

**America: Of the People, By the Corrupt, For the Wealthy**

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## **Abstract**

The following paper delves into the issue of how to best categorize and analyze the United States government. First, it uses the four theories of the American government to classify the current political system as being dominated by the elite class. The first half of the paper's body then discusses whether or not to include the economy when analyzing governmental structure, arguing that there is indeed merit to including it. The second half of the body critiques the two-party system, arguing that despite the facade of there being two juxtaposing parties, in reality the government has been stuck in a status quo dominated not by party but by class. Finally, the paper concludes that, while ideally America should be a democracy, political corruption, economic disparity, and misinformation are hurdles that must be overcome first.

## **America: Of the People, By the Corrupt, For the Wealthy**

While democracy is the label commonly used to categorize the American government since the day of the nation's inception by the Founding Fathers, lesser-known alternate theories can provide a more accurate description of how the current government truly functions.

Traditionally, the United States is described as a democracy: a state governed by the voice of the people or populace. Yet some argue that the United States is truthfully a pluralist government in which groups, not individuals have power, especially since the United States has over 340 million citizens represented in Congress with merely 535 people. Furthermore, the hyperpluralist theory argues that there are so many opposing groups that the pluralist structure has become too extreme, leaving the government frozen in the throes of clashing opinions and forces of influence. Finally, the elite class theory suggests that a small, ruling class holds the power of the government, making political decisions that benefit themselves, rather than the people. When one utilizes a structural approach to analyzing the government—looking at how the government truly functions including in relation to the economy—rather than an institutional analysis—which merely includes how the government functions on paper with three branches of elected officials—democracy is quickly thrown out of the picture. With so many citizens and so few governmental officials, in the modern day no individual, average citizen truly has a voice on a federal level to shape the government or its decisions. When one looks at issues such as gun control, for example, there has been little movement in policy in one direction or the other. This lack of true, drastic action that the government has shown in recent decades by either side reveals the homogeneity of the dominating two parties, both with similar perspectives. This status quo eliminates the pluralist theory in which various citizens should be able to impact policy by

forming into groups. Since groups such as Moms Demand Action or Gun Owners of America both work for opposite ends of the political issue, their voice and influence are limited by the equal opposite reaction of the inevitable group who will rise up to oppose that opinion. While this would seem to prove the hyperpluralist theory as accurate, in actuality the elite class theory is the reason why the American government is frozen into inaction, not because of hyperpluralism. Money and donations are what these competing groups—corporations—use to sway governmental decisions. Therefore, it is the elite class who truly hold the power and keep the nation in stasis as it is not the number of people but the number of donations that drives policy. While groups do compete with one another, often leading to deadlock, in reality only groups with money can truly have a voice. The greater amount of money supersedes the deadlock of equal supporters, leaving the decisions to be made by the ultra-rich, for the ultra-rich. The United States government is best analyzed with the elite-class theory because it shows how, in the neoliberal society, money is power. Money gets politicians elected, and money keeps the corrupted officials doing the bidding of the wealthy, not of the people or interest groups.

### **The Capitalistic Influence Upon Democracy**

Over the decades, the United States has claimed to be a superior nation due to its democratic nature, blaming communists for issues while colonizing nations they deemed inferior and uncivilized. Yet despite what the United States government likes to call itself on paper, America may not truly be a democracy in practice. By viewing economic and political systems as disparate, one may believe the United States to be a clean-cut democracy when seen from the institutional perspective—which does not consider the economy in its analysis of government—but, in reality, these two systems cannot be analyzed without the other due to the capitalistic effect of imbuing the powerful with not merely the power of governance but also the power of

wealth. No singular source of opinion, especially government-approved textbooks, can accurately provide the full picture if it fails to include not merely the blueprint of what the United States government was intended to be but the actual structure that has been built under the influence of political and capitalistic corruption and control. By ignoring the intrinsic ties and impact the capitalist economy has on the government, one cannot fully study the intricacies of how the American government functions, especially since such a by-the-book perspective closes off the avenues of alternate theories of government.

