

Redefining the American Government

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Abstract

It is often easier for people to avoid the truth and believe in an idealistic alternative rather than facing the unflattering truths that are served on a shiny platter. Avoiding the unpleasant truths to our government is what our nation has done as it is easier to disillusion ourselves to believe in our idealistic picture of the full-fledged democratic America that is outlined in our historic doctrines. It is necessary to remove the romantic rose-colored glasses we decide to wear when viewing our own government in order to realize our need for change and hopefully turn our visions of democracy into a tangible reality. In doing so we must first come to accept and acknowledge our ineffective status quo that fails to improve our society, government, and economy as majority of America's issues have seen minimal improvement over the course of its dysfunctional history and recent pursuits of economic global dominance that combines together resulting in the inhibition to create the progress needed for our nation.

Redefining the American Government

What is America? Before analyzing and achieving a full understanding of our government, we must first know what America's answer would be to this critical question. The core foundations that America takes full pride in is as follows:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it (Declaration of Independence, n.d.).

These are the principles in which our country was built upon. According to the *Declaration of Independence*, we are a democratic nation with popular sovereignty; that the "source of governmental power lies with the people." There is a social contract between the government and the governed that for when the government fails to protect its people, it shall be dissolved (Kelly, 2019). Our core values are the reason our country holds honorable titles such as Land of the Free, Home of the Brave, Land of Liberty, or the Land of Opportunity. However, this country truly seems to be a democracy in sheep's clothing. By examining the four theories of American government, perhaps we may uncover the true identity of our government.

The first theory is the one our great country claims to fall under, the traditional democratic theory, in which a country's true governmental power lies in the hands of its people. The government receives powerful influence from the people. In this form of governance, government officials are representatives of the people and their voice. However, if the

government fails to represent its people accurately, the people have the power to dissolve the government, at least in theory.

The second theory is pluralism in which citizens form groups based on shared opinions that vie for power and control. Essentially dividing into factions and competing against one another to win the power of governance. Power is centered in the group, not the individual. Therefore, if you are not part of a group, you have no power to voice your opinions in government.

The next theory of government is hyperpluralism, the intensified form of pluralism. This theory describes that far too many opposing factions exist, preventing a decision that the majority of the country can be satisfied with. It is a huge game of tug-a-war with more than two sides, which would have no result, ending in a stalemate.

The final theory of American government is the elite class theory, in which the government is separated by socioeconomic status, placing the concentration of power into the upper elite class causing a disproportionate distribution of power. The desires of the elite are favored while the rest of the country's voice is silenced with the elite's hush money.

Looking at our country from afar, some would say that our government is a democracy, until they examine deeper from the face-value. Our country has strayed away from its founding principles and virtue of democracy. We are ruled by the elite, not the people. Private profit is what runs our money-hungry government showered with the essence of capitalism. The elite have the resources to cheat the system of democracy making their goals and opinions more valuable than those of the common folk because they have what our leaders want. Time and time again, the 1% of our population, who own more than a third of our country's total wealth, use their assets to buy politicians, protect their positions, control the media, and keep the power to

themselves. In elections, parties are not competing against one another's beliefs and policies, they are competing to see whose wallet is thickest and overseas conflicts are being started in order to gain economic control for profit the wealthy can pocket. Further exploring the details of our status quo as well as our neo-imperialist behavior, we find that our country is run by the elite, fueled by the heart of America: capitalism.

The 2020 Presidential Elections: Continuity or Change

In the months awaiting the 2020 presidential election, a widespread belief that this decision would elicit a fundamental change in America came to form. In November of 2020, the 59th presidential election took place with the two candidates being Donald Trump, who had just served his first presidential term prior to the 2020 election, and Joe Biden, the 47th vice president of the United States during Barack Obama's presidency. The citizens of America saw this election as a momentous decision that would ultimately decide the fate of America, as if choosing one over the other will drastically change America as we know it. However, this failed to come to fruition as the outcome of the election, being Biden's victory, continued business as usual.

Now that the election has run its course, appointing Joe Biden as the 46th president of the United States, the exaggerated build-up of this allegedly life-changing decision has been underwhelmingly anticlimactic. No doubt changes have been made since Biden and the Democrats have been in office, but can people truly claim holistically that America has seen real change? The continuity of democracy and capitalism has been left undisturbed for nearly two centuries. The results of the 2020 Election could not and did not create a dent in America's foundations.

For so long, America has run on the systems of democracy and capitalism supposedly being the crème de la crème for living up to the American standard that was so beautifully written and doused with ideologies of democracy, liberty, equality, justice, freedom, and opportunity. As a result, these two systems have been widely accepted to be the political and economic status quo of America that we continue to follow with expectations of creating or maintaining an America flourishing with greatness. In reality, our continuity of this “sweet spot” of a status quo is contributing to the gradual deterioration of this country.

Now that America is under Biden’s administration and the Democrats are in office, the status quo is not all that different as the economic hardships America faces today are the same ones America has always faced and the Democrats and Republicans continue to dominate the political arena. Outdated and traditional doctrines continue to serve as the backbone of the American system and have not been able to evolve. No fundamental changes have occurred politically or economically under Biden and the Democrats, and even if Trump had been reelected to serve a second term, the probability of seeing real fundamental change is slim, but not zero. Under critical evaluation, the status quo seems to be destructive to our country rather than beneficial and even possibly a false front covering an underlying system that is actually being practiced. Whether it be a Republican or Democrat to take office, as long as either of the parties within the duopoly continue to lead the country, there will be no fundamental change to the system.

