

Democracy Denied

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Abstract

In the United States, it is routinely taught and believed that there is an effective two-party democracy in place, allowing for meaningful change based on the people's will and utilization of their votes. However, the structure of capitalism has imprisoned this country into a state where wealth rules all, including those who lead this country. Politicians are no longer accountable to their citizens but to their backers instead. To be considered viable for elections, candidates must receive significant financial backing, creating an environment where politicians "owe" their benefactors and write legislation to pay off their investment. This reality is masked by the illusion of choice in elections. Candidates are generally presented as polar opposites, each courting a different group of citizens, but instead serve the same leader - the all-powerful dollar. While there are distinctions that can be made between the two main political parties, in the end, they are too loyal to the problem to do anything to fix it. To understand this dynamic, one must use a structural approach, looking past the Constitution and the institutions in place to see how capitalism warps the political process. The economic elite can use their power to affect everything, whether it be the legal system, education, elections, or the media. America's institutions have become only symbolic, made hollow by economic interests, and not representative of the people's will. Change will not come from voting in a candidate who is dependent on this system, but rather from the people banding together to reclaim their power.

Democracy Denied

If a United States citizen is asked what form of government is present in the country, there will be little hesitation before the simple answer: a democracy. That is what is taught in schools and is widely accepted as truth. However, this topic is a topic of contentious debate among scholars and political scientists. Their arguments fall into four main theories: democracy, pluralism, hyperpluralism, and elite class.

The first, most commonly believed theory, is democracy. This theory states that every American has a fair, equal say in what happens in the country, using their votes to express their opinions. However, this idealistic view of democracy is easily challenged by deeper investigation. Even practically, it is difficult to argue that every single one of the estimated 260 million voting-aged citizens in the U.S. cannot only have input on the country, but also have input that can feasibly be attended to. Additionally, the many barriers preventing citizens from having their voices heard must be considered. True democracy is prevented by issues such as vote suppression, which has worsened since 2013, with the Supreme Court's *Shelby County v. Holder* decision that removed necessary checks that provided a layer of security against certain states and counties from putting legislation restricting voting into place ("Effects of *Shelby County v. Holder*," 2023).

The second basic theory of American government is pluralism, which states that the people of the United States do have power, but they must band together in order to utilize it. Believers of pluralism claim that while people may not have much influence on their own, democracy can be achieved through organization. Examples of this include groups like the National Rifle Association, which uses its large number of members to lobby for gun rights. This is present in some forms in the United States, but the theory assumes all groups can have similar

sway simply based on the size of their following; however, there are prominent, more powerful groups (such as the NRA) which have the most wealth and connections, allow them to push the smaller and weaker groups around.

The only theory that suggests the government is completely broken is hyperpluralism, an amplified version of pluralism. Hyperpluralism suggests that there are so many groups vying for control, leading to excessive compromise and cross-cancellation of legislation, handcuffing and rendering the political system useless. This can be seen with the never-ending struggle between Republicans and Democrats, each often undoing the other's progress whenever possible. While hyperpluralism can be seen in the United States, it does not explain the entire issue. There are groups in the U.S. that are so influential that they can have their will done, no matter what. No group can viably go toe-to-toe and force gridlock with the massive corporations, aside from even bigger corporations. People who focus on smaller issues end up continuously butting heads, while the rich spend what they wish to achieve their desires.

The last theory, the one that most effectively describes the current state of modern American government, is elite class theory. This view argues that the country is controlled not by the people or special interest groups, but by a small proportion of people - the wealthy elites. These elites - corporate leaders, lobbyists, and the world's millionaires and billionaires - can use their connections and money to shape policy to best fit them. While the people can work together to make some change, it is incredibly difficult against the gauntlet of elites that are fighting for themselves. This is the reality in the United States. The rich can get their legislation passed fairly easily, while the rest of the people have to get to work protesting, campaigning, and fighting the power for a chance. There is a great imbalance between the top one percent and the bottom

ninety-nine percent that cannot be ignored. America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, is not a democracy ruled by the people - it is an oligarchy ruled by the elites.

