

**The Four Theories of American Government**

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### **Abstract**

The textbook definition of the American government is that it is a democracy. A democracy is supposed to be ruled by the whole population, typically through elected representatives. The concept of a democracy works in theory; if a country is ruled by the people, they will never be dissatisfied because they are governing themselves. Yet, in the United States, it is not that simple. The U.S. likes to present itself as a democracy, but in reality it is an oligarchy. If the system of American government is looked at more closely, it becomes obvious that the country's real puppet masters are the elite ruling class. The problem is that, since the United States has always been ruled by capitalism, it will eventually fail. Several problems arise from the competition and greed that spurs from this economic system and ultimately it will be the country's downfall.

## **The Four Theories of American Government**

America's government has long been thought of as a democracy, that is how the country labels itself. From an outside perspective this appears to be true; American citizens get to vote for their laws and leaders and the majority vote wins, but when taking a closer look, flaws begin to pop up. Those who believe in the democratic theory, who believe that America is truly governed by the people, are sadly mistaken.

While it is true that most rules in America are put to a vote before being decided, voting in this country is still a privilege rather than a right. A voter does not have to be a white, male, landowner anymore, but they still cannot just be anybody living in America. Voters must be citizens, voters cannot be felons or be mentally incapacitated (depending on the state), they must be at least 18, and lower-income communities tend to have much longer waiting times at polling places. These laws exclude immigrants, the younger generation, and poor people from being able to vote, leaving the majority of voters to be older, white, and wealthy.

Yet, some still argue for the pluralism or hyperpluralism theory. Pluralism is the belief that the government is controlled by two or more parties with differing values, in America's case, the Democratic and Republican parties. Hyper pluralism is the more extreme version; a government that is controlled by too many parties, thus causing confusion on what the majority of the population prefers. While it is true that, in the American political sphere, there are several parties and two main dominating parties, there is another separate entity controlling them all: capitalism.

Elitist theory argues that America is neither governed by the people nor whichever party controls the white house, it is actually controlled by money. By examining how elections are run and how those in power run the country, this theory seems to be the most logical. In presidential

elections the candidate with the most money has the best campaign, and the candidate with the best campaign is often the one to win. Even in office, the upper class still plays a huge role. The 1% keeps the economy running, and a good economy makes it look like the president is doing their job right. This makes presidents too reliant on big corporations, so they do anything to keep them satisfied.

Because the elites will always control America, the country will eventually fail. Capitalism fosters the military industrial complex and it is destroying the middle class. The U.S. keeps wasting resources on weapons they do not need while avoiding the cries of what Americans actually want. They want free healthcare, a \$15 minimum wage, and better living conditions, but fixing these issues would not satisfy the Big Businesses, so they are continually ignored. As this system keeps going, Americans will begin to feel more and more resentful towards their own country and it will eventually collapse.

In short, Elitist theory is the most accurate in describing the true inner workings of the American government and why the American status quo is the way that it is. However, elites controlling the country is ultimately not a good thing and it will most likely end up destroying the nation.

### **The 2020 Presidential Election: Continuity or Change?**

“This is the most important election in the history of our country. There has never been such a difference between two parties, or two individuals, in ideology, philosophy, or vision than there is right now...”

--Donald Trump (August 2020)

Former President Trump made this statement just months before he lost the 2020 election running against Democrat Joe Biden. It has long been ingrained into the minds of Americans

voters that Democrats and Republicans are polar opposites. This has been done through statements such as these as well as through biased news reports and online public opinions. Since the mid-19th century, it has always been a choice between these two rivaling political parties. However, even though their beliefs and values are supposedly very different, no matter who the president is, the country's political and economic status quo remains the same. It is the status quo that both Democrats and Republicans tend to follow.

Politically, the U.S. is an oligarchy disguised as a democracy; the government tries to convince the public that they have this huge influence over how the country is run, but in reality it is only a very small elite class who has that power. Oligarchies always tend to be authoritarian. Authoritarianism is not as threatening as it sounds, it simply means that the American government prefers for its citizens to follow a certain set of rules. There is a law providing restrictions for almost everything and if people do not follow these laws, they can be criminalized and even punished. This enforces obedience to authority which is at the root of authoritarianism. Economically, the U.S. has always been capitalist. A capitalist government means that it is in support of private ownership over production and profit; meaning limited government interference in the market. However, this often ends up giving corporations way too much power which can be dangerous because a majority of America's wealth is then put in the hands of CEOs who are, more often than not, corrupt.

This status quo has influenced the American government for centuries, affecting its decisions and in turn affecting America as a country. Capitalism sets up the class system that puts both the poor and the rich in their place, and authoritarianism makes sure that this system is never broken and punishes those that try to take it down. Therefore, no matter who sits in the

White House, as long as the status quo remains the same, the United States will largely remain the same.

