

The Manipulation of Democracy: When Capital Rules the People

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Abstract

The belief that the United States is a democracy was a lie and a manipulation trick to cover up all the despicable things done by the top one percent. The truth is, the United States is an oligarchy run by the wealthy. Their greed for more wealth is driving the United States to its doomsday. The status quo keeps the wealthy in power and within the policy-making process. Despite switching back and forth between the same two political parties, nothing will change in the policies that continue to fuel the wealthy. From the clear deception and manipulation of Americans for votes of support to creating policies that continue to make the lives of those Americans worse. Many elected candidates do not fulfill their promises to Americans that got them elected and often mute their plans that will affect their chances of being elected. Politicians are following the words of the wealthy by creating policies that only make them wealthier. Democracy and capitalism do not form a beneficial relationship. Therefore, we as Americans should recognize the manipulation of the government and strive for change to this system. If we do not do so, the future of democracy will meet its doomsday. We cannot let the wealthy get away with their despicable acts.

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As Americans examine the United States government more closely, they will realize it does not represent a true democracy. The United States has shifted its power mainly into the hands of the wealthy and out of the hands of the average American. In this case, this leads to the following question: What kind of government does the United States have?

As we examine the United States Government, there are four theories of the government to be aware of. First, there is the traditional Democratic theory, which is the most common and widely believed. It states that all citizens have an equal say in how the government functions. However, this is far from what the United States has, since we have a representative democracy where around five hundred politicians represent hundreds of thousands of Americans. It means that Americans do not hold individual power and cannot represent themselves in an election.

The second theory of government is pluralism, where groups compete with one another for control over public policy. Meaning people have to form a group that aligns with their ideals and beliefs for their voice to be heard by the government. However, this does not guarantee success, and the United States government can very well ignore these groups and choose not to compromise.

However, when many groups have the same power, all voices are muted. This is the third theory of government, hyperpluralism, which states that when there are too many competing groups, it overwhelms the government and therefore has no effect on policy making. The government can no longer represent the majority, as many groups with the same power have different say in public policies.

The final theory of government is the elite class theory, where society is divided into socioeconomic classes. This theory states that the majority of the power is held by the wealthy;

therefore, little to no democracy can exist. This means that the top one percent of wealthy individuals hold the power to create or remove laws, regulations, and economic policies to keep them running in the government and becoming wealthier than ever. This theory is the closest of all four to the current United States government. Pluralism and hyperpluralism indeed hold some truth in our society, however, it tends to be overpowered by money and the wealthy class. Money can be used to bribe politicians, and therefore, groups with significantly less funds will not stand a chance against the top one percent of wealthy individuals. The United States has also shifted towards a more capitalist society where our government loves to spoil corporations over the American people. Additionally, the status quo makes sure there are no significant changes to the United States government with each election. This further strengthens the power of the wealthy, as average Americans are losing their voice over some petty money.

Capitalism's Version of Democracy

From a young age, Americans are taught that the United States is a democratic society under the exceptional system of capitalism. Classrooms utilize textbooks that categorize the United States' political system into branches and political groups. These components define democracy and how it functions but overlook the effects of capitalism in a democratic society. This is an example of the institutional approach, which is one of two methods used to analyze the political system in the United States. Using the institutional approach to examine the government will conclude that the United States is a democracy. However, can this approach accurately describe what is happening underneath the brief definitions of how the United States' democracy works? That is where the structural approach comes into the conversation. Structuralism analyzes the underlying structures and relationships between various economic and political

elements. This approach emphasizes how the economic system shapes and changes politics and political actions from the government.