Capitalism: The Invisible Handcuffs

From the very roots of the United States education system, it is reinforced in children that America is a democracy through and through. They are taught how our government came about and how fair and excellent it is. This concept is not up for question or debate: it is presented to students as an absolute truth. Government-approved textbooks are highly unlikely to open any discussion on whether or not this so-called “fact” is true. This is generally due to teachers and textbooks directing students with an institutional approach to explaining why democracy is present, by looking only towards the separate branches of government and their technical functions, checks and balances, and the presence of national and regional elections. With these lessons, they are informed - while gaining an understanding through everyday life - of the intricacies of capitalism, the nation’s economic system. Democracy and capitalism are preached as hand-in-hand principles, but in certain forms, they could not be more opposing. The institutional way of thinking is incredibly narrow and does not acknowledge other aspects of the country or how the government functions in reality, with unspoken rules.

Alternatively, to an institutional approach, the structural approach would provide a superior view by looking at everything - not accepting the country’s political state at face value. The largest part of the United States that the institutional approach ignores is the presence of winner-take-all capitalism. The economic system of a nation is directly intertwined with its political system. Ignoring economics when answering the question of what kind of government is present is irrational and possibly perilous, as it ignores past conflicts between the two. The institutional approach would only look towards how the government theoretically would operate

as outlined in the Constitution, but there is so much beyond that. In actuality, when looking at the current state of the country and the world, it is incredibly clear that an abundance of powers and ideologies can counteract democracy. Only by analyzing the symbiotic relationship between the influence of external factors and political structure can a country's true nature be seen with unclouded eyes.

The flaws in the belief that America is a democracy can be seen in nearly every facet of the government, most clearly in the judicial system. A core part of democracy is the fair and just enforcement of its laws, which is not present in the United States courts. The legal system encourages "the enactment of as many complex laws as possible and using arcane language and courtroom procedures that usually force people to hire expensive attorneys." This benefits corporations and the upper class, allowing them to "dominate the less affluent and turn the 'rule of law' into the rule of the oligarchy" (Boyer, 2006). When only the richest have access to the most competent lawyers, it provides them with an unfair advantage over the lower and middle classes. This is such an issue that in juvenile and adult criminal trials, where the defendant has the right to representation, over 80 percent of defendants cannot afford an attorney. The public attorneys appointed to them are often overworked and underpaid; therefore, unable to provide time and effort for the best defense possible (Gross, 2023). This legal leg-up that the upper class has prevents due process for the entire population and demonstrates how private wealth is interwoven with the judicial branch of the government.

Additionally, the model of for-profit prisons in the United States has led to increased punishment for nonviolent crimes and more reoffenders across the board. "Since private prisons make money from putting people behind bars, their lobbying efforts focus on bills that affect incarceration and law enforcement, such as appropriations for corrections and detention." This

can be seen from 2001 to 2011, during which large private prisons such as “CCA, GEO and Cornell Corrections spent, on average, hundreds of thousands of dollars to employ lobbyists to represent their business interests to federal policymakers” (“Gaming the System,” 2011). By using their wealth to warp the United States' legal system, these corporations have interrupted the flow of democracy. In this case, the government has chosen to sell its citizens' Constitutional rights to a fair trial and protection against the cruel and unusual punishment of being used for profit because of their crimes. A person's fate in court should lie only in the decision of their jury of peers, and not be up to an elite who want to make more money. The government continuously allows disruptions of democracy by those with economic power, displaying how capitalism continues to undermine the supposed existence of a true democracy.

In addition to the legal system's for-profit aspects, there are issues with the privatization of American media. American news has “been devoured by massive corporations, and allegiance to stockholders, the drive for higher share prices, and push for larger dividend returns” (Whitehead, 2005) Because many well-meaning Americans depend on the news for information about the world and rely on it to explain how to feel, biased reporting can confuse and rile up large groups of people. According to J. W. Whitehead (2005),

With freedom comes a moral and civic duty to stay informed about what's going on in our government. It is no longer enough to trust only mainstream media sources for the truth. We can no longer afford to absorb everything without filtration or fact-checking. Instead, we must resolve to seek it out from a variety of sources. In fact, an informed citizenry is our only hope if we are to maintain a democracy. As Thomas Jefferson once declared, "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty."