Biden in Relation to the Fundamental Constant of America’s Changing Economy

It is undeniable that America’s economy has changed and evolved overtime with countless challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Great Depression, as well as numerous economic plans to combat economic challenges, including the New Deal and ARPA

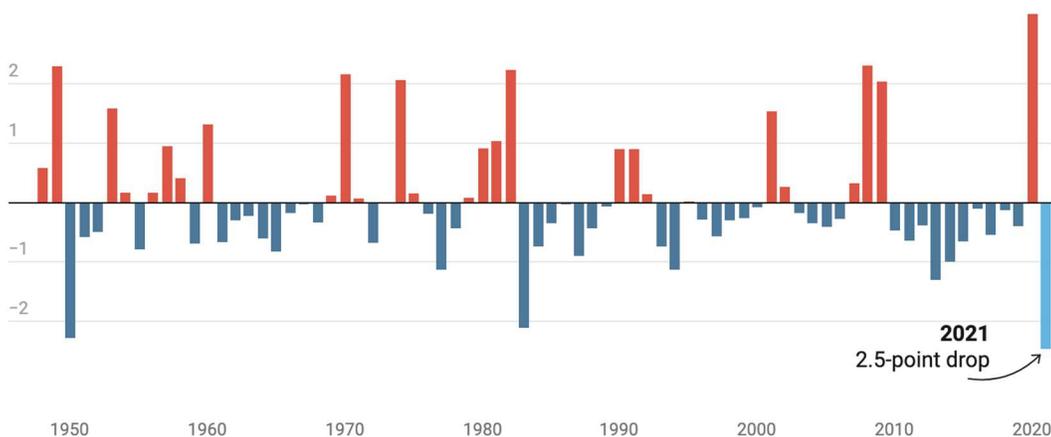
(American Rescue Plan Act). Despite these changes in our economy, the continuity of the system of ideologies and principles defining the economic status quo, notably capitalism and the free market, have proven to be ineffective as our economy has yet to stabilize.

Before Biden took office, the economy under Trump's administration was in desperate need of attention despite inheriting an increasingly improving economy under Obama. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic would inevitably have a negative effect on the economy, it does not excuse the fact that Trump had failed to alleviate or even attempt to mitigate the catastrophic effects resulting from the pandemic. Trump's resistance to put the pandemic under control and to promote a national plan of action in order to overcome or even limit the spread has "resulted in thousands of unavoidable deaths and the most severe economic crisis in a generation". Trump had numerous opportunities to discuss some of America's persisting economic challenges and to devise strategies to ease economic tensions but instead prioritizes the wealthy and upper-class over the common folk which is exemplified in his \$2 trillion tax giveaway that provided corporations redundant benefits (President Trump..., 2020). Additionally, according to MacMillan, the Labor Department issued an update that showed job growth slowed significantly in the first three years of Trump's presidency and that "unemployment peaked at 14.7 percent in April 2020" (MacMillan, 2020). Taking Trump's performance into consideration, his term has set up an opportunity for Biden to improve the economy and help it bounce back from the pandemic's interruption.

As Biden was sworn into presidency during the economy's underwhelming state, the economy has seen progress in recovery according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Since Biden took office, the U.S. economy has gained an average of 565,000 per

month and 6.2 million in total from January 2021 through December 2021 which consequently saw a remarkable drop in unemployment as shown in the data below. (Hanlon, et. al., 2022)

Percentage-point change in the U.S. unemployment rate from January to December, 1948–2021



Additionally, according to Forbes, the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) notes that “the US is the only G7 country back to its pre-pandemic GDP (Gross Domestic Product)” which is also supported by data from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). However, it must be

taken into consideration that inflation has become a significant problem as prices increase at rates

unseen since the 1980’s as a result of the economy’s rapid growth and pandemic supply chain disruptions (McGahey, 2022). Overall, Biden’s policies and strategies to combat the pandemic, such as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the COVID-19 vaccine program, have been effective in restoring the economy from the troubles of the pandemic along with Trump’s failure to address the pandemic’s repercussions.

Percentage change in real gross domestic product (GDP), fourth quarter 2019 to third quarter 2021

Country	Percentage Change
Canada	-1.4%
France	-0.1%
Germany	-1.1%
Italy	-1.3%
Japan	-1.9%
United Kingdom	-1.5%
United States	+1.4%

Regardless of the differences and changes in both Trump and Biden’s approaches to the economy, capitalism remains to be the reigning economic system of America. Capitalism is

defined by Merriam Webster as, an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market (Merriam Webster, n.d). Even after seven recessions, along with their recoveries, capitalism continues to be the system in which we base our economy on. And yet despite these fluctuations, our economy shows minimal improvement in issues such as poverty, wealth inequality, income inequality, wage stagnation, student loan debts, and so much more. The graph to the right shows the

share of US wealth held by key income groups.

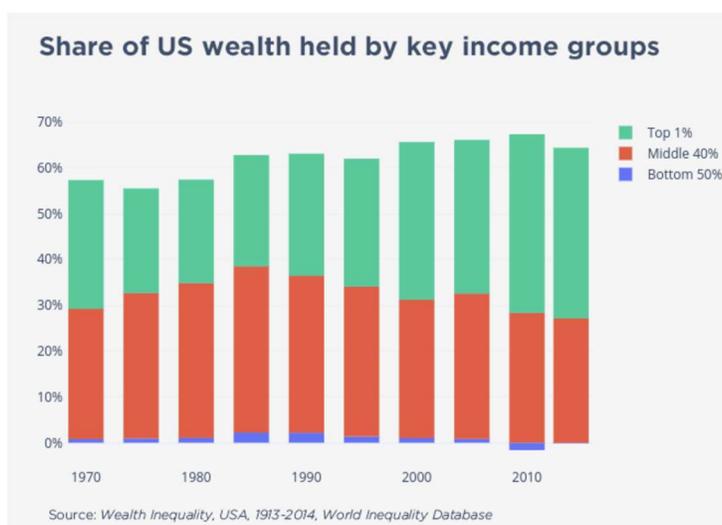
The data shows an increase in the top 1% overtime while the bottom 50% has almost no virtual change, remaining

stagnant (Poole, 2019).

