

Capitalist Dominance in American Politics

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Abstract

The United States is largely described as being a democracy, but analysis shows that this is not the case. In terms of the four theories of American government: democratic, pluralist, hyperpluralist, and elite class, elite class theory best describes the oligarchic capitalist structure of the nation. Analyzing the country through a structural approach, which looks at how the economy functions for the people, gives the best understanding of how the system works, and is the best way to look at the American government. In looking at presidential elections, the paper finds that there is no change made to the status quo in the United States based on who is in power, and thus there is little difference between the two major parties in the country. The findings in this paper give a clear view of the American government and politics through a lens other than traditional democratic theory, while offering an alternate view of an ideal American system, concluding that a focus on passion rather than monetary gain will make for a better government system.

Keywords: American politics, institutional approach, structural approach, capitalism, political theory, censorship, economics, foreign affairs, Democrats, Republicans, third party politics, democratic theory, pluralist theory, hyperpluralist theory, elite class theory, altruism, humanities

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In researching the governmental structure of the United States, widespread analysis leads to four different theories which all seek to answer the question of what type of government the nation has.

Traditional democratic theory says that the United States is a democracy, and all citizens have a voice in the political activity of the nation. This theory is widely favored by the general establishment and is the most commonly taught perspective in public school government classes. This theory largely looks at the United States government in its most pure form, disregarding conflicts that may arise between government and people.

Pluralist theory argues that the U.S. is run politically by multiple interest groups who compete for power and influence the decision-making of politicians. In this theory, because multiple groups are pushing for their own interests, there is no monopoly of power concentrated within one group or person. This is somewhat close to traditional democratic theory, in the sense that it attributes a big amount of political influence to groups of citizens, who represent the interests of large populations of Americans.

Similarly to pluralist theory, hyperpluralist theory sees multiple competing groups as the true controllers of the country but argues that interest groups will always lead to more, opposing interest groups. This means that far too many groups are vying for power over the political sphere, which prevents any true change from being made in the government. The groups essentially “lock” politicians in a spot where they are unable to please everyone, making them less likely to pass policies for fear of upsetting some groups. This leaves the country in a sedentary state, where meaningful changemaking is inadequate for the needs of the American people.

The elite class theory postulates that power in the United States is held by a small, elite class who only have their own interests at heart, rather than those of the masses. This type of rule directly opposes a democratic system, as it excludes the larger working class in decision making which generally impacts them the most.

Elite class theory best describes the power structure of the United States, rather than the fallacy that is a representative democracy. Capitalism as a system virtually ensures this version of organization. Where capitalism exists, there is inequality. This inequality means that there will always be those at the top, and those at the bottom. Those at the top are those with the most wealth, which grants them greater opportunities and thus substantial amounts of power in governing, even if that is not directly through a political position. As history has shown, the majority of U.S. presidents have been wealthy white men who surround themselves with other wealthy white men. The interests of the mass majority of Americans can never be accurately represented in this oligarchic structure, and yet the people are taught that they have an impact in the policy decisions of the country. This falsehood is what enables the elite class to stay in their power, and if there is ever change in the structure of the nation, it must start with deconstructing the system that has kept so many in a perpetual state of inequity.

The Profundity of American National Polity

When trying to answer the seemingly simple, yet very complex question of what type of government the United States is, one must first know how best to approach it. In American politics, there are two main approaches: the institutional approach and the structural approach.

The institutional approach to analyzing the American government has long been a national educational standard. This approach emphasizes that to understand the type of government in the U.S., you must solely understand the government structures and systems that

are in place. It identifies the government as a democracy through these analyses and asserts that the nation's political state and its economic state are separate and do not have a direct impact on each other. This idea is the standard that is taught in the United States public education system.

In 2015, a professor at Pomona College analyzed fifteen standard U.S. high school civics textbooks, and found that the textbooks "Only partially reflect scholarly research on American politics and public policy concerning relations between the public and private sectors, and particularly between governments and corporations." (pg. 29). This lack of diversity in public civics education has led many to believe that this is the only way of understanding our politics, but it leaves out a whole other approach entirely. (Menefee-Libey, 2015).

The structural approach to analyzing the government says that to understand the type of government that the country has, it is essential to understand how the economic structure, namely capitalism, impacts the society and politics of that country. This is done by looking at four aspects of the nation: the political economy, ideology and political culture, and constitutional and state structures.

The structural approach is the closest approach that we can use to figure out the government of the United States. If we are taught that the U.S. is a democracy, analyses of the structure must include the people. These people must be the citizens as a whole, not just the few government leaders at the top. The structural approach looks at how capitalism affects different aspects of the lives of the American people, unlike the institutional approach which primarily looks at what the lives of the American people should be in theory under the current government system.

Economic Liberty and Justice for All?

“The perennial conviction that those who work hard and play by the rules will be rewarded with a more comfortable present and a stronger future for their children faces assault from just about every direction. That great enemy of democratic capitalism, economic inequality, is real and growing.” - Jon Meacham

The institutional approach largely agrees with democratic theory and argues that capitalism and democracy go hand in hand. This is often, however, backed by theoretical ideals of American society which may be far out of reach.

Capitalism as such does not weaken democracy; on the contrary, capitalism can make democracy stronger and more vital. But this only occurs when a third variable — civic virtue, in the form of public honesty and civility — is present. The problem for democracy today is not capitalism; it is a decline in public honesty and civility, which are necessary to govern free markets and are also central to a democratic society. To blame capitalism and weaken it will not solve the problems facing American democracy; instead, it will simply waste time and resources and lower growth and prosperity, while ignoring the problems that truly face us. (Brooks, 2024)

This logic assumes that the American people are at fault for unrest between capitalism and democracy yet fails to explain where the distaste of the American people is coming from. A significant issue in using the institutional approach is that it largely assumes that the structure in which the United States was founded has always worked and therefore must be the correct system. It also says that when there are issues in the nation, it is the fault of the people, not the structure. It is not possible to simply say that America is a democracy because that is what the

Founding Fathers wanted the nation to be. In assuming that the structure can do no wrong, there is no possible way to actually evaluate what system the United States truly is.

It is very easy to assume that democracy and capitalism complement each other when the evaluation of a country is focused on the economic state of the country, rather than the economic state of the people. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the United States' gross domestic product (GDP) grew 5.7% in 2021 (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022). This contrasts with the fact that the top 1% of earners in the U.S. that year made 42 times as much as the bottom 90% of earners (Congressional Budget Office, 2024). While this higher GDP may indicate a strong economy, it does not indicate strength in democracy and the structure of the government, because the income distribution in the country is so unequal.

It is also unfair to assume that the citizens of the United States must be at fault when the structure is not working for them. Many institutionalists will claim that because the American people are “unruly” or have “bad behavior”, democracy and capitalism are struggling in the country. This assumes that there is a “correct” way for 340 million people to act, and automatically goes to insist that the U.S. is a struggling democracy, because there is no other possible explanation for our governmental structure. By looking at the issue of our governmental type, we cannot assume that the outline that the Constitution put in place in the late 1700s is fundamentally applicable 250 years later.

The impressive narratives that many institutional theorists create of institutional change hardly ever question the institutions of class, race or postcolonialism that are visible to everyone except many of those of us who work in business schools. The performativity of power is complete with the researcher enmeshed in the intricate web of internalized and normalized discourses. (Munir, 2019)

