer amount of money spent on potato chips in the United States cannot be compared to the amount of money spent on elections. Real democratic elections are not meant to be bought. As previously

mentioned, a democracy should ideally have very little monetary influence in the electoral process. To brush off the momentous amounts of money spent on elections by comparing elections to a product both misses the point of an election and proves that capitalists are succeeding in the commercialization of politics.

Capitalists want the layman to believe that the status quo is the natural order, that is the only way in which their lifestyles can survive. It makes the people complacent. That complacency prevents meaningful change at the hands of the people, which allows capitalists to continue the lie that America is democratic while it operates through an oligarchical system. This itself will allow them to make the people complacent with the status quo. Part of manufacturing that complacency is distraction. Capitalists want common people fighting with each other on their behalf. It does not matter if any given American is on the side of the Democrats or the Republicans, their anger serves the same purpose. The goal is to get Americans “stoked into a mutual loathing by corporate media that profits from the theater of hate.” in order to distract them from the destruction caused by capitalists (Cook, 2021). With this understanding of the atmosphere that has created the situation voters are in, the specific scenario of the 2024 election can be fully understood. More specifically, Trump and Biden’s individual effects on the status quo becomes much clearer.

The United States of America is perhaps more divided than it has been in decades. Both liberals and conservatives have turned to superficial attacks of their favored candidate’s opponent, regardless of their truthfulness. One such person is Peter Van Buren. In an article he wrote for *The American Conservative*, He describes Biden as “older than Yoda but presenting more like Jar Jar ” to make Trump appear more favorable (Van Buren, 2023). While humorous, his attack is exceedingly hypocritical when Trump’s age is considered. At 77 years old, Trump is

only four years younger than Joe Biden. To insinuate that those four years make Trump a spring chicken when compared to Biden is entirely asinine. This is especially true when Trump's own speeches, in which he rambles on about his cognitive test results and Al Capone, are considered (Price, 2024).

On the far left end of the political spectrum, the idea of voting for a third-party in this election has attracted much attention. After all, there are many topics on which voters agree more with third-party candidates than Trump or Biden. For instance, "some 65% of Democrats, 40% of independents, and even 10% Republicans support socialism in some form...[and] 55% of the electorate oppose additional funding for Ukraine." Both of these points are reflected in Cornel West's campaign (Harris, 2023). Due to this, many progressives are now refusing to vote for Joe Biden in favor of casting their ballots for third party candidates like West. Although their sentiment is most definitely the direction in which voters should begin to move, this plan lacks the realism with which political issues such as this must be approached. Truthfully, a third-party system is promising. It would allow a broader range of beliefs space on the governmental stage, the average voter would likely feel much better about the candidate which they chose to vote for, and it would make it much more feasible for the United States of America to finally see some of the changes which citizens have been clamoring for decades. However, it is important to note that under our current system third parties are deliberately rendered useless by a variety of capitalistic policies previously discussed. While the American people should begin moving towards a multi-party system, such a drastic shift will take decades to accomplish. In order to have an effective third-party candidate, at least a few of these barriers must come down, most notably the rules about ballot qualifications and campaign funding. Additionally, there would need to be "an alteration in the media's attitude" towards third parties (Sifry, 2003). The

platforms of third party candidates would need to be treated with the same seriousness as Democratic and Republican platforms. Only then would the average voter have the amount of information they would need to make a fully informed decision on who they would like to vote for. These changes will take a very long time, most likely decades, to implement. To act as if the American political system is anywhere near that kind of reform is extremely shortsighted.

This is not meant to discredit the idea of a third-party system, rather it is to point out that a robust third-party system is entirely possible with community organization. In fact, a third-party system is necessary for the survival of American citizens and the construction of real democracy. The amount of division currently existing in the United States cannot last forever. A 2023 study done by the Public Religion Research Institute found that the rate of Americans in support of political violence has risen from 15% to “nearly a quarter” since March 2021 (Public Religion Research Institute, 2023). This is both a symptom of the simulated division created by capitalists and a startling omen for the future of the country. Continuing down this road will inevitably lead to unnecessary loss of life. Americans need to find a better way.