Capitalism as a system

seems to only benefit the wealthy and elite who make up 1% of America as it allows the rich to become richer with their private corporations and businesses while the rest of America remains helpless.

In terms of their views on economics, both Biden and Trump are cut from the same cloth. According to the political compass, a website used to pinpoint someone's political ideologies onto a political spectrum with an economic axis and a social axis, Biden and Trump both end up



(Poole, 2019)

in the same quadrant, to the right and authoritarian. (The Political Compass, n.d) On the social scale, Biden is more to the left on the economic scale in comparison to Trump, though both remain on the far right. Going back to before the 2020 election, knowing that Trump and Biden share the same fundamental beliefs and ideologies, it can be expected that the two seemingly contrasting administrations may not be so different after all. Even Biden himself has admitted that change would not be seen as he told billionaires during a fundraising trip that if he was elected “No one’s standard of living will change. Nothing would fundamentally change” (Higgins, 2019). Whether it had been Biden or Trump to win the 2020 election, the economic status quo that is capitalism would continue to produce changes in the state of our economy while simultaneously keeping our economic roots firmly planted.

Biden and the Political Norm

In this country, when you register to vote it will ask if you would like to enroll in a political party then in which you are presented with a choice of “yes” or “no”. If your choice is yes, you are presented with three options: democratic, republican, or “other”. Clearly there is a norm. These options state who is boss. Either you are with the majority or cast out into the “other” group full of the unrepresented minority parties. This is the political status quo. Biden is simply a new addition to the collection of presidents who fall under the status quo umbrella.

America is governed by means of a democracy which is defined by Merriam-Webster as, government by the people and especially ruled by the majority (Merriam Webster, n.d). Ever since America declared its independence, the system of democracy was one we wanted to emulate as it is stated in the Declaration of Independence:

Governments are instituted among men, deriving their powers from the consent of the Governed--That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive...it is the Right

of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to [a]ffect their Safety and Happiness (Declaration of Independence, n.d.).

Along with the foundation of democracy, throughout America's history, only two parties have endured the test of time: the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. According to Mandelbaum, the Democrats dating from the 1830s and Republicans created in 1854 have survived partly due to the American electoral laws that made it difficult for the smaller less popular parties to win in elective offices which gives more support to only two parties (Mandelbaum, 2020). If these two parties have been the only two to take office in two centuries, what is to say that it won't likely remain the same?

American Politics Today: 5th Edition, written by Bianco and Canon, also conveys the status quo, though indirectly, to be a political domination of the two majority parties in our democracy. The text states: "Running as a major party's congressional nominee, as opposed to running as an Independent, is almost always the easiest way to get on the general election ballot". In other words, in order to be noticed or considered, you need to at least be associated with a major party. Furthermore, the text states: "Presidential nominees from the Democrat and Republican parties are determined by state-level primaries and caucuses over a five-month period beginning January of an election year" (Bianco & Canon, 2009). The absence of acknowledging a third or independent party in a presidential election conveys the message that the political norm revolves around the duopoly.

Joe Biden is a great illustration of a corporate democrat whose administration focuses on maintaining America's political norm. He has proven himself to be far from the progressive politician the press has made him out to be. For example, his apparent support for the issue of

climate change is shown through a plan he formulated over the summer to spend \$2 trillion in order to generate clean energy as well as to “eliminate emissions from the power sector by 2035” but then refuses to support the Green New Deal, an all-encompassing climate plan that is heavily accepted by actual progressive groups (Ember, 2021). Although people can argue that Biden has in fact been leaning more towards the left on issues regarding climate change, education, and health care, it is insufficient to consider him as remotely equivalent to having the forward traits that characterize progressives.

Under closer observation, Biden not only follows the broader political normalcy, but also continues to implement some of the policies that his rival exercised during his own term. For example, with concerns to the U.S. foreign policy, the Biden administration has decided to take a similar course of action on “strategic priorities like China, the Middle East, and U.S. military deployments” and to “stick with the status quo on the Middle East and on Asia”. In contrast, Biden also vowed to stray from several courses held by Trump’s administration, and he had accomplished them to a particular degree as he restored alliances that were weakened beforehand by Trump and took action on issues such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic (Wong, 2022).

Biden and Trump are strikingly different and remarkably similar; both are true. Yet no matter how many claims are debunked or proven in relation to each of the two parties, people continue to bring up what they believe to be the extremities of the opposing party because that is what the norm grew to be. Silbey makes this statement: “In campaigns for offices where incumbents seemed all but immune, such as in the House of Representatives after the 1960s, campaigning turned more and more on emphasizing extreme personal deficiencies in one’s opponent” (Silbey, n.d.). This proves to be true as there have been countless events in which

Trump or Biden make strong statements about the other possessing an extremist quality. Soellner wrote about one example in which Biden called Trump supporters white supremacists, domestic terrorists, and political extremists following the events of the Insurrection of the U.S. Capitol (Soellner, 2021). A separate comment was made by Trump and his administration highlighting an extremity of Joe Biden, calling him a “Trojan horse for the radical left”. This sort of behavior looks to be a part of America’s political nature.

America’s political status quo is characterized by a democratic system of government and two dominant forces that the majority of America is expected to be identified under. Biden fits perfectly into this mold because he is not interested in seeking or inducing systemic change. Why would he? The system is already in his favor, but it is not because of democracy. It is arguable that what we believe to be a democracy is truly something else.

America: The “Others” View

The true American government and status quo may be different from what we want to believe. We want to believe that we are a democracy ruled by the people and that everyone has a safe place within two parties that are able to accommodate the American people’s political beliefs. However, under critical examination, the terms used to sugarcoat America’s true form will begin to unravel, revealing the truths that underlie. Insights and opinions from the “odd men out” are usually dismissed by the mass, plagued with a fixed mindset or even confirmation bias to further support their beliefs while shutting down the opposition. Perspectives from the outside looking in are beneficial to properly uncover and understand the truth.