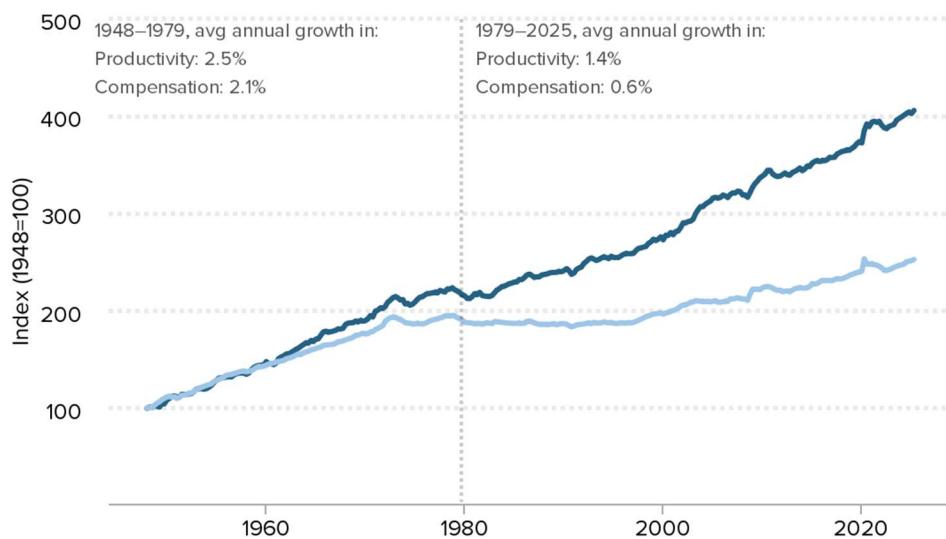
The United States has largely left out marginalized communities. This has always been a fundamental aspect of the foundation of the United States, although change has been made over the years. If one claims that the structure of the country determines the government type, they must first acknowledge that current laws do not make up for the lack of rights that the U.S. has historically given to many communities. To assume that the government's structure works for everyone is to assume that all Americans are on an equal playing field, which is tremendously inaccurate. As a constitutional analysis states, "...the U.S. Constitution, as originally adopted in 1787, embedded provisions that legalized and perpetuated the institution of slavery, specifically targeting individuals of African descent." (Haas, 2024). If 41.1 million people have been discriminated against since the inception of the United States Government, stating that they must be living under a democracy is ignorant to the fact that in practice, the country has not historically given power to all the people (United States Census Bureau, 2020). The United States is supposed to be a representative democracy, and yet only 26% of Congress members are people of color, with the U.S. population of people of color being 40% (Pew Research Center, 2025) (Population Reference Bureau, 2025). This leaves a large group of people being represented by individuals who do not necessarily represent their own needs and values. Therefore, by analyzing the Congressional system, it is difficult to say that Americans must live under a representative democracy.

The institutional definition of the American capitalist system also does not accurately represent the reality in which citizens live, making it a poor indicator of true governmental structure in the country. According to MacGruder's American Government (2023), a popular high school civics textbook, "In a free enterprise system, individuals own the right to their own labor. They sell that labor by taking a job, and the pay they receive represents the price paid for

their work.” (p. 630). This is used to describe the American Free Enterprise system, and yet, since the 1970s, the productivity growth rate has been growing much more than the hourly pay rate. (Economic Policy Institute, 2025)

The gap between productivity and a typical worker’s compensation has increased dramatically since 1979

Productivity growth and hourly compensation growth, 1948–2025



Notes: Data are for compensation (wages and benefits) of production/nonsupervisory workers in the private sector and net productivity of the total economy. “Net productivity” is the growth of output of goods and services less depreciation per hour worked.

Source: EPI analysis of unpublished Total Economy Productivity data from Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Labor Productivity and Costs program, wage data from the BLS Current Employment Statistics, BLS Employment Cost Trends, BLS Consumer Price Index, and Bureau of Economic Analysis National Income and Product Accounts.

Economic Policy Institute

The harsh reality is that this idealized economic and political system does not work for the majority of Americans how it is “supposed” to, and this makes claims of democracy less solid. Instead of workers being paid according to their labor, they are oftentimes undervalued and underpaid while the top 1% of Americans continue to grow their net worths. This goes directly

against the institutionalist idea that American capitalism leads to democracy, because though the market may be technically free, the system is such that the wealthy continue to get wealthy while the middle and lower classes continue to get poorer. There is very little choice or equality in that, so to say that our systems have been structured to promote democracy is a far cry from the truth.

All for the One Percent

“The few own the many because they possess the means of livelihood of all ... The country is governed for the richest, for the corporations, the bankers, the land speculators, and for the exploiters of labor. The majority of mankind are working people. So long as their fair demands - the ownership and control of their livelihoods - are set at naught, we can have neither men's rights nor women's rights. The majority of mankind is ground down by industrial oppression in order that the small remnant may live in ease.” - Helen Keller

Using a structural approach and analyzing multiple factors of the nation's population in analysis, it is much more possible to come toward a clear conclusion of America's government. Looking at the political economy of the nation, the impact of economics on governmental politics, the differences in how citizens view the state of their nation versus how it looks on textbooks become abundantly clear. According to a 2024 poll, 72% of Americans believe that the U.S. used to be a good example of a democracy, but is not anymore (Fetterolf, 2024). It is very clear that money plays a large role in politics, with the wealthiest having the most influence over elections. The 2010 Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* overturned restrictive legislation that had prevented wealthy donors and corporations from donating too much to election campaigns and politicians. With this decision, the wealthy were able to financially dominate the political sphere and play a role in the outcome of elections. According to Americans for Tax Fairness, 150 billionaire families alone donated \$.4 billion on

election campaigns of 2024 by August of that year. This has given a large voice to the top 1%, although they may not represent the values of the general American public. According to a 2013 study on the political preferences of the ultra-wealthy, they tend to differ in opinions of economic policy in the United States from the average citizen of the U.S.

Our evidence indicates that the wealthy are much more concerned than other Americans about budget deficits. The wealthy are much more favorable toward cutting social welfare programs, especially Social Security and health care. They are considerably less supportive of several jobs and income programs, including an above poverty-level minimum wage, a “decent” standard of living for the unemployed, increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit, and having the federal government “see to” —or actually provide— jobs for those who cannot find them in the private sector. (Page, et al. 2013)

The wealthiest Americans have very differing views on important political issues, especially economics, then most citizens, and yet their voices are heard the loudest in policy making. This creates a conflict of interest which must factor into analyzing how the United States is run.

It is also important to analyze how the economy functions to support the livelihood of the American people. Housing is a necessity and should be a right for all U.S. citizens, and yet, “Rising housing costs and low incomes are causing more people to experience homelessness *for the first time.*” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2025). The rising home prices along with the lack of adequate living salaries has made it so that many Americans are unsheltered. If the country claims to be so great for everyone, it should be examined that many people living in it do not even have a roof over their head.

In 2025, it is essential to look at how consumers are being impacted by tariffs in the U.S. In February, President Donald Trump launched a trade war against many significant trade

partners of the United States. While this was mainly meant as an intimidation method and a way to protect American manufacturing, it has left a negative mark on the pockets of American consumers. The Center for American Progress estimated that the tariffs might cost American households \$5,200 each year (2025). This is a significant dent to the bank accounts of most families in the U.S. and must be looked at from a critical angle. While the wealthy may see no change in their finances from this cost, the average American is losing a large chunk of money that could be spent on the expensive essentials that they need to survive in this country.

Looking at how corporations operate in the United States gives good insight into not just the economy, but everyday life in the U.S. While they may seem to be hidden behind closed doors or far from impacting the individual, and yet they affect most parts of American life. While big corporations do not have direct connections to the United States government, the entities often work together in order to benefit each other.

Due to overcrowding in American prisons in the 1980s, the privatized prison industry emerged, profiting on the incarceration of prisoners (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2001). This new relationship between federal and state governments and the corporations that owned the prison was focused largely on the idea of maximizing profit. This can be seen in data showing how the prison industry has changed since the start of these private institutions. In 2020, Washington State University led a study to find the impacts that private prisons have on population incarcerated and sentencing lengths.

The study found that private prisons lead to an average increase of 178 new prisoners per million population per year. At an average cost of \$60 per day per prisoner, that costs states between \$1.9 to \$10.6 million per year, if all those additional prisoners are in private prisons.

The length of sentences also increases when private prisons come into a state, especially in nonviolent crimes that have more leeway in sentencing guidelines. (Washington State University, 2020)

These results clearly show a direct impact of large corporations on the prison structure in the country, with an incentive to maximize profit by placing more and more citizens in prison. This seems to be protected by lawmakers, with corporations like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) pushing legislation that would protect privatized prisons. ALEC is a non-profit organization largely made up of conservative government officials and lawmakers, and private corporations. ALEC writes legislation that protects the corporate agenda, and the lawmakers present it to the rest of congress for approval. These corporations fund lawmakers, incentivizing them to pass whatever would benefit their profit drive more. This does not just include prisons, however. ALEC has put forward legislation in healthcare, education, etc. This relationship between Washington and large corporations has greatly impacted the structure of the laws that Americans face, and yet it often goes unknown to them.

The pharmaceutical industry in the United States has also largely profited off of unfair pricing that hurts Americans. Pharmaceutical companies do not face many legal barriers in their pricing in the United States, and they use unfair business tactics to keep prices, and their own income, high.