According to the Magruder's American Government textbook, the United States has a free enterprise system based upon "private ownership, individual initiative, profit, and competition" (McClenaghan et al., 2006, pp. 38). While it does profess the American economy to be a free market, the textbook concedes that the "government does play a role in the American economy" in order "to protect the public and to preserve private enterprise" (McClenaghan et al., 2006, pp. 39). Yet can one truly call an economy a free market if the government is still holding the reins? The American government not only regulates the economy but is itself a major player in it. While the textbook focuses on the importance of entrepreneurs who "start businesses and make them grow, creating jobs and goods and services that contribute to a high standard of living," in reality the United States government and economy are run by the same people who have themselves in mind: the top 1%. A world in which the rich are actively trying to create a better world for the people like the textbook claims is a utopia. The competition of capitalism cannot help but thrive alongside greed and inequality. The textbook goes on to say that democracy and the economy are based on individual freedom, with democracy providing economic rights, such as the right to "choose one's work, the right to join or not join labor unions, and the right to acquire, use, transfer, and dispose of property" (McClenaghan et al.,

2006, pp. 38). While the textbook does briefly concede that growing disparities or discrimination has led to issues with capitalism, it claims that there is merely a demand to possibly alter capitalism, giving very little attention to the economy's role and spending only a few pages discussing the economy's relationship with the government, almost entirely glossing over it. Yet the way to change capitalism, the American economy, is not in the hands of the people or the "free market" but in the laws and regulations of the government: the supposed democracy. How, if they control each other, can these two entities, government and capitalism, then be independent? If the government is controlled by those winning the free-market competition and the government controls who wins the free market competition, then it could arguably not be a free market nor a democracy at all. Because the government is so entrenched in the pockets of the ultra-rich, an institutional approach to interpreting the government cannot accurately depict the true United States government because it overlooks how deeply embedded capitalism has become in the government.

According to Bailey, however, "the theory that capitalism leads to liberty is far from disproved." Bailey claims that because the countries with the highest GDP per capita rankings are democracies, then capitalism leads to increased freedom and democracy, including an expanded middle class (Bailey, 2007). Not only is this correlation without causation, but also by merely looking at gross domestic product per capita, the result is inaccurate. Rather than a median which would more accurately reflect the average standard of living and income for a regular citizen, by merely looking at the average GDP, the billionaires and top 1% skew the mean as outliers to make the average citizen seem much richer statistically than they truly are (Pettinger, 2024). Urie argues that "the US has spent the last five decades concentrating incomes, wealth, and with them power, in a remarkably small number of hands. [...] Eligible voters do

elect representatives, but those elected represent the interests of corporate executives and oligarchs, not the people" (Urie, 2023). This system is a vote for show in which, regardless of who wins, a candidate whose platform was supported by rich capitalists holds no allegiance to those who voted and all allegiance to those who monetarily supported their campaign. Rather than winning based upon votes, in order to even campaign in America enough to be broadly recognized, one must not have a platform of policies but of monetary funding. In the 2024 presidential elections, Trump, Harris, and Biden raised \$4.7 billion. However, this "figure also does not include most of the cash raised by dark-money groups, which do not disclose their donors but often spend money on campaigns and elections." For example, regardless of whether one supports Democrats or Republicans, "[t]he main super [Political Action Committees]s backing Ms. Harris and Mr. Trump continued a trend of raising enormous amounts of money not from real people but from the super PACs' own allied dark-money groups, which are set up as political nonprofits and are not required to disclose their donors" (Sun & Schleifer, 2024). One such example of billionaires investing in candidates in order to get power is Elon Musk, who donated at least \$288 million to Trump's campaign (Thadani et al., 2025). With Trump's election, he became a special government employee in charge of the Department of Government Efficiency. Such a chain of events clearly shows that the correlation does not lie between democratic voters and representative candidates but between candidates raised up by money and the interests of the wealthy who got them their platform, their support, and their election. In exchange, if an elector gets into office, they must please the rich corporations or CEOs; if they fail to do so, instead making laws that tax the wealthy, they will not be financially supported, and their political career will thus fail. Power begets power begets power: one cannot separate the

power of wealth from the power of government. An institutional approach simply cannot provide the full picture of the money exchanging hands behind closed doors.

