

**Is the United States a Democracy?**

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## **Abstract**

The 2024 presidential election allowed the people to see the government for what it truly is: a better of two evils. Donald Trump and Joe Biden declare themselves complete opposites, one fights for the conservative Republican Party while the other fights for a liberal Democratic Party. But, both claim to fight for a capitalist democracy. This paper will outline the fundamentals of democracy, including equality, economic freedom, and a multi-party system. It will also compare the foundations of democracy to both parties and look at the side-by-side comparison to the parties themselves. This paper will conclude that, in fact, neither party is democratic, and therefore, neither is the government. Additionally, this paper will come to the conclusion that the two parties are not polar opposites and are really different versions of the same arrangement. This paper will also outline the foundations of a capitalist plutocracy and compare the similarities between the former and the current government. After comparing the two and coming to a conclusion that the United States government is a capitalist plutocracy, this paper will outline possible solutions to bring the government back to a democracy. These solutions include introducing third parties, updating the voting ballots, and reeducating the citizens on the government and promoting citizen participation.

## **Is the United States a Democracy?**

The Democratic and Republican parties claim that they are political opposites. But they both say that they are part of a greater democracy, a capitalist democracy. However, in the grand scheme of things, the two parties are not all that different, nor are they part of a true democracy. This paper will break down the fundamentals of a capitalist democracy and compare it to the United States. It will also provide evidence for the claim that the United States is in fact, not a democracy, and if it wants to become one, it needs to change.

### **Promises of a Capitalist Democracy**

The Democratic and Republican parties say they fight for the promise of democracy and freedom. The Democratic party says it fights for minorities and the middle class (United States Joint Economic Committee, 2024). The Republican party advertises its goals for what is called the 1%, a group of wealthy elites who run the government through money. But what do they really fight for?

The United States calls itself a capitalist representational democracy (US Vote Foundation, n.d.). The public votes for officials that will, in turn, represent the people in the federal and state levels of government. Each of these levels help to make sure that the people are incorporated in decision making and policies. It is set up in a way to seemingly give power to the people, but the power really goes to investors and corporations, who profit from campaigning and policies. This very idea goes against the literal definition of democracy which is “government by the people” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.-a). The backhandness of the government makes one question if a capitalist democracy is even possible? And in short: no.

## **Capitalism**

Capitalism can be described as both a form of government and a version of economy (Amico, 2020). This means that while the United States has intertwined capitalism with democracy, the two are not dependent on one another. Furthermore, Amico states that the two are not only not dependent on one another, but they also contradict one another. Capitalism works off of competition and private interest (Jahan & Mahmud, 2015). Capitalism works by everyone contributing based on personal gain instead of the greater public interest. But even with selfish intent, the economy continues to prosper with the increased self-interest. However, these fundamentals lead to an independent nation filled with self-centered people. Beyond the individuals contributing to the growing economy, corporations and businesses make up a large percentage of the economy. Corporations help drive the market and production. Corporations push productions to the expanding market, which adds to the equally expanding consumerism. Swanson (2026) outlines how oil companies withdrew their promises of lower carbon emission rates and fossil fuels. Fossil fuels continue to make up 90% of carbon emission, and with no major businesses in a hurry to fix this, rates will continue. Oil companies create a system where people continue to be dependent on them for cars, cooking, and other basic necessities. But simultaneously, those same companies are polluting the earth. But capitalism allows them to continue their systems since they bring money and products to the market. Since the government is dependent on the corporations to make significant profits which then lead to government investments and donations, neither of the parties will curb the damage corporations have done, since it will break their money flow from that business.

Beyond oil companies, the United States continues to overspend on weapons and the military; this is called the military-industrial complex (Painter, 2026). The United States military spends millions on lobbyists and lawyers to continue to pressure the United States into conflict. This conflict would then cause a chain reaction that would end with the government overspending and purchasing more weapons and artillery for the conflict, feeding the military-industrial complex. With selfish companies such as these leading the economy and exponentially profiting, one has to ask themselves if the economy can even allow for equality, and therefore, democracy.

### **Democracy**

Democracy is based on the fact that people are equal in every sense, and therefore people should have equal political values (Amico, 2020). This very idea contradicts capitalism: one requires a hierarchy of power and greed to succeed, the other requires equality among the people. So, if the two cannot coexist, can the United States be both? Again: no. According to the Civil Liberties Union of Europe, democracy is founded on fourteen fundamentals; in the article, it includes the following: equality, political tolerance, economic freedom, multi-party system, citizen participation (Day, 2022). While not all are listed above, the ones outlined will be looked into and compared to the United States supposed capitalist democracy.

