

America's Counterfeit Democracy

Rule of the Power Elite

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Dedication

To the American People, Who Desire More than They're
Getting

Acknowledgment

I wish to thank Monica Lamb
my talented editor

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PREFACE

The word democracy is ubiquitous in American society and around the world. You can prove it by googling the word which will display 966,000 links. Almost every American can define democracy, referencing the people's right to vote and influence government action. The term is used interchangeably with republic when describing the American political system, even though the words don't have the same meaning.

The irony of using democracy to describe the American political system is that America is not a democracy, even by the loosest definition of the term. The public stake in and influence over government direction is not a reality in America. The people's votes make little difference because the elite, wealthy, and influential control the American government. The rest of the country lives with the results.

This book will explore why the United States is not a democracy. To accomplish that task, we have to look at the issue from three different angles: the history of political systems, the history of democracies, and how those two histories influenced the political systems of today.

The history of political systems is a history of wealth and power. After agriculture began in 8,000 BCE, man's ability to create a food supply increased exponentially. That meant human group size could expand enormously. A larger population required a government to provide controls,

including protecting the food supply (stored grain) and providing a safe environment for living (control crime). An adequate food supply allowed humans to abandon their hunter/gatherer lifestyle and stay in one place. They began to claim property, and owning real estate created power. Those individuals with the most land had the most power because they could generate wealth from that land.

The history of democracies is a history of opportunities for the ordinary person to influence government action. Greece is the singular example of that political system in the ancient world. Greek society was unique, and its structure fostered the creation of a political system that engaged the public. After the fall of the Greek civilization, democracies became dormant for 2000 years. The Enlightenment Era revived democracies as a model for government because the people demanded rights.

Early political systems were monarchies or dictatorships, which concentrated power at the top of an authoritarian system. Wealth (land ownership) or the ability to lead an army determined one's ability to control others. Leadership was Darwinian, or the survival of the fittest exercise.

The journey taken by democracies from the Enlightenment until today has been steady and labyrinthic. Pressure applied by the public forced the wealthy and powerful who controlled human society to cede rights to the people over time. But the elites have never ceded enough power to lose control. Pushed to the endpoint of the power they would cede, elites agreed to build liberal states, which included the

public in the political process. Under these liberal regimes, elites continued to maintain power. Their work to control society is kept secret from the people because they want to disguise their use of power and fool the people into believing they have a say in government.

Today, wealth and military power control all human societies. Some operate as theocracies, adding the additional feature of religious power to broaden their control. The elite actors who wield power over their societies will never give it up.

Elites in America have two objectives: to enrich themselves and keep the American political system stable to avoid economic and cultural disruption. Elites use money to game the financial system to their benefit, enlisting the aid of experienced money managers. They access unique investment types and manipulate prices to their advantage. They rarely allow Congress to pass laws that the public is asking for. Money and the influence of lobbyists corrupt the elected politicians, steering them toward governance that enriches themselves rather than the public.

In this book, we use the term “power elite” to designate those elites who use their status to exercise power. Power elites are tightly connected to large corporations because they own them, have investments in them, or serve on their boards of directors. The power elite and corporate leaders operate a private network that researches public policy, influences government action, and uses the media to shape public

opinion. The actions of this network are secret and hidden from the American people.

The word counterfeit in the book's title refers to the fact that our democracy is fake and not real. It has elements of a democracy, but that's only a veneer. Changing a counterfeit democracy into one controlled by the people is impossible because elites will never relinquish control.

This book represents a change of focus from my previous books. Books 1-4 focused on left-right differences, genetic and behavioral, which influence their political behavior. These differences have helped create the tribalism America is living through today. But control of American society and the operation of its political system are significantly more important because they transcend short-term problems like tribalism. The American people are frustrated with the operation of their government right now, and we need to delve into why this is so. Understanding the problem might lead to a solution of some kind.

Elite theory emerged before the turn of the 20th Century, describing how large human populations operate under the control of a wealthy elite. This theory didn't get much attention until the mid-1950s when C. Wright Mills introduced the concept of power elite. Mills (1916-1962) and G. William Domhoff (1936-) have defined and expanded our understanding of the power elite's influence. Domhoff published *Who Rules America* in 1967 and later released seven subsequent editions with updates to his previous work.

The work of these two men is controversial because it contradicts the idealistic view of the American political system, which asserts the American people control the direction of their government by voting to elect representatives who represent their interests. The power elite concept is the ultimate conspiracy theory because of its power over all Americans. To assert that it exists and operates as I describe takes much research. In my view, the evidence for power elite operation is compelling.

Separate from my discussion of the book's thesis, I've added a chapter at the end called "Afterward," which is defined as a book section that provides a critique of the book's conclusions. Readers can draw their own conclusions about the book's thesis when they compare the Afterward to other parts of the book.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Before 10,000 BCE, man lived in small groups of fifty to one hundred persons. Those bands were egalitarian, and the group had no social hierarchy. Decision-making was determined by consensus, resulting from a vote by all or the decision of respected elders. Groups were nomadic, searching for food to satisfy their omnivorous appetite.

After 10,000 BCE, humans began cultivating and growing edible plants in environments that supported their efforts. These sites were in South America, Middle America, China, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, where the environment facilitated farming. The most well-known of these sites was Mesopotamia, which had organized villages and functioning agriculture by 8,000 BCE.

In Mesopotamia, the alluvial plains of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers facilitated the cultivation of barley and other grains on flat sediment land. The soil was rock-free, and flooding provided moisture for the plants. By 6,000 BCE, large villages were using irrigation to manage agriculture. Mesopotamia flourished for almost 4,000 years, first as a theocracy, then a priest-military leader partnership, and finally as a monarchy. In 2,300 BCE, the Akkadian king Sargon defeated the Mesopotamian cities and added them to his Empire.

Sargon was notable as the first documented king in human history. Monarchies like his would stand as the most popular form of government until the Enlightenment some 4,000 years later. They were successful because they featured a line of succession through one family, and the hierarchy put together by the monarch could manage human society efficiently. Aristocracies emerged when a group of wealthy individuals worked together and competed with each other. Eventually, one of those individuals took control by election or force and became king.

The Greek Democracy

Amidst the many monarchies and authoritarian political systems in the ancient world stood the Greeks, who fought off their authoritarian tendencies and built democracies instead. The Greek Polis (city-state) appeared following a dark age period, which ended in about 800 BCE, evolving from circumstances that supported a break from monarchical systems.

The word Democracy comes from the Greek *dēmokratia* or people's rule. The structure of the Polis consisted of the Ekklesia (the Assembly of citizens), the Boule (council of men from each tribe), and the archons (chief magistrates). The Greeks practiced direct democracy, meaning the public voted for candidates directly and held elected office.

Greek Democracy was an anomaly made possible by the geography of the Greek peninsula. The land of Greece was unsuitable for agriculture due to its mountainous character, and only 25% of the Greek Peninsula was suitable for

farming. Geography dictated that the Greek people form settlements in the valleys between the mountains because open plains were few and far between. Settlements were small because space was limited, and mountain ranges often separated one village from the next. Lack of space meant that urban populations were limited in size. In these small urban centers, everyone could participate in and influence the government's operation, and the political systems tended toward Democracy.

The Path of Monarchies

In ancient times, Europe did not have monarchies because its inhabitants were tribal and barbaric. Rome brought advanced civilization to Western Europe through occupation and control, governing its provinces and duplicating the administrative structure used at home. Spain and Gaul (France) were the primary beneficiaries of Roman influence. Germany, always a fierce enemy, defeated Roman attempts to occupy it and remained a tribal state.

When Rome fell, Europe was laid waste. All government institutions vanished: the economy, the legal system, the military, and the educational system. For 300 years after Rome, barbarians overran Western Europe: Vikings from the North into Britain, France, the Low Countries, Germans and Goths into Italy and the Balkans, and Muslims into Spain. Those invasions held back civil recovery for the European people. It would take a series of strong leaders to change Europe's future, and it took time before they appeared.

The first was Charles Martel (reigned 718-741 CE), founder of the Carolingian dynasty. Charles consolidated the Franks (future French) people and crowned himself king of Gaul (Roman France). Charlemagne (reigned 768-814 CE), grandson of Charles, was one of the great leaders of the Middle Ages. He slowly built the Holy Roman Empire by converting tribal lands to Christianity. Charlemagne was an intelligent and enlightened man, in addition to being a great military leader. He came to the aid of the Pope on several occasions when the Vatican was under threat. Charlemagne's victory over the Lombards in Northern Italy relieved pressure on the Vatican, forcing the Pope to acknowledge all he had accomplished.

After Charlemagne, Western Europe regressed, and the invasions began again. In 839 CE, the Vikings started attacking Britain, Northern Europe, and Paris in 885. The Muslims, who had control of Spain, began attacking southern France in 890. The Hungarians (Magyars) attacked Northern Italy in 899. Muslim armies conquered Sicily and started attacks on the west coast of Italy in 902. The required counterforce against these attacks was unavailable until the mid-10th Century when Otto the Great, king of Saxony, drove the Hungarians back for good. Otto was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 962 and deposed the corrupt Pope John XII the following year. In 1016, Canute, king of Norway and Denmark, became king of England, showing that the Scandinavians controlled the British Isles.

In the middle of the 11th Century, Europe drifted into Feudalism. Its cause was the weakness of central

governments, which were not strong enough to protect the people. The public was constantly threatened by brigands who waited for them on country roads, thieves who would steal their livestock, or marauders from other lands who might kill their families and steal their valuables. Towns were burned to the ground. No one was safe.

Feudalism dominated Britain, France, parts of Germany, and parts of Italy. It was never universal because there were European societies where a monarchy could function normally. Feudal states lasted until about 1500 CE when monarchies became strong enough to control their territories.

As the classic European monarchies in Britain and France reached their most advanced form, cracks in their authority began to impact their role and power over the people. Humanism emerged in the 14th Century, reviving classical scholarship and renewing the importance of the individual human being. Erasmus and Petrarch were the leaders of the Humanist movement. In the 15th and 16th Centuries, the Renaissance began as an artistic and cultural rebirth. Its objective was to create art surpassing the classical style, which had been the standard since antiquity. Simultaneous with these movements, Martin Luther launched the Reformation in 1517, leading to 150 years of religious wars in Europe, lasting until the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment

In the history of the Western World, the Enlightenment was humankind's most profound and far-reaching intellectual

and social advancement.¹ Centered in Europe, the Enlightenment fostered ideas that defined the modern world. The founders of the American political system used those ideas to build the American Republic.

The Enlightenment period was a social and intellectual movement in Europe and North America from 1650 to 1800. Before that time, people had been told what to think by their church and king, who claimed exclusive access to the will of God and an absolute understanding of how people should live their lives. Elites hoarded knowledge, leaving ordinary people no way to determine the truth. Enlightenment thinking promoted the right of individuals to think for themselves and take control of their lives. The resulting freedom facilitated the emergence of science, capitalism, and democracy as foundations for advancing the human species.

The Enlightenment was not a homogeneous movement with a single goal. It was a set of overlapping intellectual activities that influenced the entire range of human experience. It permeated every aspect of human life: religion, politics, economics, science, and, most importantly, the human view of themselves. A universally optimistic endeavor based on the idea of progress, the Enlightenment was a time for intellectual contemplation. Was this new world of free thought a good or bad thing? Would it create risks for humanity if his inventions become impossible to

¹ James MacGregor Burns. *Fire and Light. How the Enlightenment Transformed the World*. St. Martin's Press, New York, 2013

control? Ultimately, Enlightenment society had to balance satisfying its curiosity with the dangers that might result from its investigations. The people decided the risk was worth taking.

Politically, the Enlightenment opened the door to the public's participation in government. The 19th Century saw a mix of forces working to modernize European society, including the establishment of political parties, socialists' entry into politics, revolts against authoritarian governments, the rise of communism, and progressive efforts to mitigate the effects of the Industrial Revolution. The result was the establishment of democracies as the preferred model for Western political systems.

Modern Democracies

Following a period of agitation and rebellion in the mid-19th Century, European nations, ruled by monarchs for 1,000 years, were forced to cede some of their power to the public, who could now elect representatives to government. The monarchs resisted public encroachment and gave up their authority slowly and begrudgingly.

Initially, there were no political parties, and the people had no representation. As time passed, individual politicians began to represent blocs of voters with similar beliefs, typically conservative or liberal. Political parties emerged, established a cohesive set of issues the party stood for, and selected candidates for office. In those early days, only a tiny portion of the public had the right to vote. Gradually, new voting blocs obtained suffrage: those who did not own

property, women, and minority groups. Elected magistrates, including presidents and prime ministers, replaced European monarchs, who fell like dominos. Today, European nations have executive and legislative representatives elected by the people.

At its inception, the United States became the first new Western nation in 1000 years. Infused with Enlightenment ideas, America's founders built a political system from the ground up, avoiding the medieval baggage Europe had to discard. The founders referred to America as a republic, imagining the new country as a model of Rome. By definition, a republic is a political system *without* a monarch. In theory, the United States also fits the description of a democracy, a political system allowing the people to elect magistrates and pass laws.

The Greek Democracy featured an administrative apparatus that included the public as officeholders. America's founders knew that a direct democracy like Athens would not be practical because of the vast expanse of the United States, so they chose a republic in which the people elected representatives to serve their interests.

Wealth, Power, and Democracy

In an ideal world, the government in a democracy would reflect the wishes of the majority, but that has never happened in the United States. The founding fathers were elites who created our political system to maintain elite power because they distrusted the masses. After the Constitution was adopted and the government began to

operate, it had little interaction with the public, and few Americans could feel the government touching their lives. Elites were the wealthy businessmen in the North and the plantation owners in the South. Those individuals exerted power within a narrow sphere of influence, typically in the city or town they lived in.

The advent of the Industrial Revolution saw the growth of corporations as America's new centers of power and influence. The elites who owned these companies could exert influence within the sphere of their business but not beyond it. At the same time, those business owners were prone to exploiting their workers, causing personal and family hardship across American society.

After the Civil War, elections in America became corrupt, and local politics came under the influence of machine politicians who threatened, bribed, and assaulted the public to make them vote a certain way. The federal government became a patronage institution selling government jobs for votes. During the Gilded Age, the Progressive Movement emerged to take on the politicians and business owners to remove corruption and evil. They forced the federal government to pass laws limiting corrupt business practices and put a method of controlling corporations in place.

The New Deal Era saw an enormous expansion of the federal government, which was required to extend government services to Americans suffering under the weight of the Great Depression. Corporations increased their influence during World War II as they became manufacturers of

weapons and supplies. After the war, the Military-Industrial complex emerged as the manufacturing sector that would keep America armed during the Cold War.

Post World War II, America saw the final consolidation of the elites. A permanent network was built between the wealthiest families in America, new money elites, and major corporations. Together, they created a policy planning network of think tanks and foundations that conduct research and provide position papers for government consumption. These elites control the government by taking positions in the executive branch or working as lobbyists. They control the public through the large media companies they own. Their hold over the public is maintained through new laws they support and the money they contribute to elected officials and candidates.

The public has contributed to this problem through its lack of interest and engagement. Voters do not take their obligations seriously. Those obligations include understanding how the government works, the issues Congress debates, and the candidate platforms. A voter's last and most important responsibility is to vote in every election. About 60% of eligible voters cast a ballot in recent elections. How many of those did the appropriate amount of research? How many received instructions on who to vote for and mindlessly followed them? Counterfeit votes are votes that don't have any logical basis for them. Voter apathy gives power to the elites because the public sacrifices its ability to influence the government.

Voting today is ineffective because campaigning is a corrupt exercise in buying votes. Campaign ads feature direct attacks on the opposing candidate based on misinformation. There is no comparison of policy positions, only attacks. Few sources of information show a balanced picture of the candidates. Candidate interviews are scripted and don't effectively interrogate the candidate. It takes independent research to ascertain candidate positions, which is work most people are unwilling to do.

Elites retain control over the power institutions in American society: higher education, the media, corporations, the military, the financial system, and the government. There is a tight nepotistic linkage between these groups. University professors take positions in government and then leave the government for consulting opportunities. Politicians leave the government and become lobbyists. Corporate leaders take government jobs. This role exchange allows influential people to cycle within the network, receiving and giving favors to other group members. Moreover, everyone within the association occupies an echo chamber of unscrutinized ideas.

The term for elites who influence the direction of the United States government is *power elite*. The power elite are those elites actively engaged in influencing government policy. Other elites, outside the circle of power elites, have no interest in the workings of government.

The wealth distribution in America is a stark reminder of the power elites hold. At the end of 2022, data showed that the

top 1% of wealthy Americans held 31% of the assets in the United States. The top 10% owned 68%, while the bottom 50% had 2.5% of the country's wealth. The network at the top of the wealth pyramid, a group of academics, corporate leaders, politicians, and financial people, directs America's path. This group has common goals, including maintaining a stable society by convincing the people they are happy and well off. During periods when Americans are dissatisfied, elites insist they will make changes that will correct the problem. Most often, those changes do not take place.

Elite behavior proves the lie that the American public determines public policy with their votes and that democracy in America is anything like the ideal created by the Greeks.

This book is about the American elites: who they are and how they operate. America's elites are comfortable with the label democracy because it implies that political power is under the control of the people. They play a game to fool the American people into thinking they have authority when they don't.

Format of This Book

Chapter 1: *Introduction* introduces the ideas discussed in the book.

Chapter 2: *History of Governments* reviews the history of political systems from the beginning of human civilization to the present day.