### **The Political Compass in Relation to the 2020 Election**

Every four years or so, American citizens get the so-called “great privilege” of being able to vote for their next leader. The American political system is a representative democracy, meaning that the country’s citizens are not the ones making policy choices themselves, rather they vote for leaders who can make these choices on their behalf (Bianco & Canon, 2017). Whoever the majority wants wins, thus the majority of Americans should be kept satisfied and should feel like they have a voice. If this is true, then why is it that only 39% of Americans approve of how the current president, Joe Biden, is handling his job (Lange, 2022)? 39% is nowhere near the majority, so how did this happen?

The presidential election of 2020, like virtually every other election that came before, was a contest between a Democrat and a Republican, Biden versus Trump. Like previously stated, these two parties are often put against each other as polar opposites but looking at where they lie on the political compass, they are actually much more alike than one may think. The political compass has two axes, the vertical going from authoritarian down to libertarian and the horizontal going communist to capitalist. Both Trump and Biden lie in the first quadrant, meaning they both lean more authoritarian capitalist, America’s status quo. Since almost all previous presidential candidates from 2004-2020 have fallen in the first quadrant (Political Compass), America seems to have remained authoritarian capitalist, no drastic changes have been seen in the government.

However, what about the far-right and the far-left? Republicans represent the right and Democrats represent the left, but they are equally close to the center of the political spectrum.

The extremists are those that are on completely opposite ends of this spectrum. On the far-right there are groups such as the Libertarian and American Patriot Party, and on the far-left there are groups such as the Green and the Democratic Socialist Party. Yet, there are still other parties that lie even further on this political spectrum. For example, groups such as the American Nazi Party lean more right and the American Communist Party leans more left. Although highly unlikely, if any one of these parties were to gain enough power to get one of their representatives elected president, real change would start to be seen. This is because these groups stray too far from the center, the way things have always been. These groups tend to lie in the second, third, and fourth quadrants as opposed to the first.

The aftermath of the 2020 election was much more aggressive than it reasonably needed to be. Many Democrats jumped for joy when they heard Trump would be leaving office, meanwhile many Republicans were so furious that they disillusioned themselves into believing that Trump had in fact won the election and they even stormed the Capitol building in protest. In reality, there was nothing to be excited about or angry about, what really happened was that a different, white, wealthy, capitalist man took the place of the other. Biden and Trump may speak differently on political matters, but a president's actions have a greater impact than their speeches, and the actions and promises that Biden and Trump have made are actually rather similar. Much of what they say to the public is simply a facade created in order to convince their respective parties to vote for them. Thus, by examining their proximity to each other on the political compass, it can be assumed that America would be almost exactly the same as it is now, being run by a Democrat, as it would have been if Trump, a Republican, had been elected another four years.

### **Trump and Biden Are Not So Different**

The government ultimately is not controlled by Biden or Trump or whoever sits in the white house, but rather by the big corporations that use their wealth to gain a position of power. This is because, in order to govern efficiently, the president must please the business community because they depend on them to keep up the economy. If the economy declines, then the popularity and power of the president declines (Genovese, 2002), thus creating this unhealthy codependent relationship between those in power and the elite owning-class.

The 2020 election did nothing to help solve this takeover of U.S. capitalism. Neither president has any plan to stop the bleeding that this crisis has produced (Haiphong, 2020). The quiet harmony between the two parties created by the omnipresent power of Big Business is often the status quo. Both parties have consistently allowed for greedy Wall Street CEOs to take advantage of smaller investors and, in general, let nationwide corporate crime go unchecked (Nader, 2021).

Trump is often bashed for using crony capitalism and those who accuse him are not wrong. Instead of giving up his business to pursue politics, he merely passed down control of his company to his sons for the time being. This shows that, even as president, at his core he is a businessman who will always put the needs of himself and his company over his presidential duties. Furthermore, while in office Trump spent considerable time at his own properties and golf clubs which significantly raised its status and even made money from the federal government along the way. Also, his upscale Washington hotel became frequently visited by GOP insiders and lobbyists, and even some foreign officials, who have been accused of booking rooms just to buy interest (Cohen 2021). All of these instances are examples of Trump abusing his position in order to benefit his own enterprises.

Even if not to directly aid his own operations, much of what Trump does is simply to gain more money. For instance, in 2020 he threatened to ban the popular Chinese social media app, *TikTok*, a harmless video sharing platform that had recently gained major popularity among America's youth during the rise of covid. He declared that he would ban it outright unless a U.S. company acquired it. He seemed to support Microsoft's bid to buy the company, claiming that a substantial share of the acquisition price would go to the U.S. Treasury (Krueger, 2020). This implies that the reason he banned it was simply because it was a Chinese app that was popular in the U.S., meaning that a Chinese company was getting a lot of money that could instead go towards the U.S., so of course Trump the businessman could not let that happen.