Regardless, it is important to keep in mind that the construction of this democracy cannot happen from the top down. Federal elections, although they receive more media attention, should not be the starting point for a peaceful transition to democracy. As American political cartoonist and columnist Ted Rall points out, “local politics are quirkier [than presidential elections] and thus offer opportunity for growth.” Many of the more progressive American politicians in office today got their start through this exact route, such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (Rall, 2020). The focus must remain there for now. Progressive ideology is on the rise in America, according to a 2021 study by New York University, which means that now is a better time than ever to begin a new progressive party (New York University). However, in order to

build this party in a way to where it will last, American leftists cannot be shortsighted. While many progressives may feel that voting third-party in the 2024 election is not shortsighted due to the mutual corruption of Democrats and Republicans, it is important to remember that there is a significant difference in the severity of corruption between both candidates. While many Americans are tired of the lesser of two evils idea, it cannot be discarded entirely. The truth of the matter is that Trump is probably worse than Biden, and his potential second term should frighten anyone concerned about the status quo. Daily life is not the only thing that will be considerably altered by a Trump presidency, the status quo will be accelerated at such a rate that it may propel us into a new, worse status quo which will take even more work to correct.

It is important to note that Biden and Trump are both servants to the status quo. When both candidates are placed on The Political Compass, they are startling close to each other. Biden is farther left, but just barely. This is to be expected considering the parties each candidate belongs to. Democrats and Republicans “have survived in part because of American electoral laws”, which were implemented at the behest of corporate donors (Mandelbaum, 2020). They both owe the prosperity which they have enjoyed up until recently to lobbyists. On the other side of the coin, their reliance on these donors makes it so that any policies they run on must please the donors before they please the people. Both candidates show this through their policies, but to varying degrees. While in office, Trump helped pass “a \$1.5 trillion dollar tax overhaul” in favor of the richest Americans (USAToday, n.d.). His decision to do so was one of the most brazen ways in which he bowed down to his rich donors. While Trump may give campaign speeches to working class Americans, and even trick a few into believing that he will look out for them, his actions in office show where his real loyalties lie.

Biden has given similarly insulting hand-outs to billionaires. In response to the failures of Silicon Valley banks, Biden and the Federal government “retroactively designate SVB and Signature Bank as systemic risks to the American financial system and would thereby guarantee all of the deposits.” (Sammin, 2023). The decision to provide aid to these billionaires is a slap in the face to working- and middle-class Americans. Like Reagan’s decision to regulate Japanese production of microchips, it is also a betrayal of the supposed rules of capitalism. Rather than letting the people with money in these banks take the loss, Biden gave them a free pass. This bending of the rules shows how Biden puts the wealthiest Americans over the rest of the country. Such aid would likely never be given to a working- or middle-class group of bankers, because they do not donate to politicians in the same large sums that billionaires do. This overt favoritism for capitalists is something which Trump and Biden both share, and it shows how unlikely it is for either of them to shift the United States away from a capitalist system.

Beyond their relationship with the rich, Biden and Trump have similarly contentious foreign policy when it comes to Israel and Palestine. Since the events of October 7th, Biden has vocally supported the regime of Israel. His support is in direct disagreement with many Americans. A 2024 ABC poll revealed that “earlier this year, 31% [of Americans] said the US was doing too much to support Israel ". That number has since jumped to 38% as of May 3rd, 2024 (Langer, 2024). The rise of this opinion among Americans has done little to phase Biden, on the contrary, it has made him more passionate in his support of Israel. In regards to the current protests against what many view as a genocide of Palestinians by the Israeli government, Biden “insisted he has not changed his support for Israel.” and affirmed that there would be no change to official policy regarding the issue (Williams, et al., 2024). Biden’s support for Israel has become another reason that left wing Americans have begun to urge for a third-party vote in



2024. One such voter, Emma West Rasmus, asserts that “The last five months of civilian carnage in Gaza have revealed that the Democratic Party is choosing to remain planted on a bloody, inhumane, and immoral side of history” (Rasmus, 2024). The reaction which voters like Rasmus are having is one which comes from a place of empathy, as well as a want to avoid the guilt of voting for a leader who many view as an accessory to genocide. The want to vote for someone who stands against genocide is an entirely normal, human reaction to these events. That being said, our elitist system leaves no room for such displays. The reality of the situation is that Biden’s opponent is no better.