The legitimacy of our government has and still is being doubted by the masses, especially within the Millennials and GenZers. People all over the country no longer view the system as legitimate and interestingly enough, there has been a growing reputation of socialism (Wilpert,

2020). Polls show that well over 50%, even as high as 70%, of more than 50 million Millennials and GenZers prefer socialism. The Millennials and GenZers have lost hope on the system and the parties representing them to make a difference in their lives as they see it as:

...contributing to their deteriorating conditions and near hopeless future, consisting of a lifetime of precarious, part time/temp jobs, with no benefits, working two and sometimes even three jobs to make ends meet, without affordable rents, and no chance of owning a home, living a life of indentured labor paying \$1.6 trillion in student loans to the US government (at 6.8% interest, by the way, while bankers pay 1.6%), without affordable health insurance (including the soaring deductibles under Obamacare), unable to afford to even start a family (Rasmus, 2020)

The generations that will soon lead our future are growing to become skeptical of our current system and government, agreeing that the American government fails to align with the interests of the people and instead has intentions of benefitting the ruling elite.

Though the Democrats and Republicans are considered to be two separate political parties, some argue that these two parties are actually one single ruling party made up of two major bickering blocs that “continually re-balance power and divvy up the spoils between themselves through a burlesque of “representative democracy” rigged, by force of law to preclude meaningful competition”. The duopoly is revealed to be a monopoly (Knapp, n.d.). In fact, according to polling data, “78% believe that the Democratic and Republican Parties are essentially useless in changing anything, because both political parties are too beholden to special interests to create any meaningful change” (Washington’s Blog, 2016). These two parties have been the ruling blocs of America since the 1850’s and there has not been any event of

political realignment since the Republican Party rose in the ashes of the previous ruling party, the Whigs. (Knapp, n.d.)

Third parties have a similar assessment on our political system and the two parties that dominate. An open letter by Noam Chomsky, Bill Fletcher, Barbara Ehrenreich, Kathy Kelly, Ron Daniels, Leslie Cagan, Norman Solomon, Cynthia Peters, and Michael Albert, calls for the Green Party to not have a candidate run. They expressed the message that Democracy is solely for the Democrats and Republicans so those in minority parties should be voting for the lesser evil, referring to the Democrats or Hilary Clinton. In a way, this open letter was putting some responsibility on the Green Party for allowing the Republicans to win. The open letter made the claim that the Republicans and Democrats are not the same. Though Trump and Hilary were marketed to be opposites during the times of the 2016 Presidential Elections, they are actually more alike than they are different. Hillary was shown to be harmless, but she is just as bad as the rest of them, committing crimes such as murdering Qadaffi and a number of civilians through a drone attack. In this democracy, it does not matter if a person bases their vote off of their values or conscience because the party overtakes the individual (Hoenig, 2020).

As a result of this long-overdue reign of the Democrats and the Republicans, politics of “near-total paralysis” has been created. Elections are no longer competitive and are usually dominated by the party that can stack up the most money. Thus, it can be argued that America is actually an oligarchy, defined as government by the few (Merriam Webster, n.d.). The few being the wealthy class or the top 1% who hold the majority of America’s wealth. Because of their wealth, their influence on how America is run and governed is extremely significant. Additionally, campaigns that address important issues that are currently being faced, or will soon be confronted in the future, and faults that were made, have been replaced with manipulating ads

created using market research to persuade people to support campaigns (Sifry, 2003). This shows how politics and business are beginning to mesh together. Democracy in principle must be discerned from democracy in practice. There is overwhelming agreement that the system is broken as it continues to fail in delivering results the people want. Fundamental change needs to occur because despite continuous dysfunction and polarization, our political state has remained stagnant (Galston et. al., 2022).

To this extent, now that Biden and the Democrats are in office, will fundamental change occur? Well, the evidence is stacked against Biden because so far, the fundamental and systemic change the people are counting on has failed to come to life.

Noticing and Defining Change

Countless years of the same old conditions prohibits change to take form. What does real fundamental change look like? How can you tell? The answers to these questions can be better understood by being aware of our current state and considering fundamental changes that have taken place elsewhere. The most infamous being the Weimar Republic shifting from democracy to dictatorship.

The events of the Weimar Republic becoming a dictatorship are helpful in detecting change that truly swerves into another direction. The political and economic crisis of Germany was beneficial to Hitler and the Nazi Party because they were able to play off of the strong emotions of the dissatisfied citizens. As they gained traction, Hitler was able to continuously gain power until he had enough to make Germany a single-party state and take total control under his name and his name only (Germany 1933, n.d.). Of course, this is not ideal for beneficial fundamental change, but it does show how different things need to be in order to be considered a fundamental change. In America, ground-breaking changes would be a change in

the government system, our Constitution, different parties being elected, or a shift from our capitalist society. That is systemic change.

Before America can search for that transformation, we first need to understand what we are today, and it is not a democracy. America is an oligarchy ruled by the elite class, but it also exercises the nature of a certain political philosophy. Arguably, America reflects the characteristics present in fascism. It is important to note that Fascism cannot be easily defined however, according to Merriam Webster, it is a political philosophy, movement, or regime that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader (Merriam Webster, n.d.). For starters, one characteristic of fascism is “powerful and continuing expressions of nationalism”. This has been especially prevalent in recent years with Trump's powerful and intense following. Trump’s slogan of “Make America Great Again” is undoubtedly nationalistic. Many, though not all, of Trump’s supporters take this message to heart and express strong emotions of nationalism. Another characteristic is “Identification of enemies/scapegoats as a unifying cause”. This can be seen in current years, again under Trump’s term, as strong nationalistic emotions begin to create a scapegoat, immigrants, for reasons such as taking jobs away from true Americans (Britt, 2004).