### **The Democratic Party and a Capitalist Democracy**

The Democratic Party has had a history spanning over two hundred years. During their existence, they have switched opinions and policies; from promoting slavery to fighting for women's rights over their own body, the Democratic Party has evolved time and time again. (Kelleher, 2026; Democratic Nation Committee [DNC], 2026). According to the DNC, the Democratic Party currently claims to focus on continuing to give power back to the people and

granting every individual the opportunity for equality and dignity. But do they keep their promises?

Joe Biden (and eventually Kamala Harris), the most recent Democratic Party candidate campaigned in both the 2020 and the 2024 presidential election. Biden claims to want to give economic relief to the public, help the United States to overcome the coronavirus, lower the emission rate to zero by 2050, and respond to calls for racial justice (Poynter Institute, 2024). According to the Poynter Institute, after winning the 2020 election, Biden has been able to work towards these goals, one example being his success with the coronavirus and lowering emission rates.

However, his other promises fall short. Instead of helping the economy, inflation rates rose 30-40% under Biden's four-year term (Rasmus, 2025). Additionally, the median salary dropped by over \$2000 between 2020 and 2022 while the consumer price index rose 9% in 2022 (US Census Bureau, 2025). This means that the average American made less money and had to pay more for products. The combined results made living in the middle class worse than before (Meyers, Paulin, & Theil, 2023).

When Biden dropped out of the presidential race in July of 2024, he immediately endorsed his previous vice-president Kamala Harris. While some hoped for a different approach, Harris said that she would continue a similar stance to Biden's approach, again with the public not seeing anything new from either candidate. After the loss of the 2024 presidential election, the Democratic Party finds itself in the minority within the federal government and in a losing battle. With mixed results and empty promises, what does the Democratic Party continue to claim?

The Democratic Party continues to say that they want tax equality among individuals and corporations, lower costs of living for the people, and equal voting rights (DNC, 2026). These original claims seem close to the fundamentals of democracy mentioned by the Civil Liberties Union of Europe, but claims are only that: claims (Day, 2022). The Democratic Party claims they fight for the middle class and equality, yet Biden, their presidential nominee, reassures the wealthy that nothing will change (Norton, 2024). Additionally, they claim that they want to work towards equal voting rights; however, the voting process continues to be too complicated for many people. The government has made it easy to overvote and invalidate the citizen's votes. Lawmakers choose confusing wording that makes it hard to interpret before submitting voters their vote (Swaby & Waldman, 2022). Moreover, as previously stated in the paper, during Biden's presidency, the cost of living has increased while the median salary has decreased. This evidence argues the point that Biden and the Democratic Party failed to keep their promise of lowering the cost of living. All in all, the Democratic Party continues to show that it does not stay true to their claims nor uphold their own standards; their reality goes against the fundamentals of democracy which proves that the Democratic Party is not a democracy. So, if the Democratic Party is not actually democratic, is the Republican Party?

### **Republican Party and a Capitalist Democracy**

According to Britannica (2026), the Republican Party historically has been both the conservative and progressive party. They fought for the abolition of slavery in its entirety in the 19th century, but then identified with laissez-faire capitalism which had conservative social policies during the 20th and 21st centuries. The Republican National Committee [RNC] (2026) currently claims to restore the American Dream, promote economic prosperity, and protect

constitutional freedoms. The Democrats have proven they cannot keep their promises, but can the Republicans?

Donald Trump, the current president of the United States, began his journey of presidency in the 2016 presidential election against Hillary Clinton. His campaign slogan started as Make America Great Again [MAGA]. Trump used this campaign as propaganda and as a platform to rally people behind his campaign. The MAGA agenda consequently became the RNC agenda. But while MAGA claims to help the American people, MAGA is described as sexist, racist, and homophobic (Volle, 2026). This directly opposes the Republican's claim to protect constitutional freedom because in the Declaration of Independence, it outlines that "all men are created equal... with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (United States, 1776, para 2). Without the constitutional freedoms, the MAGA campaign has indirectly admitted that they treat some people better than others. This removes the fundamentals of equality, where all people are treated with equal respect and dignity, which is a pillar of democracy.