There is much evidence to support the claim that Trump was a corrupt president only out for his own capitalist interests, but looking at Biden's time as president, he is not so innocent either. Although the right often presents Biden as a communist, this could not be further from the truth. Like Trump, his actions as president have been frequently motivated by the idea of profit-building. He does not care for the working class nearly as much as he cares for making money.

The Democratic Party has upheld the slogan that Trump is the most "dangerous president in modern American history", but provide no answer as to how the Biden administration would help resolve the multitude of problems the country faces, such as those affecting blue-collar workers. Biden has opposed any kind of significant relief for working people during the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic had uncovered the limitations of the U.S. for-profit healthcare system, yet Biden has remained firm in his opposition to Medicare for All (Haiphong, 2020). This is due to the capitalist greed that plagues so many American presidents. Biden knows that thousands of working-class lives could be saved everyday if Medicare was not so expensive yet he chooses to do nothing about this for he knows that it does not "build profit".

Looking at the evidence it is clear to see that both Trump and Biden engage in anti-Democratic deeds to keep themselves and the elite class, the 1%, in power. They purposefully keep up this oligarchical system. This is because many politicians themselves are elites, and others depend on that elite for campaign funding (Phillips, 2002). Biden has even been reported to have reassured a group of elite members at the Upper East Side Carlyle Hotel that even though he will slightly raise taxes for the upper class, the increase will not even be noticeable and "No one's standard of living will change, nothing would fundamentally change"(Higgins, 2019). Both parties constantly avoid "demonizing the rich", but to do this they avoid effectively aiding the poor. They both play into the capitalist game of making the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. How will the U.S. ever get a proper leader that truly cares about taking down this system of oppression instead of just playing into it? The only way for this to happen would be if someone from a third party was elected, someone neither a Democrat nor a Republican.

### **History of Third Parties Rising in Relation to Today's Political Climate**

The problem is that a third party rising to power requires something major, something world changing, and is that a risk America is willing to take? This could either make or break a nation, but no matter what, major change will happen. The most infamous example of this is how the Nazi Party in Germany rose to power.

When WWI ended, Germany was forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles which ended up destabilizing the country for years. The new Democratic Weimar Republic was weak and many Germans became angry and disillusioned believing that they did not deserve to lose the war and that Germany had lost its former glory. They craved two things, a scapegoat and a strong leader. They found their scapegoat in the Jewish people, coming up with conspiracy theories stating that Jews had started WWI to bring Europe into financial and political ruin and to make Europe

vulnerable to “Jewish control” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2022). This ended up working due to Germany’s history of normalized antisemitism. As for a strong leader, they found this in an equally disillusioned antisemitic by the name of Adolf Hitler. Because of his radical, but powerful speeches, Hitler was able to gain popularity and become chancellor. Moreover, boosted by the rising unemployment rate from the Great Depression, the decline of center parties, and a turn to both left and right extremists, the Nazi Party slowly increased in popularity and eventually became the only political party left in Germany (Wilde, 2020). With Hitler and the Nazis in control, Germany changed drastically for the worst.

The history of the Nazis’ rise to power serves as a model of the worst-case scenario that could happen to America if a third, more extremist, party were to take over. Most of the buildup is already there. Similar to the disillusioned Germans, there are currently disillusioned Trump-supporters who cannot accept his defeat in the 2020 election. These same Trump supporters also blame immigrants for stealing their jobs causing increasing unemployment rates, as well as the LGBTQ2+ community for “brainwashing” the youth. They use these communities as an excuse for why they need to “Make America Great Again”, “great again” meaning white, straight, and protestant. This scapegoat mirrors Jewish people in Germany because, like them, they have long been hated and outcasted by “normal society”, so it is not new for Americans to start acting hostile towards these communities. Furthermore, they already have a radical leader who gives crazy speeches and expresses open bigotry towards these communities, Donald Trump. The difference between Trump and Hitler is that although what Trump says is rather extreme, his actions as president still follow the status quo, meanwhile Hitler’s reign strayed far from the democratic Weimar Republic that had preceded him. Hitler supported the Nazi Party, which was

a far-right radical group new to the political scene, however Republicans are nowhere near that level of extremity; they still remain close to the center.

The Republican Party has been part of the U.S. political status quo for well over a century, but there was a time when Republicans were a third party. Thus, there have been instances when a third party took over that did not end in catastrophe. The switch in parties was still of course messy and caused a lot of violence and quarreling and even divided a nation, but in the long run it actually served good to the country, and today's America is better because of it.