Urie argues that “capital controls political power inside the US, empire represents the reach of US-backed capital internationally, and the American electoral system exists to promote the illusion that politics exists separate and distinct from the power of capital to determine political outcomes inside the US. [...] The primary impediment to democracy is capital.” Most people, even, are aware of the corruption of democracy by the capitalist system it resides within, citing the “power of Big Tech”, “corruption”, and “corporate control of the political system” for why the United States cannot be a true democracy (Urie, 2023). This clear influence that the inequality and individualism capitalism promotes has on the democracy of America makes it impossible to critically analyze American governmental systems without considering economic factors and influences. It is money, after all, that makes the world go round—not votes. “[L]arge, multinational corporations are the Federal government. This isn’t simply a matter of who sits where. Monsanto writes agricultural and food policy; ExxonMobil writes energy and foreign policy, and Goldman Sachs writes financial policy for the Federal government” (Urie, 2020). Regardless of who is voted for, or which party wins the election, all options for voters are not representative of the people but of the monetary supporters who give them a platform, power, and a voice. Even if a politician claims to support environmental protection or to care about poverty rates while running, once they are voted into office they have no obligation to their voters or their professed principles: in order to save their career and their power, they must write policies and laws that enable large corporations to maintain their money and power. Therefore, the faces of politicians who sit in the seats of office are not the ones who run America: they might carry it out legally, but the governmental decisions all come from and support the

capitalist corporate leaders. “The currency of these corporations is power. Each have legal, tax, regulatory and lobbying departments that are as central to their businesses as those that produce their nominal products.” There has been a “merging of state with corporate power. Likewise, corporations are considered extensions of state power, hence the relation of trade and trade agreements to foreign policy” (Urie, 2020). This inarguable connection between governmental policies and corporations benefitting from them shows how trying to separate democracy from the economic system would lead to an incredibly inaccurate representation of how the American government truly functions. People are not voting for policy; they are voting for which face the corporate leaders can hide behind. According to Wolff,

[i]deally, for capitalists, their [political] bloc should rule the society—be the hegemonic power—by controlling mass media, winning elections, producing parliamentary majorities, and disseminating an ideology in schools and beyond that justifies capitalism. Capitalist hegemony would then keep anti-capitalist impulses disorganized or unable to build a social movement into a counter-hegemonic bloc strong enough to challenge capitalism’s hegemony. (Wolff, 2020)

Through this control of the media and education, those in power can stay in power by raising the next generations to believe that they have influence through suffrage, thereby pacifying the masses and enabling the minority to control the majority. Government-approved textbooks in public schools, therefore, teach an idealized version of government from an institutional viewpoint, rather than a more critical structural viewpoint, in order to continue using capitalism to undermine democracy. By denying the fact that the economy influences the government, it keeps the masses in control, arguing about Democrats versus Republicans rather than arguing against the system as a whole. An institutional perspective on government is not a method of

analyzing the American government but a purposeful method of disguising how the government runs on money, discouraging citizens from protesting or uniting their political voice that—by sheer numbers—could endanger the lavish lives of the supremely wealthy.

One of the main issues is the lack of taxation on the wealthy. This has led to increasing wealth discrepancies between the richest and poorest of the country. According to Pizzigati, Top 1 percenters are now grabbing 21 percent of our nation's income, over double the top 1 percent income share in 1976. [...] By the 1950s, Americans of massive means faced tax rates as high as 91 percent on their income over \$200,000, the equivalent of about \$2.4 million today. In those same years, the wealth America's wealthiest left behind when they entered the great beyond faced an estate tax top rate that could go as high as 77 percent. Wealthy married couples here in 2024, by contrast, can *totally* exempt as much as \$27.22 million from any federal estate tax. (Pizzigati, 2024)

This lack of taxation on the rich permits these billionaires to remain billionaires, accrue more wealth, and pass their money on to their offspring as inheritance. This inherited wealth then can protect its power by using portions of the money to continue bribing the government, letting them keep their fortune by supporting campaigns and making sure that those in charge must protect their own needs first, before the mass populace, therefore accruing more and more money, an endless cycle. Economist Thurow

writes that “democracy and capitalism have very different beliefs about the proper distribution of power. One believes in a completely equal distribution of political power, ‘one man [sic] one vote,’ while the other believes that it is the duty of the economically fit to drive the unfit out of business and into extinction. ‘Survival of the fittest’ and inequalities in purchasing power are what capitalist efficiency is all about. Individual

profit comes first and firms become efficient to be rich. To put it in its starker form, capitalism is perfectly compatible with slavery. Democracy is not. (Street, 2006)

Fundamentally, an economy based on inequality cannot be ignored when analyzing its effects on a supposedly equality-based governmental system. The wealth gap divide assures us that even if each person gets one vote, the strength of one's voice is based upon money. With politicians making policies based on their funders and not their voters, capitalism erases the equality of democracy in the United States. Therefore, one cannot simply ignore the economy when analyzing the actions of the government. Unfortunately, "American candidates without vast financial resources or access to such resources can generally forget about being taken seriously in money- and media-driven campaigns. [...] The candidate-selection and policymaking processes belong primarily to the top 10 percent of Americans that own 73.2 percent of American wealth" (Street, 2006). Consequently, because the distribution of wealth decides the outcome of politics, America cannot be assumed to be a democracy, and an institutional analysis disregards how the government actually functions; a structural analysis would be far more accurate and realistic.