Enabling drugmakers to maintain patent monopolies far beyond twenty years has significant consequences on the American healthcare system. The strategy to expand monopolies without any meaningful new science or invention exacts a heavy cost on

American payers and households. Specifically, these twelve highest grossing drugs cost \$96 billion to health insurers, government payers, and consumers in 2017 alone. Since drugmakers often continue to increase the prices of medicines once or twice a year, even after the product has already been on the market for many years, revenues may continue to grow for these medicines until there is generic competition. (Initiative for Medicines, Access, and Knowledge [I-MAK] 2018)

Price hikes on necessary medications and monopolies on the pharmaceutical industry have cost Americans billions. Many Americans cannot even afford the medications that they need to survive and have had to resort to not taking any medication, which can lead to serious health consequences. This harm has been done to American citizens by corporations, with the help of their own government, and it needs looking into to understand what values the country holds.

The Orchestrated American Dream

“As soon as you look at the world through an ideology you are finished. No reality fits an ideology. Life is beyond that.” - Anthony de Mello

Many U.S. citizens believe in the promise of the American dream and the rights of the Constitution, and yet most of them do not understand the depth of the media they consume and what they are told. People ought to know how the media actually works as a political and ideological force if they want to understand the landscape of today's government.

A fundamental ideology that Americans learn early on is the concept of the ‘American Dream’. This ideal states that anyone in this country, regardless of who they are, can achieve success if they work hard enough. This does not seem to be the case, however.

As a factual claim, the first tenet is largely false; for most of American history, women of any race and men who were Native American, Asian, black, or poor were barred from

all but a narrow range of "electable futures." Ascriptive constraints have arguably been weakened over time, but until recently no more than about a third of the population was able to take seriously the first premise of the American dream.

This flaw has implications beyond the evident ones of racism and sexism. The emotional potency of the American dream has made people who were able to identify with it the norm for everyone else. White men, especially European immigrants able to ride the wave of the Industrial Revolution (and to benefit from the absence of competition from the rest of the population) to comfort or even prosperity, are the epitomizing demonstration of America as the bountiful state of nature. Those who do not fit the model disappear from the collective self-portrait. Thus, the irony is doubled: not only has the ideal of universal participation been denied to most Americans, but also the very fact of its denial has itself been denied in our national self-image. (Hochschild, 1995)

A lack of ability to achieve the American Dream for a large number of Americans contradicts the ideals that precede much of American culture. There is also the stigma of not achieving success outlined in this ideology. It is largely implied throughout American society that if you do not succeed, there must be something that you are doing wrong, rather than realizing that the dream that you have been told to follow is false. By keeping a firm grasp on the ideal of the American Dream, American culture keeps people going with false hope.

American Zombies: The Government's Role in Media Control

"The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses." - Malcolm X

From the time that the art of motion pictures gained popularity in the United States, films, radio, and television were being used for American propaganda. In the wake of World War II, the government's Office of War Information created the Bureau of Motion Pictures, with the purpose of closely monitoring what information was to be put out about the war in the film industry.

The OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures combined censorship with content directives to ensure movies such as Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series (1942-1945) would drum up support for the U.S.'s role in the war while suppressing those films depicting the psychological toll of war, such as John Huston's *Let There Be Light* (1946). (Mirrlees, 2025)

The usage of films to convince the general public of the military's might and their need to support the war was just the start of a long history of military propaganda in the film industry. The Cold War and the Vietnam war saw the same levels of propaganda being put into movie theaters, with the additional aspect of using actors to convey propaganda outside of the screen. According to Professor Tanner Mirrlees of Ontario Tech University, famous movie stars and directors were approached by the United States government to promote the global War on Terror through producing military films and encouraging the public to join the military (Jacobson, 2020). The involvement of the military and the Pentagon in military films has continued into the twenty-first century and was elevated after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The Iraq war was very controversial among Americans, so the government put many resources into the film industry to change the narrative of public opinion.

The CIA heavily revised Mark Boal's script for *Zero Dark Thirty*. It made the torture in the movie look crucial to finding Bin Laden, when in fact his location was actually found

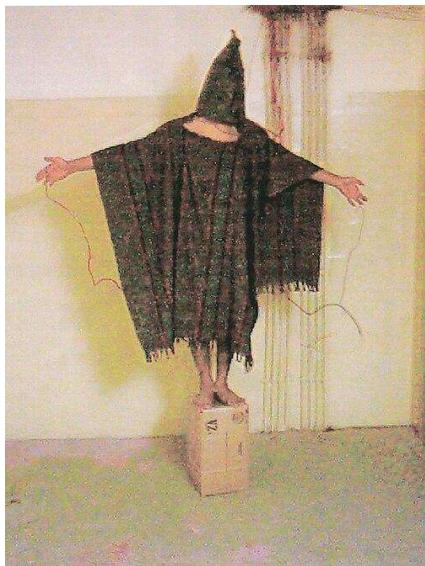
by just pouring through files the CIA already had. It also happened when *Top Gun: Maverick* commits the same omission as the first movie, and again never names the enemy, to keep allies on our side and not ruffle any feathers. (Hellerman, 2022)

With the government controlling which information is put out to the public, they hold the keys to propaganda which most viewers of the films are not even aware of. The relationship between the film industry and the government is also financial. Producers save a significant amount of money by getting things like fighter jets from the military instead of from outside sources. By giving the productions their own resources, the military is able to control film narratives which assist them in recruitment. This can be seen in recent films, such as *Captain Marvel* (2019) and *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022), which received support from the United States military with the condition of positive portrayals of the institution. Screenwriter Jason Hellerman says that, “People who want to see these movies may also get the urge to join up. Especially young people drawn to a PG-13 film, at almost enlistment age.” (2022). The narratives of these films have both pushed American supremacy ideologies into popular culture while also encouraging the public to join the military through romanticized versions of the establishment and war.

Besides military films, the U.S. government has also played a large role in the censorship of content that criticizes the country or goes against what leaders believe. In 2004, news agencies received images from whistleblower Specialist Joseph M. Darby detailing the abuse that prisoners in Abu Ghraib, Iraq were facing at the hands of United States military personnel. When the images were released, they immediately raised concerns over abuse of power in the already controversial war in Iraq, and many citizens wanted the government to open up about the abuse that had been hidden to the public.

Figure 1

An Iraqi prisoner being tortured by the United States Military in the Abu Ghraib Prison near Baghdad.



Note. Photograph originally taken by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ivan Frederick II and first aired to the media on CBS's *60 Minutes II* and in *The New Yorker* (Frederick, 2003).

In 2004, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit against the United States Department of Defense demanding the release of photos depicting the torture of prisoners in Afghanistan and Iraq by the U.S. Military. The government, including Congress, fought this case arduously, claiming that the release of the photos would be a risk to national security and could cause the potential for violence. In 2015, "U.S. District Judge Alvin Hellerstein ruled the Defense Department failed to provide specific details of such a threat in this case." (Hodges, 2015). Although additional photos were released as a result of this ruling, it should not go past the minds of Americans how harshly the government fought to cover these photos up.

When the U.S. went to war in the Middle East post-9/11, the wide ideology of xenophobia and Islamophobia that was spread in politics and the media was used as a way to dehumanize innocent Muslim civilians, both in the United States and abroad. Analysis of media during the time, including magazines, shows how largely the agenda of defending the military while dehumanizing the “Other” was.

American soldiers were highlighted as liberators of a country that was mired in terror and lacked a rule of law. Additionally, Iraqi citizens were not portrayed as innocent civilians, but rather as a group of Muslims only interested in destroying the United States. Had the U.S. delayed action, or not taken any action, there was a representation of a clear threat that these “blood thirsty” individuals would have attacked U.S. civilians (Carlson, 2016) (p. 51)

By popularizing a narrative of Muslims being “evil” and the cause of the terrorist attacks on September 11, it became easier to justify hatred, bigotry, prejudice, and even violence. This largely enabled the acceptance of the hate crimes that many Muslims and Arabs faced in the United States and abroad, and the death of millions of civilians as a direct or indirect effect of the War on Terror (Crawford & Lutz, 2021) (Savell, 2023).