To have a functioning democracy, citizens must be informed voters, which is impossible in a society where the greed of corporations and political agendas taints all information. It should not be put on citizens to excessively double-check every source so they are not fed lies. This becomes more and more prevalent every day, especially with many social media platforms removing enforcement on fact-checking. After repeated allegations by President Donald Trump, accusing “social media platforms of censoring conservative voices,” large social media corporations such as Meta (the owner of Instagram and Facebook) and X (formerly known as Twitter) removed defenses against misinformation on their sites (Isaac & Schleifer, 2025). In this case and many others, private corporations are interfering with the general public’s opinions and knowledge to court the government’s approval for all the benefits it reaps. Private media companies use their allegiance to both profit and certain political figures to interrupt American citizens’ rights to unbiased knowledge, demonstrating the connection between economic and political forces.

Another flaw to the institutional approach to government that declares the United States a democracy is that capitalism inherently undermines democratic principles. As Lindblom (1982) explains, capitalism is a domineering force over society:

Many kinds of market reform automatically trigger punishments in the form of unemployment or a sluggish economy. Do we want business to carry a larger share of the nation's tax burden? We must fear that such a reform will discourage business investment and curtail employment. (p. 324)

When the market acts as a reactionary force against change, the general population demands, it denies people a key aspect of democracy: choice. Even without the presence of extreme greed, companies acting in their interests as necessary in a capitalistic society punish citizens because

they rely on them for subsistence. This effect is found in political offices as well. “Since pro-business policies are necessary, much is off-limits for legislative debate. Seriously regulating corporations or forcing the rich to pay their taxes might please most voters, but would effectively de-fund those who propose such an agenda” (Tabb, 2006). Even politicians who may wish to do what the people want - fighting corporations and the one percent - are restricted from doing so because they would effectively be shooting themselves in the foot. No politician can win an election without considerable donations from the upper class, which they cannot get if they work to pass legislation to limit their wealth. Therefore, both average people and elected officials are trapped in a paradox where they cannot effectively regulate the market without facing immediate consequences and cannot exercise their democratic rights.

Arguably, the most damaging way the wealthy in this country can use their money to interrupt democracy is through campaign financing and lobbying. Despite arguments that this is an expression of free speech and that “The plain truth is that it costs money to communicate, and there is no reason to expect that political communication should come free” (Smith, 2006), it can easily be seen that the effect of corporations and individuals’ money spent on elections is horrific. First, having wealth or access to another’s wealth should not be a barrier of entry into politics. However, “to pursue national office requires a personal fortune of one’s own, rich friends, or patrons. [...] and no one wins high office without assembling sufficient financing” (Tabb, 2006). Any average, well-meaning citizen could not run for any office without the backing of patrons with ulterior motives. It is nearly impossible to win any significant election without selling out in some form or another. In a lot of ways, it is not a race to see which candidate can receive the most votes: it is instead a race to see which candidate can receive the most donations. Even Smith (2006), who writes against more regulation of campaign finances,

admits “the candidate who spends the most money wins most of the time.” As the direct result of this, democracy suffers. Campaign contributors invest money in politicians because “the point is winning so that investor objectives can be legislated” (Tabb, 2006). Politicians, who as representatives are supposed to work for the people, instead work for their benefactors. In almost every case, corporations and the one percent do not wish to improve the country’s state or anyone else’s, except themselves. Due to the power awarded to them by capitalism, they use “democratically” elected officials as puppets to achieve their goals.