Even education and time can be a limiting factor, with many working-class adults not having free time to research elections and politics after a long day at work. This lack of time to do quality research combined with the ease of access to algorithm-controlled mass media makes it easy for money to be the deciding factor as to whether or not a candidate is put on the ballot or reduced to insignificance, especially when "less than 10 giant corporations control more than 50 percent of the country's electronic and print media" (Street, 2006). Such domination over information effectively controls elections, making both voters and electors dependent upon these massive corporations. Regardless of whether a person has time to do in-depth research, such tight

control over the media, with sensationalist stories feeding the algorithm and silencing quality reports, makes it nearly impossible for a voter to discover and vote for candidates based on their political stances and opinion on current events, especially for a third-party candidate. In 2024, there were 1,605 people running for president, but most average Americans would likely be unable to name more than four or five, and that is without even considering knowledge of their policies or political standpoints. The top two earners with the greatest receipts and disbursements were Joseph Biden and Kamala Harris, the heads of the Democratic Party (Federal Election Commission, n.d.). Such a clear correlation between money and general awareness for candidates is not a coincidence: it is the machinations of the top 1 percent to whom democracy is yet another object they can buy. Ignoring such truths with an institutional analysis would merely be playing into the hands of the mighty corporations who wish to disguise their corruption by controlling the populace's access and attention to information.

Furthermore, even excluding economic influences, the institutional approach to analyzing the government still would fail since what has been written in the Constitution by the forefathers is very different from how the government functions today. For example, according to Lazare, Mechanisms like the Electoral College, which give state and local officials enormous leeway in determining how elections are to be conducted, date from the late eighteenth century when the infant United States consisted of scattered farms, plantations, and homesteads interspersed with a few coastal cities. It was a decentralized electoral system befitting a decentralized, homespun republic. But two centuries later, America is anything but decentralized. Thanks to round-the-clock cable newscasts, instant polling, and the Internet, information no longer takes weeks to travel by coach or schooner. Instead, it takes just nanoseconds to flash from coast to coast. Such a society needs election

methods suitable for a new age, yet as of the year 2000 it was still making do with the same old mechanisms. (Lazare, 2008, pp. 1–13)

For example, in the 2000 presidential election, Floridian systems for counting votes failed, leading to debate over which president even won. Systems are far messier than they may seem on paper because with the increasing rapidity and size of the United States, it is almost impossible for the government to follow the simple model taught in schools: three branches with checks and balances. In reality, there are far more people and complications than that. For example, the judicial branch in school is often represented as merely the Supreme Court. In truth, there are 94 district courts in the United States, thirteen circuits of Courts of Appeal, and countless more special courts (Justia, n.d.; United States Courts, n.d.). Institutional approaches, especially that which is taught in school, ignore such complexity and often focuses on the overarching category of role each branch of government has: the executive branch carries out the laws, the legislative branch makes the laws, and the judicial branch evaluates the laws, each with a method of keeping another branch from becoming too powerful. Yet, in today's world, the actual people who fill governmental seats are more varied and intricate than such a simplistic viewpoint. Even the balances of power have changed and shifted throughout the decades, such as judicial review, which the judicial branch claimed in 1803, greatly expanding their power even though it was not written directly into the Constitution. Even if one did analyze the government from an institutional standpoint, one must consider not merely the structures of government and their function but delve deeper into the various branches of the branches and how decisions truly get made in order to discern where the power truly lies—which would inevitably lead to a structural analysis when one finds that almost every decision leads back to a money trail.