Content and media in the U.S. have become increasingly restricted in order to sustain American ideologies and political stances, as well as to protect the image of political figures. Since the start of the war between Israel and Palestine in 2023, many netizens have been trying to spread awareness and information of the misdoings of the Israeli military and government against the Palestinian people. In 2025, the United Nations found that “the Israeli authorities and Israeli security forces have the genocidal intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.” (pg. 64). Despite this status, American social media companies have actively

censored content that talks about Palestine. In late 2023, the Human Rights Watch researched the restriction of Palestinian content across Meta's platforms and found an alarming number of cases of censorship.

The cases Human Rights Watch documents in this report indicate that Meta's erroneous removal of pro-Palestinian views has resulted in censorship of social and political discourse and content documenting or reacting to hostilities in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT), including Gaza, sharing on-the-ground developments, or expressing solidarity with Palestinians. (Human Rights Watch, 2023)

The report found systemic and political reasonings for censorship, and the issue can only be assumed to have gotten worse since the findings in 2023. While the censorship is systematic in the Meta algorithm, it correlates to the fact that the United States has largely supported the Israeli government and does not recognize the Palestinian state. This system makes it difficult to share information and opinions, which creates the question of how much citizens can actually say without government interference.

Censorship has been expanded by politicians in recent years, especially since the start of President Donald Trump's second term in office. Trump has used his and other governmental powers to silence his opponents in the media. In May 2025, Trump signed an executive order to cut federal funding from National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), both of which have been funded by the government since the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was established in 1967. This was signed on the basis of what he called political bias from the "radical left 'monsters' that so badly hurt our country" (Folkenflik & Neuman, 2025). Trump was able to pass this bill largely through threat to Republican lawmakers saying that "Any Republican that votes to allow this monstrosity to continue broadcasting will

not have my support or endorsement,"(Samuels, 2025). NPR affiliate stations are widely considered a primary news source for many Americans, and it is estimated that upwards of 80 local stations may close due to the large cut in funding (The Associated Press, 2025). This has marked a significant turning point in how Americans are consuming news media, which is now being more severely dictated by the government.

In September of 2025, the late-night television show "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" was abruptly taken off the air, which according to production company ABC, was due to Kimmel's insensitive comments regarding the assassination of conservative figure Charlie Kirk. In reality however, Kimmel's comments had been largely directed at the Trump Administration's handling of Kirk's assassination and the blame that they had put on their political opponents for it. Trump himself said that "I'm a very strong person for free speech. ... The newscasts are against me. The stories are 90 — they said, 97% bad. So, they gave me 97. They'll take a great story, and they'll make it bad. See, I think that's really illegal, personally." (Democracy Now! 2025). Trump's claims that speech against him should be illegal show a large shift towards a more oppressive form of government censorship in the media. Trump also had a large part in the cancellation of Kimmel's show. Head of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Brendan Carr has been working in Trump's favor, defending his reputation against those who criticize him. Carr said on conservative podcaster Benny Johnson's show, "You know, when you look at the conduct that has taken place by Jimmy Kimmel, it appears to be some of the sickest conduct possible. ... I mean, look, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. These companies can find ways to change conduct, to take action, frankly, on Kimmel, or, you know, there's going to be additional work for the FCC ahead." (Democracy Now!). Carr had threatened to revoke licenses of ABC and its affiliates, which came at a poor time for the company. Television giant

Nexstar, which owns many ABC affiliate stations, has planned to make a six billion dollar merger with Tegna, another media corporation. In order to do this, they need leniency from the FCC (Misra, 2025). Carr had essentially made an ultimatum that if ABC and its affiliates did not comply with Trump and the FCC's demands to have Kimmel taken off the air, they would struggle financially. In the capitalist structure of the United States, the media needs money to survive, and the threat of losing it is enough to comply with government requests to go against the First Amendment, the right to free speech. While the show was eventually put back on the air a few days later, the suspension aroused awareness in the American public of the real threat of losing free speech. In an increasingly tense political landscape, it is important to be aware of how much the nation's media consumption is skewed to fit certain agendas.

The Structure Is Crumbling

“What does it mean for a popular government that its people are politically effective only when they threaten to destroy it?” - Dolbeare & Medcalfe

An essential component of analysis in the structural approach is analyzing how the government was structured from the beginning of the nation and how this, along with the Constitution, still influences how the government performs today. The Constitution establishes a clear separation of powers between the different branches of government, but this, paired with a deep divide in political parties, does not work in the favor of making change because legislation often has trouble passing with such a chasm between lawmakers.

The Constitution, for example, mandates a separation of powers at the national level. The legislative, executive, and judicial functions are each assigned to distinct branches of government, and each branch is given powers to block the activities of the other two.

While the power of the judiciary to curtail Congressional or Presidential action is great,

probably the most important separation and source of blockage is that between executive and legislative authority. In contrast to parliamentary systems of representation, where the leader of the dominant party (or coalition of parties) in the legislature is also the chief executive of government, the U.S. Constitution mandates separate elections for Congress and the Presidency. This has commonly meant, as is currently the case, that the President comes from a party that does not command a majority within the legislature. Such differences between the executive and the legislature typically generate barriers to concerted national policy—except of course in those cases (foreign affairs being the source of most examples) where "bipartisan consensus" obtains between the major parties. (Cohen & Rogers, 1986)

This divide goes beyond just governmental organizations, however. Development in the United States has created large regional differences. The size of the country combined with a lack of authority to enforce national and federal laws meant that states essentially operated under their own legal and political systems. This was exaggerated during and after the Civil War, as the North and South experienced very different economic developments and levels of damage. While the North was able to quickly industrialize, the South lived largely in poverty, creating a sense of isolation between the two regions as they differed so greatly. This gap continued into the 20th century, which has had extreme consequences in political growth.

...uneven and diverse economic development tends to fragment U.S. politics. Among elites, the enduring vitality of regional splits is evident in phenomena like the "Sagebrush Rebellion," which pits Western business interests against the Northeast in a battle over environmental regulation and Federal land management in the West. Among non-elites, it is evident in the difficulties northern workers have encountered from their southern

counterparts in responding to "runaway" shops down South. Regional economic differences continue to slow concerted national responses to problems, and to divide ordinary people with potentially shared interests from one another. (Cohen & Rogers, 1986)

To this day, the Southern states are largely Republican and conservative, while Northern states are more Democratic and Liberal, making compromise between the areas hard to reach.

The Electoral College, while instituted in order to give states representative elections, has now become a system which takes away power from the people and puts it into the hands of lawmakers who do not necessarily represent their own interests. This system, in which 48 out of 50 states have "Winner Takes All" electoral votes, means that even if one candidate wins by the popular vote, they could still lose the election by not having enough Electoral College votes. Despite what Americans are told about their choice in the election, electors, not citizens, choose the president. There is no direct democracy, and this outdated system has led many Americans to believe that their voice is not being heard through their ballot. According to a Pew Research Center Study, 63% of Americans would like the president to be the candidate with the most votes nationally (Kiley, 2024). With this system in mind, it is hard to call the United States a true democracy on the basis of the people's right to choose.

Today's electors serve no real purpose. They are party loyalists, legally bound to register a foregone conclusion, and voters rarely even know their names. This reality, in company with the widespread adoption of winner-take-all, has rendered the Electoral College merely an algorithm that distorts Americans' votes, weighting some heavily and taking no account of others. Today we elect our presidents with this algorithm, given to us by political power ploys, not principled commitments. (Dupont, 2025)

While it may have once worked, the Electoral College now just serves as a restrictive foundational flaw in the political sector of the nation.

Another alarming failure in the structure of the government comes from the flaws in both the Constitution and the power given to the judicial branch. The judicial branch, specifically the Supreme Court, is tasked with interpreting the Constitution and offenses to citizens regarding it. The Constitution also gave the executive branch, specifically the president, the power to nominate individuals to become Supreme Court Justices. This holds significance, because the body that has a duty to represent the people of the United States can have partisanship biases. In his first term in office, President Donald Trump appointed three justices to the Supreme Court, all of whom were conservative, making the majority of the Supreme Court Republican. According to legal scholar Vincent M. Bonventre, “The six-to-three majority has narrowed the rights of victims of constitutional violations to bring claims against their government offenders. The constitutionally based *Miranda* protections were among those diluted as a result.” (2023) This bias of members was not something that the Constitution planned for but has now taken hold of the justice system and how Constitutional rights are upheld.

