

America and democracy

[History](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

America has long thought of itself as the torch-bearer of modern democracy. In order to preserve that legacy, the United States must continue both to advocate for human rights and practice democracy. American representative democracy is a mixture of republican institutions and democratic processes. Voters choose representatives who function as lawmakers in the country's republican institutions (House and Senate). Historically the United States, more so than perhaps any other country past or present, has successfully practiced representative democracy. It has extended the right of suffrage to women and minorities and survived without a major disruption in government for nearly all of its history (with the one exception being the Civil War). Nowadays, with the growth of democratic institutions, it is important to protect people from the "tyranny of the majority." American democracy is just as much threatened by having its government become unaccountable as it is by a ruthless voting majority suppressing or ignoring minorities and their rights. "How minority group interests are treated in democratic systems is a central concern of citizens, government officials, and scholars" (Haider-Markel 2007, 304). There is a danger that in the future the government will not so much be the voice of the people, as it will be the distributor of wealth and goods to them. A democracy that seeks to protect minority voices and promote division often finds itself using handouts and all manner of financial incentives to gain electoral majorities. "Opinion surveys from many advanced democracies repeatedly find widespread popular support for the institutions of direct democracy" (Bowler 2007, 35). This shows that there is a potential for a "tyranny of the majority," especially if the rights of individuals are not protected. A fundamental part of representative democracy is not just the principle of popular rule but also the

<https://assignbuster.com/america-and-democracy/>

need to protect inalienable rights. In order to remain effective, the American political system must be careful not to give too much say to majorities and polls. The desire for financial gain, the basis of free market capitalism, can cause individuals and groups to seek influence within the democratic state. Majorities of the body politic can vote markedly non-capitalist politicians into office who then implement income redistribution and welfare (individual or corporate) policies. Some social services are of course necessary. But America's poor are not faced with the kind of poverty that the proletariat endured in the days of Marx and Engels. Despite their present woes, they still live longer than ever, have TV's and other modern appliances, and have no problem accessing food. That alone puts them above most of history's poor. If we compare America to Canada or the UK, it becomes clear that the government's seemingly endless access to the individual wallet gives it enormous power and that this type of power is not limited to America. In both Canada and the UK, where there are also nominally free market economies, the individual drive for profit and gain stews with the democratic state's increasing capacity to control whole aspects of the economy. " The origins of capitalist democracy [in the UK] embody patterns of class relations which signify divergent pathways in development....[C]lass alliances and class capacities form the core of alternative pathways in capitalist democratic development (Joseph 1994, 211). Therefore, a similar situation is found in the UK (albeit slightly different as well) as is found in America. Competing classes, social groupings, and/or economic interests vie for state influence and money in addition to pursuing their own profits in the general economy. Therein resides the problem. Democracy and capitalism can be pitted against one another and can lead to chaos or collapse. The free

<https://assignbuster.com/america-and-democracy/>

market is only as free as the government allows it to be. If partisan financial interests drive state policy so much so that the state's duty to protect the interests of all and of the whole is weakened or sullied so as to realize the aims of connected individuals or groups or, worse, crass electoral majorities, the entirety of the system can falter, weaken, and, eventually, collapse.

Collapse in America does not seem far off if one considers its massive debts, the fruit of years of profligacy on the part of electoral majorities and the politicians they put into office. For that is the giant “ elephant in the room” threatening the future of every American: the massive indebtedness of American government. “ This generation is also about to inherit a daunting array of fiscal, social, and environmental debts...” (Gates 2000, p. 222). The ability for the government to address the challenges facing America will surely depend on its ability to finance solutions, programs, and educational initiatives aimed at them. The crushing debt the country faces has placed all that in jeopardy. In 2000 the national debt stood at about 2 trillion dollars; it has now ballooned to some 14 trillion with Bush and Obama. This does not bode well for the future of the country. It would seem that individualist democracy may very well have within it the seeds of economic destruction.

The free market can prevail but only if it is indeed free. Works Cited Bowler, Shaun, Todd Donovan and Jeffrey A. Karp. “ Enraged or Engaged?

Preferences for Direct Citizen Participation in Affluent Democracies.” *Political Research Quarterly* 60: 3 (2007): 351-362. Gates, Jeff. *Democracy at Risk: Rescuing Main Street from Wall Street*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Perseus Publishing, 2000. Haider-Markel, Donald P. “ Lose, Win, or Draw: A Re-examination of Direct Democracy and Minority Rights.” *Political Research Quarterly* 60: 2 (2007): 304-314. Joseph, Antoine. “ Pathways to Capitalist
<https://assignbuster.com/america-and-democracy/>

Democracy: What Prevents Social Democracy?" *The British Journal of Sociology* 45: 2 (1994): 211-234.