Chapter 3: The *Greek Democracy* discusses the political system of ancient Greece, how it came about, and its influence over all political systems that came after.

Chapter 4: *History of politics in Britain and the United States*. Britain led Western Europe to adopt Democratic principles, starting with the Glorious Revolution in 1688. Politics in Britain significantly impacted America through the operations of the colonial governments and the Enlightenment freedom expressed in the evolution of the British political system.

Chapter 5: The *American Democracy Today* describes the United States government as the endpoint of the development of democracies.

Chapter 6: *The Power Elite* characterizes the wealthy Americans who act together to control the American political system. The existence of the power elite calls into question traditional definitions of Democracy and how it is supposed to function.

Chapter 7: *New Circles in the Power Elite* describes the new power elite players who have entered the stage over the last 40 years. The most significant of these are the financiers and the technologists.

Chapter 8: *Mass Behavior* discusses the concept of mass behavior, what causes it to develop, and how mass behavior impacts a political system.

Chapter 9: *How Elites Control the American Public* discusses how elites control the American people. The most substantial influence comes from the media, which large corporations wholly control.

Chapter 10: *Why America is not a Democracy* compares how the United States government operates to how democracies are supposed to work.

Chapter 11: *Into the Future* looks ahead to try and understand what the American political system will become. Can it stray from democratic principles and survive?

Chapter 12: *Afterward* is a chapter added to the book, offering an alternative viewpoint to the book's theme. The theme is that elites control the American political system. Dissenting views are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY OF GOVERNMENTS

Government means always coercion and compulsion and is by necessity the opposite of liberty. - Ludwig Von Mises

What is a government? A government is the political direction and control exercised over the actions of the members, citizens, communities, societies, and states necessary for civilized society.² A community is a group of people living in one place. A society is a group of people organized for a specific purpose. A state organizes people living under a central civil government or authority.

After the advent of agriculture, humans gave up their nomadic ways to settle in specific locations. That was made possible after they discovered how to grow and cultivate edible plants. Few places could support farming, so humankind had to locate those places by trial and error. Most students consider geography useless and boring, but geography was vital to the world's earliest civilizations. To make agriculture work, farmers had to consider climate and location to find places where soil and climate could work as partners. Because they had no plows, the farmers had to discover areas where sowing and growing seeds were easy.

² *Dictionary.com*. s.v. "Government," accessed May, 27, 2024. <http://Dictionary.com/>.

In Chapter One, we mention Mesopotamian civilization and return to it here. The Mesopotamian story is helpful as an example of how ancient civilizations built a foundation for how humans would live in the future. Unlike its contemporaries, Mesopotamia created a written language to facilitate its operation. That language was the conduit that helped anthropologists decipher the Mesopotamian culture.

Mesopotamia

The word "Mesopotamia" is a collective term for several ancient cultures located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is now Iraq. Those societies prospered independently from 6000 BCE to 1800 BCE, evolving in the presence of an alluvial plain, which sparked humankind to begin irrigation farming. An alluvial plain is a gently sloping land surface formed by sediment left from rising and falling water levels.



The Alluvial plain of the Euphrates River

During its most advanced period, Mesopotamia comprised 20 to 40 separate city-states. Here, we will focus on Sumer (pronounced as sōm'ər), arguably the most important of the

Mesopotamian societies. Sumer refers to a group of cities in the South, where the Tigris and Euphrates empty into the Persian Gulf. That geography was able to support one of the greatest of the world's ancient civilizations.

When the area that would become Sumer was established (6000 BCE), the Persian Gulf extended farther north than it does today. The Ubaidian people were the first to exploit the alluvial plain of Sumer and build a civilization between the great rivers. The cities that became the jewels of Sumer were initially Ubaid cities. We know this because their names predate the Sumerian language. The Ubaidians developed as a society of farmers, cattle raisers, and fishermen. Their artisans included weavers, leatherworkers, carpenters, smiths, potters, and masons. Excavated remains include hoes, adzes, knives, and clay artifacts such as sickles, bricks, loom weights, figurines, and painted pottery. Together, these artifacts provide a record of stunning accomplishments for a people who predated the Greeks by 5,000 years.

As the Ubaid culture matured, outsiders from the Syrian desert region and Arabian Peninsula began to settle in their territory, taking control of the area via assimilation and military conquest. The result was the ethnic fusion that became Sumer. By 3800 BCE, the Sumerian civilization reached its peak.

The ziggurat was a Mesopotamian temple and one of the most important symbols of its civilization. These structures were the largest built by man at the time and represent the power and sophistication of the great Sumerian cities.

Sumerians believed the gods resided in their temples, so they prohibited the public from entering their sanctuaries. The ziggurat also contained separate structures for grain storage, recalling when the cities operated as theocracies and the priests served as municipal administrators in addition to their religious duties.



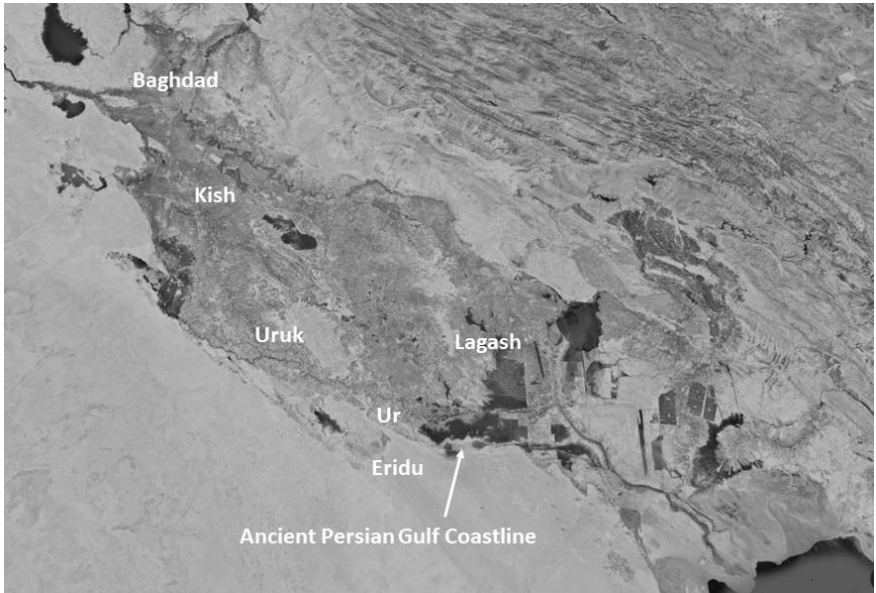
A Ziggurat temple with grain storage

The first phase of the Sumerian Era is known as the Uruk period (4100-2900 BCE), after the Sumerian city of that name. Uruk seems to have been the cultural center of Sumer at the time because it housed the principal monuments of the region and exhibited the most evident traces of an advanced urban society. By 3500 BCE, the Sumerians had developed the world's first writing system as Uruk exerted influence over the entire Near East. The written form of the Sumerian language, called Cuneiform, was created through the evolution of characters from representative (pictograms) to non-representative symbols.



Sumer was Mesopotamia's most agriculturally productive region due to an irrigation system focused on cultivating barley and pasturing sheep for wool. Although it lacked mineral resources and its climate was arid, the region had significant geographic and environmental advantages; it consisted of a delta with flat areas transected by waterways, resulting in a potentially vast area of cultivatable land, over which communications by river or land were easy. Sumer became a highly populated and urbanized region by 3000 BCE, with a social hierarchy, an artisan economy, and long-distance commerce.

During the Uruk period, the volume of trade goods transported along the canals and rivers of southern Mesopotamia facilitated the rise of many large, stratified, temple-centered cities (with populations of over 20,000 people), where centralized administrations employed specialized workers. Sumerian cities began to use slave labor captured from the hill country, and the earliest texts provide ample evidence of captured slaves as workers.



Ancient Sumer. Baghdad is shown as a reference.

The Growth of Human Society

The human dynamics that made Sumer possible were an early example of what would come later. Farms came into being to produce food for the farmers and their families. Later, as they became more efficient, the farmers grew more than they could consume, creating a distribution problem. How could the excess harvest be managed? Villages formed as organizational units for processing foodstuffs. Brokers acted as buyers and sellers for the farmer. The towns began to attract people who could contribute to the farm economy. Hence, toolmakers, carpenters, and potters became part of the community. Fine goods establishments appeared to provide clothing and jewelry for the wealthy.

The typical town contained 500-2,500 inhabitants once established. In the local region, villages sprang up to manage the agricultural output from the surrounding farms. Villages grew because the farms in their vicinity were successful. With success came growth and new problems to solve. At some point, villages created an administrative apparatus, perhaps a town council. Respected individuals became its leaders. In time, the village government became more complex, requiring professionals to manage it. Wealthy landowners assumed control of the villages because of their leverage and the respect they earned from their success. Many of the people in the villages worked for wages on the farms of the wealthy. After a time, towns began to consolidate to take advantage of local irrigation systems that control water during the growing season. The central government took control of the irrigation systems to improve and manage them efficiently, expanding their responsibility beyond the harvest's storage and public safety.

As the city-states grew, the population became stratified by economic class. Stratification occurred when capital goods were constrained. For example, when new land for farmers was unavailable, those capable of owning land could not access this source of wealth and fell into a lower economic class. There were commonly two economic classes: wealthy and poor. The expansion of the society would eventually produce a middle class that competed with the rich for wealth and power.

The first central governments in Mesopotamia were theocracies, governments ruled by priests. Those political

systems were the logical result of the people's religious beliefs growing into a political system. Religious officials took control of the government because it provided a gateway to power. Respect for the priests validated their authority, and the control they exerted was based on their connection to the gods. Priests communicated with the gods and then relayed their wishes to the people.

Eventually, the city-states of Mesopotamia required secular authority to handle civil and military matters. The office of Lugal emerged by separating it from the religious function. In ~2350 BCE, Sargon, king of the Akkadian Empire, conquered the Sumerian dynasties. Akkad and its capital, Agate, were located north of Sumer, just beyond Kish. The Akkadian Empire was the first Empire in human history, and Sargon was the first king. He built an empire that stretched from the Persian Gulf to Cyprus.

The Sumerian story demonstrates the development of a political system: organic population growth resulting from agriculture, consolidation of populations around a central government, theocracies replaced by civil authority, and finally, an empire led by a monarch who claimed hereditary power.

After Mesopotamia, monarchies remained the dominant political system in the Middle East until the Enlightenment, with Greece being the sole exception. The Minoan, Mycenaean, Persian, Hittite, and Phoenician civilizations followed Mesopotamia and provided a bridge to Greek society.

Human Societies Leap Forward

The Greek and Roman civilizations represent a remarkable departure from their predecessors; each was unique and featured a political system offering rights to the ordinary person. The Greeks were focused on man's intellect, using philosophy, science, mathematics, and art to unlock the mysteries of the human mind. The Greeks were theoretical, and they floated above the practical world. The Romans found theory boring and a useless waste of time. They were motivated by conquering nature with practical technologies. The Romans constructed bridges, aqueducts, and roads designed to last a thousand years.

In about 700 BCE, the Greek civilization began to emerge. Unique among the ancient nations, The Greeks valued ideas and creativity in ways not seen before in human history and not until the Humanist Period 1800 years after them. The Greek Democracy is an example for all time, showing what a unique point of view can accomplish. We discuss the Greeks in more detail in the next chapter.

Rome exiled its king in favor of a republic. Like Sumer, the Roman Republic had grown organically as an agricultural system until it became large enough to require a centralized government. Climate aided Roman farming, and temperate weather conditions acted on rich volcanic soil.

The Roman people were a mixture of Latin and Etruscan tribes who settled in central Italy around the 9th Century BCE. Their origins are unclear; they may have come from Europe or the Middle East. The city of Rome began in the

mid-7th Century BCE. The monarchy ended in 509 BCE, and the Republic emerged.

During the early Republican period, the Roman political system reflected the character of its people and the government they inherited from the Etruscans. The Romans were an independent race, united and possessing a robust and collective will to survive as a people. Very early, they exhibited the traits that would make them successful: the desire to organize, the ability to adapt, and a sense of cultural unity. The experience of victory in war reinforced the Roman belief in their greatness. Success drove them to expand the Republic regionally, across the Italian peninsula, to the western Mediterranean, and finally to the Greek peninsula, giving them control of the Mediterranean Sea.

The Romans retained parts of the old monarchical government in their Republic. The old council of elders became the Senate, the People's Assembly was brought forward, and a new magistrate position, the consul, was substituted for the king. The resulting political system was balanced, with each branch assigned a base of authority and shared control over it. The Senate made foreign policy and introduced new bills to the Assembly, but it could not pass laws. The Assembly could not introduce bills but was responsible for passing them. The two consuls were elected together for a one-year term of office. They acted as the chief magistrates on behalf of the Senate and held veto rights over each other.

A balanced political structure was vital because it prepared Rome to fight off the forces acting on it from within and outside. Internally, the plebian class was restless and demanded more rights. This class struggle took two hundred and thirty years to resolve, but it was accomplished peacefully because the Senate was willing to extend rights to the plebian class. At first, Rome's view of war was defensive, but later, it developed a successful policy of creating colonial outposts to serve as buffers between the Republic and its enemies. Having the class struggle resolved by 287 BCE removed a fundamental distraction to the management of foreign policy. Attention to foreign policy was essential for Rome to fight sovereign countries successfully and protect the borders of the Republic.

The most significant Roman adversary during this period was the Carthaginians of Tunisia, who occupied Sicily and controlled trade in the Mediterranean Sea. The three wars Rome fought against Carthage, called the Punic Wars, occupied a significant time between 262 BCE and 146 BCE. The first war, from 262-241 BCE, established Rome as a naval power in the Mediterranean. During that war, she captured Sicily and annexed it to the Republic. The second war, from 218 BCE to 202 BCE, featured Hannibal's famous march over the Alps. Hannibal roamed the Italian Peninsula for 15 years, winning many battles against the Romans, but he could never defeat them. He was recalled to Carthage in 203 BCE, and the war ended a year later. The third Punic War, 149 BCE – 146 BCE, destroyed Carthage after the battle of Zama in 146 BCE.

The End of the Republic

By 133 BCE, the Roman Republic was at its zenith as the most successful power in the Mediterranean. Storm clouds were gathering, however, because of internal conflict from economic uncertainty and increasing poverty. A slave war in Sicily in 139 BCE interrupted grain shipments to Rome; soon, there was a severe food shortage. Such shortages were most acute among the urban poor, whose numbers increased as farmers gave up their land and moved to the city to find work and a better life.

When changes in land ownership occurred, qualifications for the army changed with them. Historically, the Republic had operated as a society ruled by landowners, so serving in the military required a man to own property; those without property could not serve. In the early days, when the population was small, the army was essentially a militia called into action to protect the lives and property of its citizens. When wars ended, soldiers went back to their farms. Rome had fought many wars during the middle period of the Republic, and those conflicts seriously impacted the government's ability to sustain an army.

Later, wars lasted longer and took place farther from home, so farmers serving in the army became destitute while they were away because their farms sat idle and did not generate income. With the Romans fighting constantly, there was also a tremendous loss of life, and recruits were needed to replace those who had fallen. In 107 BCE, the consul Marius relaxed the property rules for military service and proposed that the army receive pay from the spoils of war. That act

destabilized the Republic because it shifted the focus of the army's loyalty from the Senate to the military leader and produced the unintended consequence of making the generals kingmakers. The first fifty years of the 1st Century BCE saw rapid swings in power as the Senate tried to keep control, only to lose it to the army when the public perceived a power vacuum. Ultimately, the Senate and aristocratic class were overwhelmed by events neither could control, and the Roman Republic collapsed after 20 years of civil war.

The Roman experience included all the classic elements that drive governmental change: instability created by lack of power to govern, inefficiency created from lack of attention to significant societal needs, dissatisfaction with a broken system, and finally, opposition to change. Any society can tolerate difficulty and hardship for a time, maybe for decades or centuries, but its path depends on its people's will. If the people are dissatisfied, trigger events can destroy the political system.

When the Republic fell, an autocratic dictatorship emerged. It lasted almost 500 years because of the Romans' stable government structure. Over time, the Empire degraded due to the variability in leadership. There were some excellent emperors and many poor ones. Most of the poor ones were assassinated. Eventually, Rome did not have the money or the army to defend its borders, and it began to collapse. The final blow was the barbarian invasions from the North that ended the Roman control of Western Europe.

Aside from Greek and Roman experiments, most of the Western world remained with monarchs and autocrats. Monarchies succeeded because they managed the state well, protecting the people and allowing them to achieve a basic standard of living. Monarchies lasted because they featured a sovereign who could claim political legitimacy, orderly succession based on family, long-time horizons for each reign, and the ability to impose law and order. The monarch was a unifying force that represented all the people.

After Rome

The Medieval period in Western Europe was a significant setback for the development of Western society. The fall of the Roman Empire in 476 CE destroyed European culture, wiping out the legal system, economy, and literacy. It would take Western Europe 800 years to reestablish stable monarchies.

Monarchies did not exist in Western Europe before Rome because its people had transitioned from tribal societies to subjects of Rome. After Rome's fall, Western Europe suffered invasions from barbarian tribes for 600 years between 500 CE and 1100 CE. The plunderers were mainly Hungarian, Gothic, and Muslim. The invaders had no interest in settling the targeted territory, only to attack and steal from the inhabitants. Later, some sought to occupy and colonize their new holdings. The most notable example of this type was the Vikings, who created permanent settlements in Britain and along the western coastline of Europe between Germany and Spain.