Compared to many other advanced democracies, the United States has a significantly lower voter turnout rate (Wang, 2024). In the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election, the turnout rate was 65.3% (United States Census Bureau, 2025). Studies of non-voters have shown an overwhelming sentiment of unimportance of the voting process in actually making political changes. An Ipsos/Medill School of Journalism/NPR poll in 2020 asked the question “Why don’t people vote?”. Their findings largely showed issues in the importance of voting rather than difficulty in the process of voting.

A majority of respondents who did not vote in the recent presidential elections express a feeling that voting has little impact on their lives, or that it will change how the country is run. There are significant differences in opinion between non-voters and voters about the effect of voting. (Newall & Machi, 2020)

Public opinion on voting matters. With the American people becoming apathetic and losing hope in the democratic importance of voting, turnout rates are unlikely to increase. There is a serious question among citizens over whether or not their vote even matters. The Unite America Institute found that only 14% of voters in the U.S. cast a ‘meaningful’ vote for the congressional election, with “meaningful” meaning that their vote had an impact in deciding the outcome of the election (2025). The lack of impact that voters have can be a solid enough reason to push potential voters away. Voters are starting to notice that their country does not seem to change, no matter what they vote on. A Princeton University study examined how much voters impact government policies.

...voters seem not to affect politicians’ choices during general elections; instead, they appear to merely elect policies through choosing a legislator. That is, they do not influence policy through their Representatives’ choices as much as they are implicitly presented with policy choices by different candidates. (Lee et al., 2004)

Time has shown again and again how little the people have to say in decision-making, and it has led to a lack of effort in participation in the democratic process. The U.S. has essentially been structured so poorly that Americans willingly do not contribute to the processes which claim to make the country so free. They have become impassive to policies they do not like simply because they feel that they cannot do anything to change them.

Where have all the voters gone? They have caught on that the system is rigged. Popular majorities' efforts to change either the distribution of wealth and power or the basic

policies that seem necessary to maintain that structure of wealth and power simply don't seem possible. To be sure, decades of accomplishment by the ideological defenders and celebrants of this system have encouraged Americans to accept it as "democracy." Americans learn to want or, more likely, consider inevitable whatever is produced, to settle for various diversionary satisfactions, and/or to fear change and even suspect that those who do seek change must have self-interested and unpatriotic motives. These are ideological rationalizations for the central fact that the Hamiltonian Constitution excludes people from directly affecting important public policy outcomes. (Dolbeare & Medcalfe, 1987)

With a lack of structural support in democratic practices, we must start to wonder whether or not the idea of American democracy is an accurate label of the United States.

From looking at political theory from both the institutional and structural approaches, it quickly becomes clear that the structural approach gives a more concise view of the state of America as a democracy. In understanding that the state of the nation is a multi-faceted issue, it is possible to see how different aspects of the lives of American citizens tie into capitalism and how it performs under a supposed democracy. Looking at the U.S. through a structural approach shows that there are serious cracks in the foundation of our democracy. Seeing large economic inequality, stark governmental media censorship, and flaws in the Constitution, it is hard to look at capitalism and government structure as separate spheres. If we keep trying to function under the notion that the United States is inherently great and untouchable, we fail to realize the catastrophic effects that capitalism can have on the people. With the country being analyzed thoroughly, it is finally time to ask the important question: are we as much of a democracy as we have been taught?

The Incessant Cycle of Capitalist Rule

The American public has largely spread a political agenda that fits a specific status quo, despite subscribing to political polarization. While the United States has many political parties with diverse views, only two of these parties, the Democrat and Republican parties, gain mainstream attention. The mass media has long excluded coverage of third-party candidates, giving the false impression to American voters that only the Democrat and Republican parties hold significance in the election. The media itself has an effect in lack of information now, but the origin of this may lie in the systemic preference placed on the major parties through their own regulations. In 1987, the chairmen of the Republican and Democratic parties joined to announce that they were creating the Commission for Public Debate (CPD), and that their candidates in the future would only participate in debates sanctioned by the organization. In 2000, the CPD established a list of requirements for a candidate to be able to participate in their debates, one of which was that the candidate must have at least 15% of the popular voter support, as determined in CPD-approved polls. This decision greatly disadvantaged third-party candidates, none of which have been able to participate in the major debates since the induction of the criteria (Brennan, 2021). Despite this CPD ruling, a 2024 Harvard CAPS/Harris poll found that 71% of voters believe that third party or independent candidates should be included in presidential debates (Penn et al., 2024). This large gap in public opinion and policy shows a fault in the democracy of our system. Voters are not being given accurate information and coverage that will help them to make decisions when casting their ballots, but this can just be seen as another strategy to keep the status quo in place.

The status quo is defined as “the existing state of affairs” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The existing state of affairs in the United States is capitalism under an oligarchic structure,

whether that be from a Democratic or Republican perspective. The relatively small number of lawmakers are responsible for the livelihoods of 342 million Americans, but the main goals of these politicians are usually wealth and power rather than being of service to the greater national community. If things stay as they currently are, we will have a system that favors the wealthy, especially white heterosexual males. Many Americans work diligently every day of their life for just a fraction of the assets that the top 1% have, and no matter the slight variation in policy issues, the two major parties would like to keep it this way.

Textbook Balloting

“If voting changed anything, they’d make it illegal.” - Emma Goldman

Most American high school textbooks give a very limited amount of information on the actual impacts of elections. Much is discussed about the electoral process, political parties, and general formalities regarding voting, but there is a stark lack of political theory included in these texts. What these institutional books do not fail to leave out, however, is the supposed “vast differences” between the two major political parties. Savvas, a major publisher of high school textbooks in the United States, published an article detailing how teachers should teach students the fundamentals of government during an election year. Unsurprisingly, they recommended teaching “how just one vote can make a big difference”. They suggested doing this through activities like mock elections. This approach is overly simplistic in the complex landscape of American politics. There is more to elections than just one vote, and yet a major source of the information for students wants to strip the actual importance of understanding how elections do or do not change their daily lives.

The general consensus, though limited in content, amongst these textbooks is that Democrats and Republicans have very different policies and opinions, which could shift many

policies in the country. Whether this is accurate is a question which should be asked in the curriculum but seems to be deliberately omitted.

The Political Compass

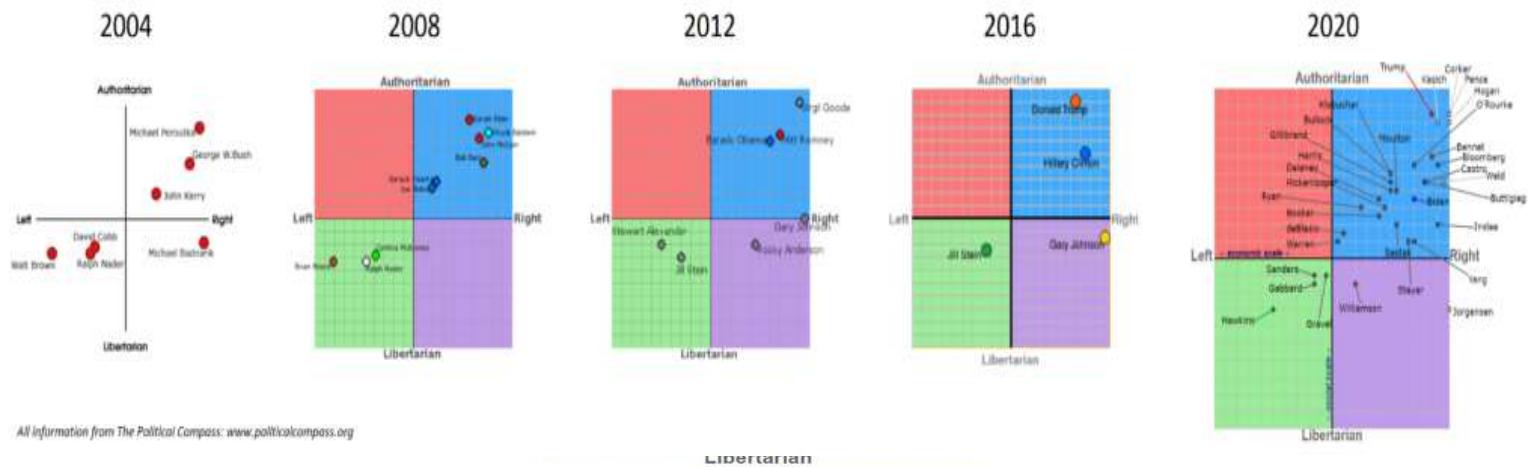
“Always capitalist policy consists in dividing the working class by making it adhere to two opposite capitalist parties.” - Anton Pannekoek

The Political Compass is a tool used in modern political science which divides political opinions into four quadrants, each corresponding with views on economics and political power structures.