When talking about politics, many tend to look at the economic system separately from the political system. They do not realize that the two systems form a symbiotic relationship, where one affects the other and vice versa. The United States operates under the economic system called capitalism, in which “trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit” (Liberto, 2024). This simple definition may appear to have nothing to do with politics and the democracy of Americans; however, by comparing the true definition of democracy with the democracy created by capitalism, the contrast is clear. Democracy values “freedom, [...] the principle of holding periodic and genuine elections by universal suffrage,” and “the protection and effective realization of human rights” (Democracy, n.d.). Because capitalism gives wealthy owners of companies the power to determine how much someone’s labor is worth, which is usually low for private owners to maximize profits, this creates an unfair sharing of wealth. The wealth generated by capitalism gives too much power to these private owners, which goes against the core values of democracy, where power lies within the people. Currently, the richest one percent owns 45% of global wealth, while the other 44 percent of humanity lives on less than \$6.85 per day. This is creating a greater gap between the wealthy, with the top one percent rapidly adding to their wealth. With such a large wealth gap, “billionaires are now pretty much [...] able to shape economic policies [and] social policies, which eventually gives them more and more profit” (Billionaires growing richer..., 2025). The unequal sharing of wealth creates an imbalance of power held by the wealthy; it forms a hierarchical system that favors the wealthy with the most capital. A true democracy is where the majority of people hold power; it is not

supposed to be held by the people with the majority of wealth. The inequalities created by capitalism diminish the democracy of the United States by creating the illusion of choice.

The wealth and profits that a corporation owns give politicians the power to dictate which direction the United States government goes towards. This causes corporations and wealthy people to bribe presidential candidates into following their orders like puppets. During the 2024 election, Elon Musk, a billionaire, donated “at least \$288 million to help elect President Donald Trump,” so Trump created the Department of Efficiency for Musk to hold the power to regulate federal funds and spending (Thadani et al., 2025). Now, Elon Musk, the billionaire businessman, has the power to control how the country spends its money. In addition, Musk is aggressively invading “at least half a dozen government agencies that have challenged congressional authority and potentially breached civil service protections” (Swan et al., 2025). The same billionaire businessman has the power to interrogate other politicians and federal officials. This goes to show that as long as an individual has enough capital, they can buy power within the government. This is an invasion of democracy because, suddenly, a businessman can meddle with federal affairs. They have the power to control economic and political matters, which most Americans do not have. The average American cannot hold such power because they do not have the capital to donate millions to bribe a presidential candidate into giving them the power to control federal affairs. An unequal sharing of capital created by greedy corporations creates an unequal sharing of power between people. This created a hierarchy because the spread of power is held at the top one percent rather than being within the majority of people. A hierarchical system does not hold any room for democracy.

Since I was taught about the United States government through the institutional approach, I used to believe that politicians working within the government were normal people who cared

about the people and made laws accordingly. However, politicians within the government are nowhere near normal people. When looking at the demographics of the Congress, which oversees the government and makes laws, the majority of the members are wealthy individuals who own some sort of investments and capital. Many congressmen start with only the base salary of 174,000 dollars; however, they quickly gain enormous wealth the longer they remain in the government. Representative Collin Peterson, a long-serving Congress member, was worth 123,500 in 2008 but currently has “average net assets of \$4.2 million.” Another representative, Judy Chu, was worth “less than six figures in 2008 [but rose] to 7.1 million dollars a decade later” (Blease, 2024). Their investments in startup technology companies, inheritance, businesses, wealth from their spouse, and many other economically related factors could account for their enormous wealth gain throughout the years. However, how can we be sure that our congressmen would not make laws according to their benefit, since they are so invested in getting wealthy? Are congress members making ethical considerations when there are conflicts between their financial benefits and current issues that concern the majority of the people when making policies? Congress is not very transparent about how it gained such wealth after serving in the government for years, especially since the base salaries of government officials are not the reason for such a rapid income gain. Looking deeper into this situation, the sudden and enormous wealth that the majority of the congressmen gain leads to the conclusion that they are actively involved in lobbying, in which organizations or wealthy individuals can influence the decisions of the government, often through money donations.