Despite those invasions, Europe moved forward, albeit at an uneven pace. France was always ahead of the other territories because it had benefited most significantly from the Roman occupation. France also had the best leaders at the beginning of the Medieval Period.

Charlemagne was uniquely talented and furthered Western European civilization beyond what seemed possible. His success depended on an alliance with the Pope, who supported him based on mutual interests. Charlemagne wanted to educate his people and realized the value of the Catholic Church in that effort. He encouraged Catholic missionaries from the British Isles to come to France and convert his people. He also urged the expansion of monasteries, which could foster education in his realm. In 770 CE, at the Pope's request, Charlemagne attacked the Lombards in Northern Italy, who were threatening the Vatican. His victory over them expanded his Empire south of the Alps. The Holy Roman Empire evolved, validated by the Pope's crowning of Charlemagne as its emperor in 814 CE. Feudalism began to appear in France and spread to other parts of Europe after Charlemagne's death.

A new type of social hierarchy evolved because the early kings of Western Europe were not powerful enough to fund their armies. Feudalism was a pseudo-governmental system featuring a set of reciprocal obligations between the wealthy and the warrior class. The lord was a rich landowner, and the vassal was an individual seeking protection in return for his loyalty. The vassal was subject to both military and non-

military service. An agreement was signed formally between the two parties, including an oath of allegiance to the lord.

Feudalism survived in Germany and France until about 1300 CE. It slowly passed out of existence because kingdoms became more robust, and their armies used mercenaries rather than subjects, negating the effectiveness of the feudal model. Like earlier empires, the feudal system depended on loyalty, authority, and sanctity, all conservative values. Life for the commoner remained a survival-of-the-fittest struggle.

After Feudalism

Monarchies were successful in pre-modern society because wealth created power, and power resided at the top of society. Still, they could not withstand the coming change, and a new type of government would soon replace authoritarian governments as the most popular political system in the West.

Three centuries before the Enlightenment, a period of trouble began in Europe. During 1315-1322 CE, a famine killed 10-15% of the people in European towns. Crops failed, farm animals died, people starved, and crime was rampant. People blamed the Catholic Church because they believed the clergy's prayers were ineffective. Then, in 1347, a pandemic called the Black Death, caused by Bubonic Plague, appeared. Four years later, 40% of the European population was dead. Workers and prices were scarce, disrupting all the European economies.

Amid all this pain, and maybe because of it, a new set of ideas appeared, which were focused on the inherent value of human life. Humanism evolved as a scholarly approach centered on analyzing ancient Latin and Greek texts to revive scholarship. Scholars sought to reawaken the ancients' ideas and include them in a new conception of human life. Humanists eventually produced two essential inputs to Enlightenment thinking: a renewed emphasis on scholarship and criticism of abuses by the Catholic Church.

Petrarch (1304-74), considered the first humanist, reacted against what he saw as human ignorance in the centuries preceding his birth, the time known as the Dark Ages. Petrarch sought to revive Cicero's ancient works and return Europe to the intellectual rigor of antiquity. Erasmus (1466-1536) followed Petrarch a century later. He was a Catholic priest, theologian, and scholar who traveled widely across Europe. Erasmus studied the Bible, producing new interpretations of the sacred text and translations into modern Latin and Greek. These translations gave the public access to the Bible and removed their dependency on the official church interpretation. Although he retained his loyalty as a Catholic, Erasmus was highly critical of the Catholic super-structure and suggested it carve out a way to reform itself.

The Renaissance, which began in the 15th Century, overlapped and complemented the Humanist Period. Mainly a cultural movement, it featured the advancement of art, architecture, and music. Both the Renaissance and the Humanist Period created a foundation for the Enlightenment

Period, emphasizing scholarship and art produced by individuals rather than institutions. For the first time since the Greeks, 2,000 years earlier, liberal thinking was active in Western Europe. Scholars and governments would soon focus on the individual as the center of society and the rights that political systems must grant to their people.

Enlightenment Politics

With the Enlightenment's emphasis on the individual and its realignment of authoritarian governments and the traditional church, new ideas about political systems emerged. How should humans govern themselves in the new world? The Greek Democracy and the Roman Republic stood as examples from the past that featured citizens' rights, so perhaps they could be modified and used as modern political systems.

A new ideology, Classic Liberalism, arose as a political form. Core beliefs of this new system established the idea of a society made up of individuals, departing from the older views of society as a family. Classic Liberals believed that individuals should take the lead in determining how they could succeed in life and have a voice in directing the government.

The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) asserted that the purpose of government was to minimize conflicts between individuals. For example, in society, the authorities granted courts power to resolve issues without violence. In his book *Leviathan*, Hobbes proposed a political system based on absolute government power. Laws were not

enough to keep human beings from dangerous behaviors, so authoritarian control was required to act as a deterrent.

John Locke (1632-1704), an English philosopher like Hobbes, exerted significant influence during the Enlightenment. Known as the "Father of Liberalism," Locke believed that the people's consent should rule the government. He disagreed with Hobbes's pessimism, thinking that human nature featured freedom and tolerance, not evil. Locke's book, *A Second Treatise on Government*, described his views on government structure. Locke believed four principles should bind the government.

First, the government should rule by established laws. Second, the legislature could not rule arbitrarily and should abide by the laws it passed to protect the people. Third, the government could not take an individual's property or tax their property unfairly. Fourth, the legislature could not transfer its power to another entity. Locke believed in the separation of powers, where each branch of government could provide a check on the others. Locke's views had a significant influence on America's founding fathers, who incorporated them into the design of the American government.

Classical Liberals argued for a minimal state, limiting government to protecting individual rights, maintaining national defense, and passing laws protecting citizens from each other.

In the 17th Century, liberal ideas began influencing governments in The Netherlands, Switzerland, England, and Poland. Other states retained the longstanding monarchical forms of government because power was held by those who continued to favor absolute monarchy and established religions. In the late 18th Century, America became the first government in the West without a monarch or a hereditary aristocracy. The American Declaration of Independence included the famous words:

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 ensure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed³.

The American version of liberalism eventually spread around the globe as a replacement for governments built on aristocratic power.

The history of political systems is a story about wealth and power. Agriculture allowed man to accumulate property, which was valuable for farming. More land meant greater profits from agriculture and significant wealth. As governments evolved, the wealthy took leadership positions or influenced others in those positions. Military leaders acquired power based on the strength of their armies, so they demanded roles in the government for themselves.

³ United States Declaration of Independence. July 4, 1776.

Monarchs emerged as motivated, intelligent men with the backing of an army.

The Greeks created a unique political system in which the people had rights. The Romans granted rights to their people during the Republican period. After Rome fell, Western civilization struggled for 800 years as it attempted to rebuild itself. Then, a new period began, which saw the valuing of human beings as individuals for the first time. The change produced new political systems with individual rights and a say in government. Democracies emerged, prospered, and carried humanity into the 21st Century.

The world is different now, and the effectiveness of democracies is being challenged. Can they continue to meet the needs of the people, or will other types of political systems replace them?

CHAPTER THREE

The Greek Democracy

Democracy arises out of the notion that those who are equal in any respect are equal in all respects; because men are equally free, they claim to be absolutely equal. - Aristotle

Greek Democracy is the best example of the human quest for individual rights expressed in the design of a political system. The Greek Polis (city-state) emerged in 700 BCE from a dark age period on the Aegean Peninsula, causing an efflorescence of new ideas in the mind of man. The Greeks created the notion of progress because they were the first to conceptualize and implement new ideas about government. As they saw it, progress came from the desire to acquire knowledge. Wisdom came from knowledge obtained from observing the world.

Origin of the Polis

The Polis did not appear out of thin air or develop quickly. It was forged by the heat and hammer of life in ancient Greece – its geography and its isolating influence, the collapse of the Mycenaean Civilization and its monarchy, and finally, the cultural isolation that existed during the Greek Dark Ages. The factor that eventually formed the Polis was population growth. When Greek villages became large enough to be called cities, they were able to support a more complex political system. A warrior class was developed to protect the Polis from attack – military power from the people and not paid mercenaries of a king. At the center of

it, we see human beings who divide themselves, like they always do, by capability and effort.

The Polis evolved from circumstances that supported a break from the monarchies, namely, an aristocratic class that sought to rule independently without a king. As they acquired wealth, the aristocrats asserted their independence as individuals. They started to create social distinctions to separate themselves from the commoners. They adopted a more refined and cultured way of life. That, in turn, fostered a more conscious focus on man's nature and place. The external influence was strong, and the aristocrats did not limit themselves in any way, demanding new models for artistic expression.

As populations grew, the social classes came into conflict. These conflicts led to the development of a simple political structure – not restrictive enough for the wealthy to control ordinary people. This political incubator created a system of magistrates, councils, and a people's Assembly – all original ideas and all attempted to bring fundamental rights to the lower classes. On the judicial side, wise lawgivers were granted the power to make legal decisions for the community.

The structure of the Polis required a defined geographical unit, organized locally as a concentrated set of urban dwellings. With the emergence of the city-state, military, religious, and political functions were in one place. Courts became centrally located, and geographically separated religious functions were brought together in the temple of

the state gods. The most essential Poleis (cities) became economic centers, attracting potters and other artisans to relocate there. The cities' initial growth was not a result of commercial activity but rather the complex organization of an agrarian society. Initially, Athens was a group of villages located around the fortress Acropolis. Because the connection between the government and the people was loose, there were no walls until hundreds of years later when the people had money to build them. The people, not the structures, were what mattered. As Alcaeus said, "Neither houses, finely roofed, or canals and dockyards make the city, but men able to use their opportunity."

Early on, the upper classes realized the value of passing on their cultural model to succeeding generations. Fathers set standards for their children's education and hired tutors and philosophers to teach them. As the children grew, peer pressure compelled them to conform to their class, so the model was tightened. The aristocracy expanded but not without constraints. Their class could not discard its history, where kinship had linked them to the ordinary people, preventing class separation. Despite their lack of political power, the masses possessed unity in numbers and skills essential to the aristocracy. In the end, the delicate balance between the classes was protected by geographical isolation, so Greece was free to incubate its city-state in a pure form without interference from the outside.

The aristocrats gained the most from the emerging political system by consolidating their power. They became the officers of the state and imposed their moral and artistic

preferences on the people. That is not to say class power was out of balance because the Polis was fundamentally a reaction of its entire citizenry to the problems of the age. All classes knew they had to work together to ensure the changing world did not produce chaos. In restricting individual freedom for the good of the whole, one can see that a brake was applied to the aristocratic class, whether they agreed to it or not; there was a balance between the classes that would last for hundreds of years.

The Polis continued to evolve despite obstacles. Because it relied on a delicate balance between the classes, it was subject to any disruption that would upset that balance. In the middle of the 7th Century, revolutions against the new institutions began. The government could not meet the needs of the people, so opportunists seized power and became tyrants. They were not tyrants as the dictionary defines them, but competent autocrats who cared for their people. They appeared because there was always a tendency for the wealthy to become more oppressive, leading to widespread support for someone who could take power on their behalf. However, the Greek tyrants could never accumulate enough power to establish continuity, so the Age of Tyrants ended when the Greek Democracy regained stability. The tyrants only lasted a few generations, but paradoxically, they strengthened the future Polis by cleaning out its defects and forcing the people to raise their political consciousness to the point of governing themselves.

Solon

A second significant disruption in the history of the Polis took place in Athens, starting in the early 6th Century BCE. Solon, one of the dominant figures in the history of Greek politics, rose to power and played a pivotal role in the architecture of Greek Democracy. He was an educated aristocrat, successful businessman, and poet who was the right person in a time of peril. In the year 600 BCE, Athenian politics were again in disarray. The prior decades had seen the fall of the pottery trade behind the Corinthian competition, so the city was suffering economically.

Meanwhile, the Athenian aristocratic class had become more ruthless. Poor farmers became serfs of the rich when they could not pay their debts. The landless became slaves and sold abroad.

Solon himself tells us that it was with reluctance that he took charge as an objective leader, concerned over the avarice of the rich and the desperation of the poor. He was chosen Archon in 593 BCE to act as an arbitrator and lawgiver at once because "the rich had confidence in him as a man of easy fortune, and the poor trusted him as a good man." (Plutarch's Lives, Volume 1, Solon). Solon chose to proceed quietly as administrator, not to disturb or upset the state, because he would not have sufficient power to reconstitute and organize it again if he failed the first time. To rule properly, Solon thought it best to "Combine force and justice."

Solon did not believe democracies were practical. In his mind, the only proper way to organize the state was as a republic using the distribution of wealth. Anticipating the Roman Republic, which was still ninety years in the future, he rejected equality, choosing instead to create a balance between the classes. Solon believed that creating a middle class would neutralize the conflict between the upper and lower classes, which is precisely the role the Knights would play in Republican Rome. Solon's year in power ended with passions high, yet there was enough support in each class for his reforms to keep the Polis stable. He ordered the new laws to be in force for one hundred years and then, to the surprise of many, resigned from his post and left Athens. The Athenian Polis returned to Democracy, but the reforms of Solon had made it more robust.

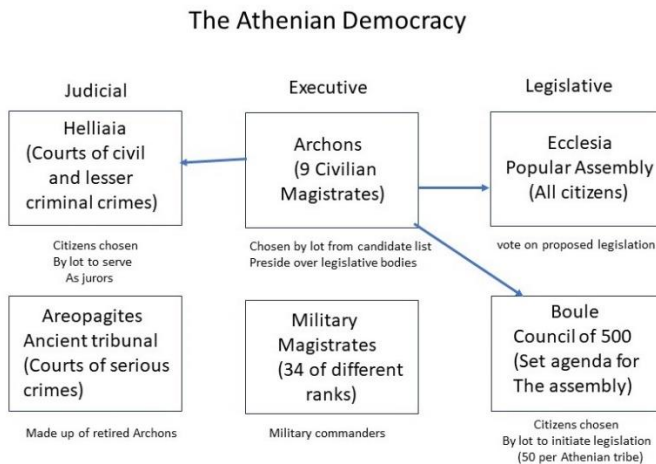
Cleisthenes

Cleisthenes was an ancient Athenian lawgiver credited with reforming the Constitution of ancient Athens and setting it on a democratic footing in 508 BCE. For these accomplishments, historians refer to him as "the father of Athenian democracy." He was also credited with increasing the power of the Athenian Citizens' Assembly and reducing the nobility's power over Athenian politics. Through Cleisthenes' reforms, the people of Athens endowed their city with equitable institutions—equal rights for all citizens (though only free men were citizens)—and established ostracism as a punishment.

Structure of the Athenian Government

The Athenian government resembled the typical Western government structure we see today, consisting of executive, legislative, and judicial branches. However, several aspects were unique, demonstrating the Athenians' strong belief in individual rights.

First, the Assembly consisted of all Athenian citizens. To be a citizen, an individual had to own property. Like the Romans, the Greeks believed property owners were more responsible citizens who would govern to protect all the lands of the Polis. Secondly, Athens was a direct democracy, meaning the public voted on legislation. Whoever showed up for an assembly meeting could vote. Several of the government offices were filled by drawing lots. That was a random selection of an official from a list of candidates.



The government of Athens included seasoned politicians to maintain stability by applying their knowledge and

experience. They controlled the executive branch and managed the other branches. The structure above reflected the Athenian government around the Golden Age period (450 BCE). The Athenian political system constantly evolved, so its offices changed over time. In general, the changes featured greater involvement by the public.

Wars with Persia

The wars between Athens and Persia lasted 50 years (499-449 BCE). However, the most critical period (490-479 BCE) saw the two great Persian invasions on the Aegean Peninsula. Many Greeks lived along the coast of the Ionian Peninsula (now the western coast of Turkey) as independent states. The Persians sought to control them by installing tyrants to manage those territories. In 498 BCE, the Ionian states revolted, attempting to throw off the tyrants. During the insurrection, the Ionians burned the Persian city of Sardis. The destruction of one of his cities offended the Persian king Darius, who vowed to destroy Athens and the entire Greek culture. It took several years to prepare for an invasion, but Darius was finally ready in 490 BCE.

After a successful attack and subsequent destruction of Eretria, a town in Northern Greece, the Persians sailed on to the eastern coast of Attica, near Athens, where they began to bring their troops ashore. After a five-day stalemate against the Greek army, the Persians decided to withdraw and move south. While loading their ships, the Greeks staged a surprise attack and routed the Persian army. Fearing a Persian move south, the Greek general dispatched a courier, Pheidippides, to run to Athens with a warning. He ran the 26-mile distance,

delivered the message, and dropped dead. The modern marathon uses that same distance in honor of his feat. When the Persians reached Athens, they saw that the Athenian army had blocked the landing locations, so they abandoned the invasion and sailed home.

Darius died in 486 BCE, and his son, Xerxes, became king. Xerxes wanted to complete the conquest his father could not accomplish and planned to invade Greece in 480 BCE. Anticipating the attack, the Athenians reached out to Sparta for help, but their timing was unfortunate. The Spartans were in the middle of a religious festival called the Carneia and were prohibited from going to war. Despite the restriction, one of the two Spartan kings, Leonidas, volunteered to take 300 men north to intercept the Persian army. A military force that small did not violate the prohibition. The 300 (and some Thebans) held off the Persian army of 300,000 at Thermopylae for three days before being killed. The Persians invaded Athens and took the city captive until the following year when a combined Spartan-Athenian army defeated them at Platea, ending the Persian effort to conquer Greece.

