

US Elections in 2024

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Publication date: 21 July 2024

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Concerns of an average American citizen about Democracy in the USA in 2024

As a U.S. citizen, I exercise my right to vote at every election, whether it is municipal, state, or federal; however, I am intentionally unaffiliated with any political party, and I find this year's election particularly concerning. I love that I can vote and have enjoyed that Constitutional right as a U.S. citizen since I voted in my first election shortly after turning 18. This election leaves me at a loss for how to cast my vote—do I 'write-in' a candidate or hope for the best in an obviously failing bipartisan system? Because I am a political "Independent," I do not support either candidate officially or unofficially. From my perspective, both have proven to be out of touch or blatantly mismanaged issues, perhaps because of our generational-social differences, economic gaps, or because lobbying and the monetization of U.S. politics forces politicians to serve their donors (read: corporations and wealthy donors) vice their constituents. In a country where one gains power by the voice of the people, it is befuddling to witness politicians immediately concern themselves with becoming millionaires and worrying about the next election cycle instead of passing a balanced budget or holding government agencies and officials accountable to carry out their duties.

Quick U.S. Civics Lesson

The U.S. elects a President every four years, while some federal, state, and municipal elections typically stagger the four-year term changes every two years. There is a continuity to our convoluted system that is particular to our tastes. It is very programmatic, and we seem to enjoy the predictability, hence why we like to complain about the inefficiencies without fixing it—the rigidity of our system also allows a lot of manipulation, strategizing, and disaster to occur. U.S. politics is an unpredictable-choose-your-own-ending-bipartisan-adventure that hedges its bets on cosmopolitan hope and the ethereal 'American dream.'

The President occupies the highest elected seat in the U.S. with the creation of the Executive Branch in Article II of the U.S. Constitution.¹ The Executive Branch began exercising its power more following the 9/11 terrorist attacks which left us grappling with the shattered sense of domestic security that we enjoyed after World War II. Former President George W. Bush began to etch out more Executive powers through Executive Orders, and to this day this power goes largely unchecked. This provides precedence for future Administrations to exercise authority that may or may not be in direct competition with the Checks and Balances system that delicately maneuvers a triangulation, thereby guaranteeing the continuity and stability of U.S. democracy, and preventing an authoritarian government.² Former President Bush's deployment of the military to invade Iraq and Afghanistan, are by U.S. law a blatant violation of our checks and balances, as well as illegal because only Congress possesses the power to declare war.³ (Congress has not exercised its power to declare war since World War II.) Each successive President has leveraged unchecked growing executive power, now perceived as inviolable, to ensure the completion of campaign promises or circumventing the need to engage with Congress and cocreate legislation that is the voice of the people to direct the country vice the political platform of the President.

Established by Article I of the Constitution, the Legislative Branch (the Senate and House of Representatives) is a complex system that has only grown more inefficient with the political jockeying and lobbying. The legislative process is thoughtful if it addresses concerns and needs of constituents, unless ego and special interests dominate the debate floors and chambers.⁴ Depending on who occupies seats in the Legislative and Executive branches they may work together well or force a deadlock that threatens to shut down the government—which has happened ten times since 1980, twice of which were during former President Trump's administration.⁵ Election cycles inherently force the Legislative Branch to (hopefully) cooperate by (allegedly) giving platform to all citizens in the formation of federal laws. When there are diametrically opposed parties occupying the House and Senate chambers, the legislative process stymies because it needs to cocreate through majority vote to pass laws that receive the approval or veto of the President; all legislation must first pass the House and then Senate. This process becomes infinitely more complex if the President is from an opposing party. In the event of a veto, Congress must overturn a veto by voting again to pass without approval.