Our essential point is that left and right, although far from obsolete, are essentially a measure of economics. As political establishments adopt either enthusiastically or reluctantly the prevailing economic orthodoxy — the neo-liberal strain of capitalism — the left-right division between mainstream parties becomes increasingly blurred. Instead, party differences tend to be more about identity issues. In the narrowing debate, our social scale is more crucial than ever. (The Political Compass, n.d.)

The Compass essentially visualizes the idea that the two major parties are not truly very different to each other in policies and values. This tool allows for the comparative analyses of politicians on a large scale of issues, and shows the true nature of the status quo in the United States.

US Elections - Candidate Mapping



Source: *The Political Compass*

Political Compass charts from the past 20 years show the stark reality: no matter how different the major candidates claim to be, they are still both in the authoritarian right quadrant.

The Democratic Perspective

When Donald Trump won the election in 2016, Democrats were up in arms. There was a widespread belief among the party that his second term would lead to the downfall of democracy: a stance they take to this day. On April 24, the Center for American Progress reported that, “President Trump’s first 100 days in office have taken a chainsaw to democracy and brought the United States to the doorstep of authoritarianism.” (Sozan & Olinsky, 2025). Democrats say that Trump’s targeting of political opponents and cut backs on previous government programs are harming the democracy of the nation, and that if Kamala Harris had won the election, things would be very different. With only the idealized version of a “perfect”

nation under Harris, the party is left speculating about how different things would be now if Trump had lost the election. This utopia, according to the Houston Defender, would be a society where Harris kept programs put in place by previous presidents, led progressive tax policies, and helped to improve the American education system. (Walker, 2025) This faith in the 2024 Democratic platform will no doubt be a major argument used by the party against Trump, but on the “other” side of the aisle, the exact same rationalization is occurring.

The Republican Perspective

When Donald Trump lost the election in 2020 to Joe Biden, the Republican Party, although more specifically Trump’s ‘Make America Great Again’ (MAGA) fanbase was immediately outraged and claimed that the election results were a fraud. From that moment on, the party seemed focused on coming back in 2024 with a Trump victory, and luckily for them, it worked this time. With the influence of power as president, Trump and his allies did not treat Harris and Democrats favorably, consistently criticizing them even after gaining control of most of the government. Despite continued battles in the political spectrum, the party still insists that Trump has made major improvements to the United States. This radical “positive” change has consisted of mass deportations, removing DEI policies, and making the country more affordable for Americans to live in. (The White House, 2025) The party claims the slogan “Make America Great Again”, but as a country, we must analyze whether or not this statement is true and or achievable.

Third Party Views

Third parties have consistently been a minority in America, being left out of most major political conversations (with the exception of Senator Bernie Sanders who has gained national popularity). Despite this, they have their own views and politics on primary elections and serve a

function in the electoral process. Many left-leaning third parties, politicians, and independents criticize mainstream politics as not doing enough to actually help the country, especially minority groups.

A left alternative in the electoral arena, such as the one West poses, challenges the Democrats to be progressive. Otherwise they have little incentive to raise crucial issues. Removing a progressive challenge from the left is tantamount to encouraging the Democrats to shift further to the right with the assurance that their progressive-leaning captured constituencies, such as ethnic minorities and labor, have nowhere else to go. (Harris, 2023)

Independent candidate Cornel West believes that left-leaning Democrats are not progressive enough, candidates like West want radical change in the system to improve the lives of citizens, however this platform can prove difficult to stand on with a lack of voters casting their ballots toward third party or independent candidates. Right leaning third parties and independents, such as the Constitution Party, largely have the similar, yet opposite, view that the two major parties, especially Republicans, are not conservative enough. The Constitution Party platforms on issues like anti-gay marriage and anti-abortion, so even the limited appeasement by Republicans is still too liberal for them. (Constitution Party, n.d.) While third party candidates may have views that many voters would agree with, the lack of media attention that they get means that the likelihood of them winning in the current electoral system is very low. This means that despite their views that winning an election would greatly change the political structure or that major party candidates cannot, there is no probable way to gauge this in the current state of affairs.

Similitude in Party Platforms

“The problem is politics is made a sport, almost as much a sport as football or baseball. When it comes to politics, adults and politicians do more finger-pointing and play more games than children ever do. Too often are we rooting for the pride of a team rather than the good of the nation.” - Criss Jami

Americans are repeatedly told that the Democratic and Republican parties are very different, but in reality, they have many of the same stances and policies. Party differences primarily show themselves in more localized issues like abortion access, LGBTQ+ rights, and gun control. While these issues are significant and do affect the livelihood of many Americans, the issue that affects everyone: Capitalism and the economy, should be the principal concern of politicians. In solving issues surrounding the financial system in the United States, these concerns may be resolved, yet the two major parties have chosen to highlight their differences rather than working toward viable solutions. This enables them to distract from the fact that though they do have a few large differences, their stances on economics and foreign affairs are virtually the same.

Both parties claim to represent the working class and their interests, and yet both are headed by extremely wealthy candidates. While 2024 Democratic candidate Kamala Harris may have had a modest upbringing, her combined net worth with her husband in 2024 totaled to around \$8 million, which is about 20 times the amount that people their age in the United States are making (Khan-Mullins, 2024). On the other hand, Republican Donald Trump has built a platform on supporting blue-collar workers, but it is hard to say that that would be in his best interest, considering he was raised wealthy and is worth \$6.1 billion today (Feldmann, 2025). These two candidates were, and continue to be, under the influence of corporate interest. In her

time as Vice President, Harris forged close ties with corporations and their heads as advisors in her policymaking. In this relationship, the companies provided not only advice, but also a push toward their own interest, especially in terms of finance and foreign affairs (Aleem, 2021).

Contrary to establishment narratives, the Democratic leadership has often resisted advocacy organizations pushing for bold reforms on immigration, Big Tech, climate, debt, healthcare, rent, mass incarceration, Palestinian rights, and for policies like the Build Back Better agenda. This tension isn't just about differing priorities—it reveals the actual balance of forces in the party. Corporate donors on Wall Street and Silicon Valley pour billions into campaigns, shaping agendas to suit their interests. A consultant class reaps millions from flawed strategies and failed candidates yet continues to fail upward, perpetuating a pattern of mediocrity. They, not progressives, are the roadblock preventing Democrats from becoming a populist force that could disrupt the status quo and win back voters of all stripes. (Shahid, 2024)

The popular belief that somehow the American Left caused the failure of Harris' campaign and the negative effects from Trump's presidency negates the fact that Harris herself failed to address the issues that voters are most concerned about, those that impact them the most. While corporations may greatly influence elections in the United States, they cannot lead a candidate to victory when their campaign has faults. Trump may not truly have the interests of working Americans in heart, but he did succeed in creating a platform that criticized the poor economy under President Joe Biden and offered solutions; whether those solutions were viable is yet to be analyzed.

Both Harris and Trump have advocated for tax cuts for entrepreneurs, but as Trump's presidency has shown, this plan does not work well in reality (The Associated Press, 2024). Tax

deductions for pass-through business owners almost always benefit the wealthier small business owners in the United States, without truly assisting in the growth of entrepreneurs' endeavors. A report from the United States Congress Joint Committee on Taxation found that, "Those in the top decile, taxpayers with AGIs of at least \$174,000, account for approximately 87 percent of all tax liability reductions under section 199A." (2024). Businesses, starting with little and trying to grow are not benefitting from tax cuts, but the already wealthy are. This Bill veils the true recipients of financial deductions behind the term "small business", when in reality, they are the upper class. Additionally, small businesses are hurting from Trump's high tariff policies, as many rely on imported foreign goods.