The Whig Party, formed in 1834, proved that it was unable to handle the nation's divide over if slavery in the south should stay legal or not. The problem grew larger and larger and eventually the Whig Party disintegrated following the passage of the Kansas–Nebraska Act. By 1854, former members of the Whigs who were anti-slavery began to discuss the possibility of a new party and the Republican Party was born. Just six years after its birth in 1860, one of its members, Republican Abraham Lincoln, was elected President. This infuriated Southern slave states who, in protest to an anti-slavery Republican as their leader, decided to secede from the Union and start the Confederacy, the beginning of the Civil War. After the war, the Reconstruction era was issued in by the new Republican-dominated Congress which created the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, granting equal rights to both black and white people, something extremely new that former Confederate states had trouble getting used to (Republican Party... 2021).

The Republican party's rise to power serves as an example of the good that can come from third parties replacing the status quo. If Republicans never gained enough attention and support to get into office, then the norm would have never changed, slavery being legal in the South would have continued, there is a possibility the Civil War would have never happened,

and even though hundreds of thousands of lives were lost to this war, it is still an essential part to America's growth as a nation and it is why black people today have the freedoms they do.

Like the divide between the pro-slavery South and the anti-slavery North, currently there is a divide between the pro-abortion left and the anti-abortion right, but even though this problem also affects a certain group of people who have long been marginalized by society, women, the issue has not blown up to the size of the split between the North and the South during the civil war. Also, from the spread of Covid-19, there came a divide between the pro-vaccine, mask-wearing left and the anti-vax, anti-masking right. Yet, these problems are still not enough to create the political atmosphere that drives a country to need big change; not the kind that helped launch the Republican Party into popularity so quickly.

In terms of the main question, "continuity or change", by examining what it took for other third parties to rise in modern history, change seems near unachievable. Certain third parties have the potential to rise to power, just not in today's political climate; it has not quite reached the same boiling point as those of the past.

### **The Third Parties of America Today Compared to Trump and Biden**

The rise of a third party in 1930's Germany versus the rise of a third party in mid-19th century America shows that these events can have wildly different results, but what about the rise of a third party in today's political climate? What would change look like in 21st century American politics?

As of July 08, 2022, 85% of Americans, including 92% of Republicans and 78% of Democrats, say "things in this country are headed in the wrong direction". Meanwhile, national support for a "third" political party remains high at 62% (Knapp, 2022). Moreover, former candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, Andrew Yang, and former Republican

governor of New Jersey, Christine Todd Whitman, have recently created the Forward Party which aspires to promote more moderate politics and candidates (Galston, 2022). Clearly, the public would not mind a change of pace, the problem is that they cannot come to an agreement on what this change should look like. Americans openly acknowledge that they are not satisfied with their leaders, but they are divided on who should replace them.

Some third parties believe that the government should be smaller, that it should not have the amount of power it does now which goes against the authoritarian part of the status quo that the U.S. currently falls under. For example, Jo Jorgensen, the 2020 Libertarian Party presidential nominee stated, “I am glad that the voters will finally have a real choice because the non-choice between Trump and Biden is still an option between big government and more big government.” This statement would be put lower on the political compass towards the libertarian side because it expresses the desire for less regulation and more freedom for the public, rather than an authoritarian “bigger government”. Meanwhile, other third parties focus more on reducing the capitalist influence on the government. For example, the 2020 Green Party presidential nominee, Howie Hawkins stated, “We can't wait on Trump, the racist incompetent, or Biden, the neoliberal hawk, to fight for the needs of the working-class. We need our own political voice! We need our own independent power! We need an #EcosocialistGreenNewDeal!” This statement lies further left on the political compass, towards communist because it stands up for the working-class rather than the owning-class.

If Jorgensen or Hawkins were to somehow become president, then change would begin to be seen in the government. The status quo could end up shifting to the total opposite end of the political compass, the third quadrant, libertarian communist. This is in stark contrast to the political and economic standings of those who are currently in power. Trump and Biden are in

different spots, but in the same quadrant of the political compass, the first quadrant, yet they both try to convince the public that they are completely different.

“That is all that Donald Trump and the Republicans offer: Backward-looking politics that will harm the environment, make communities less healthy, and hold back economic progress while other countries race ahead. It’s a mindset that doesn’t have any faith in the capacity of the American people to compete, to innovate, and to win. And it will extract a deadly cost. I know better. And I know you do, as well.”

—Joe Biden (July 2020)

“Our opponents believe that America is a depraved nation. We want our sons and daughters to know the truth: America is the greatest and most exceptional nation in the history of the world! Our country was not built by cancel culture, speech codes, and soul-crushing conformity. We are not a nation of timid spirits. We are a nation of fierce, proud, and independent American Patriots.”