The Golden Age of Athens

Following the wars with Persia, Athens entered a new age under the leadership of Pericles, an aristocrat with the gifts of intelligence and leadership. He became the leader of the council of ten generals and served as the de facto ruler of Athens from 461 BC until he died of plague in 429 BCE. During his tenure, Pericles passed laws allowing poor citizens to attend plays for free and began a compensation

system for magistrates and jurors. Those freedoms allowed a broader spectrum of the populace to participate in government. He also lowered the property qualification for the archonship to help break up the monopoly of the aristocratic class. The time of Pericles, in fact and history, was the Golden Age of Athens.

Sadly, this period also signaled the beginning of the end for Athens, as the Athenian Polis became imperialistic. Leaders sought to extend their hegemony around the Aegean to protect their city from invasion and bolster their economic interests. Athenian arrogance alienated its allies, notably Sparta, leading directly to the Peloponnesian War, which began in 431 BC. After thirty years of fighting, Sparta defeated Athens, and she never recovered. The Spartans instituted a republic in Athens, governed by thirty oligarchs.

Loss of military and economic control was a symptom of the decay beneath the surface when the cleavage between rich and poor began destabilizing Greek politics. The willingness of the poor to subscribe to the idealism of the Polis was worn away, and their desire for equal rights was out in the open. The people wanted a re-distribution of land and a cancellation of debts. The rich, for their part, formed oligarchic clubs to maintain control. Aristotle quoted one of the club's oaths, which said, "I will be an enemy to the people and devise all the harm against them which I can."

The Greek city-state declined as the Greeks moved toward an individualism that made humans more conscious of themselves and more impatient with the regulations of

society, and their literature became more individualistic. This new philosophical view was foreign to the Greek tradition and focused on the whole culture. A new generation of orators, called sophists, believed that the individual should be the center of society because only the individual could control his own life. Their debates were not won with logic. They won by making the best impression. Greek individualism foreshadowed the same phenomenon that would later emerge during the Enlightenment Period.

When Philip of Macedonia rose to power, a fragmented Greece could not stop him. In 338 BCE, he defeated Athens at the Battle of Chaeronea, ending Greek independence.

The Polis lasted four hundred years. It evolved into the most significant ancient political system of all time. Like all political systems man has created, it eventually fell. No concept or belief system can remain static because it must adapt to its time. Evolution brings risks, and sooner or later, the political structure fails to meet the needs of its people.

The Greeks paved the way for individual rights by promoting independent thinking (philosophy), leading to new ideas about how best to govern people. Instead of ruling through strength and leadership, the men of Athens showed how ideas could push their culture forward. To the Greeks, the human mind sought independence based on the principles of justice and fairness. Over centuries of Greek development, mathematics, science, philosophy, drama, and medicine advanced in ways that man could not have imagined.

Criticisms of the Greek Democracy

Four criticisms were leveled against Greek Democracy by their contemporaries. The first is that people had too much freedom. Aristotle was critical of this because if each person lived as he liked according to his "fancy," this was a bad thing. Plato in Republic complained that under a democracy, "the city is full of liberty and free speech and everyone in it is allowed to do what he likes ... each man in it could plan his own life as he pleases⁴."

Plato made the second charge, saying that democracy treats the equal and the unequal the same. Aristotle disagreed, stating there was no alternative unless criteria such as wealth and birth were used, but that approach would be anti-democratic. Demosthenes argued that what makes all citizens public-spirited is their belief in equality and justice. The Athenians did not seek absolute equality in theory or practice because they distinguished between different political functions.

The third criticism of Democracy came from Aristotle, who said the public was sovereign instead of the law. In other words, the majority in the Assembly could override the existing laws, already established, acting as a tyrant would act.

The fourth criticism brought by the philosophers against democracy was that it allowed the rule of the poor majority over the wealthy minority. Why should the government promote the interests of the poor at the expense of the

⁴ Plato. The Republic, VIII, -557b

wealthy? Democracy, by its character, must be directed to the advantage of the poor, which is illogical given that the rich are more knowledgeable.

Despite his criticism, Aristotle was not wholly opposed to democracy. His issue with Athens was that it was often *too* democratic. The common people were routinely tricked by populists and made decisions that served themselves rather than the state. Moreover, Athens lacked a substantial oligarchic or aristocratic counterweight to balance the public's desires. Aristotle believed tyrants appeared when laws were ignored and the people controlled the government.

That does not mean that Aristotle favored oligarchies. He believed that whenever the masses or the oligarchs gained power, both sides established governments that served their interests over those of the state.

Aristotle favored governments that had characteristics of both democracies and oligarchies. This kind of government would be characterized by its moderation. A citizen from such a mixed government did not come from the rich or poor but from the middle class. The middle class was not susceptible to the extremism of the rich and poor.

What could we say about Greek Democracy now, looking back 25 centuries? The Greeks developed a unique idealism about human life that encompassed all their institutions. Their idealism always produced systems that were well-reasoned and equitable. Fortunately for them, geography

and the way of life held the accumulation of power in check until permanent political systems were created. Even so, at various times in Greek history, tyrants took power. They were unable to sustain it, and democracy returned. The city-states of Greece ultimately fell because their lack of unity left each separate polis vulnerable to attack. The mountains that helped create the Polis prevented the Greeks from consolidating in a way that could repel a foreign army.

CHAPTER FOUR

Democracy in Britain and America

Democratic communities have a natural taste for freedom: left to themselves, they will seek it, cherish it, and view any deprivation of it with regret. - Alexis de Tocqueville

Politics did not exist in Western society until the beginning of the 18th Century. As the Enlightenment took hold and individual rights were recognized, the public began to agitate for voting rights and protection from arbitrary government action. Monarchs found themselves on the defensive across Western Europe. Some supported an expansion of rights, while others were opposed to any new freedoms. Most couldn't see how granting rights to the public would lead to better government. After all, the public was nothing more than an unorganized mob. Still, political factions and powerful men developed a liberal point of view and set themselves off against conservatives.

Enlightenment Progress

The Classical Liberals, who supported individual rights, argued for a minimal state, limiting government to protecting individual rights, maintaining national defense, and passing laws protecting citizens from each other.

In the 17th Century, liberal ideas began influencing governments in The Netherlands, Switzerland, England, and Poland. Other states retained the longstanding monarchical forms of government because power was held by those who

continued to favor absolute monarchy and established religions. France was torn apart by a devastating revolution that started in 1789. After ten years of counterrevolution Napoleon seized power and became the political leader. Those ten years were devastating for France because the entire culture and society, including the church, the nobility, and the government, were destroyed. Because there were no remaining traditions to build on, it took France 80 years to recover.

Most conservatives rejected the Enlightenment because it disrupted the traditions they lived by. Britain's most influential voice on that subject was Edmund Burke (1729-1797), who argued that continuing the traditional aristocracy was the only way to build the country's future leaders. Burke heavily criticized the French for their revolution, citing it as the best example of why traditions are important. The French people had destroyed their society to gain revenge against the monarchy, the church, and the aristocracy.

Although the Enlightenment was best known for its concept of individual freedom and influence on the emergence of science, capitalism, and democracy, another set of ideas appeared and had an equally significant impact on the future of Western society. Collectivism became a rival ideology, joining the fight to control the Western cultural and political landscape. Collectivists saw the Enlightenment's focus on the individual as dangerous because it ignored group interests, which was the traditional model of human society. That concern generated a new ideology called socialism, which sought to replace the emerging capitalist model with

group-oriented governments. To the collectivists, the individual did not have the right to dictate the function of government. In the view of the socialists, human society needed a government that could guarantee rights for all groups in society. The combination of Classic Liberalism and capitalism was immoral because it created an underclass and prevented the government from acting on behalf of all the people.

The 1848 Revolts

An earthquake in European politics occurred in the year 1848. That year, the people of most European countries revolted against their governments. Several factors led to these revolts, including the economic hardship affecting the lower classes, competing ideological battles between new political ideas, and dissatisfaction with out-of-date monarchies.

Liberals seeking democracy were the primary motivators for the revolutionary period. They no longer accepted autocratic regimes as legitimate and wanted to force change. Competing ideologies made the task of the revolutionaries more difficult. In addition to the liberals, socialists were trying to tear down state political systems, nationalists were trying to unite their nations, and monarchists were trying to defend the autocratic order. In many countries, liberals and socialists fought each other, trying to achieve the same objective.

The revolutions began in Italy in January. Italy, like Germany, was still composed of many small independent

states and was not a unified country. Tuscany, Lombardy, Piedmont, and Naples were separate states.

Remarkably, the revolutions were not coordinated between different states. Often, the people in one country would hear about the revolution in another, motivating them to move forward. Most of the 50 countries involved made progress against the monarchies during the period from January to March 1848. At that point, the monarchs realized they could keep power, so they struck back at the revolutionaries. There was a great deal of violence, but the monarchs kept control.

The revolutions ended in October 1849 with some successes but no significant changes in most countries. Serfdom was abolished in Austria and Hungary, absolute monarchy in Denmark ended, and representative democracy in the Netherlands was created. The revolutions were more important in France, the Netherlands, Italy, the Austrian Empire, and the states of the German Confederation that would make up the German Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The lesson from this revolutionary “trial run” was that Europe was not ready for radical change. The monarchs were still strong, and the people were torn between ideologies and unable to exert enough pressure to change their governments. Nationalism would remain strong, and within 20 years, Italy and Germany would become united countries. Over time, the people of Europe saw their voting rights expanded and constitutions ratified.

The British Political System

The British government avoided the turmoil of the other European states by building a liberal government earlier. The Magna Carta, signed in 1215, was signed after the nobility demanded that King John agree to govern by the rule of law.

Later, the British government evolved into its current parliamentary model by changing the original king's councils, created in the 11th Century. Those early parliaments had about 40 members, including the king, his ministers, religious leaders, and members of the nobility. In 1341, the commons were separated from the aristocracy and the clergy, creating a separate legislative body for the people. The upper chamber of nobility was named the House of Lords, and the lower chamber was the House of Commons. The king was responsible for appointing members of the House of Lords.

By the 1550s, both houses of Parliament passed legislation and sent it to the king for signature. The common people had little say in government action because of strict requirements for voting (property ownership). Only 3% could vote. During the 19th century, the structure of parliament evolved further. Voting rights expanded to include more citizens, and voting districts for the House of Commons were standardized. In 1911, after a period of intransigence by the House of Lords, that body was stripped of its power. Today, it is a ceremonial body with no authority. The House of Commons holds legislative power for all new laws, and its members represent districts.

British politics emerged when the Tory faction appeared in 1678. The Tories were conservatives who represented the traditions of the monarchy. The Whig Party appeared at the same time as the more liberal opposition. The Tories supported the monarchy, and the Whigs supported Parliament. The Tories were tolerant of Catholics, and the Whigs were not. The Whigs and Tories traded the Prime Ministry from 1721 to 1834. That year, the Tories were renamed the Conservative Party. The Whigs lasted until 1859 and then became the Liberal Party.

Before 1867, only 10% of the British population could vote. In 1885, over 50% of the population became eligible, which grew to 100% in 1918.

The British Labor Party and Socialist Party appeared simultaneously in 1906. The Labor Party has enjoyed some success, but the Socialist Party never won a single seat in Parliament.

The prime minister's position emerged when political parties began to operate. In 1720, during a financial crisis, King George I appointed Robert Walpole First Lord of the Treasury and leader of the House of Commons. Many men served as prime ministers over the next 200 years, although the title was unofficial. It became official in 1905. The prime minister is the leader of the majority party in Britain, so when a party reaches the majority, its leader takes office.

The modern British government came about as the mature stage of a legislative system that did not have a powerful monarch. The vacuum in Britain, left when the monarch's powers were removed, needed to be filled by a chief magistrate. Since tradition dictated that the party's leader in power controlled the legislative agenda, that person eventually became the prime minister.

The British system is one of two types of parliamentary systems: a Constitutional Monarchy and a Parliamentary Republic. A Parliamentary Republic does not have a monarch but features a weak president. Two-thirds of the European countries use one or the other of these parliamentary systems due to their transitions from monarchies.

The British parliamentary system has some advantages over the American system, depending on the point of view. First, the executive is not elected separately. The prime minister is simply the head of the majority party. That eliminates the presidential campaign and limits executive power. The Senate and the House are combined in the British parliamentary system. Britain does not have a checks and balances system because it doesn't need one. Parliament is the government. In America, the president has sole power over the executive branch and answers to no one except the American people. It would be more challenging for a prime minister to accumulate power in Britain because of the obligation to their party. If the majority party loses faith in its leader, he can be replaced.

The American Political System

America's founders rejected the power-class model used in Britain because it didn't apply. America lacked nobility, so there was no way to determine who would become "the few." More importantly, the founders did not want to grant monarchical power to a chief executive, who could use that power against the people. To solve these problems, the framers adopted the ideas of the French political philosopher Montesquieu and the philosopher Locke, who advocated a separation of powers and a checks and balances system.

The concept of a Greek-type democracy was too limited. It was practical for a tiny principality but too limited to be used in a nation-state. The founders wanted to design a government dedicated to the public good, so they had to decide how to handle conflicts that commonly arise in a diverse society. They could see that fitting a democratic model to a nation-state was impossible.

As the founders grappled with the structure of the American government, they realized it was necessary to step outside political history and incorporate ideas never used before. During their debates, the concept of representation was introduced. Representation was used during the medieval period when kings summoned individuals to act for them in assemblies. America's founders decided that representation could be bolted onto democratic republican theory and adapted to a society of any size, including the nation-state.

In each of the thirteen colonies, a governor led the executive branch, and the legislative branch contained two houses: a

governor's council and a representative assembly. Pennsylvania chose to have only one house in its legislature. During the colonial period, the British government appointed the governor for the royal colonies owned by the crown, and a proprietor was selected by the colony's board of directors in the privately owned colonies. Property owners elected the assembly in each colony. After the Declaration of Independence, the states dissolved their governments and created new ones. They also wrote their own Constitutions, many including a Bill of Rights.

During the Constitutional Convention in the summer of 1789, the delegates argued and debated as they designed the American political system. Fifty-five men attended the Convention, and thirty-nine signed the final draft after the states had voted to accept it. The vote was unanimous except for South Carolina, which split its vote. Rhode Island refused to attend the Convention.

Thirty-five delegates were lawyers, twenty-nine had served in the Continental Army, eight were governors, and thirteen were businesspeople. Four delegates are familiar to us as important historical figures: George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison. Thomas Jefferson was not one of the framers because he was serving as a minister to France. John Adams was also absent, serving as a minister to the Royal Court in England. Other names from the Revolutionary period, including Sam Adams and Patrick Henry, were not selected as delegates.

Washington was elected president of the Convention at the opening session and, although not an active participant, created an air of stability throughout the proceedings. Benjamin Franklin was eighty-one years old and played an active role, although he never addressed the delegation himself. Franklin asked colleagues to read his speeches.

There was great division in the ideological beliefs among the framers. The largest group represented by Washington, Hamilton, and Franklin supported a national government. They believed that people always put themselves ahead of group interests, so they must be governed and made to cooperate for the public good. Opposing them were the republican ideologues, who believed the government should use democratic republican principles, which focused on public virtue. The debate was a showdown between the Aristocratic Republic of Aristotle and the Democratic Republicanism of the Enlightenment.

One influencing factor in the ideological debates was the inadequacy of the Articles of Confederation, enacted in 1777. It had two significant drawbacks: no strong executive (president) and the states naming their representatives. The public had no part in governance. The new Constitution needed public elections and an independent office of the president who would be equal in power to Congress and the courts.

Small state concerns had to be addressed during the Constitutional debate. Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Delaware, and Maryland were small states. None of those

states had claims to western lands, so their boundaries were fixed for all time. The small states did not want the population to be used as the basis for electing the federal legislature because that would weaken their influence. They vetoed having the House and Senate elected by the people, supporting instead the concept of having representatives from both Houses chosen by the states. A compromise was reached when the convention agreed to have House members elected by the public and Senate members by the states.

The debate over the presidency was protracted because none of the states had a chief magistrate, so they had no experience with that office to draw on. The framers chose Rome as a model for the new federal government. They debated the office of Roman consul, the chief magistrate in the Republic. The Romans created twin consuls who served together for one year. They had veto rights over each other, preventing either from accumulating too much power. The delegates debated the twin-president concept but decided that it would be unworkable. After agreeing to have a single president, the delegates discussed the length of the presidential term. With no support for a suggested seven-year term, it was abandoned in favor of a four-year term.

By mid-September, the delegates were worn out from enduring the hot summer in a closed room; workers had sealed the windows so no one outside could listen to the debate. Benjamin Franklin gave a speech at the end of the proceedings,

I confess that there are several parts of this Constitution I do not currently approve, but I am not sure I will ever approve them. In these sentiments, Sir, I agree to this Constitution with all its faults, if they are such, because I think a general government is necessary for us. I doubt, too, whether any other convention we can obtain may make a better Constitution. When you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, passions, errors of opinion, local interests, and selfish views. From such an assembly, can a perfect production be expected? It therefore astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does, and I think it will astonish our enemies, who are waiting with confidence to hear that our councils are confounded like those of the Builders of Babel, and that our States are on the point of separation, only to meet hereafter to cut one another's throats. Thus, I consent, Sir, to this Constitution because I expect no better and am not sure that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors, I sacrifice for the public good. Within these walls, they were born, and here they shall die. On the whole, Sir, I cannot help expressing the wish that every member of the Convention who may still have objections to

it would, with me, on this occasion, doubt a little bit of his infallibility and to make manifest our unanimity, put his name to this instrument.⁵

The Constitution lacked a Bill of Rights because there was no consensus on including one. When state leaders realized the Bill of Rights was missing, they expressed their concerns. An organized group called the Anti-Federalists, led by Patrick Henry of Virginia, began to publish articles in newspapers critical of the Constitution. The group's principal concerns were the power of the presidency and the lack of a Bill of Rights, which they felt was essential to protect the people.