In addition to domestic policy, foreign policy is warped and shaped not necessarily by American capitalism but by capitalism throughout the rest of the world. Greed fuels “American foreign policy [to be] tied to support of the multinational corporate economic system and to arrangements with juntas and dictators that make resources and cheap labor available to these corporations.” (Boyer, 2006). Instead of prioritizing democracy and human rights, the U.S. has historically and repeatedly backed oppressive regimes to assist corporations. According to Michael Parenti, author of *Dirty Truths*, “the United States has supported some of the worst butchers in the world: Batista in Cuba, Somoza in Nicaragua, the Shah in Iran, Salazar in Portugal, Evren in Turkey, and even Pol Pot in Cambodia” (Boyer, 2006). Of course, all of this is done for the principal reason everything else in the country is done: money. This pattern displays how corporate and political elites disregard American and foreign citizens in order to make a quick buck. Corporations do this by moving manufacturing out of the United States to where labor is cheaper to increase profit margins (Boyer, 2006). Instead of stimulating America’s economy, they set that aside to boost their bottom line. This not only lessens domestic job opportunities but also exploits workers in foreign countries by paying barely livable wages and

letting them work in poor conditions. Money should not be the primary concern when deciding foreign policy - as everything else in a democracy, it should be the people.

Some may argue that a structural approach is unnecessary because the structures in America create a stronger democracy. Certain free market enthusiasts argue that “free markets produce a middle class which then demands more freedom and democracy” and that “authoritarian states will eventually fall before a triumphant globalization” (Bailey, 2007), while ignoring the evidence otherwise. In fact, the middle class has shrunk from 61 percent of the American adult population in 1971 to 50 percent in 2021, while concurrently, the upper class’s income has increased 69 percent while the middle class’s has only increased 50 percent (Kochhar & Sechopoulos, 2022). This displays how the structure of capitalism has been waging a war on the middle class and empowering the upper class. An unregulated free market allows monopolies to form and the rich to consolidate wealth, leaving the middle class powerless to make a change and forcing them into the lower class. According to political scientist Francis Fukuyama, America is moving “back into societies where extremes of wealth and poverty are fueling ‘oligarchic domination’ and nasty forms of populism” (Keane, 2013). A shrinking middle class is a warning of extreme wealth inequality to come, with the one percent dominating all else. This key aspect of American structure is left heavily ignored by the institutional approach in its assumption that the United States is a functioning society. The structure of a partially free market has resulted in growing inequality, not representative of democracy.

In addition to all the flaws in the structure of the United States, its most important and basic pillar of democracy is defective: voting for representatives. The presence of the Electoral College denies the popular vote to decide the winner of an election, as seen in the Bush-Gore election, in which Gore won the popular vote by half a million, but Bush was awarded the

presidency. “Where previously they had looked upon the Electoral College as a harmless relic from another era, [Americans] now see that it is not harmless at all, but a serious infringement on the people's right of self-government” (Lazare, 2001). Despite many Americans not truly understanding or caring that an Electoral College system is present instead of a popular vote, it makes a big difference. In fact, when looking at how the United States’ voting system is arranged, it puts more value on voters in certain states. Political scientist Gautam Mukunda explains, “The fact that in presidential elections people in Wyoming have [nearly four] times the power of people in California is antithetical at the most basic level to what we say we stand for as a democracy” (Liasson, 2021). There is absolutely nothing democratic about one person’s opinion quite literally mattering less than another's. If the United States is a functioning democracy, everyone - no matter where they live - would be represented equally in elections.

The other issue with voting in America is that the highest authority in the country is appointed rather than voted for, the Supreme Court, which, in effect, awarded the winner in the Bush-Gore election. Due to an extremely thin margin with Bush leading in Florida - which winning the Electoral College hinged on - after a machine recount, Gore pushed for a manual recount but was denied by the Supreme Court. “Republican justices had awarded victory to a Republican candidate so as to ensure that control of the court would remain in Republican hands” (Lazare, 2001). The people and their votes had no choice in this matter, and their opinions were squashed by partisan justices working in their party and therefore their own interests (as more Republican presidents lead to even more Republican judges). These structural issues prevent the democratic process of the United States by refusing citizens their basic right to vote and concentrating power in specific groups of people.