Beyond MAGA, the Trump administration also advertises both Project 2025 and Agenda 47. Both programs say the same thing, they outline Trump's, and the Republican's, agenda for his presidency. Project 2025 outlines the Republican's goal to turn the United States into a neoliberal proto-fascist government (Polychroniou, 2024). However, during his campaign, Trump openly said that he was not involved nor connected to Project 2025. Instead, Trump promoted Agenda 47, which outlined how they want to protect the United States from the extreme leftists and put all of the federal power under direct control of the president. This very idea goes against the process of checks and balances, which creates a system where each of the branches have some control over the other two. Therefore, if there are no checks and balances

and the power is only in the president's hands, it goes against the fundamentals of control over the abuses of power. The Civil Liberties Union of Europe (Day, 2022) describes control over the abuses of power as a way to make sure everyone is involved in the government and that politicians attempt to better it. Abuse happens when the government puts itself above the law and exempts itself from punishment and policies. Day offers a solution of separating the powers of government between branches, which is exactly what the Republican Party wants to undermine. This direct attempt to undermine democracy further proves how the Republican Party is not democratic.

The Republican Party also highlights that it wants to improve the economy, but does it really? It has been proven that the economy consistently does better under Democratic presidents than Republican presidents, and the Democratic presidents have not done great, as previously outlined in the paper (United States Joint Economic Committee, 2024). The same committee also explains that the Republican Party focuses on the elite 1% of the population and commonly gives the wealthy tax cuts. Unemployment rates consistently rise under Republican presidents, and the economy simultaneously tanks. With a failing economy, the Republicans can no longer say they want to improve the economy, since history says that they prefer ruining it.

As the MAGA president, Trump quickly puts through executive orders to push anti-immigration laws. These laws are aggressive and resulted in over 390,000 deportations in his first year as president, with 3,000 arrested daily (Gottlieb & Cruz, 2026). Gottlieb and Cruz also point out how the arrested are put in inhumane detention camps. The Republican Party targets minorities and anyone with an ethnic background other than white European. This discrimination contradicts political tolerance, a democratic fundamental outlined Day (2022). The Republican Party has shown again and again how they violate the foundations of democracy.

So, if the Republican Party cannot keep those promises, can they provide anyone the American Dream? The American Dream is defined in many ways, but people can agree that the American Dream includes an equal opportunity for anyone to gain social upward mobility, economic success, and a comfortable life (Churchwell, 2022). But is this ideal obtainable in this day and age? According to Churchwell, the “American Dream” was coined in 1931 by James Truslow during the Great Depression. The American Dream was made to give people something to rally behind and strive for. But the American Dream cannot happen without democracy. The American Dream talks about equal opportunity for everyone, something not seen today, and economic prosperity, which is also not seen today. The American Dream is an ideal that helped the old United States, but the current United States is not the same. It currently has two competing parties that call themselves polar opposites, but really, they are not. They claim to be different: progressive and conservative, left-winged and right-winged. But when fundamentally compared, the two parties are not all that different, and neither fight for nor represent democracy. So, if not democracy, what?

### **Realities of a Capitalist Plutocracy**

*When a plutocracy is disguised as a democracy, the system is beyond corrupt.*

- Kassem & Grim, “Rise Up and Salute the Sun: The Writings of Suzy Kassem”

Plutocracy can be described as a government ruled by the controlling class of the wealthy (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). A capitalist plutocracy allows for the wealthy and corporations to hide behind a wall of democracy and equality. The decision makers of the United States want to tell the people that they respect their voices while they simultaneously undermine their power.

The capitalist democracy that the United States knows, and loves is no longer the prevailing system, instead, a capitalist plutocracy has taken over and runs the government.

The Democratic and Republican parties are so similar that it no longer matters who has the majority in the government, they result in the same thing. Throughout the centuries of their existence, the parties have slowly become more dependent on corporate donations and investments. This dependence results in a bias towards their investors so the parties can continue to have more money. To operate in the government, politicians need money. Total costs of elections, including both the presidential and congressional, in 2020 cost around \$19 billion and in 2024 cost just under \$15 billion (Open Secrets, n.d.). The absurd cost of campaigns and elections mean that politicians have to spend much of their time courting monetary supporters in order to maintain a presence (Habitat Media, 2012). These contributors do not care how they obtain influence in the government as long as they have a voice. This means that contributors for the Republican and Democratic parties significantly overlap. When looking at top contributors to the parties, many corporations donate to both parties in order to have a say in the government no matter who has prominence at the time (US Chamber Foundation, 2024). If the contributor works openly towards something that the Republican party aligns with, then the Democratic party should be against it since the parties are polar opposites. That is what the parties want the people to think. However, if both the Democratic and the Republican parties are taking money from the same contributors, then there has to be an overlap in opinions. This idea then contradicts the claims that the Republican and Democratic parties are as far apart as one can get. The data proves that while they advertise themselves as enemies, the people funding the campaigns are the same sources of income. If the monetary supporters are the same, and both parties are plutocratic, where does that leave the United States?