Not only under Trump do these characteristics peak through. Joe Biden also mirrors semi-fascist tendencies. Despite accusing those in opposition to his agenda as being semi-fascists, he himself can be considered a semi-fascist. For instance, during the same week of the semi-fascist comment, Biden erased about \$500 billion in student loan debts without any proper constitutional authority. Biden exercised a power he did not rightfully have (Shapiro, 2022). These characteristics can easily be identified within America, along with the ones of avid

militarism and fraudulent elections, thus raising the question if our country reflects Fascist tendencies (Britt, 2004).

Theories of a Second Trump Term

The potential of an ongoing Trump term was put to a halt after Joe Biden won the 2020 Presidential Election. But what would have happened if Trump's leadership had continued on? Would America's status quo still remain the same or would it have altered?

Trump had not been in any political position or had political experience prior to his presidency yet was still thrown in as a businessman and reality TV star to such an influential role for America. Now that he has gone through one term, he knows how to use the government to his advantage. When first entered the presidency, he hired non loyalists, but now he will hire loyalists. Similar actions would be done to make everything follow his agenda if he were to win the 2020 election. Trump would be preoccupied with covering his tracks, validating his lies, and working towards "retribution against those who, in his view, wronged him, and [he] would then corrupt the instruments of power in Washington, from Congress—because he'd have a compliant, complicit House and Senate Republicans who would do every bidding that he put in front of them" (Segers et. al., 2022).

With Trump's four years stretching out to eight years, it can be expected that he would continue to pursue his foreign policy fantasy, including U.S. abdication from NATO and potentially abdication from the World Trade Organization. His extremism and hate will continue its legacy and his apparent appreciation for authoritarian leaders will likely find him an authoritarian ally (Segers et. al., 2022).

Though nothing particularly radical, if Trump were to continue his parade, authoritarian and fascist behaviors can be identified which could have the slightest potential of shifting America in an undesirable direction. Ultimately, the chances of his term evoking a

transformation would be similar to Biden's, slim. To see the change that a second Trump term could theoretically push America towards would require a long period of time.

America - Business as Usual?

Essentially, Biden and Trump are consistent with maintaining the standards of the country's status quo of a capitalist democracy or in reality, an oligarchy. In regard to the Political Compass, they stand almost hand in hand in the upper region of the first quadrant, indicating they lean towards the right and authoritarian (Political Compass, n.d.).

In the event that Biden is only to carry out a single term and is removed by the Republicans, it can be anticipated that America would stick to business-as-usual no matter the outcome. It would be unnatural for a shift to take place by the time after the next election. Change is not able to occur rapidly especially when it is a change to the status quo. Additionally, assuming that the Republicans manage to remove Biden from office means a Trump 2024 term, America would most certainly not be "great again". For something to be great again it needs to have been great. With the damaging and long-standing traditional status quo America continues to retain, the day this country finally becomes great will fail to see the light of day.

Will America's Global Dominance Last Through the 21st Century?

Though the political and economic status quo will likely continue to stay firmly planted in our country's nature, our title as the leading global superpower is beginning to wither. In 1898, soon after the American Civil War, America fought in the Spanish-American war and was triumphant. As a result of this defeat against Spain, America had acquired multiple territories around the globe and thus started to follow the road to becoming a global superpower (Ellis et. al., 2016). Their power branched out and grew stronger in their territories, which included the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, Hawaii, Alaska, and others. The United States established

military bases in these territories and set up coaling stations and plantations for American settlers and merchants. They extracted natural resources from these territories leading to a boost in their economy, surpassing that of the United Kingdom dubbing them to be the world's largest economy. In addition to these new natural resources such as coal and oil, the U.S. had developed a powerful navy and military which would set them up for success in World War I (World 101, n.d).

Despite America's expansion overseas, Presidents Taft and Wilson turned to an isolationist approach which successfully kept the U.S. uninvolved with WWI from 1914 to 1917 until President Wilson changed course and brought his country into a great conflict. After helping the Allies turn the course of the war to their success, in 1941 the U.S. entered WWII after the attack on Pearl Harbor. This is when the U.S. truly flexed its military might as they utilized their resources and civilians in total war (World 101, n.d).

Since then, America has been an active leader in global institutions and possesses good relationships with allies. Our nation has been involved in various challenges such as pandemics (such as COVID-19 and Ebola), climate change, terrorism, domestic crisis in the Middle East, and other issues regarding natural disasters, human rights, and economic instability. It is difficult to think of any global issues that the United States is not involved in or has not participated in.

Knowing our country's history of rising to the top, many people would easily say that America plays a significant, if not, the most significant role in global leadership. Looking at the raw facts, it would be foolish to say that our country is not one of the most powerful countries to date; politically, militarily, socio-culturally, and economically. However, this results in the widespread belief, similar to the essence of Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*, that we have a duty as America to nurture and lead the world in our image. With this, so-to-speak

America's Burden mindset, most have come to believe that America will continue to be this way, the leader of the world. However, others have been suggesting that this is not so. They believe that the strengthening and continuous rise of America as a powerful force will soon come to a halt and perhaps even start the trek downhill. The events of China becoming the world's economic leader, Russia announcing modern weapons, our extensive military spending, and the increasing number of internal issues at home, hints that our title as a global leader may begin to fade or simply be passed onto a new nation. Further exploring the three most prominent schools of thought regarding the debate of America's future, being declinism, American exceptionalism, and neo-imperialism, will allow for a more critical and knowledgeable interpretation for what the future of America holds.

The Trek Down from the Peak of Power

There are some who argue against the notion of the U.S. continuing its role of the global godfather. The mindset of this community stems from the declinist school of thought. Declinism can be defined as the belief that the dominating power of the United States is fading. According to this school of thought, all of the great world powers have a period of prosperity that is eventually followed by their decline.