Ultimately, the structural approach is the best way to uncover the form of government in the United States. When systems integral to the function of democracy are ignored, the true nature of the American government is hidden. Specifically, capitalism dominates not only the U.S.A. but the rest of the world. It is the ruleset for how the game of politics is played. No decision can be made without considering the financial consequences. Everyone in power is highly motivated to make decisions based on how it affects their personal wealth and the wealth of their sponsors and supporters. This begs the question: How can America be a democracy when, fundamentally, power is dispersed and legislation is made not due to the will of the people, but because of greed and wealth? When looking to solve this question, it is blatantly and undeniably irresponsible to disregard the incentives caused by the economy and capitalism. Without this, one cannot achieve a clear view of how the government functions. The political economy dominates every facet of life. This is not to say that students should not be taught about the different branches of government and how the country is set up, but rather should be taught that in addition to the effects of outer factors, specifically capitalism, on how the government functions. This would be the most beneficial way to educate the citizens on how their nation works and what form of government the United States has.

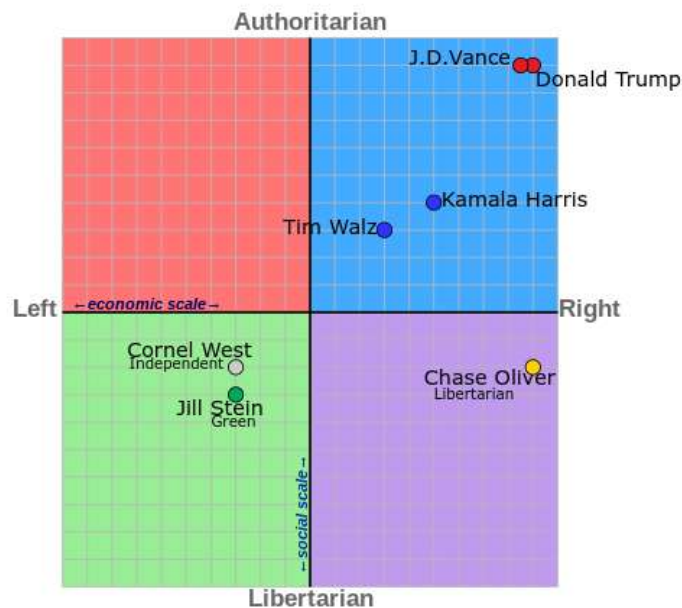
Presidential Elections and Splitting Hairs

With the first one hundred days of President Donald Trump's second term coming to a close, there is continued debate about his effect on the country. A small proportion of his supporters argue he is the messiah, while some opponents say he is the antichrist, showing how extreme each viewpoint can become. There is no end to the discourse between Republicans and Democrats regarding whether Trump or Joe Biden/Kamala Harris would have been the better president. This argument generally comes down to policy, with either side claiming their

candidate has the best policy and would be the best for the country; however, there is one policy that is not considered, which is nearly identical between candidates: capitalism. It is unheard of for a politician with a significant chance to win the United States presidency to be against capitalism.

A tool that can be used to analyze the differences in ideologies between President Trump's and former Vice President Harris's ideologies is the political compass, a spectrum measuring policy on two axes - economic policy (left to right) and social policy (libertarian to authoritarian). The four quadrants one can fall into are the upper right (authoritarian right), upper left (authoritarian left), lower right (libertarian right), and lower left (libertarian left). All main Republican and Democratic candidates - Trump, Vance, Harris, and Walz - can be found in the authoritarian right quadrant

The US Presidential Election 2024



(The Political Compass, 2024). This invites the question: Why does it matter who wins the election if every possible winner has the same general beliefs? Despite the media often inciting fighting between the two parties, the status quo of our capitalist nation will continue to be enforced in either situation. However, though Trump's election may have changed the present state of affairs, other differences set his America apart from what would have been Harris's. By looking at both Trump and Harris's approaches to running the government, it becomes clear that while their commitment to the status quo of authoritarian rule and capitalistic economy is shared, their methods can differ wildly, leading to very different outcomes for the nation's political climate, civil rights, and global standing.