To combat the writings of the anti-Federalists, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote a series of articles (85) in favor of Constitutional ratification using the pseudonym "Publius" to disguise their names. These articles became known as the Federalist Papers. The Federalist writers published in New York newspapers because that state vehemently opposed ratification.

In December 1787 and January 1788, five states—Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut ratified the Constitution. Massachusetts, Virginia, and New York agreed to ratify if amendments were attached. By June 1788, a ninth state voted for ratification, reaching the number needed for official passage. James Madison compiled a list

⁵ Benjamin Franklin. Speech read on the last day of the Constitutional Convention, September 17, 1787.

of amendments and submitted them to Congress on July 21, 1789. The Bill of Rights reached final approval on September 25, 1789.

Was the new American government an aristocratic republic or a democratic republic? Probably more the former rather than the latter. The Federal Government was designed by the leading intellectuals of the late colonial period. All were wealthy, educated, and experienced in politics. The public had no part in creating or implementing the American political system. It was aristocratic in Aristotle's sense because experts were running the government, but also a republic because its growing middle class would serve as a connection between the lower and upper classes. Voting rights were limited to property owners (6% of the population). Each state's legislature selected its senators. The president was chosen by a majority of the electors from each state, and state governments chose the electors. The only voting right of the public was the election of members of the House of Representatives.

Over time, the United States became more democratic. By 1856, states had eliminated the property ownership requirement. Most states had relaxed the elector selection process by 1832, moving to the popular vote to determine the electors we have today. The last brick to fall was the election of senators by the people, enacted through the 17th Amendment in 1913. In 1920, Congress certified the passage of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote.

The 1920 version of America was more of a democracy than in 1789. Most citizens had the right to vote and the power to elect the primary officeholders in the Federal government. Was that enough to make America a real democracy?

CHAPTER FIVE

American Democracy Today

The Founders knew that a democracy would lead to some kind of tyranny. The term democracy appears in none of our Founding documents. Their vision for us was a Republic and limited government. – Walter E. Williams

Political systems and democracies operate as a balance between two great forces: the public and the elites. As mentioned in the previous chapter, elites controlled most societies before the Enlightenment, mainly through authoritarian governments and monarchies. When the Enlightenment began to tear down the old systems, there was a backlash from those trying to protect their power and authority. In the last chapter, we mentioned Edmund Burke, a member of the British Parliament during the revolutionary period. Burke's view of government and politics has survived until today because he attempted to characterize how modern governments should operate.

Burke maintained that the traditional British aristocracy was vital because it produced each generation of political leaders and maintained standards for qualification to serve the English people. Burke's beliefs became one of the two competing ideologies about the operation of a democracy, and his ideology is called “aristocracy” criticism or criticism by *elites*. Its base argument is if the public gains too much power, democracy will fail because the people, as a

controlled mob with too much influence, will destroy a political system.

The competing ideology is “democracy” criticism or criticism by *democrats* (the people). Their concern is that elites will have too much power. If the public is not protected from the government, the political system will become an aristocracy or dictatorship. The tug-of-war between these two views of government has been in play since the Enlightenment.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the American Constitutional Convention featured a battle between those who favored an aristocratic-like system with a robust federal government and those who preferred a democratic-like system featuring strong states and a balance of power between the states and the federal government. Ultimately, the founders compromised between those points of view.

The American government began life as a second-generation democracy, carrying forward the Greek Democracy with modifications. America was more like a republic than a democracy because the framers preferred the Roman republican model over the Greek democratic model. The founders never used the term democracy to refer to the political system they created. Over time, the American political system became more democracy-like when it expanded the voting franchise and removed corruption from the voting process.

Many people are familiar with Churchill's quote, "Democracy is the worst form of government ever created, but it is better than all the others." Indeed, "the others" have universally failed to offer benefits equal to those which come with democracy. Robert Dahl, in *Democracy and its Critics* (1989)⁶, provides a definitive analysis of democracies throughout history. He reviews the benefits and challenges of democratic systems and compares democracies worldwide.

The Theory of Democracies

Dahl discusses how democracies can offer significant benefits to the public and, at the same time, exhibit major defects. When people adopt a democracy, it tends to produce the most practical political system compared to the alternatives, but its flexibility can also be messy.

Dahl points out that at least four features of democracies are a measure of their value.

The first feature is intrinsic equality, which defines equality as a public right. All Americans are considered equal in collective decision-making, a traditional American value. Americans may not be similar in personality, intelligence, and body type, but for voting purposes, they are. Many common examples, like laws prohibiting criminal activity, demonstrate how intrinsic equality is applied. The government's responsibility is to apply criminal statutes equally to everyone.

⁶ Robert A. Dahl. *Democracy and its Critics*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1989.

What other ideas might intrinsic equality include? Does it include equality of opportunity? Some people think so. Here, we are wading into deeper water. Suppose you want to include equality of opportunity in intrinsic equality. To do that, you *must make it practical in a democracy*. Who will determine whether an individual has this right: the individual, the government, or some expert? Everybody is different, which makes this right challenging to implement. A proposed right can't be considered intrinsic unless there is a concrete method of applying it.

The second characteristic is freedom. Freedom is embedded in the democratic process as a benefit given to the people. In addition to general freedom, its associated rights include free expression, political organization, opposition, and free elections. Freedom is one of the essential attributes of a democracy because it makes people feel that their lives are under their control.

A third characteristic is self-determination. In theory, this means governing oneself and obeying laws chosen for oneself. Because human beings live in a society, they can't decide which laws to follow. The solution to that conflict is for them to vote in a democratic system and help control the laws they must obey. In other words, choose to live in a society that lives by the concept of a *government based on the consent of the governed*.

The fourth characteristic is moral autonomy. The freedom to govern oneself opens the door to other benefits, including

facilitating the personal development of citizens as ethical and social beings. A morally autonomous person chooses moral principles independently, without coercion, making him a better person and citizen.

These positive characteristics of democracies do not exist in other political systems.

I do not mean to imply that all democracies respect all rights. Dahl points out three ways democracies may violate rights. First, a majority may choose to infringe the right to vote, as in the case of women before 1920. Second, rights external to the democratic process may be violated. For example, poverty may limit an individual's ability to participate in the democratic process. Third, decisions made during the democratic process may violate individual rights. An example of this situation is a defendant not getting a fair trial.

Is it appropriate to criticize democracy if it isn't perfect and makes mistakes sometimes? *Not unless practical corrections to the denial of rights can be put into law.*

If a democracy is imperfect, the reason is that the conditions that would make it perfect have not been implemented. Either the conditions are impossible to implement, or they are possible but haven't been instituted. The people may have chosen not to implement them. Democracies, as they stand today, result from a quest for an ideal that falls short because of human nature. The government of a complex society cannot solve the problems of a mass of individuals who exhibit different behaviors and interests. Eliminating

failures would require voluminous laws and procedures that would have to be executed by an enormous bureaucracy. Even that scenario would fail because of the fickle nature of man.

The Evolution of Democracies

Dahl describes how 21st Century democracies represent the third stage in the development of democracy. The first stage was the Greek Democracy (700 BCE-330 BCE). The second stage, the transition to representative government, appeared during the Enlightenment and was exemplified by the United States (1787-). The third stage, featuring expanded suffrage to include nearly all citizens and guaranteeing honest elections, emerged in the 20th century.

Democracies evolved into a second stage out of necessity. There was no other way to achieve a direct voting model with a large population spread over a wide area.

Democracies evolved to a third stage based partly on public demands for a broader voice in government among women and minorities. Dahl's term for these late modern democracies is *polyarchy*, a democracy with multiple power sources.

In Dahl's definition, a polyarchy must include the following characteristics:

1. Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in public officials.

2. Elected officials are chosen in fairly and frequently conducted elections where coercion is relatively uncommon.
3. Practically all adults have the right to vote.
4. Practically all adults have the right to run for office.
5. Citizens have the right to express themselves without fear of punishment.
6. Citizens have the right to seek alternative forms of information, and the sources of that information are protected by law.
7. Citizens have the right to form independent associations or organizations, including independent parties and political groups.

Points 2 and 3 were invalid in the United States until the 20th Century. Before the secret ballot was enacted in 1884, there was widespread coercion and corruption in voting. Land ownership was a qualifying factor for voting until the mid-1800s, and women did not have the right to vote until 1920.

Dahl used the characteristics described above to develop a classification system for 20th and 21st Century political systems that would explain the growth of polyarchies. He examined political systems worldwide and showed how well

they complied with his definition. Dahl also described the factors that either led to the development of polyarchy or prevented it from developing. The primary reason nations did not qualify as polyarchies was their limits on voting rights (violating characteristic 3). The second reason was that parliamentary monarchies required the monarch's approval before legislation (violating characteristic 1) was implemented. Most European countries changed their laws in the early 20th Century and were then compliant with Dahl's criteria.

During the period between the world wars, some countries, most notably Italy and Germany, discarded democracy. Then, after World War II, the Eastern European countries had their democracies replaced by the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, many African nations that had practiced democracy degraded into authoritarian or military dictatorships.

Dahl's list is helpful for two reasons: to define and describe third-generation democracies and to utilize those definitions and descriptions to compare the quality of different democracies.

Dahl tabulated the distribution of the world's political systems in 1985.

World Political System Types

Advanced Polyarchies	41
Polyarchies with minor restrictions	10
Quasi-polyarchies with major restrictions	13
Dominant party regimes	12
Multi-party non-democratic	7
Non-democratic with limited freedom of Expression	48
Autocratic	26

This information can be used to understand how democracies change over time.

Why did polyarchies develop? For a nation to operate as a democracy, military and police organizations must be subject to civilian control, *and* the civilians who control the military must be subject to a democratic process (be elected). Historically, one factor limiting the American military's power was its small size and dependence on the foot soldier. An army must be large to carry significant political weight. The development of large weapons like atomic bombs after World War II changed that power calculation. Those weapons are much more dangerous, even if concentrated in a few hands. Their threat has to be minimized through various factors, including capping the number of weapons and troops, dispersing forces over different political units (states), and indoctrinating professional soldiers to understand they are under civilian control.

Other characteristics of successful polyarchies exist in the United States, including a high level of income and wealth,

long-term growth of capital and wealth, a high level of urbanization, occupational diversity, and a high educational attainment. These factors support dispersing power from a central government to various individuals, groups, associations, and organizations.

We need to take note of danger signals that appear in polyarchies. When a segment of the population believes its way of life and value are being menaced by another group, a rift occurs in that society. That rift in the extreme can cause civil war or the collapse of the political system. Culturally, the United States has a history of accepting immigrants from many cultures and tolerating those cultures for the most part. But today's tribalism is not cultural; it is ideological. That means that working to accommodate cultural differences will have no effect. It will take an ideological compromise to remove tribalism from America.

What is happening in the United States Today?

Dark clouds are visiting America in the 21st century. The current tribalist state is eroding the quality of its democracy. The evidence of this change is apparent in the *Economist Group's* yearly report, which rates the world's nations on the quality of their democracy. The rating system is a points scale that looks at five categories: electoral process and pluralism, functioning government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. Those reports have appeared every year since 2006.

In the 2007 report⁷, the United States was ranked 17th with a score of 8.22. America lost points in the categories of a functioning government and political participation. In 2016⁸, the United States was ranked 21st with a score of 7.98. The score was lowered for the same reasons cited in the prior example. In 2022⁹, the United States placed 30th at 7.85. This time, functioning government and political culture impacted the total.

Comparing the United States with other countries using the 2022 data shows an ominous trend.

			Avg Score	Electoral Process	Functioning Govt	Political Participation	Political Culture	Civil Liberties
1	Norway	Full democracy	9.81	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	9.41
2	New Zealand	Full democracy	9.61	10.00	9.29	10.00	8.75	10.00
4	Sweden	Full democracy	9.39	9.58	9.64	8.33	10.00	9.41
12	Canada	Full democracy	8.88	10.00	8.57	8.89	8.13	8.82
14	Germany	Full democracy	8.80	9.58	8.57	8.33	8.13	9.41
16	Japan	Full democracy	8.33	9.17	8.57	6.67	8.13	9.12
18	United Kingdom	Full democracy	8.28	9.58	7.50	8.33	6.88	9.12
22	France	Full democracy	8.07	9.58	7.86	7.78	6.88	8.24
22	Spain	Full democracy	8.07	9.58	7.50	7.22	7.50	8.53
25	Greece	Flawed democracy	7.97	10.00	7.14	6.67	7.50	8.53
29	Israel	Flawed democracy	7.93	9.58	7.86	9.44	6.88	5.88
30	United States	Flawed democracy	7.85	9.17	6.43	8.89	6.25	8.53
34	Italy	Flawed democracy	7.69	9.58	6.79	7.22	7.50	7.35
46	India	Flawed democracy	7.04	8.67	7.50	7.22	5.63	6.18
87	Ukraine	Hybrid regime	5.42	6.50	2.71	7.22	6.25	4.41
146	Russia	Authoritarian	2.28	0.92	2.14	2.22	3.75	2.35

The United States was 47th in functioning government and 46th in political culture. These factors result from tribalism, dividing our culture and inhibiting government operations.

⁷ The Economist. The Democracy Table, 2007.

⁸ The Economist. The Democracy Index, 2016.

⁹ The Economist. The Democracy Index 2022. February 1, 2023.

“Pluralism and competing alternatives are essential for a functioning democracy, but differences of opinion in the United States have hardened into political sectarianism and institutional gridlock¹⁰,” the authors wrote, explaining why America’s score for government functionality hit a new low point.

The narrowly divided Congress “has further crippled the legislative process, particularly as Democrats contend with widening divisions between their moderate and hardline members. Obstruction will worsen ahead of the November 2022 mid-term elections — which could flip the majorities in both houses of Congress — as neither party will want to appear to be ceding ground to the other¹¹,” they wrote.

Data gathered yearly about the quality of democratic systems worldwide shows that as of 2022, there were 24 high-quality democracies. There are also 48 “flawed” democracies, which sit a step below high-quality democracies. The United States has dropped into the “flawed” category.

Factors Impacting the Operation of American Democracy

Today’s most significant challenge to American Democracy is its tribal battle, which overshadows every other political issue in American society. Since the left and right have moved into tribes, communication between them has evaporated, and no consensus about the direction of America can be reached inside or outside of the government.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Tribalism Drivers

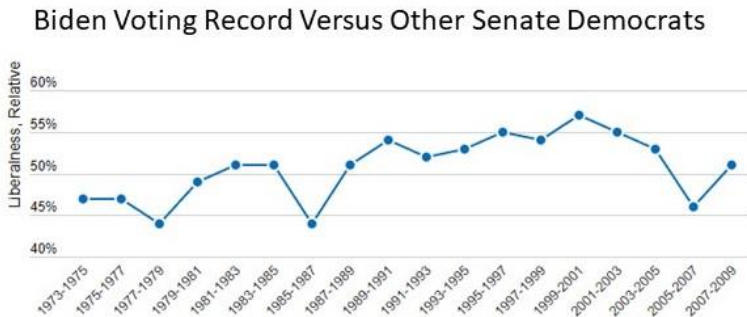
Cause	Reason	Support tribe
Historical factors	Traditional views	Right
Cultural differences	Immigration history	Left/right
Economic inequality	Capitalism, lack of government programs	Left
Political manipulation (secondary)	Party politics, no rules	Left/right
Fear and uncertainty	Confusion and disruption in society	Right
Social identity theory	Attracted by shared characteristics	Left or right
Globalization	Capitalism	Left/right
Media influence (left controls)	Capitalism	Left
Lack of cross-cultural understanding	Openness to differences, lack of communication	Left
Group dynamics	Forming abnormal groups which divide	Left

Tribalism was spawned by the factors listed above. These factors operate independently but then aggregate in people's minds. A combination of factors makes one of the tribes more attractive. Tribalism in America is nothing more than the public seeking safety to avoid an environment of political uncertainty.

Tribalism began to accelerate during the Bush years when the Iraq War became controversial. At the end of the Obama years, progressives on the left began to reject neoliberalism because of the expansion of inequality. Bernie Sanders started a populist presidential campaign in 2016 focused on fixing inequality. Although he gained tremendous popularity, his campaign was overcome by the political power of Hillary Clinton. The Trump election sidelined the left's momentum, but they were successful at attacking Trump as a corrupt, evil man. The progressive populists were ready to field a candidate for the 2020 election, but the party bosses selected the "moderate" Joe Biden instead. Surprisingly, Biden went out of character after his election

to embrace a progressive agenda. Progressives account for only 8% of Americans, so their views differ from almost everyone else.

Initially seen as his Achilles' heel in the 2020 Democratic primaries, Biden's 35-year Senate voting record shows how he broke with liberal orthodoxy on various issues. He voted to authorize the Iraq War and backed measures that led to mass incarceration. The graph below shows how *Voteview* ranks Biden's legislative ideology from 1973 through 2008: how he measured up among Senate Democrats. Biden was in the middle of the pack. On average, he stood at almost precisely his party's center line.¹²



Biden discarded his track record after he got elected. The Biden administration has embraced ending fossil fuels, funding renewable energy, limiting drilling, massive government spending (much in support of favored constituencies), and unlimited integration. Biden's support

¹² John Kruzell. *Joe Biden claims he was a staunch liberal in the Senate. He wasn't.* Politifact, May 6, 2019.

of new issues in identity politics, particularly transgender issues, is roiling the culture debate.