Knowing the history of the great fallen powers, such as the British Empire, Qing Dynasty, and Mongol Empire to name a few, is it possible that our country can beat the odds of those before us? To escape the historical fate the past has echoed? One possible answer can be found in Paul Kennedy's book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*.

Kennedy's view of the past, and of the years to come, is governed by a central and, on the surface, astonishingly simple thesis: "The historical record suggests that there is a very clear connection in the long run between an individual Great Power's economic rise and

fall and its growth and decline as an important military power (or world empire) (Gray, 2001).

Over the recent years, Americans have begun to notice a rise in confident competitors with “trade imbalance, budget deficits, falling currency, skyrocketing military expenses” jeopardizing the American dream. Another way to think about America’s decline is that we as a nation may not be getting weaker, but other nations are becoming stronger. Kennedy expects that China will increase their share of world power. Based on current events, he may be right about China (Gray, 2001).

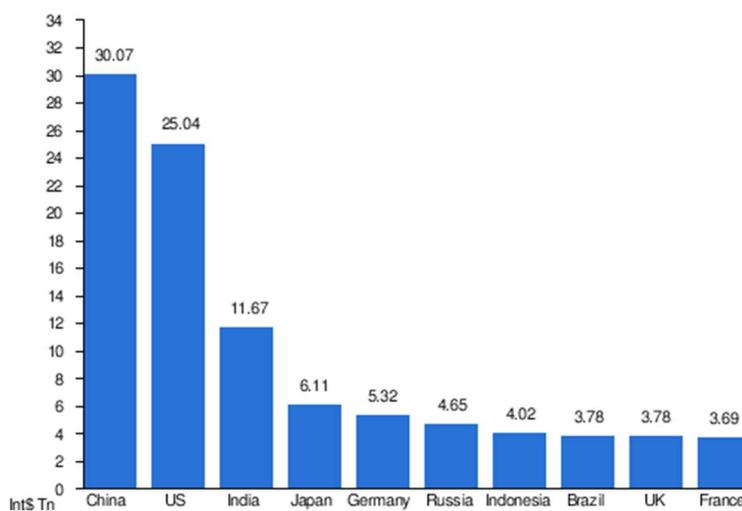
According to the graph showing the largest economies in the world by PPP GDP in 2022, China can be seen being the largest economy in the world, surpassing the United States to be the global economic leader (Wikipedia, n.d). This indicates economically, America has lost its title as the leading world economy. Additionally in recent events, Russia has announced having new weapons that could outplay our defense systems. “Not only does that mean that the entire ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] effort of the USA is now void and useless, but also that from now US aircraft carrier battle groups can only be used against small, defenseless, nations!” U.S. leadership is left in disbelief after spending trillions on military budget, Russia has outdone them with only 10% of their budget. As a retort to Russia’s new weapons and perhaps the rise of China’s economy, which could result in an eventual increase in military spending, the Pentagon's plan towards this issue is to spend more money. Afterall, with most Americans in financial distress, our economy can obviously handle this increased amount in military spending (sarcasm). The vote in Congress was nearly unanimous in giving the Pentagon tens of billions

more than requested, resulting in military spending taking up 57% of federal discretionary spending and further escalating the arms race with China and Russia (Flowers & Zeese, 2018).

Aside from other nations growing stronger, America has taken a ghastly shot in the foot by none other than President Donald Trump. Having a TV personality as president may not be the smartest thing

as the first thing we want to avoid on the global stage is drama, which Trump so miserably fails to do. During his term, he has insulted nations, torn up alliances, and botched foreign policy.

Trump has pushed foreign policy towards expensive military solutions that create more problems, destabilizing the tender duality of U.S. power. To add on to the damage he has done to our nation, he is constantly unaware of the fine line he walks on when speaking to our allies. For example, in May during a visit to the new NATO headquarters, “he chastised European allies...for failing to pay their ‘fair share’ of the military costs of the alliance and, while he was at it, refused to reaffirm NATO’s core principle of collective defense.” To place the cherry on top with his theatrics, he not only upsets our allies, but he also insults and provokes enemies with Twitter being his preferred method of irritation. One of the many instances of his hate tweeting was when he was “repeatedly trash-tweeting Kim Jong-un as ‘little Rocket Man’ and bragging that his own ‘nuclear button’ is ‘much bigger’ than the North Korean leader’s.” These child-like and seemingly butthurt tweets have trashed our modern diplomacy with this incident specifically



Largest economies in the world by PPP GDP in 2022 according to International Monetary Fund estimates

pushing Seoul “towards direct talks with Pyongyang— excluding Washington and weakening what had been a rock-solid alliance” (Mccoy, 2018). “Today, America is intensely unpopular. Its intentions are mistrusted, and its leaders are disbelieved.” Now especially with the previous term of President Donald Trump, this sentiment rings quite terribly true (Rihani, 2013). If America was, in fact, steering its ship on the course of exceptionalism, the administration of President Donald Trump has had a hand in changing its course.

Despite all the facts and data that may point America’s future to an unfortunate one, it must be understood that “history never repeats itself exactly, but it often deals hard blows to those who ignore it entirely.” In Paul Kennedy’s words, “It would therefore be best to approach these ideas with caution, if not outright skepticism, to have some humility about whether a Western-led crusade for democratization is a wise policy, and to insist that Congress play its proper role in asking hard questions and setting reasonable limits on the republic's future foreign policy in this troubled region” (Kennedy 2003). Having an open mind to the possibility of our power waning will better prepare us to not feel deceived when the time comes. Whether or not we are proud of everything our culture produces or the things our country has done, its allure around the globe is undeniable (Dowd, 2007).

Are We a Global Necessity?