As a core value of democracy, many middle-class Americans believe in freedom and equality. However, it can be seen that the government favors wealthy corporations and banks over millions of other Americans. The United States government had long believed in the trickle-

down economic theory, where if the wealthy get tax cuts, financial support from the government, and other benefits, it will trickle down to the other social classes. This belief is very ineffective as it only supports the wealthy in gaining more capital and increasing the social and income inequalities. Between 2007 and 2009, “U.S. households lost over \$16 trillion in net worth, the value of the stock market fell by half, and unemployment reached 10%” which was the result of risky financial practices such as “a housing bubble, risky mortgage lending, complex financial products, and inadequate regulation” from banks for years” (Gratton, 2024). To account for this matter, the United States first assisted banks by bailing them out with billions of taxpayer dollars (Vis, 2020). Corporations and banks can still retain their assets while millions of Americans lose everything with no regard from the government, despite it being the fault of the wealthy. Bailing out the wealthy makes sure that the companies and corporations are stable, so that American workers will have jobs and be fine (Eisinger, 2020). However, it only proved to benefit the wealthy because they ended up hoarding all the wealth for themselves due to their greed for more capital. Although the economy did recover from the 2008 crash, it was not because of the trickle-down theory. The economy can heal itself as time passes. It is hard for Americans not to be trapped under large banks’ neglectful mistakes. How is the United States considered a democracy when the government favors big corporations and banks over the well-being of millions of other American citizens? What happens to power being held by the people when they have to pay large amounts of taxes to fix the mistakes of the few wealthy? When capitalism works with the government, the wealthy certainly get a free pass every time they screw something up within the economy.

Shortly after Trump became president, he quickly appointed wealthy individuals to positions within his cabinet. Not only are they wealthy, but the majority of them have no

experience in the position that they were assigned. Linda McMahon, a wealthy billionaire, has been appointed Secretary of Education. Because Linda McMahon has limited experience within education in the United States, she certainly got the job because of her wealth and support for Trump. Since Trump has plans of taking down the education department after gaining approval from the Senate, McMahon will be assigned the job (Who is on Trump's..., 2025). It is absurd that a billionaire is going to take away an American's right to education. This act could potentially destroy the public education system and make all education cost money. This is practically taking away one's right to education because not every single American has the money to send their children to get an education. Low-income families and children with disabilities are supported by federal funding that goes into K to 12th-grade education (Liptak et al., 2025). The wealthy within the government are taking away the rights of all Americans that they should have when living in a democracy.

Aside from educational rights, Americans sure have the choice to pick between their daily used products, right? Having the ability to choose between eating nutritious oatmeal from Quaker Oats or cereal from Life for breakfast, to eating Doritos or Cheetos for an afternoon snack, and to drinking plain Aquafina or Pepsi, gives Americans the perception that they have unlimited options in choosing what brand or type of product they want to use. However, taking a closer look at the brands reveals the complex interconnection. All these different branded consumer products are often owned by one parent company. All of the products listed above are in the control of a one-billion-dollar company: PepsiCo (These 11 companies..., n.d.). These corporations hold power not only in politics but also in the choices of products that Americans have access to. To think that every product we use, despite being from different brands, can all be controlled by the wealthy, really questions whether Americans still have choices or the power

to choose what they use in their lives. In reality, we exercise our freedom of choice by picking between the products controlled by a few large corporations. The wealthy control the variation of our everyday products, such as different brands and categories like beverages, snacks, or hygiene products. Do we even have the right to choose what we put into our mouths and bodies? Or is it all controlled by the wealthy?