The left-right war in the United States has moved from the political to the ideological-religious. Attitudes on both sides reflect the personality characteristics of each group. The left is obsessed with equality and rapid change to improve the American political system. The right resists rapid change and embraces the traditions by which Americans have lived for 250 years. The left embraces science as its religion and believes man can control the planet. The right embraces more traditional religion and rejects the notion that man is in control. There does not appear to be a solution to the tribal state because each side holds its position firmly.

Other Factors

We cannot place all the blame for the state of American politics on tribalism because America has experienced tribalism before. Changes in society, including social, demographic, and economic factors, apply pressure on the U.S. political system to adapt.

American society began as an agricultural nation. In 1820, 72% of Americans worked on farms. By the end of the Civil War, industrialization was taking over as the primary economic engine in America. During the early 20th Century, America became a significant industrial society with bureaucratic service sectors. By the 1970s, America had transitioned to a post-industrial society. These vast shifts threaten people's livelihoods and impact their political views.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism began in the latter 1970s in response to attacks on capitalism and is a significant disrupter of democracies. Its ideology is built around the acceptance of capitalism as the primary engine of the West. To take full advantage of capitalism's benefits, the nation-state must support its application to all aspects of society.

In the beginning, neoliberalism was a conservative ideology. The left embraced it more fully in the Clinton years. After the Bush years and its embrace of neoconservatives, Obama returned neoliberals to center stage. After Obama, the left began an effort to return to their roots, which led to the rise in popularity of Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, who hammered away at the inequality in America.

Neoliberalism is capitalism taken to the extreme and a rejection of anything that gets in its way, including the welfare state. It's anti-democratic because it favors corporations over the people. As long as corporations make money, what happens to the people doesn't matter. The neoliberal connection to globalism is part of a strategy to create a world neoliberal state, replacing the nation-state as the entity controlling the world population.

The View of Another Democracy

Christophe Guilly, a French geographer, published his book *Twilight of the Elites* in 2019. Guilly writes about French society and its problems in the postmodern world. His book tells the story of France's embrace of globalism and its

impact on the French lower classes. In Guilly's telling, France has become a polarized society in tension. The transition to that state took place when the elites gained the support of the globalists, and together, they set out to transform the French economy. The net effect was that cities became the castles of capitalism, raking in the spoils, while rural areas and small towns were abandoned. France now has two main public groups: wealthy city elites and disadvantaged country folk with no voice. The gentrification of the cities has driven the lower classes out, leaving them in small towns with few jobs.

Like the United States, the French middle and lower classes were overpaid relative to overseas workers and lost their jobs during the transition to a global economy. The problems of the lower classes are not within the view of the elites, who focus only on growing their wealth. The continuing embrace of globalism promises a permanent future of anxiety for the lower classes.

The French elites have begun to realize the extent of this problem. Rather than help the lower classes, their solution is to make Paris a city-state and remove it from France. However, the future of France depends on the political class's acceptance of the plight of ordinary people and their willingness to do something about it. They have to stop rejecting criticism of the current system. France will either take steps to unite its people or live with perpetual conflict.

The real risk is that the elites will embrace a soft-totalitarianism model. That means they will accept election

results only when they like them. The operating principle behind that is that the working class does not understand political issues and gets carried away by their emotions. There has been talk of a weighted voting system where young people receive two votes and older people only one. The idea behind this was that young people are more willing to accept the government changes needed today. It is unlikely that the globalist French government will be able to carry off a political transformation that excludes the majority of its population.

The United States, like France, has many of the same problems: an elite agenda that does not include the people causes a widening of the wealth gap, large corporations in control, and isolated groups of American workers with no one to represent them.

CHAPTER SIX

Sources of Power, Elite Theory, and the Power Elite

This Power Elite directly employs several millions of the country's working force in its factories, offices, and stores, controls many millions more by lending them the money to buy its products, and, through its ownership of the media of mass communication, influences the thoughts, the feelings and the actions of virtually everybody. – Aldous Huxley

Elite behavior has been an essential characteristic of political systems since agriculture began 8,000 years ago. Once human populations reached a specific size, societies became differentiated by social and economic class, with elites at the top of the pyramid. Elites generated wealth through ownership of land, and that wealth gave them power. They could now influence their societies politically, economically, intellectually, and culturally. Today, elites occupy leadership roles in government, the military, corporations, finance, technology, media, and education. From their high position, they disproportionately influence the political and social structure of the United States.

In this chapter, we will discuss three approaches to understanding control by elites. The first was Michael Mann's Sources of Power Theory, published in the mid-1980s. Second was the Elite Theory, proposed by three Italian sociologists around the turn of the 20th century and

expanded by Higley and Burton in 2006. Third was the Power Elite Theory described by C. Wright Mills in 1956.

Sources of Power Theory

Sociologist Michael Mann proposed a Source of Power theory to explain how elites operate in large human groups. Mann's model defines four networks that compete with each other: ideological, economic, military, and political. These networks make up the power structure of any democracy. If you think about the forces that can influence the government, you will see they come from one or more of these networks.

The four networks overlap, and one group may be transformed into another. For example, Iran developed a powerful religious authority that later became a political network. The United States military was perhaps the most powerful of the networks during World War II. After the war ended, the military moved into the economic group.

In the United States, the four networks developed out of the circumstances that existed after the American Constitution was ratified. Both the military and the federal government were weak. An ideological power group did not exist because the separation of church and state blocked the formation of religious power groups. Farmers were the sole economic power, but their power was dispersed across the country. As the Industrial Revolution progressed, corporations replaced farms as the primary contributor to financial power. During the New Deal Era, the American government expanded as welfare state programs were introduced. That meant the growing political network and

the corporations that made up the economic network were now partners. World War II raised the status of the military network, and it remained elevated during the Cold War.

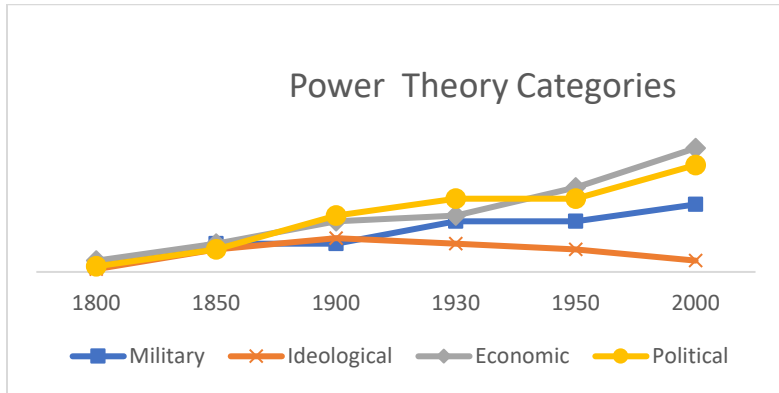


Chart 1

Chart 1 shows the evolution of the power networks in America. Ideological power was significant in America until the 20th Century when it began to decline. Military power steadily grew in importance during World War II and the Cold War. Corporations became the primary economic power in the late 19th century and dominate today. Political power has expanded with the size of the federal government and because of its close connection with corporations. Corporations enjoy the most potent power position.

Mann believes power is rooted in organizations, defined by rules, roles, and routines. These groups emerge to accomplish a specific purpose once they agree on how to do things. Groups grow and become hierarchical, and with that hierarchy comes power. Many groups compete, and those that compete most successfully gain the most power. These

four potent groups are as old as humankind and reflect normal human behavior. In a primitive human tribe, the chief exerted political power, the medicine man exerted ideological power, the best warrior exerted military power, and the man with the most land exerted economic power. All four of these types work in opposition and determine the path of a political system.

Elite Theory

The character and history of elites are the subject of the 2006 book *Elite Foundations of Liberal Democracy* by John Higley (1938-) and Michael Burton (1944-)¹³. The authors characterize the elites in the following quote, "In all modern societies, political power is necessarily concentrated in a few persons, but the configurations these persons form vary importantly among societies and within them over time¹⁴." They define elites as "persons who are capable, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations and movements, to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially¹⁵."

The number of elites in a complex society is a few thousand. If it were larger, interconnectivity between group members would be too unwieldy to be effective.

¹³ John Higley and Michael Burton. *Elite Foundations of Liberal Democracy*. Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

¹⁴ Ibid, page 6.

¹⁵ Ibid, page 7.

According to the authors, guile and cunning are two basic types of elite personalities. The former are the "foxes," ruling through persuasion, deception, and fraud, and the latter are the "lions," which are bold and rule through force. These styles conflict and compete for control of the elite organization. These personality types are common in successful people, whether in entrepreneurship, business management, or government. These traits also build and extend the middle class and place pressure on the wealthy who lack ambition.

Within the elite groups, there are two types: united and disunited. United elite groups communicate through a tight network based on value agreements and codes of conduct dictating member behavior. Divided groups are separated from each other, disagree about political norms, and have no single code of conduct.

United elite groups also have two types: consensually united and ideologically united. Consensually united groups accept competition as a part of their operation. Ideologically united groups concentrate power at the top and use force to maintain loyalty to their ideology.

Each type of elite organization maps to a specific political system. Studies have demonstrated that the elite class and its corresponding political system are interdependent. In other words, a political system type builds the elite system that supports it.

Postulated Elite-Regime Relations

Elite Configuration	Regime type and subtypes
Consensually united	Stable representative (Liberal democracy)
Ideologically united	Stable unrepresentative (Totalitarian or Theocracy)
Disunited	Unstable representative (Illiberal democracy)
Disunited	Unstable unrepresentative (Monarchy)

Chart 2¹⁶

A consensual united elite network exists in the United States. Their goals and activities are advanced by the tight network of interactions in which members operate. Elite behavior depends on the similarity of its personnel, their personal and official relationships with each other, and their psychological and social affinities. Members group together based on their area of expertise. The unity of the elite network comes from the career and lifestyle of each circle member. From a party and ideology standpoint, elites are divided because there are members from both political parties. Still, the internal discipline of the elite community is more potent than party affiliation, so it always rules. There is always a question about whether the elites are adaptable given their group code of conduct. Can they transcend that code and place the American people above personal interests when necessary?

Elite Behavior

Elite behavior is determined by the individual's social position and the psychology that motivates them. In other

¹⁶ Ibid, page 19.

words, how they are admitted, praised, and promoted to their social circles. Those within a specific circle have similar personalities, and the codes they live by are a measurement system for their behavior. One variable is their association with other elites through clubs, resorts, golf courses, and vacation spots. They also meet at each other's estates and share a microphone on TV when interviewed. Prestige accumulates through their associations, facilitating their elite position. Power standards are used to judge them because they are the agents of influence. In other words, they are judged by their success at exerting power. Members of a unified elite have assurances from the other elites that missteps or mistakes they make will not harm their reputation. An example of this is the case of President Nixon, who maintained a place in the elite network after resigning from office in disgrace.

Since America is a liberal democracy, its elite system is stable and unified. Its operation is an arrangement among members that allows their group to lose an election, knowing they can win the next. Those peaceful competitions between factions widen popular representation and legitimize democracy.

Elites in American History

America inherited a united elite from Britain but did not accept all aspects of that structure. The new Americans were more antagonistic toward monarchy and state religion than the English, rejecting both. When Britain removed the Stuart kings and adopted its new Constitution, the American

colonies were motivated to create their own Declarations of Rights.

The British Parliament was distracted and loosened its control over the colonies from 1690 to 1765, which gave the Americans leeway to govern as they saw fit. They gained experience governing, and the colonial elites became more unified. After the French and Indian War ended in 1763, Parliament attempted to reassert strict authority over the colonies, but it was too late to put the genie back into the bottle. The colonial elites immediately resisted the British efforts at control, and colonial resistance accelerated America's desire for independence.

The Declaration of Independence resulted from a consensually forming elite, unified from the long, arduous effort to resist British control. Internal opposition to independence disappeared when elites who supported the British left America during the revolution.

The federal design of the Constitution was a compromise, as was the separation of powers and checks and balances. When some states refused to ratify the Constitution without a Bill of Rights, the framers knew they had to create one. The most divisive issue, slavery, had no obvious solution. How could a new nation guarantee rights for its citizens while excluding one of its constituencies? The compromise over slavery hammered out during the Constitutional Convention delayed the inevitable battle between the North and the South. Without it, the Southern states would not have ratified the Constitution.

The North's motivation to defeat the South in the Civil War resulted from the widespread desire among its people to restore the national government created in 1789. A similar sentiment in the South allowed it to accept defeat and reunify with the North after the war ended. The Democratic Party had split over slavery before the war, with the Democrats in the North supporting Lincoln and the Democrats in the South supporting secession.

The North-South compromise over the 1876 presidential election was a North-South elite accommodation. The North received the votes needed to elect President Hayes. In contrast, the South received guarantees that the Reconstruction effort would end. After Reconstruction, the South embraced the Democratic Party in opposition to the Republican Party in the North. The two elite groups later reunited to form a single set of elites in the United States.

The Power Elite

C. Wright Mills (1916-62), in *Power Elite* (1956),¹⁷ defined power elites as the subset of all elites with the most significant influence over the politics and economy of the United States. They actively manage and direct the federal government while other elites remain passive. Power elites are a heterogeneous group of wealthy upper-class people, including corporate executives and political outsiders. They are top-income earners and reside near the top of their career organizational pyramid. They probably attended Ivy League schools.

¹⁷ C. Wright Mills. *The Power Elite*. London, Oxford University Press, 1956.

The circles inhabited by power elites facilitate movement between them, and an individual can occupy more than one circle simultaneously. Moving between circles tests elite power, enhancing their image when they succeed in multiple circles. The power elite has an inner core, including those occupying top roles in more than one dominant institution. Financial experts and lawyers are uniquely positioned because they link the various circles by lending their wide-ranging skills.

The idea of a power elite helps us understand institutional trends observed in American society, the personalities and behaviors of the individuals who occupy power positions, and the power held by a group of individuals unrestrained by political training. Most politicians sit on the second tier below the power elite, hindered by their dedication to local issues. There is no politically neutral component of the power elite, and it always expresses itself through one party philosophy or the other. Decisions made by the power elite are secret, and the elites are not responsible to the public.

The theory of American Democracy relies on the role of the public, which is to exert control of the government through the election process. Politicians are supposed to listen to the people, ascertain their views, and act accordingly. Conventional wisdom says public opinion behaves like the economy. In other words, the sum of all the factors affecting economic inputs drives the economy forward: money transactions, manufacturing, service delivery, employment, etc. In the same way, the public forms political opinions based on all the discussions between voters, which lead to a

consensus. The separate role of each individual makes the system work, and the process starts with each person's opinion. Is this reality?

Most Americans accept the romantic model of democratic power as an automatic balance, with its assumptions of a plurality of independent, relatively equal, and conflicting groups in a balanced society. Sociologist David Riesman (1909-02) supported that idea when he said, "During the past half-century (1900-1950), there has been a shift from a power hierarchy of a ruling class to the power dispersal of veto groups."¹⁸

Riesman supported pluralism because his concept did not distinguish between the top, middle, and bottom power levels. His balance of power theory was a narrow-focus view of American politics, where too much attention to the mid-levels disguises the actual power structure. In his view, checks and balances at each level balance the American economic classes. This balance is a system where individual layers of society have autonomy and use it to hold the federal government in check.

Unfortunately, our society now consists of an economy in which small entrepreneurs have been replaced by large corporations, resulting in an imbalance of authority, making the executive branch supreme and pushing the legislative branch down to the middle levels. America is a political economy with political and economic affairs joined together.

¹⁸ David Riesman. *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1961.

The new corporate-driven power elite has caused significant change in the American government's control structure, and the middle class is now dependent on this new machinery. A dependent white-collar class has joined the old middle class. Still, they are not united and cannot exert power inside the corporate system. Labor continues to fight for relevance as a united but smaller special interest group.

Today's American government is not merely a framework within which contending pressures jockey for position and make political decisions. The government now has interests vested in its hierarchical structure; some are higher and more ascendant than others. There is no adequate opposing power against the coalition of prominent businesspeople now occupying command positions. While professional party politicians are still sometimes power brokers, they are no longer at the top of the state. Professional politicians are ascending when the middle classes are able to exert power. Politicians lose control when the middle classes decline.

The formation of the power elite rests upon the following:¹⁹

- The fall of the professional politician to the mid-level of power
- The stalemate of interests of local politics and mid-level legislators
- The absence of a politically neutral civil service that is relevant and skillful

¹⁹ Paraphrased from Mills, p 296.

- Important decisions made in secret without the knowledge of Congress or the public

The politicians and the corporate rich have come together as the power elite. They have expanded and centralized hierarchies that have replaced the old power structures and re-regulated them to the mid-levels of power. So, balancing society is a concept that pertains to the middle levels.

The public is left behind: uninformed and categorized into impotence.

Dominant Circles in the Power Elite.

Today's power elite consists of circles of influence representing the structure of 21st Century society, including government, the military, corporations, finance, and the media. Depending on the stability of the United States and its relationship with the rest of the world, one or more of these circles were dominant at various periods in history. For example, during wartime, the military played a vital role. In times of economic distress, such as the Great Recession, the government and financial organizations take center stage.

The government's position is critical because the United States is a democracy, and its people expect the government to respond to their needs. When the government falls into the second tier, it degrades democracy because there are circles above it that exert control over it. Today, corporations, including tech companies, exert that control.