The contrasting view to declinism is the American Exceptionalism school of thought, the debate that America is unique from its fallen predecessors in world history and will continue to cultivate influence and power. They believe America does not possess the same instabilities and weaknesses of their fallen peers. In their eyes, America is unique in its attributes and strengths, offering a helping hand for all of humanity.

The world shares the same struggles of climate change, pandemics, such as Ebola or COVID-19, and constraints of natural resources. In the fight to regulate and resolve these significant issues, America has always played an important role in its efforts. We are also heavily involved in creating effective responses to challenges such as terrorism, state-on-state conflicts in Eastern Europe or Asia-Pacific, and the internal unrest transpiring in the Middle East. It is difficult to imagine a global issue that does not involve American organization, government, or business. For instance, in response to the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, our pharmaceutical industry was invaluable in the pursuit of a vaccination or cure. In security and military operations, we are important assets to our allies which is exemplified when “the UK and France found in 2011, their operations in Libya could not long be conducted without the support of US capabilities ranging from intelligence to ammunition to strategic lift.” Now, our indispensability does not indicate that the United States is right in every policy choice or plan of action and although our presence is evident in the issues that trouble our world, we cannot act alone (Why the United..., 2015).

Some of those who believe in American exceptionalism acknowledge the fact that we as a country were less powerful at the end of the twentieth century than we were in the mid-century and that America’s share of global product has dwindled down from a third of the total, to a hair over a fifth. However, it is argued that “raw materials and heavy industry are less critical indices of economic power today than are information and professional and technical services” and that the description of America declining is deceiving. A portion of declinists believe that our economy cannot handle increased military spending as a response to the rise of the Russian military. However, some claim that “America is rich but acts poor. In real terms, GNP is more than twice what it was in 1960, but Americans today spend much less of their GNP on

international leadership. The prevailing view is ‘we can't afford it’ despite the fact that U.S. taxes are a smaller percent of GNP than in other OECD nations.” This may be true, but when only a few percent of the population own America’s wealth while the lower middle class experience financial distress, it may be difficult for them to “react appropriately to global changes.” One suggests that “the critical question is whether it will have the political leadership and strategic vision to convert these power resources into real influence in a transitional period of world politics. The implications for stability in the nuclear era are immense.” Essentially saying that, America has the resources to continue to be an indispensable nation, but it all depends on our political leadership. With our recent political leadership in this era of nuclear power, with Trump being first in mind, our great nation will fail to convert these resources into change and influence (Nye, 1990).

In opposition to the declinist thought, American exceptionalists make the argument that claims to the unlikelihood of America continuing to possess its dominating role has been repeated and thrown around as far back as 1972. Despite second place in GDP, it is said that America continues to “lead the rest of the world in measures of competitiveness, technology, and innovation” with our research universities being the most reputable in the world holding 17 of the top 20 spots (Lieber, 2008). Now although American exceptionalists do believe our country to be the leader of the world, the majority of them do not dismiss the arguments presented by declinists and sometimes even agree with them to a certain extent. They understand that “an empire whose economy is barely above the level of subsistence cannot bankrupt its treasury indefinitely” is true to some level, but the decision for a country to spend two percent or five percent of its GDP on military endeavors instead of consumption is solely based on that nation’s political priorities and ideals (Fukuyama, 1989). Ultimately, what matters most is our country’s

structural advantages in comparison to the waves of anti-Americanism, commercial cycles, and commercial deficits (Lieber, 2008).

It is obvious that we would want our political leaders to be optimistic about our country and think positively of it, but with anything, you need balance. A leader who is hopeful while simultaneously aware of both our positive and negative attributes, is someone who will effectively mold our country into something great. America has lacked this kind of leadership. For instance, at a national convention during the running of the 2016 presidential election, Hillary Clinton expressed ideas of American exceptionalism arguing, “We need to unify our country and go forward into the future with confidence and optimism,...We are the indispensable nation. People all over the world look to us and follow our lead.” Although it may not be her intention, it sounds like the rest of the world are our followers and not collaborators. She continues by saying, “The decisions we make and the actions we take – even the actions we don’t take – affect millions, even billions of lives.” While that is undoubtedly true, people must keep in mind that our decisions are not the defining factor in everything. What we say or do does not always go. Other countries’ decisions can have impacts like ours that can affect a multitude of lives. On the simplest level, her argument is that without our leadership, the world would be left in chaos (‘Indispensable Nation’..., 2016). Ultimately, what matters when believing in the dominance of our nation is that we are cautious of falling into a blinding superiority over all other nations and to understand that our collaboration, not control, with other countries is what will prolong our stature.

America: External Excellence with Internal Issues

Declinism and American exceptionalism are two schools of thought that are on the opposite sides of the debate regarding America’s future, but there is an alternative to these

theories. An idea that suggests that while our leaders dedicate their focus on global leadership, they neglect the social, political, and economic issues that reside at home. Further elaborating on global leadership, leaders focus on an empire of liberty or establishing political and economic dominion over other nations without claiming the land as their own. This is the idea of a Neo-Imperialist. The premise of Neo-Imperialism can be roughly explained by the duck analogy where on the surface, the duck looks calm and graceful while beneath the surface of the water it is frantically paddling its webbed feet. Now although this analogy broadly relates to the Neo-Imperialist idea and is scientifically incorrect, belittling the duck, for the purpose of explanation, it provides a sufficient basis of understanding (Johnson, 2012). Similar to the duck, America presents a strong and mighty exterior, with its policies and military, but beneath the surface is in a state of internal suffering.

Before World War II, it was customary for empires to compete, pillage, conquer, exploit, and claim every territory they had lay eyes on, but that tradition was supposed to end after the independence of European colonies and the creation of the United Nations with its purpose being to create an international community where nations can peacefully coexist and respect one another. This goal has failed to come to fruition as a new form of imperialism replaced the outdated one (May, 2019). As our empire expands, our nation declines.