## The Political Compass

The Political Compass is a graph that helps to visually place various politicians and parties in order to demonstrate the similarities and differences in where they all stand. The political compass has an x-axis of a left-to-right economic scale and a y-axis of a libertarian-to-authoritarian scale (Political Compass, 2024).

In the Political Compass, the current United States is represented through the 2024 presidential candidates, Harris and Trump. Harris falls in the direct center of quadrant one, right-authoritarian. Trump falls further up in the top right of quadrant one. Both candidates, for as much as they deem themselves opposites, fall in the same quadrant of the Political Compass. This data proves the point that the two options for the United States government are not options at all, but merely two versions of the same argument.

This revelation is a major problem. Neither candidate is bringing anything new into the government. In 2024, 2020, 2016, 2012, 2008, and 2004 all of the presidential candidates fell in quadrant one. This means that the 2024 presidential election is not an anomaly, but instead a continuation of a consistent pattern. Additionally, over those election years, the candidates have increasingly become more extreme, moving towards right-authoritarian. This comes to a head with Trump being almost in the intersection point, with no more room on the graph. This extremism is problematic. Extremism, whether left-libertarian or right-authoritarian, does not represent the majority of the people, who generally fall in the middle. Beyond extremism, the similarities in the candidate's placement also means that there is less diversity within the government. The people who do not fall into quadrant one do not have an option to be represented. This means that no matter who wins, some people never have the chance to be heard. This needs to change.

## **We Need to Change**

If the United States wants to return to a democracy back from a plutocracy, the foundation of the government needs to change. To achieve this goal, and to allow all people to have a chance to be represented, the government needs to allow for more diversity beyond quadrant one of the Political Compass. This means opening the stage to third parties, encouraging participation of the people, and offering greater access to widespread political education.

In order to see any change in the highest level of the government, the lowest levels need to change first. This means that the people need to take initiative in order to rework the system. Democracy is a government run by the people. The people vote for the politicians who they think will best represent them, and then the politicians will vote and represent the people accordingly. But, when the people decide to become bystanders, and not participate, they do not get politicians who represent them. This cycle of the people's indifference and the resulting elections causes the government to become focused on a small percentage of the public. The less people participate, the more one voice gets a say. If that one voice is an extremist, as seen in the current government, then the government no longer represents the majority. But, for more people to correctly participate, they need to be educated on the system.

Widespread education of the government has decreased significantly, with 70% of Americans unable to pass a simple civic literacy quiz (US Chamber Foundation, 2024). Most Americans do not continue formal education about the government past high school (Hanson, 2025). This means that much of their information about the government comes from the media and the press. The press is meant to honestly inform the public of the ins and outs of the government on all levels. However, according to (Croteau & Hoynes, 1999), the United States

does not hold its press to those standards, and instead, the government is the one pulling the strings. Croteau and Hoynes describe a good press as a watchdog press: one who informs the citizens, diversifies the media, and watches for abuses of power. The press is the bridge between the government and the people. However, Croteau and Hoynes argue that the United States' press is more of a lapdog press, one who sucks up to the government. It will give prime footage time to the government, mainly the Republican and Democratic parties; prioritize funds and profits over relaying the story; and broadcast big dramas over the seemingly mundane, daily political changes. These key differences between the watchdog press and the lapdog press make one wonder if the press is reliable at all. Of the 68% of Americans who often get news about local policies and government, only 25% of them are satisfied with the results (Wang, Lipka, Matsa, Aubin & Shearer, 2024). This means that people no longer see the media and news as a satisfying, reliable source of information. With a lack of further education of the government mixed with insufficient sources of current politics, many Americans cannot vote based on the true facts. This then affects voting results and participation since many people do not either understand the stakes of the election, or they are not informed about the candidates on the ballot. But, even if the people do have an understanding of the government and the candidates, the options are so limited that it almost does not matter who they vote for.