According to Elving, “[t]hroughout our history we have functioned as both [a republic and a

democracy]. Put another way, we have utilized characteristics of both. The people decide, but they do so through elected representatives working in pre-established, rule-bound and intentionally balky institutions such as Congress and the courts" (Elving, 2022). Even with an institutional approach it is not as simple as democratic versus undemocratic: any system complex enough to lead one of the world's leading nations will never be encapsulated with one word. It is necessary to pose multiple questions and analyze from a variety of views with a multitude of factors—including the economy—in order to discern an accurate conclusion. For example, author Nwanevu posed the following questions: "Do we have a politics that undermines our democratic institutions in some fundamental way? [...] What is democracy? Why do we like it so much? Do we have as much faith in it as we tell ourselves we should? Is America a democracy? And if it's not, what would it take to get us there?" (Serpe & Nwanevu, 2025). Nwanevu's response is that, of course, it is complicated. Nwanevu reasons that the United States does not have a system in which people's votes count equally, or even close to equally. It's difficult as a matter of political design to have that be the case exactly, but we are very far out of whack with international standards. [T]he entire edifice of the American constitutional system falls apart very quickly. And the central locus of a lot of things that should concern us is the U.S. Senate. [T]he compromise was forced by the small states in 1787. And things haven't gotten better. The classic comparison is California and Wyoming: California has 40 million people, and it has the same number of Senators as Wyoming, which has under 600,000 people. Wyoming has sixty-seven times the representation by population size that California does. The Senate distorts policymaking, but it also confirms people to the judiciary and the executive. This is not democratically tenable, but we accept this status quo as normal, because we tell ourselves a story about

how the House of Representatives balances things out. It doesn't. (Serpe & Nwanevu, 2025)

Therefore, even if one tries to evaluate America from an institutional perspective by diving into the structures itself, one runs into the issue of how to even define democracy. According to Merriam-Webster, a democracy is defined both as a "government by the people", "rule of the majority", "a form of government in which the people elect representatives to make decisions", "a form of government in which the people vote directly against or in favor of decisions", "an organization or situation in which everyone is treated equally and has the right to participate equally in management", and "the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Such a broad array of definitions from one source alone shows the issues that attempting to decide the true nature of the United States government from solely an institutional standpoint causes: such a complicated machine is not to be analyzed for categorization but analyzed for comprehension, which is what a structural approach can provide. Ignoring money in the question of how the United States government functions is like trying to discover the main purpose of an umbrella on a day without rain. In order to fully appreciate precisely how the United States government works, one cannot simply ignore what happens behind closed doors: one must try to force them open in an attempt to discern the full truth of who truly holds all the power in the United States. A structural approach is clearly the superior method of analysis comparatively to an institutional method of investigation due to the large role of the economy—and especially of the wealthy one percent—in the American government. Regardless of how one defines democracy, ignoring the corruption of capitalist America in relation to the government would make it impossible to accurately suppose whether or not the United States is democratic. Money is a factor in who makes the laws, who gets elected, what

legislation is passed, and who has a voice. By failing to consider the implications a capitalist system has on the government and how an economic system based on competition and individualism might influence to what extent the government can be based upon equality, one fails to comprehend the true picture of the American government. Democratic or not, America is inarguably capitalistic. Excluding such a defining characteristic under the facade that the economy and government are disparate entities leads to false conclusions. Therefore, the best way to define whether or not America is a democracy is to utilize a structural approach.

### **A Monopoly on Power**

Political polarization has turned American politics from a civil debate into an emotionally charged argument. Members on both sides of the two-party system point fingers at the other, warning of communists and fascists, corruption and duplicity. Yet with emotions running high, logic can be easily swayed. Rather than policies, people fight for parties, praising their own party as America's savior and demonizing opponents as unintelligent and immoral. Yet, at the end of the day, these two parties—Republican and Democrat—that claim to be polar opposites are not truly too different from one another. When one steps back from heated social media arguments, one can see the broader political compass. While both Republicans and Democrats have similar policies, falling into the status quo of right-leaning authoritarians, many more extreme or truly differing political perspectives have fallen by the wayside, voters refusing to vote outside of the two main parties since they believe that a third-party candidate will never win, thereby reinforcing the two-party system status quo. The Political Compass shows that Republicans and Democrats fall into the same quadrant (authoritarian right), with a spectrum overall on the graph running from libertarian to authoritarian on a social scale and from left to right on an economic scale. Such a categorization shows the full range of political perspectives, showing how, if one

takes a step back from the two main parties, they are actually close together politically in the scheme of the whole political world. Therefore, despite claims that Trump's 2025 election will drastically change America—for the worse or for the better—in the long run his policies would have been similar to a Democratic president's, with parties arguing not over whether or not to have taxes or rewriting the tax system itself, but merely over percentages and fractions of how taxes are collected.