—Donald Trump (August 2020)

At the core, both these statements are saying that America is a great, strong country and it will not back down in the face of adversity; they are saying the same thing just creating a different enemy. Compare these statements to those said by the previously mentioned third party candidates. Leaders like Jorgensen and Hawkins often focus on fighting for the little guy, for example the working class, however when Trump and Biden refer to being on the side of the “American people ” what they really mean is that 1% of the American people. They want the elites to stay the elites even at the cost of the working class.

Even though Biden leans left, his ideas still differ from those who lie further left, like those in the Green Party. For example, Biden has remained in opposition of Medicare for All and has been revealed to have reassured upper-class elites that he was not going to raise their taxes enough to affect them, meanwhile Green Party representative Bernie Sanders disagrees entirely with these ideas. Sanders promotes Medicare for All, a drastic reduction of medical debts, and increasing workers' rights while raising taxes on the wealthy and on corporations (D'Souza, 2021). He does not care if this means the government will lose money and he does not care about angering the owning class. The stances he takes put Sanders in the third quadrant.

There are also disagreements between the economic policies of Donald Trump and Libertarian Party members even though they both skew right. Trump is running on a platform that calls for a more active role for government in nearly every sector of American life, promising to use federal power to address the resentments of white working-class voters (Appelbaum, 2016). Meanwhile, Libertarian Presidential Candidate Gary Johnson made promises to roll back regulations in the federal government and has stated he thinks smaller government grows the economy (Stewart, 2016). His preference for smaller government puts him lower on the political compass, somewhere around the fourth quadrant.

### **What is Next for America?**

Looking at the differences between Trump and Biden compared to the differences between both of them and third parties, it is clear that the latter is more drastic. Therefore, if Biden is taken out of office in the 2024 election and replaced by a Republican like Trump, America will not be “great again” nor will it get much worse. The U.S. tries to convince the public that they get to choose who gains control, they only present two options, but at least there are options. However, in practice, they actually only get one choice. Whether they elect a

Democrat or a Republican, they get the same result each time, a big government controlled by capitalism. The rhetoric that America is a democracy, that the public gets to have a real say in who runs the government, is just an illusion.

Although there is a chance for change, it is very slim. Change would come if a third-party candidate were to become president; this would mean that they are neither Democrat or Republican, they would be more extremist. By examining the condition the country is in currently, it can be argued that there is no major storm brewing, at least none close to WWII or the abolition of slavery or any other time in history when there was a drastic change in government. There are several people in the country who are currently dissatisfied with how it is being run, but the uproar is not enough. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that a third party would be able to gain enough popularity in this social climate. With a third party out of the question, the results of the upcoming 2024 election will not matter. After whatever outrage comes with the disclosure of the next president, the country will eventually resume back to business as usual.

### **America's Future: Three Schools of Thought**

While it is true that the status quo in the U.S. has, for the most part, stayed the same, this type of government is slowly taking its toll on the nation. Some argue that the country is still in its prime and that America will continue to expand its influence and remain exceptional. Others say that the country's power is in decline and that it is only a matter of time before it reaches its inevitable end. Then there are those who believe that this focus on global power is irrelevant, and that America's more important internal problems are being ignored. They claim that this will cause the country's true downfall. These are the three schools of thought for the country's future.

Those that argue America will continue to be powerful claim that America is special. They argue that the United States has some special factor that makes it stand out from all the other empires that have fallen before.

“That must be this — we must start with diplomacy rooted in America’s most cherished democratic values: defending freedom, championing opportunity, upholding universal rights, respecting the rule of law, and treating every person with dignity. That’s the grounding wire of our global policy — our global power. That’s our inexhaustible source of strength. That’s America’s abiding advantage.”

-- Joe Biden (February, 2021)

This quote was stated by America’s current President. He claims that “defending freedom” and “treating every person with dignity” is what makes America stand out, what gives America an advantage, but when taking a look at the country’s recent actions in the middle east as well as the atrocities committed overseas during the Cold War, Biden’s claims seem clearly false. These so-called “cherished democratic values” have almost always been ignored in America’s pursuit of power. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of WWII was a display of military might, fighting in Vietnam and Korea was to weaken communist influence and increase their own, even the current “war on terror” in the Middle East is just a ploy to keep these countries under America’s control and use up their resources. America has always claimed to conduct invasions and wars “in the name of democracy and freedom”, but what they are really trying to do is take more power for themselves. They are just as greedy and power-hungry as the others. Thus, if the United States has no “special quality”, what is to stop it from meeting the same fate as so many of the fallen empires that have come before?

After the world became more globalized, all the U.S. leaders began to care about were the country's wealth, influence, and military size, meanwhile the problems plaguing their own citizens and society fell by the wayside. Furthermore, if there was ever a time when the country truly upheld their "democratic values", this era has long since passed.