Trump’s opinions on Israel have gotten less media attention than Biden by virtue of the fact he is not currently in office. In many ways this is working in his favor, because it leads people to view Biden as worse on the issue than Trump is when in reality they are about the same. Just like Biden, Trump is unambiguously in support of Israel. Trump has vowed to “come to Israel's aid” in terms of a possible conflict with Iran over the carnage in Gaza. Additionally, Trump brags that he has “done more for Israel than any other President ”. These claims may be why he has more support from Israelis than Biden. 44 percent of Israelis would like him to be president as compared to 30 percent who want Biden to be president (Trump vows to support, 2024).

Biden and Trump’s agreement on this issue effectively renders the argument for voting against Biden in the upcoming election as an exercise in futility. Third parties are not yet viable in the United States. For third parties “getting on state ballots is challenging and expensive, thanks to a patchwork of U.S. laws designed by Republicans and Democrats” (Renshaw, 2024). These laws make it so that Biden and Trump are the only viable candidates in the upcoming election. Therefore, the choice to not vote for Joe Biden has the potential to indirectly give the

presidency to Donald Trump. This is exactly what happened in the 2016 election, although voters understood that Trump was dangerous, “they disliked Hillary Clinton so much they decided to sit on their hands or vote for the Green Party candidate, Jill Stein” (Riech, 2024). While the Democratic Party’s choice to nominate Hillary Clinton contributed to Trump’s win, so did the refusal to vote for the democratic nominee, That refusal resulted not only in a presidency which had detrimental effects to the daily lives of many Americans which are still being felt today, but also in the potential for a very dangerous status quo shift depending on how the 2024 election turns out.

Admittedly, predicting how a presidential candidate will behave once in office can be difficult. Capitalist interference makes it so that candidates may run on policies which they will abandon once in office. That being said, theorizing about the possible outcomes of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden’s second terms is made easier by the fact that they are both former presidents. While it is certainly still important to take into account the promises which both make in their current campaigns, understanding the decisions that they made during their previous terms will allow a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which they may bring about possible changes to the status quo, as well as how dangerous those changes may be.

In terms of the status quo, Donald Trump’s first term in office did much to strengthen the capitalist economic system. Unlike his successor, Trump did very little to hide any aid which he handed out to the rich. He did exactly the opposite. Trump prided himself on his pro-wealth policies. In 2017, Trump touted that his tax reform bill which provided significant benefits to capitalists through “the doubling of the cap for the estate tax break and lowering of corporate and s-corporation taxes”, was “the biggest ever”. He also reportedly bragged to his rich friends that the bill would make them “a lot richer” (Watson, 2017). The 2017 tax bill was not the only

instance of Trump putting the rich before the common person. Trump is also responsible for the dismantling of “dozens of health, safety, and environmental regulations” (Noah, 2023). His pattern of relaxing regulations to benefit the rich may seem as if it makes very little difference in terms of the status quo, but in reality, it makes a significant difference. Although there is no shift into a new economic system, the policies which Trump put in place will inevitably lead to hypercapitalism if not halted.

Hypercapitalism is defined as “extreme capitalism at the expense of traditional values'”, in other words it is the final stage of a capitalist system (Yourdictionary). Under our current system, a switch to hypercapitalism is inevitable. The government has consistently treated the wants of capitalists as their first priority, largely because the elite hold the most power over the government. The average American citizen’s lack of input in the inner workings of government also means that there is no balance between what benefits them and what benefits the rich. Elites will continue to get what they want in the form of tax breaks and softened regulations, which will give them more opportunities to abuse workers and hoard wealth. The closer the country is to a hypercapitalist state, the harder it will be for the average person to survive. While Trump may not be directly responsible for these conditions, he certainly did all he could to bring America closer to this dystopian future. In other words, a 2024 Trump win will likely spell disaster for economically leftist movements. Any gains these movements have made will likely be repealed, assuming that they were not already repealed in the time since Trump was first nominated in 2016. The Republican Party has even promised this on their official website. Their statement proposes that ideals such as “freedom, prosperity, and opportunity” are “under attack from the far-left”. The party promises that they are “engaged in a national fight” against leftist efforts (Republican party Official Website). In order to prevent this from happening, anyone who cares

about the dismantling of the capitalist status quo should be doing everything they can to prevent a second Trump term.