If one compares the political platforms of Republicans and Democrats, the way they portray themselves may leave voters believing that they are not actually two faces of the same coin. For example, the Republican Party declares itself to stand against politicians who “sold our jobs and livelihoods to the highest bidders overseas with unfair Trade Deals and a blind in faith [...] globalism.” In their 2024 platform, they declare that politicians insulated themselves from criticism and the consequences of their own bad actions, allowing our Borders to be overrun, our cities to be overtaken by crime, our System of Justice to be weaponized, and our young people to develop a sense of hopelessness and despair. They rejected our History and our Values. Quite simply, they did everything in their power to destroy our Country. (UC Santa Barbara, 2024a)

Not only does this fail to include a single policy or goal of their own, but they also treat these politicians (whom they later name to be Joe Biden and Democrats) as villains, rather than people who are trying to run the country. While the Republicans are making broad, empty-handed claims about the destruction of the American spirit, the Democratic Party took a different approach that appears to be the very opposite at first glance. In their 2024 platform they open with acknowledging Native Americans owning the land and how political polarization is turning opponents into villains. They then go on to disparage Donald Trump, albeit in less heated words

than the Republicans used for them and say that they're combatting climate change, rebuilding infrastructure, protecting the border, and "closing the racial wealth gap and gender pay gap." They try to speak to the people, saying that they will "fix the tax system so everyone has a fair shot. [They] will restore the right to choose. [They] will continue to bring down costs for families" (UC Santa Barbara, 2024b). Yet with all these claims to speak for the people and address their concerns, are they truly that different? In the 2020 presidential election, Biden and Trump were extremely close to each other on the Political Compass, with Trump only a little more authoritarian and capitalistic, especially in comparison to candidates like Hawkins (Green Party) or Jorgenson (Libertarian) who fell in completely different quadrants and, unsurprisingly, are little known of by the general populace (*The Political Compass*, 2020). With all the focus on the small gap between Biden and Trump, those outside of the quadrant fall completely out of sight, blocked out by angry social media and fear that voting independently would just be wasting a vote. Yet when everyone follows that path, no change is ever made.

According to the Magruder's American Government textbook, a political party are people "joined together on the basis of certain common principles, who seek to control the government in order to secure the adoption of certain public policies and programs" (McClenaghan et al., 2006). Yet with a population of over 340 million people, our system cannot truly be representative of common principles if the nation is only divided into two main groups. After all, can 170 million people truly agree on public policies ranging from marginal tax rates to the declaration of war any more than 340 million people can? After a certain point, there is bound to be variation within a group, necessitating the branching off of political parties into smaller parties or groups. While there still are third parties in America outside of Republicans and Democrats, there has never been a president elected under a third party, and when a third-party

candidate does rise up enough, it results in a split vote, leaving the third-party candidate and the party they branched off from, or are most similar to, both losers against the opposing main party (County Office, 2025). Therefore, there is a stasis in the two dominant parties, with third parties unable to rise up. Therefore, even when enough dissenters want to break the two-party system, they are stuck voting between the two main parties, especially since only 15% of Americans are very likely to vote for a third-party candidate, and “if a third-party candidate they preferred was unlikely to win, more Americans say they would change their vote rather than stick with that candidate. Additionally, nearly six in 10 Americans each are highly concerned that voting for a third-party candidate would result in them wasting their vote on a losing candidate or helping to elect their least preferred candidate” (Jones, 2025). This means that even if Americans want drastic change—like policies outside the capitalistic authoritarian quadrant on the Political Compass—or dislike both the Republican and Democratic Party, they still will not vote outside of the status quo, thereby maintaining two political parties who do not represent the wants and needs of the people but the path of money into their own pockets. With voters supporting them not for their policies but for the reluctance of wasting a vote on a third-party bound to lose, the elected Republicans and Democrats are free to pick whatever policies they choose; policies that keep the wealth and control in the hands of the rich and powerful.

The two party-system has become so engrained into the American political system that many Americans forget that the two-party system itself was never intended by the founding fathers. While the Magruder textbook claims that “[p]olitical parties are absolutely essential to democratic government” and are “a vital link between the people and their government” (McClenaghan et al., 2006), political parties themselves are merely the status quo, so enforced

upon them that Americans forget there are other options for running elections in a democracy.