Small businesses operate on significantly smaller margins than large businesses, are less able to absorb extra costs, and are more likely to pass them onto consumers. Given forecasts of a U.S. recession following the announcement of the Trump Tariffs, consumers faced with higher prices and tighter budgets will likely spend less overall and prioritize spending at lower-cost retailers, which are typically large businesses.⁹ This will further compound the negative impact on small firms. (Markey, 2025)

Higher costs can mean life or death for small businesses, who often do not have a lot of money to spare. Although tax breaks might help some small businesses, they are still losing money as they are forced to pay higher prices for their goods. This in turn hurts consumers, who bear the brunt of the increased price of goods. Whether Harris or Trump applied these deductions, the wealthy would benefit, as the system is built to support them rather than working Americans.

In matters of foreign affairs, both the Democratic and Republican parties seem to have an affinity toward involvement in the government of other nations, whether that be through the supply of weapons, war, or economic support. The issue of the "war" between Israel and

Palestine was a contentious one during the 2024 election cycle. During her time as Vice President, Harris condemned the death of innocent civilians in Gaza, yet she also supported the United States giving foreign aid, including arms, to Israel. This has totaled to around \$16.7 billion since October 7, 2023, and has contributed to the deaths of countless Palestinians (Masters & Merrow, 2025). During his second term, Trump has facilitated a ceasefire between Israel and Palestine, yet his early statements and actions deduct from this step forward toward peace. Trump promised to support Israel in his presidential campaign and fulfilled this in January of 2025 when he ordered the supply of 2,000-pound bombs to the nation (Mathis, 2025). To the major politicians in the United States, Israel is worth supporting, even if that means enabling them to commit a genocide.

In United States-China relations, both Trump and Harris have continually stated that China poses a threat to the economy of America. As Chinese scholars have stated, “rather than offering alternative approaches to their country and the world, the two major U.S. parties both reflect a general approach to China that has emerged in recent years, one that is strongly informed by domestic U.S. political concerns.” (Jisi et al., 2024). During Harris’ campaign, she did not speak much about China, but experts believe that if she had won, her policies would have likely been a continuation of those during the Biden presidency, of which she was Vice President (National Committee on U.S. China Relations, n.d.). She would likely have implemented similar tariffs to Trump but may have been somewhat more negotiable in her way of going about it. Harris would also probably take a stance in favor of the independence of Taiwan, which China stakes their claim on. All of her policies, though, would have a focus on prioritizing the United States as the number one global power in a time where China is at a close second place. (Kostka, 2024). Trump has shown a more aggressive continuation in his U.S. China policies in his second

term as compared to his first. In early 2025, Trump threatened China with tariffs reaching 125%, which resulted in China's retaliatory tariffs on the U.S. at a rate of 145%. In the later half of 2025, these rates have calmed some, but remain high, with U.S. tariffs on China at about 47.5%, and China's rates on the U.S. at around 32%. (Brown, 2025). Trump met with Chinese president Xi Jinping in October of 2025 for the first time since 2019, but the results of the meeting did not do much to calm the tensions between the two countries (Hunnicutt et al., 2025). The two nations continue to vie for economic dominance, but whether Trump or Kamala had won, they both would have implemented trade policies that would protect the United States' economy, usually at the hands of American consumers.

Contrast in Policies

"We huddle tightly together as cowards, protecting the ranks of our false collective identity from "less-human" intruders, when the only obvious and sane truth is that we are all the same human beings." - Bryant McGill

Despite the status quo not changing much, if not at all, between each election, there are still more specialized issues that are affected by who is in power, which has become abundantly clear after the 2024 election.

President Trump has been harsh in his immigration policies since his first term in 2017, ordering the construction of a border wall between the United States and Mexico, but his second term has been more severe, and has included multiple violations of the legal rights that immigrants in the U.S. are granted. Trump early on ordered the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) to conduct raids on major cities, targeting all immigrants, regardless of their immigration status. In September 2025, the majority conservative Supreme Court which was largely appointed under Trump voted to overturn a ruling that said that ICE agents could not

target people based on their language or skin color (Valenzuela, 2025). This has had a major impact on Hispanic and Latino communities, who are targeted the most by ICE (Gelatt & Bush-Jacob, 2025).

As of this month [June], there are approximately 59,000 immigrants currently held in ICE custody, which is over 140% of its detention capacity. Over 70% of them have no criminal record, and 93% have never been convicted of a violent crime — a blatant disregard of Trump's repeated invocation to target violent criminals. From February through May, ICE detained an average of about 20,000 immigrants each month, a more than threefold increase from 2024. (HIAS Staff, 2025)

An analysis from The Guardian found that between January and June 2025, there was an 807% increase in arrests of immigrants with no criminal history (Olivares & Craft, 2025). The number of immigrant detainments has only increased since June. Hardworking Americans are being forcefully removed from their families and communities, and their loss is felt throughout the nation. Though each U.S. president has had to deal with the topic of immigration, Trump's tactics around it have been detrimental. In his own words, “No, they're not humans, they're not humans, they're animals” (Terkel & Lebowitz, 2024).

Since his first day in office, Trump has targeted the rights of LGBTQIA+ Americans. In his executive order titled “Defending Women from Gender Ideology and Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government”, Trump set out a broad set of anti-transgender policies that would hurt many members of the transgender community. These included not legally recognizing non-binary people, defunding gender-affirming care to youth, preventing transgender individuals from joining the military, and allowing employers to discriminate against transgender employees (Wolf, 2025).

A new study from the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law finds that 81% of transgender adults in the U.S. have thought about suicide, 42% of transgender adults have attempted it, and 56% have engaged in non-suicidal self-injury over their lifetimes.

(Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, 2023)

Transgender individuals have a very high rate of suicide and self-injury, and laws denying their rights may increase these issues. The policies enacted by the government are not just words: they can cause the loss of lives within a vulnerable community.

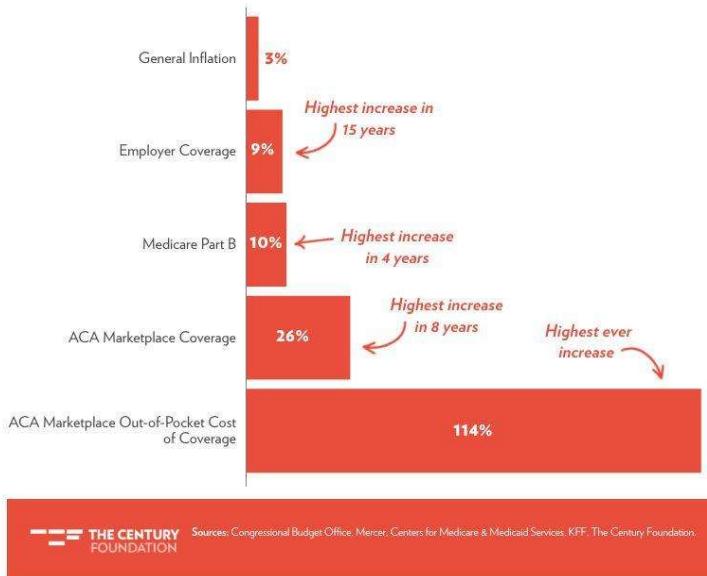
Healthcare, especially health insurance, has taken a turn for the worst under the Trump administration, with millions losing coverage.

The Republican reconciliation bill cuts more than \$1 trillion from Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act (ACA), destabilizing the health care system and making care more expensive and harder to access for all Americans. The nonpartisan, independent Congressional Budget Office (CBO) found that Republicans' health care cuts would directly terminate health insurance for 15 million Americans. (United States Senate Committee on Finance, 2025)

Even without the direct termination of health insurance, many Americans will experience an increase in the cost of health insurance.

HEALTH CARE PREMIUMS FOR 250 MILLION AMERICANS WILL RISE DRAMATICALLY IN 2026

Premium increases will be at least 3x larger than growth in prices, income, and Social Security benefits



A lack of insurance or an increase in its cost means that many Americans may not be able to survive financially with even one serious injury or accident. This can lead to many people avoiding seeking healthcare, even when they may need it.

Three-quarters of uninsured adults say they have skipped or postponed getting the health care they needed due to cost. Having health insurance, however, does not offer ironclad protection as about four in ten adults *with* insurance (37%) still report not getting health care they needed due to cost. (Sparks et al., 2025)

The danger that the change in health care and insurance will cause is dire, and it is important to look at why a president may want to prioritize financial benefits before the health of the American people.