In terms of the political aspect of the status quo, Donald Trump has the potential to push the country into an authoritarian state. While Trump has serviced his capitalist donors thus far, his narcissism will likely put a stop to this relationship. Trump has claimed that The United States “will lose World War III” if he is not made president, going as far as to say “the only thing standing between you and {the country’s} obliteration is me” (Shutt, 2024). Most famously, Trump encouraged and incited the narrative that the 2020 election was stolen from him, despite the fact that the states which had the biggest effect on Biden’s victory had “fewer than 475 instances of confirmed voter fraud” (Yoon, 2023). This pattern has continued into Trump’s current campaign. During his CPAC speech, Trump admitted that he “was going to blame the organizers of CPAC for having him give a speech” if he lost the South Carolina republican primary, which took place that same day (Shutt, 2024). These behaviors reveal just how highly Trump thinks of himself. In his own mind, he is infallible. Having a person like that in a position as powerful as president is extremely dangerous for both capitalists and the common person. A president who truly believes he can do no wrong will likely come to the conclusion that he is the only person capable of running the country. Trump may begin to believe that his opinion is the only opinion necessary in order to run a country. While he is under the thumb of elite donors now, that may quickly change. His ego will cause him to believe that what his donors want him to do is of no importance, just as he currently believes what the people want him to do is of no importance. This will lead to an authoritarian state in which although capitalists will lose their grip on the government, control will not be handed to the people. Instead, that power will be wielded by Trump and Trump only.

The social aspect of the status quo is the one which the general public is most aware will change. In terms of topics such as minority rights, Donald Trump and Joe Biden run on very different agendas. Both in his 2016 and 2024 presidential campaigns. Donald Trump took a hard anti-minority stance. In his speeches he claimed that Latino immigrants are “‘destroying’ the country” (Noah, 2023). Additionally, during his first term, Donald Trump banned transgender Americans from enlisting in the military (American Oversight, 2021). Trump’s utilization of exclusionary rhetoric and policies persists to this day. For example, he is indirectly responsible for the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* through his appointment of several conservative Supreme Court justices. His current campaign promises to ban gender transition therapy, “‘terminate the visas” of who he calls “‘‘‘ Hamas sympathizers’’”, close the department of education, tighten border regulations, and reverse Joe Biden’s “‘‘‘ equity’ agenda’’” (Blackburn, et al., 2024). In other words, Donald Trump is dead set on revoking the rights of nearly every oppressed group in the United States. A future in which Trump is president may not seem all too different to White, straight men who feel that not voting at all is the most morally righteous decision, but everybody else will feel the effects. As disheartening and unfair as it is, voting for Joe Biden in the next election is the only option for many Americans who want to keep their civil liberties. He may not have been a perfect president, but a future in which Biden gets a second term is much less dystopian than a future in which Trump does.

Where Donald Trump and Joe Biden are most similar is in the ways in which the economic aspect of the status quo will shift during their potential presidencies. Much like Trump, Biden will inevitably pass laws that aid capitalists more than they aid the average American. Part of Biden’s 2024 campaign is the promise to “[raise] the top tax rate to 39.6%, the corporate tax rate to 28%, and the stock buyback tax to 4%” (Megerian, 2023). These campaign points sound

promising, however these changes actually happening become uncertain in light of Biden's first term. Biden, like Trump, has a history of implementing policies which benefit primarily the rich. For example, much of Biden's efforts to alleviate the economic damage done by the Covid-19 pandemic have been focused on businesses rather than the public interest. His prioritization of capital shows how firmly Biden believes in "the ongoing preeminence of private capital" (Henwood, 2023). This belief will no doubt continue to influence his policies if he becomes president again in 2024. Therefore, Americans should not expect any grand changes to the economic status quo under Biden. Biden is a capitalist minion. He will work to ensure America is successful only by capitalistic standards. That reality will cause strife for many Americans. Where Biden becomes more complicated in this regard than Trump is his policies which have helped those same Americans.