George Washington himself warned that political parties

serve to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force—to put in the place of the delegated will of the nation the will of a party; often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the community; and, according to the alternate triumphs of different parties, to make the public administration the mirror of the ill concerted and incongruous projects of faction, rather than the organ of consistent and wholesome plans digested by common councils and modified by mutual interests. (Washington, 2024)

Such forewarnings went unheeded and, today, methods to fix political polarization and the issues of political parties never mention the removal of political parties themselves but instead the rearranging of the electoral system, such as ranked voting or popular representation. In all plans, America is still divided by party lines.

So, if America is stuck with political parties in the foreseeable future, then the status quo must be disrupted in another way: overthrowing the two domineering parties. While the Democratic Party allegedly fights for the people, “[t]he left wing of the Democratic Party isn’t coming to save workers and young people. It’s time to abandon this party completely and build something new. The United States is the only advanced capitalist country in the world that has never had a worker’s party” (Hubbard, 2024). Because both parties are driven by money, not by voters, the people are left without a party that represents them. Then when “liberal supporters come into every election claiming that the fascists are coming and everyone needs to vote for the lesser evil”, the Democratic Party gains the liberal vote without needing “to do anything to win it. Instead, what they do have to do is appease the forces to their right. This process has forced politics in the US to ‘move steadily right’.” Rather than voting for the lesser evil, it is better to

vote for the party or candidate outside of the mainstream, even if they might not win that election. Currently, the president's job "is to maintain the neoliberal state" which encourages privatization and focuses not on society but on individual gain, enabling corruption and increasing class disparity (Jay, 2024). By regaining unions and solidarity as the citizens of America, the majority can use the power of their voice to overthrow the minority in power by voting for and electing candidates that represent them. The only barrier is the lack of organization and information in addition to the fear of wasting a vote.

Presidential candidate Ralph Nader had the "best showing of any progressive third-party presidential candidate since 1924" after campaigning all over the nation and raising millions of dollars with 150 thousand volunteers, yet it was only 2.7% of votes. Almost twice that is required in order to even get federal funding for the Green Party. Yet there is hope. The "corruption, dishonesty, and sheer ossification of the two-party duopoly are producing its antithesis: the search by millions of Americans for a meaningful alternative." So why hasn't anything changed yet? A large issue for the continued lack of success for disrupting the two-party status quo is the corporate control of the media and therefore of American citizen's information. Due to this, "[d]espite their current and historic contributions to the democratic process, third-party candidates are generally treated as nuts, nuisances, or nonpersons" by the mass media (Sifry, 2003). This dismissal of third-party candidates by the media—that's controlled behind the scenes by the Republicans and Democrats—reinforces the status quo of the dominating 1% as they pull the puppet strings of both Democrats and Republicans alike, enabling the ultra-rich to stay in power and maintain their ever-increasing wealth. This erasure of choice through media enables the Democrats and Republicans to cast third parties and their

candidates in a negative light, labeling them as extremists for falling outside their status quo—which they color to be “democracy”.

Great wealth [...] empowers oligarchs to pay armies of lawyers, publicists, politicians, judges, academics and journalists to censure and control public debate and stifle dissent. Neoliberalism, deindustrialization, the destruction of labor unions, slashing and even eliminating the taxes of the rich and corporations, free trade, globalization, the surveillance state, endless war and austerity — the ideologies or tools used by the oligarchs to further their own interests — are presented to the public as natural law, the mechanisms for social and economic progress, even as the oligarchs dynamite the foundations of a liberal democracy and exacerbate a climate crisis that threatens to extinguish human life. (Hedges, 2020)

While the media is free to discuss race, LGBTQIA+ issues, patriotism, religion, immigration, abortion, gun control, and cultural degeneracy—“issues used to divide the public, to turn neighbor against neighbor, to fuel virulent hatreds and antagonisms”—the topic of class is left to gather dust. Cultural debates enable Republicans and Democrats to enter cutthroat debates while having “few substantial differences between the two ruling political parties”, to the point where candidates “can switch effortlessly from one party to the other” without most citizens blinking an eye (Hedges, 2020). By controlling the narrative, the two leading parties can paint themselves as opposing enemies rather than two arms of the same puppet led by corporations with a monopoly on power. Therefore, the status quo of corruption and neoliberalism is upheld as people fight over social issues rather than the deeper economic and political machinations that engrain issues like racism and sexism into the fabric of our nation alongside the overused catechisms of democracy, liberty, and patriotism.