The general American belief that any ideals further than slightly to the left of the center of the political spectrum is anti-American, communist, etc, can be traced back to the Cold War. With the rise of communism following World War II, American citizens were set against each other by the government and the media. The "Red Scare" taught people to spy on their neighbors, looking for any sign of leftist or communist beliefs. Though Americans are supposedly granted freedom of speech, communists were demonized, even directly by the government, through McCarthyism. Government officials and prominent Hollywood figures were brought before Congress, risking losing their jobs, reputations, and even freedom if they refused to condemn communism (*Red Scare*, 2010). Thus began the fear of the left in the United States. With this, Americans expected their leaders to defend them from the left, leading to the rise of more militarist presidents such as Ronald Reagan. Reagan, a champion of "traditional" values, greatly contributed to moving the acceptable political spectrum of the country further to the right, with his stances catering to large corporations and the military budgets while

undermining social services. (Rust, 2021). This continued to equate any form of socialist structure with frightening communism in Americans' minds. Reagan once said

Socialists ignore the side of man that is of the spirit. They can provide shelter, fill your belly with bacon and beans, treat you when you're ill – all the things that are guaranteed to a prisoner or a slave. But they don't understand we also dream, yes, even of owning a yacht (Batura, 2020).

Upon hearing this, people agreed that everyone wants more than the bare minimum, but they missed the fact that not everyone gets the bare minimum. Despite shelter, food, and healthcare being universally important and necessary things, not everyone gets them. However, Reagan paints this as acceptable, solidifying the belief in Americans.

Reagan's policies and ideals have led us to today, where the last two major presidential candidates were Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, economic right capitalists and lapdogs of corporations. Despite many supporters of each arguing that if their respective candidate wins, the future would be entirely different, corporate leaders disagree. Larry Fink, the billionaire CEO of BlackRock, claimed he's "tired of hearing this is the biggest election in your lifetime. The reality is over time it doesn't matter." BlackRock - the largest investment company on Earth, managing \$11.5 trillion in assets - has had employees throughout the government, including Biden's Treasury (Norton, 2024). The company knows it will continue to be catered to by whatever form of government emerges. For decades, both the Democratic and Republican parties have been at the whim of the wealthy while largely ignoring average citizens, as proven by Professors Gilens and Page with their study of 1,779 survey questions asked between 1981 and 2002 on public policy issues and the corresponding policy adopted by the government. It was observed that when the "economically elite" and the majority of citizens disagree on a topic, the rich often get

their favored policy passed (Study: US is an oligarchy, not a democracy, 2014). This phenomenon is not the crime of either party specifically, as from 1981 to 2002, there were Republican presidents for 14 years and Democratic presidents for 8 years. Both parties need the support of the wealthy to continue being elected, as they depend on massive donations to win elections. Though in a democracy, the majority should be the group making the decisions, not the minority, despite how large their bank accounts may be. The vote of a billionaire who has never worked a day in their life should not matter more than that of a single mother on welfare.

Today, the Republican and Democratic parties do not serve different groups of normal people; they serve different groups of the elite and wealthy. Both are at the whims of and require the donations of the super-rich in order to win increasingly more expensive elections. From January 2023 to April 2024, about \$8.6 billion was collected for House, Senate, and presidential elections, an exorbitant amount that includes over \$5.6 billion from political action committees, or PACS (Tracking 2024..., 2024). PACS are tax-exempt private interest groups that raise money for specific political candidates, allowing corporations and wealthy private individuals to influence elections with campaign donations. These organizations have an exorbitant amount of sway when it comes to political decisions by the candidates they back. In fact, Biden was essentially forced to back out of the election after the Super PAC (PACS allowed to raise an infinite amount of money for a candidate), Future Forward withheld \$90 million in funding. As Hubbard states, this is “a nauseating example of the influence mega-donors have over the political process,” as despite many Democratic voters begging for a new candidate, Biden did not drop out until he was forced to by his donors (Hubbard, 2024). In a democracy, it should be up to the voters to decide who the candidates are, not the financial backers. As long as campaign

success and ability depend on appeasing these ultra-rich financial backers, the same group will run the country no matter what candidate is elected.