Established by Article III of the U.S. Constitution, the Judicial Branch perhaps is the most far-reaching in its ability to impact generations because it is difficult to overturn judicial precedent.⁶ Abortion is a contentious topic, and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the Supreme Court with its ruling on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* signaled the end of 14th Amendment to the Constitution protecting Women's bodily autonomy and access to reproductive health care, to include birth control.¹ Deviation from judicial precedent like this will impact

¹ Note: This recent ruling was not based on medical evidence supported by medical research, nor did the Justices consult obstetrician/gynecological expertise. The ruling struck down fifty years of precedent by eliminating the protection of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution's Liberty Clause to guarantee reproductive health choices for women. This politicizes women's reproductive health care instead of it being a codified human right by ensuring the government abstains from encroaching on individual liberties, and by proxy, deeply personal health choices. Again, I point out the irony of Republicans wanting to conveniently encroach on liberties of a

thousands for generations because abortion is not codified at the federal level which allows states to legislate, sometimes with draconian laws, leading to fatal outcomes for some women or require traveling to other states to receive urgent or emergent reproductive health care.⁷ Unlike other branches, Supreme Court Justices enjoy life-long appointments by the President tasked with filling any vacancy upon death or retirement of a Justice. With some Justices appointed in their mid-life, some enjoy decades on the bench, which can lead to stagnation and corruption. The ‘stacking’ of the Judicial Branch by former President Trump is now calling into question the relevancy of life-long appointments, and if expanding the number of seats within the Supreme Court could create more robust and balanced judicial rulings.⁸ The Judicial Branch must legally, not politically, interpret legislation and precedent—lately there has not been a distinction. Recent court rulings may facilitate the precedent of a President having *carte blanche* while in office or enable abuse of power without recourse during or after a term in office.⁹

Unpacking the Political Platforms for 2024

The dynamic of U.S. power structure established by Articles I-III of the U.S. Constitution are vital to understanding the minutiae and nuance of the power structure. The balance of the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Branches are necessary to maintain balance—but what happens if this next election changes what is technically U.S. anocracy into something resembling a populist authoritarian conservative Christian regime?¹⁰ Democracy in the U.S. experienced threats many times before, but this election may see a permanent transition away from anything resembling a democracy in the U.S. The implications of this election are terrifying to say the least—in much the same way disillusionment and disgruntled citizens conferred power upon the Nazis, one must question what is possible if there is not an intentional shift back toward a full democracy in the U.S.

The chasm between the Democrats and Republicans may destroy the U.S. We are at a crossroads with not only an identity crisis (i.e., anocracy or democracy), but we are actively in a silent civil war—and we have been since 2016.¹¹ This is not hyperbole, but rather a simple triangulation of the erosion of Constitutional rights and freedoms we enjoy being preyed upon by intentional misinformation, meddling, Executive overreach, legislating to strip people of their humanity and Constitutional rights, and monetization of fears, to name a few problems.¹² This election is going to change the trajectory of the country I love to call home and served while in the U.S. Navy.

The U.S. brags about its exceptionalism, but there is nothing exceptional about falling victim to our own failings (of which there are many).¹³ This election year is humbling because the political strife that human beings bring into existence by merely interacting is threatening the fabric of not

specific portion of the population by saying this is a “pro-life” stance, while simultaneously supporting the death penalty. It is more appropriate to label their alleged “pro-life” stance as anti-abortion and pro-capital punishment. To codify women’s reproductive rights now requires state legislation or federal legislation; federal legislation seems insurmountable because it may not ever pass given the necessity for the House, Senate, and President to approve. If Congress approves and the President vetoes, then Congress must overrule the veto; given the contentious nature of abortion and bipartisan divide in Congress there would be a considerable amount of political jiu-jitsu required.

only the U.S. government, but also U.S. society writ large. I say this in jest, but it belies the darker truth I see in this situation—we need an emotional support partner—our kind Canadian neighbors to the north have offered this (jokingly) on social media since 2016;¹⁴ but the truth is we brought this on ourselves and have not done enough to course correct. I see outsiders concerns and yes, tensions are high.¹⁵ This election is the culmination of collective traumas and disappointments that shattered our perceptions of the efficacy of our democracy.¹⁶ The lack of thoughtful and relevant gun control that facilitates rampant gun violence in the U.S. is one of the many reasons this silent civil war could erupt into a devastating catastrophe.¹⁷

Many politically left-leaning individuals were upset at the outcome of the 2016 election because the dog whistles of white supremacy, blatant sexism, and alt-right Christian Nationalist dogma no longer had to hide behind smiles and operate in shadow.¹⁸ Hate crimes rose by 5% the first year of former President Trump's administration—his response was inept, if not downright flagrantly minimizing the harm.¹⁹ This only emboldened the alt-right to assume that his silence signaled the acceptance of their behavior, and by proxy granted permission from U.S. society writ large. History teaches that one must not tolerate intolerance, or you are complicit in the harm. The result is a volatile pendulum swing, with people like me in the crosshair of that movement.