A large part of Biden's 2020 campaign was the promise of student debt relief. At a first glance, it seems as if the Biden administration has done very little to achieve this goal. However, to assert Biden has done nothing to fulfill this promise is to ignore the mechanics of the American government. A large part of the reason that Biden's student loan debt relief plan has not come to fruition is the Supreme Court. Most famously, the Supreme Court justices ruled against Biden in *Biden v. Nebraska*. The final decision of the case was to "[strike] down the administration's student loan forgiveness program and agreed with the six challenging states that they had standing to sue" (Frederick, 2023). It is important to note that this decision is a byproduct of Trump's presidency, in which he had the opportunity to appoint three justices. This opportunity has led to the "conservative majority" that exists in the Supreme Court today (Richer, et al. 2023). Pushback from conservatives means that Biden will have to put up a significant fight in order to follow through on his campaign promise, something he has proven he

is open to doing on occasion. In May of 2024, Biden was able to forgive “\$6.1 billion in student debt for 317,000 people to attend The Art Institutes” (Picchi, 2024). While these gains will not shift the status quo, they should be viewed as valuable steps towards economic reform. A peaceful shift away from capitalism entirely will be very hard to achieve, therefore any shifts farther from the harmful effects of the system are extremely valuable to this long-term goal. This includes small shifts such as student loan debt relief. The fact that Biden’s policies can even put a metaphorical band-aid on the gaping wound in the American economy left by capitalism is significant, especially when Trump’s 2024 policies are likely to cut the wound even deeper.

Biden has displayed a level of respect that Trump lacks when it comes to the political aspect of the status quo. For all of Biden’s faults, he does not display authoritarian tendencies. Unlike Trump, who will “not commit to accepting the results of Wisconsin’s presidential election in November” if he does not win, Biden “is pledging to accept the results” regardless of who is victorious (Beck, et al., 2024). This attitude towards election results is a good sign against an authoritarian shift in the status quo which Trump is likely to bring about. It shows that Biden does not view himself as the only person worthy of leading the country. For anyone interested in creating a better political system in the United States, this is a necessity. Working towards a country in which everyone’s voices are of equal importance is much easier under a president than under a dictator. That does not mean Biden is a man of the people. He, just like Trump, is a servant to the elite class. He will continue to propel the lie that America is a democracy while simultaneously participating in the current oligarchical organization of the United States. Still, the very fact that this president is willing to cooperate with other legislators will aid in the passing of laws that expand things like access to voting, crack down on capitalist interference in

government, and increase political education. This cooperation is one of the few aspects of a democratic process that America has, keeping it alive is important to the leftist cause.

Social policies are perhaps where Biden differs the most from Trump, although not as much as many may believe. Biden's past in this area is spotty. As a senator, he took part in many discriminatory practices which harmed Americans of color. He was "at the forefront" of the anti-integrated bus movement in the 1970s. Although Biden initially "expressed support for integration", he later "morphed into a leading anti-busing crusader" in 1974 when his constituents built up an anti-busing movement (Sokol, 2015). Biden should have to answer for these actions. Any attempt to slow the progress of desegregation causes direct harm to Black Americans. He should not be able to pretend that he is an arbiter of equality with these racist stains on his political record. The most effective way for Biden to do this while still remaining in office, which seems to be an inevitability as he currently has no plans to retire, would be building up systems that aid the groups he hurt. This is something which Biden has seemingly become more committed to than he was in the past.

Whereas Trump launched venomous attacks on minorities during his presidency, Biden oversaw significant gains in rights for marginalized groups. His administration "outpaced the three previous administrations while placing more than 100 new judges -- many of them women and people of color" (Shwartz, 2023). These appointments address the biases which exist in the American judiciary system, especially the ones impacting Nonwhite Americans. According to the NAACP, Black people are "five times more likely to be stopped without just cause" than White people are. Additionally, "one out of every three Black boys born today can expect to be sentenced to prison", not every month, not every year, every day (NAACP). Through the appointment of more diverse judges, the Biden administration contributes to the correction of



these systemic biases. Placing minorities in these positions gives defendants an opportunity to have their case presided over by someone who has faced these same biases. That common ground means that false arrests and acquittals which favor White man will begin to become less and less common.