Despite the continuity of those in power in the United States, the media acts as though the difference between one candidate and another is life and death, increasing animosity between citizens, and maintaining the status quo. The two main strategies the media utilize are “deliberately misleading the public while causing dissension” in the form of prioritizing “opinions-about-the-news” rather than the news itself, as well as “dividing the world into an ‘us’ and a ‘them,’ vilifying the latter” (Roscini, 2021). This gets people riled up and distracts from real issues in the current state of American government, in both the Republican and Democratic parties. This sort of sensationalism serves as the opium of the masses, filling Americans with rage and bitterness, turning them against each other while the rich loot them for all they have. Additionally, the news largely ignores or even suppresses political figures outside of the accepted major parties. Cornel West, a presidential candidate in the Justice For All party, who ran on the platform of anti-imperialism and social justice, was effectively targeted by hit pieces run by both the corporate and supposedly liberal media. He was denounced as being right-wing and bound to cause the defeat of the Democratic candidate in the election by multiple news sources. This is done because “Democrats and their corporate media minions want to silence third-party and independent candidates who reject corrupt electoral politics, when both major parties are making bank at the expense of their constituents” (McCarley, 2023). Make no mistake whether or not a candidate wins in an election, they win financially. As long as they are part of the system in power, nothing will change because change will hurt their wallets and the wallets of those corporations who support them. Any challenger to the system will be immediately put down to prevent any damage. No matter what the media suggests, it is not

different groups of citizens that Republicans and Democrats represent, and they will stop anyone who does represent the citizens.

While it is true that both Trump and Harris represent the strongly flawed capitalist system, it must be remembered that there is a lesser evil. Despite neither being a step in the right direction, Trump is a much larger step back than Harris. This can be seen repeatedly through their policies and actions. For some, Harris is directly a less extreme evil than Trump; for example, in a debate, when discussing fossil fuels, Harris said she “will not ban fracking” while Trump claimed he “got the oil business going like nobody has done before” (Walk & Parker, 2024). While Harris is not nearly as progressive as necessary to turn the world’s climate change around, Trump openly and consistently brags about how good he is for large corporations and how bad he is for the Earth. When it comes to human rights issues, Trump is generally directly opposed, such as for the issue of abortion and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, which the three Supreme Court judges he put in place played a major part in. Harris, on the other hand, stated

[She] pledge[s] to [the citizens] when Congress passes a bill to put back in place the protections of *Roe v. Wade* as president of the United States, [she would] proudly sign it into law. (Walk & Parker, 2024)

It is frankly terrifying that a man with such disdain for human rights was able to rise to power and become the democratically elected president twice. While Harris is extremely far from perfect or even ideal, at least she had some goals of fixing some of the damage Trump has done. Additionally, Harris had not stoked the flames of an insurrection, causing an estimated five deaths, not including four members of law enforcement defending the Capitol who committed suicide in the months following the riot on January 6th (Farley, 2021). Trump has done considerable damage to the United States and will likely continue to do so for the next four

years. Neither of the candidates was anywhere close to the best the country had to offer, but Harris would have been the choice causing the least harm. Trump embodies a far more dangerous threat, not only for the environment and human rights, but to democracy itself.

While Kamala Harris was very unlikely to cause any real change for the better, Donald Trump has a track record of subverting the system not for the better, but for his own gain. To this day, Trump has maintained and spread misinformation that he won the electoral college in the 2020 election. Despite this being unequivocally false, his lies led to widespread illusion in Republican voters. A Pew Research study found

A large majority of those who voted for Donald Trump incorrectly say their candidate received the most votes cast by eligible voters in enough states to win the election.