To be clear, the wealthy will not suffer, and unfortunately, they have the advantage of buying power or influence, leaving if they must, or simply paying to be beyond reproach—we are a country with a convicted felon as the Republican candidate for President.²⁰ Ironically, this has not converted anyone supporting the former President into prison abolition since the actual sentencing has yet to occur; I also no longer hear calls for putting (alleged) “criminals” in jail after Trump's conviction. The reality is that for most U.S. citizens, leaving is not an option, and there is no more money to spare because of the economic reality of inflation and the rising costs of living without any rise in our living wages prevents us from escaping this reality.²¹ There is even more to unpack as it relates to the struggles of the ‘average’ citizen, but I digress. That is why this election marks a definitive moment in our country—history will judge us, but we will be living that story with the scars to remind us of our experiences, whether we weather this storm or succumb to our failings.

Civil discord occurs in all democracies—in fact, I believe that it is a necessary catalyst for adapting to the difficulties of cocreating a shared existence that hopefully leads to prosperity. However, given the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump while campaigning this past weekend in one of the election-defining states of Pennsylvania (the would-be assassin was a registered Republican),²² the crisis facing democracy in the U.S. is evident.²³

I vividly remember watching nationally televised political debates throughout my life and not witnessing such disgraceful behavior by then candidate Trump as I did in 2016—and I was hoping it was anomalous;²⁴ however, it was not because the disappointment continues. By all accounts, the Republican nominee lost the 2016 debates and resorted to flagrantly disrespectful behavior to garner support for his inherent lack of a coherent platform.²⁵ The incoherence of his debate was a precursor to the tumultuous ‘governing by tweets’ that left us all in disarray. The 2024 debate between President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump was not nearly as volatile as predicted; however, it was an embarrassing disappointment considering what is at

stake for the U.S.²⁶ I am astonished and embarrassed that I know this country has a strong and enviable higher education system with brilliant minds solving relevant and critical problems—and these candidates are what we present as our best options.

To say I am disappointed is an understatement; and yet, I am not surprised because politics has turned into a dirty game, and apparently is also turning violent. So, what is the solution? Do I choose an octogenarian who has cognitive fumbles and physically trips? Or a convicted felon who signals he supports Christian Nationalists by his complicit silence and gaslighting? I remember during the Covid-19 pandemic we affectionally referred to President Joseph Biden as “Uncle Joe,” he seemed genuinely concerned with guiding us through the collective trauma and mitigating damage. We seemed to collectively need that elderly father figure to calm our nerves, especially after the previous Administration’s tumultuous and negatively disruptive tenure. Now, I wonder if Democrats ‘changing their horse mid-stream’ is a strategic error or a brilliant fumble recovery. This begs the question: will this devolve into something worse? With President Biden’s Covid illness this week, perhaps the time to gracefully transition and pass the baton is at hand.²⁷

Forecasting the Possibilities

What I am certain of is that former President Trump is the harbinger of death for U.S. democracy if elected again. *Project 2025* is essentially the U.S. conservative republican version of a complete and legal conservative takeover of the U.S. government. Written by *The Heritage Foundation*, a conservative Regan-era organization that aims to transform the U.S. Executive Branch into a hardline conservative stronghold within the first year of any Republican candidate gaining the highest office in the land.²⁸ During an interview on a conservative media outlet, one of the main writers of this document stated that “We are in the process of the second American Revolution, which will remain bloodless — if the left allows it to be.”²⁹ What is shocking is that Republicans are either lacking the intestinal fortitude to prevent excessive Executive government overreach, authoritarianism, and Constitutional rights infringements—preventing big government and maintaining Constitutional integrity is part of their political platform—or they are showing their true nature. This week’s Republic National Convention (RNC) showed the true nature of many Republicans as it turned into a cult worship session with its addiction to Trump by emulating his ear bandage. To make matters worse, the language utilized by the Republicans signals that a dark chapter will not conclude without more volatility, and perhaps violence.³⁰