While it is true that America is still the most dominant world leader, its power has been slowly waning since the Cold War and several of the main social, economic, and political problems at home are yet to be solved. The country will eventually lose its rank as "#1"; it is unclear how soon, but it is inevitable. Even if no other world power is ready to take over yet, America's internal issues will be the cause of its overall downfall as a powerful, unified nation.

### **America in Relation to the World**

The U.S. has been considered a world leader for over a century now. As the world steadily became more interconnected and countries around the globe began to view other nations thousands of miles away as competition, it became quite clear that on this theoretical leaderboard America has always been near the top. However, as seen throughout history with all roughly 70 empires during the last 4,000 years, including the Greek, Roman, Chinese, Ottoman, Hapsburg, imperial German, imperial Japanese, British, French, Dutch, Portuguese and Soviet empire, there is always an end to this reign (Hedges, 2021). Some believe that the U.S. is a special case that can surpass the odds and that the country is and will forever remain on top, but this theory simply seems like wishful thinking.

Those who believe in American exceptionalism like to make the argument that the country won WWII as well as the Cold War, thus proving its superiority amongst the other leading nations. With the defeat of the USSR allowing for the taking of ex-Soviet client states and for the pillage of the Russian economy, the U.S. empire made its steady climb in the global

ranks. Moreover, during this time, America dominated world trade, led global investments, and contributed heavily in the creation of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Petras, 2018a).

While this is all true, the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union also fostered several harmful effects. The two proxy wars fought in Korea and Vietnam took the lives of tens of thousands of American soldiers and even with all that effort put in, the U.S. still was not able to accomplish its goals. In the Korean peninsula, they were able to push the border between North and South Korea, but by the end it was almost in the exact same spot as it was before the war. As for Vietnam, the proxy war there ended with helicopters having to evacuate American diplomatic staff from the rooftop of the US embassy in Saigon; needless to say, it was a catastrophe. Furthermore, the beneficiaries of the military-industrial complex had billions of American dollars spent on a ridiculous number of nuclear warheads, an amount that greatly surpasses what is theoretically needed to “get the job done” (Bacevich, 2017). Therefore, even though America eventually won the Cold War, the two proxy wars they lost along with the billions of dollars lost did not make this victory worth the struggle.

In more recent years, America has again tried interfering in foreign affairs, not in East Asia, but in the Middle East; they call it the “war on terror”. Like in Korea and Vietnam, the U.S. is not faring too well in this battle. Two decades of combat have followed the 9/11 attacks. The one trillion dollars spent, the 100,000 troops deployed to subdue Afghanistan, the high-tech gadgets, electronic surveillance, attack aircraft, torture, the millions of dollars used to buy bribe the local elites and train an Afghan army of 350,000, these all failed to defeat a guerrilla army of only 60,000 in one of the poorest countries on earth. This sort of failure is very reminiscent of the Vietnam war; the U.S. still has not learned from past mistakes. On top of that, even though

the U.S. claims that this is a “war on terrorism” that the Middle East started, in reality it is their own doing. To stop the spread of communism during the Cold War, President Johnson’s counselor, Brzezinski, oversaw a multibillion-dollar operation to arm, train and equip the Taliban to fight the Soviets. This ended up leading to the ascendancy of the Taliban in Afghanistan, along with the spread of its radical Islam into Soviet Central Asia, once Soviet forces withdrew (Hedges, 2021). Thus, a new problem was born. Even though America’s military is “without competition”, they still were not able to defeat an army with less than half of the might and funding they were given.

Aside from making the U.S. military look weak, the war on terror also has not been too kind on the American economy. Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel prize winning economist, predicts that the Iraq war will cost \$3-5 trillion dollars. The U.S. pays an estimate of about \$30 billion each year to send 100,000 troops to Afghanistan, meaning that for every individual al Qaeda fighter, the U.S. will apply 1,000 troops and \$300 million a year. In order to finance its multiple wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen, the U.S. is adding trillions to its national debt. (Washington’s Blog, 2010). Even though, as of now, the U.S is the richest country in the world with the highest GDP, it also has one of the highest debts. Meanwhile, other countries such as China and Russia are rising up, ready to surpass them in terms of wealth and military might respectively. China is the second richest country in the world and makes up 18.45% of the total global economy and Russia’s weapons are advancing (Gravvat, 2021). The US does not have an adequate defense to the weapons announced by Putin, meaning that the entire Anti-Ballistic Missile effort of the U.S. is now useless. After spending trillions of dollars, Russia has outsmarted the American military with 10% of their budget. The U.S. leaving the SALT treaty in 2002 and expanding NATO to

cover the Russian border is what led to Russia's development of these new weapons in the first place, so America's own actions are to blame again (Flowers & Zeese, 2018).