In *Who Rules America* (2022)²⁰, G. William Domhoff (1936-) asserts that corporations formed a strong connection with the Power Elite after World War II. The evidence for that connection is that elites control significant quantities of stocks, maintain close relationships with corporations via investment partnerships and holding companies, and work to get professional managers of middle-level origins absorbed into the upper class. Research studies have verified the existence of an elite class of upper-income Americans who are socially connected.

A third circle overlaps the power elite and corporations, known as the policy planning network. Corporations and the power elite created this set of non-profit, non-partisan organizations to conduct research and produce policy preferences they can communicate to the federal government. There are four ways corporations and the power elite interact: provide financing for the policy-planning organization, provide services to them, such as legal and accounting services, serve as trustees of organizations they control, and participate in PPN daily activities.

The policy planning process begins in corporate board rooms, social clubs, and informal discussions, which identify issues to be solved by new policies. The ideas are passed to foundations, think tanks, and policy discussion groups for review. No single organization is more important than the others. It is a network of organizations that play different roles.

²⁰ G. William Domhoff. *Who Rules America? The Triumph of the Corporate Rich*. New York, McGraw Hill Education, 2022.

In concert with large corporations and financial institutions in the corporate community, the foundations, think tanks, and policy decision groups provide the organizational basis for exercising power on behalf of the power elite. The leaders of those organizations are members of an institutionalized leadership group for the corporate rich. They work to preserve the governmental rules and regulations that make the inequality in wealth and income distributions possible.

Circles of the Power Elite.

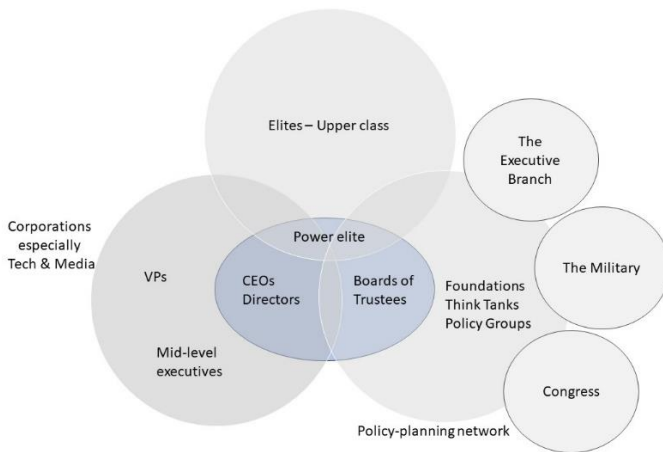


Figure 1

Figure 1 shows the relationship between the elite class, corporations, and the policy-planning network.²¹ Relationships are fluid with no overall coordination. The

²¹ Original diagram in G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America? The Triumph of the Corporate Rich*. New York, McGraw Hill Education, 2014.

elites and the corporations may often disagree about which policies take priority.

The policy planning network expands the reach of the power elite by providing experts to support its activities. Because government officials have small policy-making staff, they must rely on foundations, policy groups, and think tanks to supply them with new ideas. This power is expressed on the elites' behalf without their government involvement. The power elite exerts their influence through the strength of their organization, the status power of their elite position, and the expertise they provide. Even with these powers, there is no guarantee the power elite can control the government, so they must employ other tools to accomplish their objectives. These tools include manipulating public opinion, influencing political parties, and applying direct pressure on the government.

Public Opinion, Party Influence, and Government Pressure

Opinion polls and studies have shown that even though the American public is sensitive about specific issues, they are not connected to detailed legislative proposals when introduced and when they move toward a vote. The people don't know how their representatives will vote on that legislation, suggesting that public opinion is not focused enough to impact legislation. Nevertheless, the power elite constantly fears public opinion may generate policies they don't like. Their response to that fear is actively working to influence the public.

The power elite spends millions of dollars annually to shape public opinion in response to that fear. Key players in the policy-making network, such as think tanks and policy discussion groups, participate in an opinion-shaping network. They do not get involved in the process directly other than releasing reports to the media. Instead, they form special committees that seek to change public opinion on a particular issue. Their strategy is to portray the situation as a crisis that needs to be addressed quickly. They also disseminate information through schools, churches, and voluntary organizations after establishing working relationships with them.

Those materials carry a subtle message designed to appeal to the American tradition of personal responsibility. Americans believe in the concept of the land of unlimited opportunity, so they are supposed to blame themselves for not being successful, not the government. Self-blame was one of the strongest criticisms of America by the socialists, who argued that Americans were brainwashed into accepting evil capitalism as a system that was always good.

Corporate leaders view liberal opinions of the economy as annoying and troublesome. They blame the problem on the public's lack of understanding of economic issues. They believe a better-educated public would support their principles, so they spend millions of dollars trying to educate the public. That reeducation process is an uphill battle because people have their own experiences and those of their friends as evidence of how the American economy operates.

The power elite controls the mass media because they own large media companies and have relationships with all the major corporations. They use the media to reinforce the legitimacy of the political system by preaching respect for business and government leaders, but the public's perception of bias in the media decreases its effectiveness.

Elections and Parties

Elections provide the best opportunity for the public to shape government action through their votes. At the same time, elections are the scariest time for the power elite because they do not have control over the outcome. They are limited to influencing candidate selection and funding candidates they prefer. An example of power elite fears made real was the Trump election in 2016. Trump was the ultimate boogeyman of the elites because they couldn't control him with money, and he carried a populist message. Populism is a measure of public dissatisfaction with the government, and the elites can't predict what direction it will take.

Despite the power elite's influence over public opinion, election time is when they must pay attention to voter opinion. The public understands economic issues better because they see their impact on their lives every day. The power elite must take specific action to influence public opinion in these situations. The practice of gerrymandering and voter suppression laws have been a factor in American elections, and the power elite commonly use them.

Today, only two parties have the organizations and funding to run campaigns nationwide. Each party makes its own rules

regarding candidate selection and tries to field the best candidate. This “American” system discourages third parties because they don’t have the money and the platform to attract a significant percentage of voters. They are not permanent organizations and only appear when widespread dissatisfaction with the two major parties exists.

The power elite views third parties and wildcard candidates in the same light: a risk to them. Since third-party interest flows directly out of voter dissatisfaction, allowing third parties to obtain any power would mean relinquishing power to the people.

The power elite uses the same mechanisms for the influence they manage daily, applying them at election time. That means matching their ideology with candidates and funding candidate activities in primaries to ensure they win.

Foreign Policy

The power elite has two primary motivations in foreign policy: to prevent destabilizing events that may impact the United States and to promote their financial interests. Those objectives are challenging since elites have less control and influence over other nation-states. Managing foreign policy requires unique skills not found in many power elite members, so they must rely on specialists to assist in policy development.

Opinion polls indicate that the public is more liberal and less militaristic than the elites. The power elite believes that the public has little knowledge of foreign policy matters and will

likely accept foreign policy decisions out of patriotism or fear of opposing countries. Public influence operations through the opinion-shaping network are directed at highly interested citizens with a college education.

The Foreign Policy Association is the primary vehicle for communication with interested citizens. They provide literature and create discussion groups in middle-class organizations and college campuses, working closely with local Foreign Affairs councils. Independent and corporate foundations support these activities.

This chapter has described the three theories of elite control in democracies. The evidence for elite control is strong and should not be ignored. The American public must understand the elite structure and influence if it is to oppose its operation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

New Circles in the Power Elite

Information technology alone cannot provide us an absolute shield against its evil twin disinformation technology. Our only protection is law, and that protection is available to us only if legitimate governments have the power to govern. –

Paul Starr

Manufacturing dominated the American economy when C. Wright Mills published the *Power Elite* in 1956. For that reason, Wright identified three components of the power elite: political, economic, and military. Manufacturing dominated the economic space then, while technology and finance were in their infancy.

Technology Elites

The composition of the corporate elite has changed significantly in the last thirty years, and the growth and influence of the leading technology companies have moved them into the power elite orbit. Because some are corporations *and* media companies, those companies have a more significant impact than traditional media due to their reach. Their founders represent a new generation of successful business creators: new money and a more left-leaning political philosophy.

A profile of the top 100 Tech elites worldwide published in 2021²² describes their characteristics. The study analyzed keywords from Twitter conversations and hypothesized that keywords accurately represent the Tech elite's beliefs and opinions about various subjects. In 2017, those individuals had a net worth of \$1.081 trillion. They invested primarily in computer software, hardware, and internet-related technologies and services. Founders, executives, and investors in companies like Facebook, Google, Amazon, Airbnb, eBay, and Microsoft were on the list. The group consists mainly of middle-aged men; 94 are men, and six are women, with an average age of 54. Half are Americans by nationality, and they share similar educational backgrounds. Elite American higher education institutions play a decisive role: Harvard (13) and Stanford (10) were the most frequently attended universities. Yet 22 of the top 100 never studied at a college or university.

As representatives of an economic elite, they do not demonstrate typical views of the relationship between democracy, money, and power. Most Americans understand the relationship between capital and power and the relationship between money and democracy. Technology elites dispute there is a relationship between money and democracy, which suggests that elite members believe market success and financial wealth should be part of a worldview that downplays democratic representation. In other words, they think the United States can function

²² Brockmann H, Drews W, Torpey J (2021) A class for itself? On the worldviews of the new tech elite. PLoS ONE 16(1): e0244071. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0244071>

efficiently WITHOUT the people's input. They are unique among special interest groups: more global in outlook, outside the democratic order, and aware of how the power of their wealth can circumvent the democratic process.

The percentage of the 400 wealthiest Americans who made their money primarily in the technology sector has tripled over the last several decades. Technology entrepreneurs direct companies with enormous structural power over governments through their ability to control investment and jobs. Their resources are significant. By market capitalization, the top five public corporations in the United States are technology companies: Apple, Amazon, Alphabet/Google, Microsoft, and Facebook. The ubiquitous presence of technology products in Americans' lives gives technology entrepreneurs an unprecedented platform to influence and mobilize the public. The average American spends about a third of their waking hours using a computer or smartphone. This access to the public can be enormously influential.

Millions of Americans work for companies founded and operated by technology entrepreneurs. These numbers continue to increase as over half of America's job growth from 2013 to 2015 was from firms in just four digital service areas. Employers can powerfully influence their employees' political behavior, and this leverage gives executives sway over officeholders.

Technology entrepreneurs are loyal to the Democratic Party. Campaign contributions to Democrats from technology

industry employees and ultra-wealthy technology investors vastly exceed the contributions to Republicans. Technology entrepreneurs agree with typical Democratic Party positions on most issues. But this is not the case for all.

Theories of political development predict that as a powerful group aligned with one party senses its growing capacity to influence politics, it begins to steer that party's ideologies and platforms toward its policy views and priorities. Technology entrepreneurs expect their power over and influence of the Democratic Party to grow as they increase the pressure on Democratic officeholders.

Although technology entrepreneurs overwhelmingly support Democrats, they share a unique set of views across policy domains, being conservative in some important areas. On issues related to economic redistribution, globalization, and social issues, technology entrepreneurs are as liberal as or more liberal than Democratic citizens, wealthy Democratic individuals, and Democratic donors; they are also more liberal on all these issues than millionaires in the mass public. However, technology entrepreneurs are very conservative in terms of government regulation.

They oppose government regulation because it violates the spirit and ability to execute their businesses. They have built companies on their own with no help. They believe that the technology space requires significant freedom because of the speed with which it changes and its technical challenges, so regulation is inappropriate.

Technology entrepreneurs exert pressure on the power elite through various avenues. First, they make up a block of progressive-thinking Democrats pushing the Democratic party to the left. In that role, they provide significant funding for progressive initiatives. At the same time, these entrepreneurs oppose labor unions and regulation. Union-supporting liberals must tolerate that opposition to continue their close relationship with politicians. The Democratic Party is adapting its platform to fit the new reality of Silicon Valley influence.

Technology entrepreneurs are the most pro-globalist of any group other than Democratic donors. For example, they are the most likely to say that trade policy should prioritize the well-being of those abroad instead of Americans (with 44% agreeing), to disagree that we should pay less attention to problems overseas (with 53% disagreeing), and to support free trade agreements (87%). Additionally, 56% of tech entrepreneurs favor increasing immigration levels, which is essentially equal to Democratic donor numbers and 15 points higher than Democratic citizens. All these policy views favor greater global equality.

On social issues, technology entrepreneurs are liberal like Democratic donors and more liberal than Democratic citizens. They nearly universally support same-sex marriage (96%), favor gun control (82%), oppose the death penalty (67%), and view abortion as a matter of personal choice (79%). Finally, perhaps most surprisingly, technology entrepreneurs strongly support redistribution and taxation.

Technology Direction

The rise in technology has been unprecedented. In the 1960s, when computer power began to influence business, its only role was to automate essential business functions. Today, technology has permeated all businesses, increasing productivity and facilitating efficiency. The technology industry in the United States accounts for 35% of the total world market!

Technology has changed every American's life, revolutionizing how we communicate, work, learn, and entertain ourselves. The internet has made our planet smaller, allowing connectivity everywhere. Letters and landline calls have given way to messaging, video calls, and social media platforms providing real-time interaction. The new communication paradigm has facilitated personal connections and revolutionized business and commerce, allowing seamless global transactions and collaborations.

Technology has made working more efficient. A work-anywhere model has replaced the idea of an office workspace for all. Automation and AI have removed mundane tasks from the workers' responsibilities, freeing them up for more complicated activities.

The freedom of connectivity has profoundly changed America's educational system. Online learning gained traction during the pandemic when schools closed. The availability of tools and resources allows everyone to learn more efficiently. Augmented reality offers the opportunity to learn in ways the classroom can't duplicate.

The entertainment landscape has changed in ways not anticipated as recently as twenty years ago. Streaming services allow TV shows and movies to be available on any platform at any time. Traditional broadcast models continue to lose market share as more people discard them.

Technology has permeated the life of every American through the use of cellular phones with internet connections. Applications on those phones provide tools to make us more efficient, help us communicate, shop, and even improve our health. The devices give us rapid access to information for choosing dining places or navigation guidance.

Technology has brought significant innovation to the medical field. Robotic surgery, better diagnostic tools, and telemedicine are examples. Genetic information will target medicines and therapies to specific individuals. Drug development will also advance through integrating large data sets via artificial intelligence.

Another area of technological innovation is the home. The Internet of Things (IoT) has created many devices in the house that provide monitor and control functions. These devices can also learn and adapt to the environment. Money is saved through control over energy use.

Transportation is another area of innovation where autonomous driving capability and automated transportation systems are growing in popularity. Electric vehicles offer the chance to lower carbon emissions and help make the air cleaner.

Unfortunately, the incredible power of technology has brought with it a set of problems that human society has not experienced before. The most critical of these problems are security, privacy, and protection from bad actors who operate everywhere. Social media emerged as platforms to host but not moderate content to meet federal government rules, removing them from liability for dangerous and inappropriate content. That model has not worked because the platforms were forced to censor inappropriate content and have failed in that effort. The federal government would like to fix the problem, but there is no consensus on the solution. While this problem is not addressed, the public is harmed. The platforms have also been bad actors in exploiting users' private information for profit.

With all the incredible capabilities technology has brought us, we must accept the liabilities that come with them. Digitalizing everything has produced an overwhelming amount of data and information overload. Individual privacy has been compromised, and bad actors have become lethal, attacking young people who are not discerning enough to protect themselves. Cybersecurity threats pose an ongoing problem for corporations and individuals who may be attacked and be subject to theft. Since technology is ubiquitous in our lives, we have to learn to navigate its use. The government must work with technology companies to find a balanced approach to technological innovation that limits the disruption to American society.

The impact of technology we have described here demonstrates the industry's influence as members of the

power elite, both direct and indirect. Its products drive the economy, which depends on technology to run its businesses. Technology stocks drive growth in the stock market, which uses them as a bellwether for future growth.

The Financial Elite

In the last thirty years, the finance sector has gained influence within the power elite because of the growth of investing and the ability to achieve high investment returns. Workers in the financial industry earn two to three times the income from other corporate sectors. The well-publicized increases in compensation for CEOs find those in the financial industry at the top of the list.

The financial sector is a section of the economy consisting of firms and institutions that provide financial services to commercial and retail customers. For the American economy to thrive, it must have a robust and safe financial sector.

Components of the sector include:

Commercial banks loan money and issue credit cards.

Investment banks underwrite debt and equity for the private and public sectors, handle mergers and acquisitions, restructure businesses, and do investment research.

Investment Service organizations that manage hedge funds, private equity, and venture capital.

Insurance companies that sell and underwrite insurance policies.

Speculator capitalists replaced industrial and petroleum capitalists starting in the 1970s. Changes in government rules and consolidations have grown the finance business enormously.

Enthusiasm for investment innovation has led to new forms of investing. Instruments such as futures, options, derivatives, and swaps were created to expand the opportunity to make money. Financial service firms hire mathematicians to design new investment vehicles around these structures. A shadow banking system processes monetary transactions outside banks' balance sheets. The system had become increasingly complex, opaque, and ungovernable because some investments are hard to understand, and most are unregulated.

Financiers have always been a part of the power elite because their skills are critical to maximizing wealth and profitability. Like technologists, they have two roles in the power elite: they are members based on their credentials and serve as consulting subject experts. Their subject expert role is akin to the role played by lawyers. Both have skills required to influence government policy through activities they validate. Nearly every business transaction requires a lawyer and a financial expert to structure the transaction. Some financial experts advance to become power elite members based on their accomplishments.

The power elite of the financial industry is part of a worldwide finance and financial transactions network. These people run banks, insurance companies, investment banks, and hedge funds. These companies' boards of directors and the Federal Reserve Bank are also part of the power elite. Key members of this group huddled when the Great Recession unfolded in 2008 and devised a plan to save the American economy. When not bailing out customers, they participate in a worldwide network of financiers who try to stabilize the world economy while making enormous sums of money for their shareholders.