Women's rights, including health and reproduction, have been threatened under Trump's policies in his second term. The administration began laying off thousands of employees of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in April 2025. This included the termination of

most of the CDC's Division of Reproductive Health (Wheeler, 2025). This department is responsible for conducting research for the advancement of maternal and reproductive health. This is an essential organization for furthering science related to women's health, and its downsizing will have a large impact on the future of reproductive science. In terms of labor and the workforce, the ending of DEI in the federal government, ordered by Trump, has harmed working women. DEI benefits marginalized groups, including women, and Trump's order has influenced many American companies outside of the federal government to participate in the DEI cuts. A 2025 survey found that among U.S. companies, 24% saw less women advancing in leadership positions, with the hiring of women, especially women of color, falling substantially (GWL Staff, 2025). These cuts are hurting the careers of women who have had to work much harder than men to build themselves up and is a step back from previous advancements made to women's equality in the workforce.

“Challenging the status quo is not unreasonable, unpatriotic, or certainly un-American. It may be uncomfortable, unpopular, unwise or even untenable, but it is not un-American....We are in a sea change, where political tides and alliances are turning on a global scale. For those who believe in generational theory, this period is as unpleasant, likely dangerous for institutions, beliefs and people, as it is inevitable....This is a nation built on shifting ground by generations of people who ended up here by force or by will. They survived formidable odds to create a flawed, perfect, terrible, beautiful, impoverished, prosperous amalgam of a country unlike any other, a country made distinct by its differences and by its continuity. Too many today seem terrified by those very differences.”

- Nisa Donnelly

Donald Trump has set his presidency on the idea of “Making America Great Again”, but as his record has shown, he has not really been able to achieve this. The idea of “Making America Great Again” would mean that the United States was once a great nation for all, but this is simply not the case. Many Americans have historically struggled under the capitalist oligarchic structure, and Trump has not taken any actions to try to make change to this. For a country to be great, everyone must be cared for. Although the system will not be drastically changed by whoever wins the election, the changes made under Trump have worked to take away advancements and rights that have greatly improved the lives of marginalized groups. A rhetoric of hate disguised as the bettering of a few has no place in a democracy. Kamala Harris would not have changed the financial system that burdens the majority of the country, her attitude in embracing the diversity of the nation may have brought a new sense of empathy in America. The status quo will not be systematically changed, but that is not to say that ordinary citizens are not working on their own to help others. Politicians can only do so much, but the will of the many is stronger than political systems will ever be.

Conclusion

“Reader of dead words who would live deeds, this is the flowering of my logic: I dream of a world of infinitive and valuable variety; not in the laws of gravity or atomic weights, but in human variety in height and weight, color and skin, hair and nose and lip. But more especially and far above and beyond this, is a realm of true freedom: in thought and dream, fantasy and imagination; in gift, aptitude, and genius—all possible manner of difference, topped with freedom of soul to do and be, and freedom of thought to give to a world and build into it, all wealth of inborn individuality. Each effort to stop this freedom of being is a blow at democracy—

that real democracy which is reservoir and opportunity . . . There can be no perfect democracy curtailed by color, race, or poverty. But with all we accomplish all, even Peace."

- W.E.B. Du Bois

A broad analysis of the United States government will give the grim conclusion that the country is ruled by the very few and that ordinary citizens have very little political influence. This does not mean that this is the end for a democratic America, however. Capitalism and greed do not need to control the political landscape. If the United States focuses less on capitalism as a core tenet of American livelihood, politicians with genuine zeal for helping the people may rise.

In the U.S., the humanities as academic disciplines, with many turning to more "practical" areas of study which conform more to a capitalist-focused society, such as STEM and business.

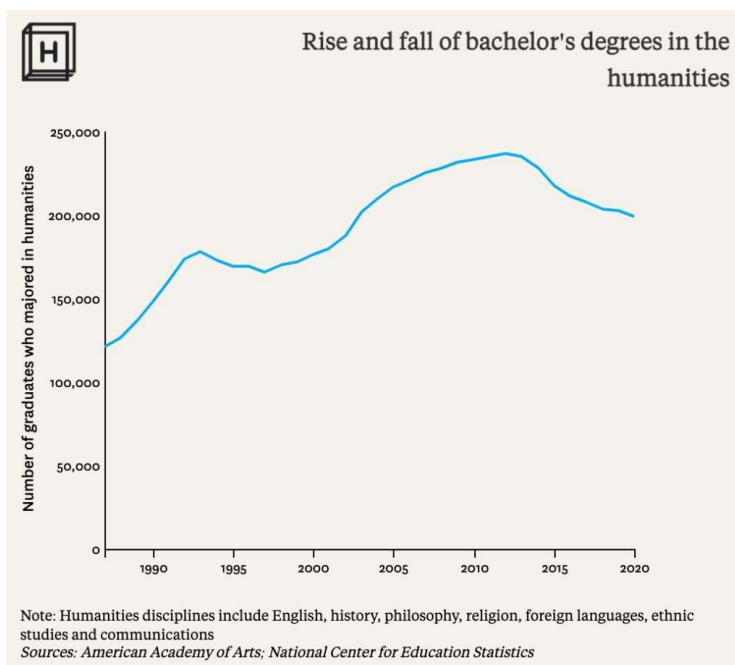
Attempts to strip "non-productive" majors and programs from colleges goes back many years. Amputating sociology, English, history, philosophy, the classics, and even art and music, always done in the name of "economizing," has been a theme of politicians who claim simply to be applying business principles to higher education. In reality, the motivation is often trying to get rid of troublesome departments that sometimes inspire students to think critically about social systems, culture and history. (Dix, 2018)

American students are being taught to value subjects and majors which value the advancement of corporate interests, rather than those that advance the interests of humanity. The subjects in the humanities explore the themes that make humans human: morals, life, death, relationships; they teach that there is more to human existence than simply existing.

But educators for economic growth will do more than ignore the arts. They will fear them. For a cultivated and developed sympathy is a particularly dangerous enemy of

obtuseness, and moral obtuseness is necessary to carry out programs of economic development that ignore inequality. It is easier to treat people as objects to be manipulated if you have never learned any other way to see them. (Nussbaum, 2010)

The capitalist system will always try to prevent the formation of caring and concerned citizens, which is why the push on cutting humanities programs in higher education has become so prevalent. Young people are being discouraged from pursuing the humanities in college due to their “uselessness” in today’s society, and thus humanities majors have been significantly declining in the past 13 years (Barshay, 2021).



Due to this declining rate, many schools are ending their humanities programs, with schools like Clarkson

University, West Virginia University, SUNY Potsdam, and Marymount University removing many humanities-adjacent majors (Drozdowski, 2024). While the numbers of enrollees may be low, eliminating the programs altogether ends the possibility of students deciding that they may want to study in these areas.

Many Americans are working jobs and studying subjects that they do not like, just because it may make more money than fields that they are actually interested in. The main motivator in the American lifestyle has become money and power, rather than fulfillment in life. The focus of citizens is rising to the top, no matter the cost, and politicians are no exception. Many politicians in the United States focus on the idea of power and control rather than helping their constituents. A recent study found that 11% of the billionaires in the world have run for or held political office (Krcmaric et al., 2023). The wealthy continually enter the political sphere to further their own interests and the interests of other wealthy individuals, and the power goes on with power rather than passion.

While capitalists may claim that humans are naturally selfish, research has shown that humans have a unique tendency toward altruistic behaviors, like reciprocity and cooperation, and that these start showing themselves from the time of infancy (Filkowski et al., 2016). Humans show that they are naturally drawn to helping others, without necessarily gaining anything from themselves. In 2023, 75.7 million Americans above the age of 16 volunteered, totaling 4.99 billion hours (Schlachter & Marshall, 2024). Research and polling suggest that a large factor in volunteering is altruism or a genuine desire to help others (Nowakowska, 2022). The work of volunteers shows a clear reality: Americans can and do work without monetary profit. People follow their passions despite earning money from them, and in a society that values the passion of individuals over profit, authentic care would thrive. Politicians would be those who have a genuine desire to make change, rather than power-hungry billionaires. Community care must be at the forefront of a democracy, and prioritizing avidity in all areas, including the arts and humanities, would make for a United States where attention to the needs of all would be better met. The government could assist in this through providing programs, such as universal

healthcare and education, which would develop the whole human, though it may cost the country more financially. There is a future for American democracy, one worth fighting for; but for change to be made, the American people must acknowledge the flaws that keep the country in peril and actively work to change them.

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