Starting around the time of the Cold War Era, the United States's interference in wars overseas has been detrimental to both the country they are fighting and themselves. These wars have spurred the military industrial complex, started a useless arms race, added trillions to the national debt, and have weakened the image of the American military. Overall, the United States has been in decline. This self-defeating military adventurism of late empires has been labeled by historians as "micro-militarism." For example, during the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians invaded Sicily; they suffered great losses which ignited revolts throughout the empire, and they collapsed. Britain attacked Egypt because of a dispute over the nationalization of the Suez Canal and was humiliated when it had to withdraw its forces. This was around the time that Britain was declining as a world power (Hedges, 2021). By comparing these events with recent U.S. history, it seems as though America is reaching a similar demise. History tends to repeat itself.

### **America's Internal Issues**

Even if America does not collapse due to lack of military might, its government's dismissal of issues at home-- such as social tensions, living conditions, and the growing wealth gap--will lead to its internal defeat. While these issues may not directly affect America's global dominance, they have the potential to destroy the country from the inside out.

There are two major social tensions in America: racial and political. The U.S. has always been a deeply divided country; Federalists vs. Antifederalists, the Union vs. the Confederacy, black people vs. white people, Democrats vs. Republicans, etc. America has long quarreled with itself and during the civil war, this almost led to its demise. If the Confederacy had won, America would have been split in two and in the words of Abraham Lincoln, "A house divided

against itself cannot stand." As previously stated, the tensions in the U.S. now are not strong enough to tear it apart, but as for the future it remains a possibility, especially with the advent of social media.

The interconnection of the country, as well as the world, through an online platform has fostered easy community building. In some cases, this has been useful for making friends and discovering new interests, but other times it can help closed-minded people find each other and validate each other's opinions which further deepens social tensions. The biggest, most recent example of this would have to be the 2021 storming of the Capitol building in Washington. This idea for a planned raid started after President Trump told the protesters in Washington to march on Congress. His supporters online spread the word, directions on which streets to take to avoid the police were shared, and which tools to bring that would work for prying open doors were exchanged in comments on right-wing dominated social media sites. Pro-Trump movements to retake the Capitol building and calls for violence against congress members had been circulating online for months (Frenkel, 2021). Thus, the platform that social media provides can make pre-planned acts of violence such as this much easier to create and organize. To reiterate, the storming of the Capitol cannot be compared to the seceding of the Confederate states, but it can be a sign that something similar to the Civil War is approaching in the near future.

Another problem that has gotten worse in recent years would be the increasing wealth gap amongst Americans across the country. Today, most capitalist countries have returned to the huge 19th-century-sized gaps between the richest 1% and everyone else (Wolff, 2017). One contribution to this issue is the aforementioned military industrial complex. Since the military economy in the U.S. is disproportionately larger than the rest of the economy, that means the government is pulling away resources and using them to buy weapons and supplies and to pay

for military personnel. In standard models of economics, military spending is a direct drain on the economy. Since America is rapidly increasing its debt, this will eventually decrease economic growth, and create much fewer jobs than if the money was spent on non-military purposes (Washington's Blog, 2010). With fewer jobs, more people lose their income, thus more people's standards of living are decreased. In addition to this, employers have reduced or eliminated health coverage, ceased paying for pensions, and have reduced corporate taxes which in turn lowers the quality of public education. Over the past two decades, salaries for most U.S. households have declined or stagnated, cost for basic needs such as education and health has left many bankrupt and has left many university graduates with long-term debt. For Americans under 45 years, accessibility to owning a home has fallen dramatically from 24% in 2006 to 14% in 2017 (Petras, 2018b).

The wealth gap may even be leading to deaths. Authors of a report named "Inequality Kills" have claimed that this growing economic divide is causing several working class members to die of starvation, from climate disasters, lack of health care, or gender based violence worsened by financial pressures. Irit Tamir, director of Oxfam America's Private Sector Department, states, "If the world was more equal, at least 21,000 fewer people could be dying each day". The recent Covid-19 pandemic has greatly contributed to pushing the poor lower and raising the rich higher. According to public sources like the Forbes Billionaires List and the World Bank, over the pandemic, billionaires experienced the "biggest surge" in wealth since public records began tracking it; Elon Musk alone saw his wealth increase over 1,000% going from \$26 billion pre-pandemic to \$294 billion in November 2021. Meanwhile, the other 99% of the world *lost* income and more than 160 million people were pushed into poverty. This is

because lockdowns prevented daily wage earners and those in informal jobs from going to work and travel restrictions caused layoffs and factory shutdowns (Lu, 2022).