By looking at the government using both economic and political systems, there is more clarity on why the United States does not feel like a democracy to most Americans. According to Pew Research, which has surveyed adult Americans on whether the United States is a good example of democracy, the range is only between 16 to 22 percent despite the age differences and political parties (Fetterol, 2024). The American people are supposed to trust that their government will do their best to represent the people in a democratic society, but this appears not to be the case. Corporations and the wealthy run this country. Examples of this are Elon Musk, a billionaire businessman with no prior political experience, entering federal office, Trump's Oval Office being filled with wealthy individuals without political experience, and the number of politicians entering the government becoming wealthy within a few years. Because the institutional approach does not explain the effects of capitalism on politics, it does not clearly explain why some actions from the government seem unfair and unjust if the United States is deemed a democracy. The institutional approach does not go into depth on why the majority of the individuals within the government are wealthy. It would only explain that they got into the position because Americans elected them to be in the government to represent them. Looking at economic and political systems together will give a complete view of how the United States government is run. As the government continues to expand with billionaires running the country, it slowly strips away millions of Americans' rights and voice in a so-called democracy.

The Doomsday of Democracy

Americans believe that the democracy in the United States is doomed the moment Trump won the 2024 election. The same people believe the Democratic Party is the representative of democracy and the voice of the people, which refers to all people, not just wealthy white men. It is common among Americans to divide themselves into two major political groups and call themselves either liberal or conservative; Democrats are liberal, and Republicans are conservative. On the internet, there is a clear divide between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party as they often argue during debates. During the 2024 presidential election, Trump and Harris often made fun of and ridiculed one another during their campaign speeches. For example, Trump has called Harris names such as “crazy Kamala” and “Kamabla.” This also happened in the 2016 election, where Trump also called his opponent “crooked Hillary” (Piper, 2024). However, when comparing the policies of the major political parties of the United States – the Democratic Party and the Republican Party – during their stay in office, barely any major differentiation can be found. There will indeed be some changes in policies, but the baseline system stays the same. In reality, Americans are not offered many choices during presidential elections that are different from one another. The major political parties, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, are advertised to be very different in ideals and often hate one another. However, they actually occupy the same quadrant on the political compass to which they are considered the status quo. Meaning there are minimal changes in terms of politics and economics between the two political groups. Many Americans believe that if the Republican president does not do well in their term, they can change it by switching to a democratic candidate. However, this does not make much difference as the United States is still moving around the same quadrant – authoritarian capitalism.

Capitalism is where private owners can control the supply and demand of their property that best serves their interests. The main pillars of capitalism are self-interest and limited control from the government (Jahan et al., n.d.). However, the United States does not have true capitalism. Our government is very much involved in capitalism and its monetary benefits. Not only that, but the whole United States government is the definition of capitalism; they are only interested in making money and getting wealthy during their term of service. During presidential elections, many corporations will try to bribe a candidate by donating money to their campaign, so once the candidate wins, they will make laws or regulations that benefit corporations. For example, during Trump's first term in 2017, he lowered corporate taxes from 35 percent to 21 percent for his wealthy buddies. The Trump administration claimed that the massive tax cut on the wealthy would benefit the majority of Americans because of the trickle-down theory, where money will reach the hands of lower-class Americans if money is given to the upper-class Americans (Trump's Corporate Tax..., 2019). However, this is not the case because corporations invest the extra money from the tax cut. This only makes the wealthy wealthier as the investment gains will be reinvested repeatedly. Therefore, money will be continuously held by the top 1 percent of Americans. The money from the tax cut is not being used to pay the working class a higher wage or worker benefits as it was intended to.

The Democratic Party is associated with increasing corporate taxes, while the Republican Party is associated with lowering corporate taxes. Corporate taxes help balance out the income inequality and fund medical insurance and retirement plans for the majority of American families. During the Harris 2024 campaign, she promised to increase the corporate tax to 28 percent from the previous 21 percent (Where Kamala Harris..., 2024). This may appear like Harris cares about the middle and lower class; however, based on the top marginal tax rate