Regarding the latest presidential election in 2024 with Harris versus Trump, was Harris all that different from Trump? Many lofted her up as the ideal candidate as, being both female and a person of color, she hypothetically represented the perspectives of these two repressed groups. Yet just because she was part of those two groups does not erase the larger group she was loyal to: the corrupt, corporate oligarchy of America's top 1%. Despite lofty promises when running for office, once elected and with "majority control in all branches of government" Democrats "failed to codify Roe v. Wade, failed to pass the labor-friendly PRO Act, and have been overwhelmingly in favor of increasing funding for police and the mass incarceration state." This inaction has led to displeasure with Harris and the Democrats, "opening up the space for the right wing of the Republican Party [...] because they spout empty rhetoric while failing to pass any meaningful reforms to help working people weather the crisis of capitalism" (Shibabaw, 2024). Therefore, when a Republican such as Trump takes over the White House from a Democrat, there is very little difference at all—but much uproar from the corporate-controlled mass media trying to up-sell the argument between the two parties to drive focus away from any outside opinions or perspectives. With such a cycle, American politics and economy remains in the same upper right quadrant of the Political Compass, a reinforcing system of power, money, and control. In the last 20 years, "the candidates who have the most funding win the elections in the House of Representatives over 90% of the time and in the Senate roughly 80% of the time." Money—not votes or citizens—decide who wins and what gets made into a law. Even "[t]he billionaire CEO of BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager" has admitted that "it 'really doesn't matter' who wins the US presidential election, because both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris will be good for Wall Street" (Norton, 2024). The status quo is not determined by party or president, it's determined by who holds the most money, and that has not changed. Instead, it's

become more fixed into society, enmeshed into the economy through policies and political decisions that make it increasingly difficult for the people to change or disrupt the status quo.

With Republican Donald Trump as president now instead of a Democrat like Joe Biden, America will see little difference. Those who voted for Trump will praise his policies while blaming issues on Democrats while those who voted against him will rant about his actions while claiming the Democrats could do a better job. Yet, at the end of the day, both Harris and Trump stand for similar policies, even if Harris claims to be more aligned with the people. When it comes to politics, actions speak louder than words. Even if they run on different campaigns, the political and economic choices made in office are what define a candidate and party, and, from that comparison, both Democrats and Republicans—Harris and Trump—are more similar than different. When one takes a step back from the raging, corporate-controlled social media designed to inflame party lines and incite attention on the two dominating parties, citizens can see beyond the one quadrant of the political compass that has a firm grasp on the status quo and realize that what is depicted as political polarization is really misinformation and manipulation of media. Unless citizens utilize alternate media or vote for a candidate to raise awareness and support even if it does not mean the candidate will win an election that round, America will be stuck under an authoritarian, capitalist structure. Rather than voting for the “lesser evil”, Americans can utilize their vote and numbers to take back democracy to benefit them, not the wealthy billionaires. Rather than dismissing third parties as ludicrous extremists since they’re outside the status quo, if voters considered those such as the Green Party or the Libertarian Party, power of the authoritarian capitalists could shift from the hands of the few to the hands of the many, shattering the monopoly on power. Acknowledging that Republicans and Democrats are, in fact, similar in the broad scheme of the political compass enables voters to see beyond the

propaganda dominated by the two parties—who do not want voters to know about issues beyond their two sides—and change America for the better.

### **Conclusion**

While the American government may be ruled by the elite class and kept in place through control of the media, elections, and policies, there is still hope for the vast majority who fall outside of the 1%. Because the institutional structure of the government still enables citizens to vote, utilizing voting power to replace corrupt officials with those the corporate-controlled media wants us to dismiss will remove the reins of the government from the puppeteering wealthy and hand them back to the people. By actively searching for alternative news sources and voting for officials even if it is to raise attention and support rather than to actually win the election itself, citizens can reshape how the government functions under the elite-class theory to align with what America is supposed to be on paper: a democracy. It is what the founders imagined and built America to be and is the fairest system in which the people can craft a nation that best supports the largest amount of people. If anything goes astray, the people can elect those best able to handle issues and adapt with votes if the nation needs to alter its ways, rather than being stuck in a status quo of governance motivated by money. As the nation's situation changes, new representatives and policies can be implemented, instead of the current cycle of corruption that fixes the issues of the rich minority rather than the vast populace. Perhaps it is an ideal, but a democracy is the government that best serves its citizens. All it takes is the power of people.

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