A wealthy nation does not always correspond with a content nation. Capitalism in America has helped the country's economy grow, kept American entrepreneurs on top, and supplied the military, but it has also helped foster a work system that continually furthers the distance between the 1% and the 99%. Sure, billionaires like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos are kept happy and they keep the economy running, but what about everyone else? This trickle-down economics effect Americans keep waiting for still has not and will never happen if the capitalist system continues like this. It is only a matter of time before the middle class disappears. This may not affect the U.S.'s rank in the global hierarchy, but it will definitely deteriorate the average American life which should also count as "the nation's downfall."

### **What Does a Collapsing Empire Look Like?**

By examining why great empires of the past have collapsed, it seems as though America is already showing signs of a similar fate. Specifically focusing on the most infamous collapse, the fall of the Roman Empire, there are obvious parallels between the factors leading to its decline and recent U.S. history.

One factor was military overspending. By the second century, Rome was struggling to get enough troops and resources to defend its frontiers from local rebellions and outside attacks. As more and more funds were funneled into the military upkeep of the empire, technological advancement slowed, and Rome's infrastructure struggled. Constant wars and overspending led to inflation and oppressive taxation which in turn widened the divide between rich and poor. As previously stated, America too is overspending on the military to combat Russian and Middle Eastern forces and still losing. As a result of this hyper focus on the military, problems at home

are being dismissed; the American government is not giving enough attention to the widening class divide which has gotten increasingly worse during the pandemic.

Another factor in Rome's decline was government corruption. The empire's massive size made it difficult to govern; it was hard finding an effective leader. At one point, more than 20 men took the throne in the span of only 75 years, usually after the murder of their predecessor. The Roman Senate could not handle the excess of emperors because they themselves had grown corrupt and incompetent. As the government grew more and more chaotic, civic pride weakened and many Roman citizens lost trust in their leaders (Andrews, 2014). This distrust in leadership can be seen in America today. In the 2016 election when Trump was announced president, many Americans were extremely disappointed, and in the recent 2020 election when Biden was elected, many Americans were extremely angry. Some were so angry they stormed the Capitol building in hopes of "retaking the government". It seems that recently, no matter who is president, Democrat or Republican, Americans cannot be satisfied, and they have now begun showing violent displays of this dissatisfaction. Chaos is on the rise.

Rome's fate was a result of their military being incapable of keeping up with attacks from other empires, but also from internal issues at home being ignored. These causes line up with declinist and neo imperialist schools of thought for America's future. Therefore, the American Empire will most likely meet a similar demise.

### **Conclusion**

America is not truly a democracy. The country is not ruled by the people, nor is it ruled by a group of coexisting political parties. In reality, America's fate is in the hands of the rich. Wealthy interest groups control the economy and if the economy declines, the power of the

president declines. Thus, the president allows these big corporations to influence public policy to be more suitable for their own needs.

This has long been America's status quo. No matter who the president is or was, they are always controlled by greed. They all claim to be looking out for the needs of the people, but what they are really looking out for is the economy. American presidents purposefully keep up this oligarchical system to keep themselves and the other elites on top. The 1% does not keep the economy running to help the 99%, rather they use the 99% to keep the economy running.

Furthermore, it does not seem like this status quo will change anytime soon. On the political spectrum, Democrats and Republicans are both equally close to the center. Also, they both tend to lie in the first quadrant of the political compass, meaning they are authoritarian capitalists. Political parties in the center always get the most votes because they are the least extreme, that is why no other political parties have risen up in America since the 19th century. The majority of Americans are not currently satisfied with the way the government is run, but they are still very divided on how it should be fixed, thus the status quo is likely to remain the same.

Since it is highly doubtful the plague of capitalism will ever be eradicated, the country's situation will continue to worsen. The United States's power has been on a steady decline since the start of the Cold War. They have lost the Korean war, the Vietnam war, they are currently struggling in the Middle East, their weapons are being challenged by Russia, and their economy is being challenged by China.

Those who believe in American exceptionalism argue that America can surpass the odds and remain powerful forever, but there is no evidence that the U.S. is a special case. They are meeting the same stage that most great empires in decline face. Their government is becoming

increasingly more corrupt, they are overspending on the military, and being defeated in international conflicts. Clearly their power as a world leader has started to wane in recent years.

Even if America is never surpassed economically or militarily by any other nation, they could still be destroyed from the inside. Going back to the topic of capitalism, this system is destroying the nation. Because presidents like Trump and Biden only focus on the economy and the military, the actual needs of the public are being ignored. The class divide between the rich and poor has been further widened in recent years due to the military industrial complex and the pandemic. Meanwhile, these financial pressures along with the advent of social media have deepened social tensions and now it seems Americans are angrier than ever. This hate and distrust in their own government is a clear sign that something in this country is not right and if it is not fixed soon, the country is due for a collapse.

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