Biden also made revisions to Title IX, “extend[ing] the law’s reach to prohibit discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity and widen the range of sexual harassment complaints that schools will be responsible for investigating” (Montague, et al. 2024). These additions to title IX will help oppressed Americans in school achieve justice against their abusers and bullies. Biden’s work to protect marginalized groups will result in a much safer county for minorities than would exist under Trump. His commitment to doing so is a primary reason that leftists cannot pretend that Biden is equally as bad as Trump. While Biden is far from perfect, his effect on the quality of life of marginalized Americans has been significantly less damaging than Trump’s effect. Under Biden, marginalized Americans can expect to more easily fight to be entitled to the same rights as other Americans. Under Trump, that is far from likely.

Ultimately, the 2024 election is a combination of all the problems which permeate the American government and political system. The frustration which many voters currently feel at the circumstance of being presented to two lackluster candidates is a natural consequence of an elitist system. The polarization which currently exists in the American political sphere is a ticking time bomb waiting to go off. If America as a nation does not change course within the coming decades, destruction of the entire country is imminent. That reality should inform the way in which we view this upcoming election. Pre-existing laws have intentionally made it so that third party candidates are not currently visible in presidential elections. Voters need to work

to reverse this in order to create the foundations that will eventually lead to an expanded selection of candidates in these types of elections. However, due to the fact that those foundations do not currently exist, voters should be looking for the candidate that will create the least damaging shifts to the status quo.

No matter which of the two mainstream candidates win, this country will continue to have a capitalist status quo. The danger lies in how fast either candidate will accelerate that capitalist status quo. Both Trump and Biden love billionaires, but Trump loves them more. He sees himself as one of them in some ways, better in others. His massive ego will inform any decisions he makes in office, just as it did during his first term. That will spell disaster for the average American and the status quo. While the current status quo of a capitalist, oligarchical society is terrible, a hyper capitalist, authoritarian state is undeniably worse. The fact of the matter is that certain rights which Americans currently enjoy will be stripped by Donald Trump if he wins in 2024. Therefore, Biden is the safer candidate. That does not mean he is the perfect candidate, nor does it mean that voters have to like him. It simply means that voters have to recognize that his effect on the status quo will be less catastrophic than Trump's. That will leave the state of the country more conducive to reform. It will allow leftist organizations to accomplish more work, work that will hopefully pull the country into a better status quo for all of its citizens.

### **Conclusion**

The American government has always been controlled by the elite class, and that class has always been able to consolidate power through capitalism. Although the members of the elite have changed throughout the nation's history, the power the group has had over the government has remained constant. The elite class is not altruistic. They care for themselves and themselves

only. As long as they have control over the United States of America, the country will never be truly free. Despite this, America is not a lost cause. The very fact that theories on how the American government truly operates exist are proof of this. Americans want a better system. Many are willing to put in the work for it. Part of that work is understanding that America is not and never has been democratic. However, the average American is not entirely powerless. There is a reason why America is not the authoritarian dystopia it is in danger of becoming. That reason is collective action. Are the odds stacked against the ninety-nine percent? Absolutely. The entire system guarantees that. In spite of that, Americans are capable of making a change to the political organization of the country.

The capitalist American oligarchy must be peacefully dismantled and replaced with a socialist democracy. A government cannot properly serve its citizens if those citizens are not in control of the government. Collective governance is the only way for a government to be able to properly assess and respond to the needs and wants of the people. The people must be allowed to have tangible effects on government, and the best way to do this is through a democracy. In order to create a true democracy, the government has to stop operating like a corporation. It has to become a civil servant. More than just that, it has to become an extension of the civilians. Whether via voting or public demonstrations, democratic principles have proven to be successful when Americans band together. We see this in the civil rights movement, the women's suffrage movement, and the worker's rights movement. These groups all still face barriers due to the capitalistic, elitist system which profits off of their misery, but the improvements in their conditions were gained through a large-scale mobilization of citizens, much like the organization democracy promotes. The only way to live up to the ideal of freedom Americans have been fed

is to follow in the footsteps of activists throughout history. Through that tactic, the elite class will lose its control over the government, and America will finally have liberty and justice for all.

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