on Statista, from 1990 to 2020, the tax on the rich has been fluctuating between 30 and 40 percent, regardless of which party won the election (McCarthy, 2021). The tax rate would go down when the republicans are in office but only go up by a few percent once the democratic party is in office. Although the democratic party does appear to care about the working Americans, the difference is minimal because both major parties still care about their profits and gains, as they are capitalistic. Not to mention that wealthy corporations supported the Harris campaign; around 83 billionaires supported Kamala Harris (Saul, 2024). The support the wealthy give to candidates is a method of bribery. In the end, if Harris had won the election, she would still have to make policies that benefit corporations, and there would not be much change to help the middle class. Corporations want capital, but capital needs to be spread out to have a larger middle class. That means that even though Harris appears to help the middle class, she would not be able to, since corporations would not let capital fall into others' hands but into their own. This is just an oligarchy in disguise, run by the top one percent. It does not matter which party wins; the result will be the same: we are still an oligarchy with an illusion that power is held by the people. No after who the people vote for, in the end it is all the same candidates.

However, the outcome of Harris winning the election may turn out better than the current situation with Trump and Elon running the government. The Harris campaign supports more human rights, which represents what the majority of Americans stand by, such as expanding healthcare and abortion rights (Where Kamala Harris..., 2024). Unlike the Trump administration, which has revoked DEI and fired a bunch of federal workers, claiming that they got the job because of DEI. Trump also revoked a significant amount of LGBTQ+ rights, such as transgender women participating in women's sports and signing a bill that removed civil protection of transgender people (Yourish et al., 2025). Trump has made massive efforts to

decrease diversity and equal rights in the United States. This is a key issue, as the United States has long been known as one of the most diverse countries. It seems almost as if the United States is developing backward. The United States may have been in a better situation if Harris had been elected because at least she still cared about Americans at a superficial level. There still might be massive hits on diversity, rights, and inclusion, but they will be gentle and less in the spotlight. However, we must still acknowledge that not much will be changed about the economic system in the United States if either candidate wins. The United States will remain with a capitalist government as long as the Democratic and Republican parties run this country.

Besides the two major political parties, the United States has other third-party organizations, such as the Green Party. However, not much spotlight is shining upon them because they lack the campaign money to advertise everywhere like the two major parties. The lack of support third parties get makes it impossible for them to win the election. Even if they gain support from the American people, voting for a third-party candidate is deemed as wasting votes because of how vast and impactful the two main parties in the United States are in the media. For example, “votes for the Green Party are going to be votes taken away from Harris and the Democrats, and votes for the Libertarian Party are going to be votes taken away from Trump and the Republicans” (Bouranova, 2024). Therefore, it is believed that voting for the next best thing is a smarter move. Green party supporters are told to vote for the Democratic party because the chances of a Green Party candidate winning are minimal. It is not like the Green Party has no influence. It is a large political organization in a lot of countries, such as Europe and Australia. It is a smaller party in the United States because it is masked by the Democratic and Republican parties. Most corporations tend to support political groups that are in favor of capitalism. Because the Green Party is more libertarian socialist, which is the opposite of the two major

parties in the United States, and socialist ideals do not align with capitalist ideals, they tend to get less support from the wealthy. Less support means less money, and less money means less campaign money to create a large impact on the media and Americans.

Even if donations and endorsements are not an issue, it would still be hard for a third party to win, mainly because every politician's goal is to win the election. To win the election, every politician will promise something that the vast majority wants. They want to appeal to themselves as representatives of the people to get elected. This means that every politician will lie in their campaign and promise something they will never do when they are in the office. For example, during Trump's 2024 campaign, he promised to end the Ukraine and Russia war immediately after entering office. It has been more than 100 days into his presidency, and still, there is no process in ending the war between Ukraine and Russia. He also promised that he would make things more affordable for the American people; however, his recent tariff policies are doing nothing but raising prices of goods and isolating the United States from the world. The democratic party is not any better at keeping promises. Biden also made promises during his term, such as promising to help illegal immigrants become American citizens and offering another system of healthcare to Americans (Biden Promise Tracker, n.d.). Both of which he failed to complete. So even if a third-party candidate can catch the attention of people, another party's candidate will attempt to take back the spotlight by making a fake promise.