Diversity of opinions has been a recurring issue for the United States. Whether in broadcast events, political parties, or voting participation, the United States consistently chooses a limited amount of variety. Currently, the options for presidents are either Democrat or Republican. Those two are the major political parties, which is why the United States qualifies as a two-party system. But, there are others. The 2024 presidential election technically had four parties which included the following: Democrat, Republican, Green, and Libertarian.

The Green Party focuses on the environmental side and prioritizes policies that will benefit the planet and combat climate change (Green Party, n.d.). They say that they want to give power back to the people instead of corporations and the 1%. In the 2024 presidential election, they nominated Jill Stein, who also represented the Green Party in the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections (Ballotpedia, n.d.-b). Stein promises Medicare for all, bringing the United States off of fossil fuels by 2035, and improving the economy to allow for affordable housing. She argues that the United States is too militaristic and that it endangers both itself and the world. Stein's promises bring in a new focus built on hopes for an improved climate and environment. Stein falls in quadrant three, left libertarian, on the Political Compass, reaffirming that her voice will bring a change to American politics.

The Libertarian Party focuses on a limited government based on individual liberty and personal freedom (Libertarian National Committee, 2025). It says that it focuses on the individual right to choose how they want to live and an emphasis on a free market with a less aggressive approach on foreign policies. Its 2024 presidential candidate is Chase Oliver. Oliver promises to promote individual freedoms instead of state power and respect of the individual. Additionally, he wants to remove the government's influence over an individual's choice of their environment and economic standing. He also claims to want to abolish tariffs and rework the healthcare system to benefit the people (Ballotpedia, n.d.-a). Oliver falls in quadrant four, right-libertarian, of the Political Compass, giving another perspective on government regulations and control not currently seen in today's government.

These third parties would allow for more people to be represented on a large scale as well as give more variety on all levels of the government. Since the Democratic and Republican parties are so similar, the current government has only one party. If the United States wants to

return to a representational democracy, then it needs to have options so the people can be represented. Additionally, in order to have their voices heard and pick their representation, the voting system needs to be adjusted accordingly.

In the 2024 presidential election, 73.6% of eligible people registered to vote and only 65.3% of people actually voted (Bureau, 2025). This is the result of many things: voter suppression, lack of options, and accessibility. The ethnicity breakdown of the 2024 presidential election is 71% white, 11% African American, 11% Hispanic, Asian 3% (Roper Center, 2024). It has been shown that leaders of the government are attempting to suppress certain demographics from voting based on previous results (Brave New Films, 2022). For instance, when 83% of African Americans voted democratic in 2024, republicans put in voter suppression policies in order to stop the heavy democratic votes. They made voting hours the same as working hours, which prohibited much of the working force from voting, and made the voting lines excessive (Legal Defense and Education, 2025). Currently, the government is attempting to redistrict the voting lines, so it makes it harder for certain communities to vote. The government is now also trying to make it necessary to bring documents proving citizenship in order to vote (Lathan, 2026). This suppression could cause less people to vote due to all of the obstacles (Brave New Films, 2022). This, among other things, needs to change.

The United States prides itself on being a representational democracy, and it can get back to that standard, but not without significant change and help. Democracy requires equality, political tolerance, economic freedom, a multi-party system, and citizen participation. (Day, 2022).

Much of this can be achieved with third parties. Third parties would bring in diversity and a multi-party system. Since the Democratic and Republican parties are the same thing, a new

party would need to gain significance for the United States to be a multi-party system. Third parties would also help to bring in economic freedom, with the Libertarian Party's candidate Olivier advocating for an individual's right to economic independence.

The United States would also need a free and independent press to relay factual information about the government as well as broadcasting multiple perspectives on the same issues and concerns. Having an open press would bring in diversity and opportunities for the people to become educated and informed. Political education is extremely important since it would allow people to know where they stand on policies and what to expect from candidates and various measures on the ballots. With more knowledgeable citizens, the United States would also have to open access and availability to voting, which to reiterate, would increase citizen participation and equal representation throughout the nation. Open voting would then lead to political tolerance since minorities would have an equal chance to be represented in the government and be heard and seen.

Overall, the United States cannot currently call itself a representational capitalist democracy for all of the reasons previously stated in this paper. However, while it is currently a capitalist plutocracy, the United States has a chance to change. It will be a long road before it will be a democracy again, but the United States has an opportunity to change the fundamentals of the current government to match the fundamentals of democracy.

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