Our geo-political maneuvers and decisions, such as the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, all serve the purpose of asserting dominance over foreign economies and ensuring control over natural resources, most notably oil and gas. The policy that the U.S. attends to, along with the equipment used to achieve their endeavors, are strikingly similar to how the British Empire achieved global dominance in their time. The only difference is that while the British Empire acquired the colonies as territories, the U.S. controls other nations indirectly. They achieved this

indirect control most prominently using “international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, GATT and WTO.” The U.S. and its allies utilize this section of its arsenal more frequently than military armaments. This is specifically through “imposing sanctions, extending loans, grants and aid packages” which would result in the eventual financial occupation of target nations (Sheikh, 2013). However, the United States cannot outrightly admit to invading countries overseas and deploying troops to foreign countries all because they want to extract natural resources. Instead, they disguise it with a war on terrorism abroad.

Our costs of militarization are shooting through the roof with our ongoing war on terror, at home and abroad, but also the building tension between the U.S. and Russia. To exemplify our staggering military budget, “Twenty years after 9/11, the response has contributed to thoroughly militarized foreign and domestic policies at a cost of \$21 trillion over the last two decades” and “of the \$21 trillion the U.S. has spent on foreign and domestic militarization since 9/11, \$16 trillion went to the military (including \$7.2 trillion for military contractors), \$3 trillion to veterans’ programs, \$949 billion to Homeland Security, and \$732 billion to federal law enforcement” (Koshgarian, et. al., n.d), With all focus being placed on military efforts makes it evident that “US economic history, the principal US banks, oil companies, manufacturers, investment houses, pension and mutual funds all depend on exploiting overseas nations and peoples to secure high rates of profit” (Petras, 2006).

Increased spending in our military and on methods of our expansion, the heart of America is left unattended to. Economic instability that frequently plagues our nation such as the Great Depression and the Great Recession, in addition to eleven other “downturns” in our country between those two historical events in American history. Every time, millions lose their jobs, citizens fall into financial distress, and poverty worsens; and every time, our appointed

leaders make promises to heal our economic illness but are never fulfilled as they attempt to reform everything but the system itself (Wolff, 2017). Referring back to the \$21 trillion budget towards militarized foreign and domestic policies, for far less than the money used for those short-term goals could have alternatively been used to help relieve critical challenges the American people have dealt with for the last 20 years. “\$4.5 trillion could fully decarbonize the U.S. electric grid, \$2.3 trillion could create 5 million \$15 per hour jobs with benefits and cost-of-living adjustments for 10 years, \$1.7 trillion could erase student debt” and the list continues (Koshgarian, et. al., n.d). All of these solutions address issues such as climate change and internal financial distress, but instead, those in power decide to place their priorities on expanding indirect power over the world.

What Does America’s Future Hold?

When searching for an accurate foretelling of America’s future, it may not be best to use an average highschool government textbook, such as *American Politics Today: 5th Edition* by Bianco and Canon, because its purpose is to educate students simply about our government using information and facts. It does not provide interpretations or predictions based on history and current events which is why we look into the opinions of others. Not just one opinion, but multiple and from different people with different views. Based on the three schools of thought regarding America’s future, our life to come can accurately be described through the lens of Neo-Imperialism but with an inevitable and eventual decline. It proves to be a very accurate take on what our future holds as well as representing our present status. The consequence of focusing on our global outreach and military is the reduction of legitimacy and trust in our government in the eyes of the American people. This corruption turns its policies into private and profitable gain putting resources into private hands. Additionally, it intensifies internal class inequalities

and thwarts democratic governance. In the words of Petras, “it creates a culture of corruption which siphons public resources from social services and productive investment to personal wealth” (Petras, 2006).

Yes, perhaps our nation may continue to flex its dominance in the foreseeable future, but others will begin to surpass us if we do not work on our nation as a whole. If corporate and government corruption somehow dissolves and the well-being of our nation is truly the shared goal of those in power as well as only a necessary amount of military action, then America may continue to take up the top rank. The notion that we are a formidable country is valid as of now, however based on the pure nature of history and the realistic conditions our nation faces, we may simply drop a rank or two. As long as we acknowledge the rising power of others, have self-awareness, and an open mind to accept the possibility that we may not be destined to lead the world after all, then we will be ready for whatever the future holds. If we are blinded in our own greatness, we will fail to realize that rising nations are pulling themselves up and onto the shiny podium we stand so confidently on.

Conclusion

With the economic and political power the elite class possesses, it is inaccurate to describe America as a country ruled by the people. The social contract does not uphold the pairing of the people and government, rather it is a contract between the elite population and the government. The elite have control over the government because they are one in the same. They work in cohesion to keep the majority of the population helpless and powerless.

In money, there is power. Those in possession of wealth shape our country with a prime example being the scandal of Cambridge Analytica, a full-service propaganda machine feeding information, whether it was legitimate or not, to citizens in order to manipulate the people’s

psyche to push the Trump campaign forward, winning the 2016 Presidential Election (*The Great Hack*). Events such as these are constantly happening under the thick red curtains of our government.

The effects of this exceedingly disproportionate balance of power, favoring a sliver of our population, infects all of America. The majority of people who inhabit this country experience this abuse everyday as the rich become richer while they are left with financial distress, decline in living standards, and governmental injustice. That is the expense of elite power. The source of our lack of democracy is capitalism. These injustices are justified as a result of the encouragement of private-interest and profit by capitalism.

From the very beginning, we compromised our democracy the moment we adopted capitalism to be the economic system we adhere to. Democracy was destined to crumble with capitalism prioritizing the goals of the elite class, making it especially difficult for democracy to translate into practice. Every blow to our democracy serves as an additional brick to the new home we soon call our own, 'The Land of America: Ruled by the Few.' Until capitalism's firm greedy hands ease the chokehold, democracy will continue to suffocate and eventually draw its last breath.

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