What is worse, most elected presidents will act out different plans from their campaign. In April of 2025, Trump announced his new tariff policy to practically every country on this planet. It was a surprise to Americans since this was not highlighted in his campaign speeches. His administration claims that this is to help bring back the jobs of Americans because tariffs are taxes on foreign countries. This is not going to bring jobs back to America, as factories cannot

just relocate whenever they want. It costs a great deal of money, so most companies would prefer to raise prices rather than move factories back to the United States. Trump also unexpectedly started a trade war with China, the top manufacturing country in the world. China retaliated against the United States' tariff with its tariff on United States goods, and each country continued to raise tariffs on each other until it paused at a 145 percent tariff on Chinese imports and a 125 percent tariff on American imports (Kozul-Wright, 2025). Presidential candidates often highlight issues more important to the public, such as diversity, immigration, and transgender issues, rather than economic issues such as tariffs and trade. They do not give the whole picture of their plans because they want to strategize their win by highlighting issues largely of concern to the public. This would be an example of manipulation and deception to gain power. It would be clear that if Trump openly shared his tariff plans, it would affect his chances of being elected. Tariffs only cause inflation of prices, which goes against lower prices wanted by Americans.

Trump's new tariff policy also made everything more expensive, however, stock prices plummeted, but they rose as soon as Trump announced his plan to pause tariffs on all countries but China. This trade policy that only benefits the wealthy causes the stock market to rise and fall, so his billionaire friends know when to invest money and when to put in money, so they can rapidly earn money. The increase of foreign goods will not affect the wealthy as well, but it will deeply impact the lives of normal Americans. What happened to promising lower prices on goods for Americans? Was that just a fake promise to get Americans to vote for him so he could regain his power? Not only that, but Trump's tariff policies ruined the relations of the United States with allies and other countries. Weakened foreign relations can lead to weakened national security because of the lack of allies and cause global insecurities because of potential conflict that may be sparked.

Forget about “Make America Great Again.” What is even meant by “Great Again”? Bring the United States back into the past? As Trump is back for his second term, we can expect that he is only back to make himself and his wealthy buddies wealthier by draining all the money out of ordinary Americans. Based on what he has already done within the last four months, his main goal is to earn money with his nonsensical politics. Although the democratic party and the republican party share the same roots, the democratic party may have been the better result, at least for a smaller population such as LGBTQ+, immigrants, and low-income individuals. Not much will change after Trump is elected in 2024, as the United States will continue its usual feed to the wealthy. To change this system, the people of the United States must have deep motivation and effort to break apart the scheme of the two major political groups. However, for now, since the majority of the public is unaware and uneducated about this issue, it may be very difficult or even impossible. It is due to how well the wealthy are hiding their control by using presidents of the United States as puppets in a wonderful show called capitalism.

Conclusion

After examining the government of the United States, it is clear that we do not have a democracy like most Americans had believed. The amount of power held by the wealthy top one percent is insane. It diminishes all beliefs and ideals regarding American democracy. It is undeniable that wealthy business owners use their wealth to change policies to help them become even wealthier. Even if Americans were to elect different presidents from different parties, nothing would change, as the status quo will make sure the American government stays the way it is. The main political parties will only prioritize policies that greatly benefit themselves and their wealthy supporters over the hundreds of thousands of Americans. They run the government to make sure profits and money are first in line when it comes to priorities.

The United States should strive for a true democracy where the vast majority hold the power to make decisions rather than relying on a few representatives. We must first limit the power of capitalism, as it is clear that capitalism and democracy cannot coexist. Americans need to wake up from their dreams that they are currently living in a democracy. They must evaluate the steps needed to be taken to defeat the despicable system of capitalism and regain the democracy that many had believed in.

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