Among Trump voters, 40% say he “definitely” won and another 36% say he “probably” won the election. Only 7% of Trump voters concede that Biden definitely won the 2020 election, while another 15% say he probably won. (Pew Research Center, 2021)

These lies are what resulted in the attack on the Capitol and the following unnecessary loss of life. Instead of conceding the election, Trump continuously utilized fear and anger in his followers to attempt to regain the presidency through force. He also attempted to corrupt officials, specifically the Georgia Secretary of State, whom he asked “to ‘find’ the exact number of votes he would need - just one vote over the margin that he trailed President-elect Joe Biden by - so he could be declared the winner of an election that three separate counts confirmed he lost” (Scanlan, 2021). He uses his power and influence to pressure those under him to erode democracy effectively and cling to the power he has. The fact that this is such a blatant attempt to overturn the democratic election was even possible displays how fragile the current system is and how easily Trump can take advantage of it. He weaponizes misinformation and the blind

loyalty of his followers to create division and encourage violence against his enemies. Once again, while Harris is not the answer to this country's problems, Trump, if unchecked, can bring the United States to the brink of collapse - all while claiming to be its savior.

Though many may express discontent with the decision, the reality in the United States includes Donald Trump as president for his second term. The future is obviously impossible to determine, but with Trump's current and past decisions and remarks, along with the history of the presidency in the United States, a general sense of how the next four years will go can be assumed. Whether it was Trump or Harris who was elected in 2024, their presidential terms had to be bound by the same rules. Both their views are encompassed by the Right-Authoritarian section of the political compass, ruled by capitalism and a power structure that limits freedom in favor of control. Trump will not "save" the U.S.A., but the same could be said for Harris, had she won the presidency. The status quo will be maintained - the United States will continue to allow corporations to rule and always have the mighty dollar as its god and its reasoning for essentially every decision.

This being said, some distinct differences between Trump and Harris separate how they are/were expected to run their presidencies. In Trump's presidency, it is likely that the rights of certain groups, specifically women but also including other minorities, will falter more so than they theoretically would have if Harris had won. Additionally, Trump has consistently and repeatedly incited his followers to distrust or bring violence to their fellow citizens and other politicians who do not align with MAGA beliefs. The misinformation he utilizes is a dangerous tool and one likely to damage America's relationship with itself by turning people against each other. As has been seen on the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, this can quickly turn deadly. While the systems in place have created both candidates, Trump's specific strategies and

styles as a leader - focusing on division, misinformation, and disregard for the vulnerable people of this country - pose a unique threat to America. His re-election reflects not only the majority choice between two candidates, but the system that holds capital and power above community and people. Until this structure is fought and defeated and the slow march further right and authoritarian is stopped, it matters less and less who holds office and becomes more of an illusion of choice. To truly save this country, a vote between candidates from the Democratic and Republican parties will not be enough - the foundations of the United States must be challenged.

Conclusion

After examining the U.S. through a structural lens, it becomes clear that despite the widespread belief that America is a democracy, the system functions in a far different way. The institutions that are put up as pillars of the free country - such as the courts, elections, and the media - are overtly controlled by capitalism. The structure benefits those with money and power, while average citizens are left with the illusion of choice. All the institutions were built to protect the people instead of controlling them. Private prisons punish the poor and disenfranchised, the media warps the truth, and the candidate with the most money and corporate backing generally wins elections. Donald Trump's second term will not do anything to fix the system or be what will break it completely - he is just a symptom of the disease of capitalism. We have been stuck in this downward spiral towards an oligarchy ruled by the elite. This system has shaped his policies and loyalty to the rich, giving him the incentive to behave the way he does.

The solution to the state of our country is not replacing Trump with a Democratic president. They are all a part of the same system and will only further the United States' slide away from democracy. Whether the figurehead that is put on this crumbling structure is a Democrat or a Republican is not the biggest concern at the moment. The most important cause is

repairing and rebuilding the structure of the U.S. The ultimate goal is to achieve the first theory of American government: democracy. If a movement begins to force leaders to acknowledge the people, a democracy is possible. Everyone must have an equal voice and influence, no matter what level of personal wealth they might have. The system we have, the one built on greed, is fated to collapse under its own weight. Radical changes must be made to take the power from the one percent and redistribute it fairly among the others. However, for this to be done, the first step is acknowledging the truth that America is not truly a democracy today. Then, the dismantling can begin, and possibly someday, a true democracy will emerge. Change is possible, but the people must fight for it.

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