If elected, despite Trump deflecting questions and concerns, his platform, which is now the Republican National Convention (RNC) platform, facilitates the opportunity for this extreme alt-right shift to occur.³¹ If *Project 2025* is the leaded version, then Trump’s campaign platform is the unleaded because many of the people who served in Trump’s administration contributed to *Project 2025*. Christian Nationalism intends to leverage a Republican triumph in this election to legally solidify the legitimacy of its foothold the same as Hitler did with the Nazis in the 1930’s. They are no longer speaking in code; the writers of *Project 2025* have clearly stated their intentions and it would be devastating to U.S. democracy if they win, and if all else fails—conspiracy theories will abound. And lest we forget, the Nazis legally seized power by creating their playbook from U.S. Jim Crow laws institutionalized after the U.S. Civil War. Most of this is not a secret to my European friends, they seem to have better political acumen of U.S. politics because the misinformation is not as rampant when you are an outside observer.

One of the writers of *Project 2025* stated in a nationally televised interview that Republicans would accept election results provided there is no proof of a fraudulent election. However, when confronted with the evidence gathered by *The Heritage Foundation* about the 2020 election, there was no massive fraud, to which he repeated himself as if to dismiss the evidence collected by his own organization because it is incongruent with his desires.³² In essence, this provides an out to spread misinformation again this year if someone disagrees with the popular vote or electoral college outcomes. (I could write an entire paper about the electoral college to explain this convoluted concept; rest assured even people who paid attention in civics class while in high school do not understand it that well.) This insinuates that if there is or is not a transition of power, that an insurrection becomes an inevitable response for fringe elements in U.S. politics. The U.S. 2020 election was free and fair with almost no fraud to support any claims that Republicans or Trump fabricated to the contrary—conspiracy theory debunked.³³

More Questions than Answers

Does one assume President Biden is a lame-duck and incapable of having a positive influence and continuity in democracy? Should Europe and NATO brace for the shock of a U.S.-centric approach to engagement if leadership changes? Or will there be a second term for President Biden that clearly supports NATO and maintains current positions in conflicts? Strategically, stability intertwines the fates of Europe and the U.S. through the outcomes of elections happening on both sides of the Atlantic this year; will we see the 2020's marked by the shift to the right, middle, or left? And can we predict how to strategically recover if there is a drastic shift to maintain our special relationships based on centuries of interaction and cooperation?

The alternative to this conundrum...I can 'write-in' a candidate because I have plenty of time to research the available options and examine their track records and platforms. And yet the quandary is that if I vote one-off this election (which I will probably do unless things drastically change before November), then do I consider that a waste of my vote? When I deviate from our bipartisan system, often that feels like I am silencing myself which is the antithesis of casting a vote. And yet, with less than four months until the election, I am holding out hope that perhaps my eternal U.S. optimism and that undying dream of *e pluribus unum* holds true after this election cycle. I honestly found myself envying other democracies that can call an election and get the process over within a matter of a month or two; however, that would upend the political pageantry and flare for the dramatic we have here in the U.S. It seems that conspiracy theories are becoming the new 'reality' tv because there is a constant inundation of them when engaging in political discourse here in the U.S.

Surviving until November

For myself, I am experiencing extreme emotional fatigue, which is a sentiment shared by many voters this year.³⁴ News media and social media are predisposed to sensationalizing, addicted to this incessant need for a dopamine hit through sound bites. I suppose that is the goal of either side—wear out the opposition or anger enough people to create change. Either way, stoking the fire makes it burn brighter. I wish I could be certain that democracy will endure in the U.S., but the past eight years has eroded my ability to naively hope that will occur without further struggle

and conflict. "Freedom is not free," is what I learned serving my country, and unfortunately that may be a reality for more than just U.S. military members. My hope is that daily gun violence and the violence of this past weekend are not signaling a marked decline in our ability to engage in public discourse in good faith to build a stronger democracy without any more bloodshed. I fought in a war, and violence begets violence, and the only way to end violence is to disrupt it with compassion. I am leaning into my critical analysis skills to objectively frame this period as a necessary test to transition out of bratty teenage years and into a mature, compassionate, and thoughtful country that we hope we are. The U.S. needs to move away from an anocracy and back toward democracy, because the alternative is terrifying.

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