America's top 10 banks collectively logged asset growth of \$629.80 billion in 2017, accounting for more than 70% of the aggregate asset growth at the 50 largest US banks.

Their accumulated power is a two-edged sword for Americans because the investment instruments they create can benefit investors but at the same time foster instability in the markets due to unintended consequences. What about the portion of the public that does not invest? They are the ones that usually suffer the consequences of a financial collapse.

In the past 20 years, the power elite has changed its character through the influx of technology and financial elites. The leverage created by these two business types has pulled the power elite to the left and forced it to adapt. We should expect the influence of these groups to grow further and their impact to increase.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mass Behavior

For the amoral herd that fears boredom above all else, everything becomes entertainment. Sex and sport, politics and the arts are transformed into entertainment. ... Nothing is immune from the demand that boredom be relieved (but without personal involvement, for mass society is a spectator society). – Merold Westphal

In the last two chapters, we discussed the structure of the power elite who control America from above. Communications between the public and the government are supposed to travel in both directions, informing the people of the intentions of elected officials and informing elected officials of the policy views of the public. The risk of this open structure is that elites will dominate communications and make them one-sided. If the people remain strongly organized, they can avoid that outcome. When people are disorganized, they fall into mass behavior.

In a *mass society*, elites and the public are directly available to each other, which is a potential problem because that exposure can disturb the balance a democratic society requires. The exposure of either must be offset by intermediate groups acting as information aggregators while communicating upward and downward. The public interacts with local groups, like clubs and associations, which serve as platforms for opinion formation. Those opinions then travel upward to state and federal government officials. The

government also communicates downward through intermediate groups.

For example, a local charitable group may contact their congressman for financial support. An interaction occurs in which the official hears what issues are essential to the requesting group. The Congressman then weighs the benefits of helping the group. Will this help generate support for him in the next election? Local communication is critical because it facilitates the back-and-forth dialog between individuals, which is necessary to define public opinion.

William Kornhauser discussed mass societies in his book, *The Politics of Mass Society* (1959)²³. To Kornhauser, *mass behavior* represents a threat to democracy.

Mass society concepts emerged from two views of power politics: aristocratic and democratic, which we discussed in Chapter Four. The *aristocratic* view warns of danger when the people have too much power. The European monarchies and conservative politicians adopted that point of view during the Enlightenment when the public began to agitate for rights. The framers of the U.S. Constitution expressed a similar view after they were traumatized by Shay's rebellion.

Shay's Rebellion occurred in 1786 as a reaction against high taxes in Massachusetts. A rebel band took control of some courthouses and blocked the conducting of trials. The governor of Massachusetts condemned the mob action but

²³ William Kornhauser. 1959. *The Politics of Mass Society*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.

could not intervene because he had no militia. Later, he put together a private militia of 3,000 men to repel an attack on the Federal armory in Springfield. After a skirmish at the armory, the rebels retreated West with the militia in pursuit, and the rebel force dissolved without further bloodshed. Three thousand men admitted involvement in the rebellion when offered a pardon. The government indicted several hundred but pardoned the rest. Eighteen men were sentenced to death, and two were executed. Shay's Rebellion shocked the founders and convinced them America needed a federal government quickly. Without one, rebellion would be a constant danger. The public had proven, at least in this case, that they couldn't be trusted with power.

The democratic view is the opposite of the aristocratic view, warning of the danger of elites having too much power and using it to move toward aristocratic or monarchist governments. The Republicans among the founders, like Jefferson, feared a strong central government because it could evolve into a monarchy. Jefferson and his fellow Republicans held fast to the concept that state power must equal federal power to prevent federal government overreach.

Democracies, in the real world, need to be a combination of these two types, a balance between people's power and elite power. The public elects representatives to execute their wishes and holds them accountable when ignored. Elites serve as political leaders because they have the knowledge and experience to steer the state in the right direction. A mass society requires balanced control, which means either group

can exhibit mass behavior under pressure. The relationship between a public and its government follows from the structure of the political system, which dictates how communication occurs.

To understand this better, we will consider different types of governments. A *communal* society is one where **elites are not accessible** because of rules of tradition, and **non-elites are not accessible** because they live in a structured community. An example of this type is a commune or Kibbutz, where a contract structure determines elite and non-elite behavior.

In a *pluralist* society, **elites are accessible**, and **non-elites are not accessible**. An example would be some liberal democracies, where elites are accessible to independent groups who compete for power. Non-elites are not accessible because they are committed to specific groups. The people can only be mobilized by breaking up the independent groups. India is an example of a pluralist society with eight national political parties fighting for power.

In a *totalitarian* society, **the non-elites are accessible**, but the **elites are not**. The public is accessible because it lacks the organization needed to resist control by the elites. The elites exert control over the people using their monopoly over the means of coercion and persuasion. Using the media to disseminate influence content is their principal tool.

In a *mass society*, both **elites and non-elites are accessible**. To control accessibility, intermediate groups prevent elites

and the people from pressuring each other directly. A mass society is stable and operates smoothly as long as there are effective two-way communications. However, when communications become one-directional as intermediate groups disappear, the system loses its democratic character.

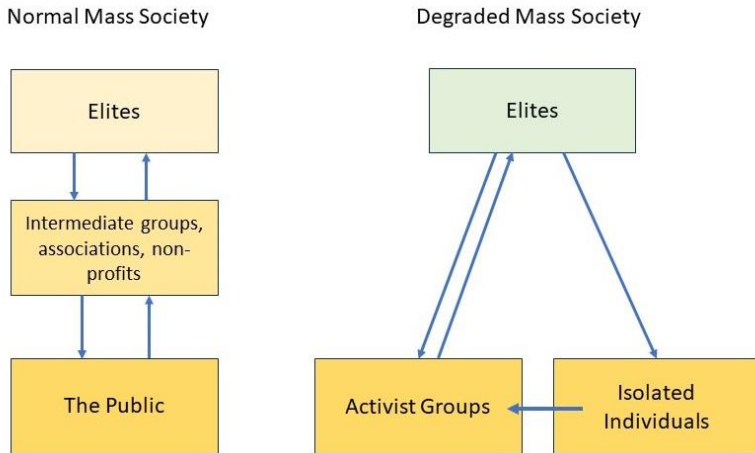


Chart 3

The chart above shows the difference between a regular and a degraded mass society. In a normal mass society, intermediate groups separate elites from the public and act as communication conduits. The indirect communication conduit disappears when middle groups go away. That creates an environment where activist groups confront the government directly. The government reacts to those groups and tries to control them. If they are successful, the public adopts mass behavior. People, not members of activist groups, are isolated and subject to direct influence from the government. That motivates them to join activist groups. The current tribal state in America reflects this situation. People

gravitate to a tribe to stand for something and to oppose other groups.

An example of mass behavior would be the Democratic Party organizing a pro-choice march because that issue is part of their platform. Here, the government applies pressure on the public. The public can also apply pressure through activists organized against the government. For example, the American public is an activist for climate change and wants the government to respond to their pressure. The government reacts and responds rather than initiating.

America as a Mass Behavior Society

Today, the United States is exhibiting mass behavior, as institutions formerly available to the people as buffers between them and the federal government have disappeared.

As we mentioned earlier, the classic view of democracy is that it uses public opinion to influence government action. Think of this as similar to shopping. One political opinion equals one purchase. The government responds to the output of a thousand discussions in the same way that businesses respond to a thousand sales or a thousand lost sales. It adapts and adjusts. In a democracy, public dialog is supposed to promote the development of social movements and political parties. Those groups then apply pressure to the politicians. Public opinion is fluid and adapts to prevailing institutions of power. When the public becomes impatient with the actions of government, they question the legitimacy of the legal authority and decide to take action.

Unfortunately, the concept of democratic operation we just described is a fantasy. The issues that impact the people are not created or decided by them. The public has little impact because it has adopted mass behavior.

The transformation of a public to one exhibiting mass behavior predicts the death of democracy. By the mid-20th Century, collective economic and political life forms replaced individualism. The result was that the disharmonious struggle between classes replaced a harmony of interests. Expert decisions made by the government replaced rational discussions by the public, leading to an irrational appeal to the citizens.

When mass behavior emerges, the power elite's role becomes more sinister, acting as a powerful controlling mechanism.

We use four characteristics to describe the differences between a public and a mass-behavior society²⁴.

1. Is there a balance of information flow? In a normal society, most opinions come from the public level and move upward. The ratio reverses in a mass behavior society, and most political views flow downward.

2. Can opinions be expressed without the fear of internal or external reprisals? In a mass behavior society, the government ignores public opinion and censors opinions they don't like.

²⁴ Mills, page 302.

3. What is the relationship between opinion formation and social action? In a public society, opinions generate action; public opinions are ignored in a mass behavior society.

4. Can authorities easily penetrate the public? In a normal society, the public has autonomy from the government; in a mass behavior society, the public receives content designed to create conformity.

In a mass behavior society, the public is relegated to a media market, receiving influence content from the authorities. The public has disappeared as an authentic expression of the people's involvement in government.

Social clubs, business clubs, professional organizations, and churches are examples of intermediate organizations. People who belong to these organizations derive satisfaction from their experience and focus their time and effort on participation. Their political beliefs are expressed in the group.

People who do not participate in intermediate organizations are isolated from their community. Politically, they change their focus to national politics because the ideas they stand for have no voice at the local level. They become connected to organized national groups that attack the elites directly on specific issues but have no sense of connection to far-away national organizations, which makes them vulnerable to elite influence.

One of America's most critical structural transformations is the decline of voluntary associations. In the past, they were relatively small organizations that individuals could influence. However, they grew in size and became centralized, reducing the influence of individuals or small groups. Now, vast associations such as foundations and charity organizations sit between an atomized public and the elites. Moreover, the leaders of those groups forgot where they came from and became an instrument of the elites. Once the leaders defect, a gap opens between the terms in which issues are debated and resolved among elites and the terms in which they get presented to members of mass associations. As the large group expands, leaders become advocates for the opinions they represent. Elections become contests between two large, unwieldy parties. The individual does not feel they have any influence, and the parties themselves cannot win politically decisive victories. The parties are no more than clones of other mass organizations.

When people feel no association with large groups, they feel uneasy about their loyalties. Frustration with separation from healthy associations expresses itself in several ways: The public receives little information firsthand, and the media invades our existence, providing us with new identities and telling us what we should be like. The media, television, and the Internet encroach on our home-based discussions, rudely monopolizing our valuable time.

The media helps drive the migration to mass behavior forward. It replaces first-hand knowledge with that broadcast from afar, sanitizes the information to reflect someone's

model, and infringes on small group discussion. Without competition within the media, the public has fewer opportunities to compare the players and locate the truth. In every significant area of life, losing a sense of structure and submerging into a powerless mass becomes a reality. The man in the mass does not gain a transcending view from the media; instead, he gets his view stereotyped and sinks further after each experience.

Operating below the elites are their minions in charge of the content. These individuals control the formation of public opinion to appease the public into thinking that things are okay. They pay close attention to managing people's lives, intending to employ the tools of personal influence and mass persuasion. They use a relay network to accomplish their goals of influencing the public. If they applied pressure directly, they would be unmasked and accused of being authoritarian. So, they apply pressure indirectly while staying hidden from the public.

In the political order, with the fragmentation of lower-level organizations, the public cannot see the whole picture and its place within it. The loss of a structural view means a loss of community. On the one hand, there is increased scale and centralization of the decision structure, and, on the other, the increasingly narrow sorting out of men into the masses.

A person's life conforms to external routines as they try to avoid chaos. They cannot understand their desires because they are implanted into them from the outside. They lose self-confidence as human beings. Life in a mass behavior

society implants insecurity and furthers impotence; it makes people uneasy and anxious, isolates them from a solid group, and destroys group standards.

The forces that have enlarged and centralized the political order and made modern societies less political and more administrative have caused the public to break apart and become something different.

The organizing principle of a large-scale mass behavior society centers on the national level. Centralized power is created by expanding governmental functions into previously autonomous areas. Problems previously solved locally have been transferred to the federal government. In the United States, the federal government has expanded its energy, health, and crime authority, replacing local organizations that, in the past, dealt with those problems at the community level.

A centralized federal organization at the expense of more minor forms of organization helps produce a disconnected public. Large-scale communication is geared toward mass participation and prevails over other communication forms.

Direct interaction between policymakers and the public no longer takes place. The public requires experts to explain the nuances and government issues under discussion and is incapable of original dialogue. As Freud has pointed out, man's behavior is often irrational, so arguments and debates at the public level do not always include necessary facts. So, the public must trust that their representatives take actions

that align with what they view as correct. Representatives do not regularly communicate with their constituents, so the public is unaware of their decisions.

The top of American society is increasingly unified. The middle levels are a drifting set of stalemated, balancing forces – the middle does not link the bottom with the top. The base is politically fragmented and increasingly powerless. The public reaction to isolation is the embracing of new ideologies.

In economic and political institutions, the corporate rich exert enormous power, and they have never had to win the ethical consent of those over whom they hold that power. This immorality, the general weakening of older values, and the organization of irresponsibility have not involved any public crisis; they have proceeded based on their secret efforts and the public's indifference.

The Danger of a Mass Behavior Society

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a mass behavior society appears when intermediate institutions that filter communications between the public and elites are degraded or disappear. This event creates public vulnerability to elite influence.

A liberal society requires widespread participation in the selection of leaders *and* a great deal of self-governing activity on the part of non-elites. There also needs to be competition between potential leaders and independence for

those who achieve leadership positions. What kind of social structure will achieve these outcomes?

A social pluralist arrangement is the answer. A plurality of independent and limited function groups supports liberal democracy by providing the social basis for free and open competition for leadership, widespread participation in selecting leaders, restraint in applying pressure on leaders, and self-government in broad areas of social life. Where social pluralism is robust, democracy will be strong.

The principal guarantee against growing power by elites is the existence of a plurality of groups having equal power who compete for leadership across several levels of society. Differences in receptivity to mass symbols and leaders are due primarily to the strength of social ties and not the influence of class or any other social status. When these groups are absent, the lower classes are not protected.

This mass behavior society discussion focuses mainly on the middle class, which holds a democracy together through its participation in community and government politics. The middle class is the primary competition for the elites because of its size. Its quality and level of influence measure the strength of the middle class.

Today, in the United States, the middle class has been compromised. The lack of intermediate groups that can communicate upward from communities to the government and downward from the government to the people alienates the public from the system. The public is exposed directly to

the influence content from Washington and corporations, and it cannot recognize the truth. Alienation drives people into tribes because they look for groups they can relate to. This calamity cannot be reversed until the people rise against the elites.

CHAPTER NINE

How Elites Control the Public

Shortly, the public will be unable to reason or think for themselves. They'll only be able to parrot the information they've been given on the previous night's news. - Zbigniew Brzezinski

Social scientists define two types of power within a society: collective power, which is the capacity to achieve the common goals of the society, and distributive power, which is the ability of groups within a community to exert power over other groups. The ability of a group to succeed in its effort to obtain power depends on its ability to control at least one of the four social networks in society: economic, political, military, and ideological. The ideological network is typically associated with religion, but political groups on the left and right have recently employed it to attack the other side.

How can we measure distributive power to identify its impact on society? Domhoff suggests we use three indicators of power: Who benefits? Who governs? And Who wins?²⁵ The “who benefits” power indicator is answered by which group in American society has assets and experiences most people consider valuable. The answer is the wealthy, those in good health, and those who can travel. The “who governs” question is answered by looking at groups with essential

²⁵ Domhoff, page 9.

positions or who influence critical decision-making processes. The answer, once again, would be the wealthy in their various roles in corporate America or government. The “who wins” indicator measures the results of battles between different groups. For example, unions and corporations are at war constantly. Union victories are a measure of their tactical power; their losses are a measure of corporate power. In most battles like this, the power elites are the winners.

How power gets disseminated

As discussed earlier, class dominance theory is a proposed explanation for the influence of the wealthy and corporations in America. Some scholars dispute their power, but we state it as fact in this book. Domination means that the commands of a class are carried out with little resistance because it has established organizations, rules, and customs that govern everyday life. The distributive power of the dominant class comes from its structural power, which falls to it by being owners and high-level executives of corporations that operate for profit in a market economy. As previously discussed, corporate structural power is associated with a policy-planning network. This network was built gradually over decades based on the participants' common interests and social cohesion.

America’s corporations achieved their level of power partly due to compromises during the writing of the Constitution, which led to the formation of two political parties. The fight over slavery during the Constitutional Convention resulted in one party being controlled by the wealthy in the North and the other being held by the wealthy in the South. Structural

power, policies developed by the policy-planning network, and control of the two parties resulted in a political system with no organized public opinion on issues *separate* from the policy-planning network. Additional parties or more vital labor unions might have offset the power of the two main parties and given the public a more significant say in government policymaking, but that has never come to fruition.

The dominant class uses their structural power to control the federal government on issues that matter to them. Working through the special interest process, lobbyists shape elite-supported policies to ensure they become a reality.

Corporate leaders constantly worry about the independence of the government and their ability to influence it. They know that the government is the only institution that can challenge their supremacy, especially in the case of labor markets. For example, the government could pass laws to help unions or change immigration rules to tighten the labor market and impact the economy. Elites try to limit government freedom by reminding elected officials that the economy may decline if corporate leaders lose confidence and have to scale back their plans for investments in factories, equipment, and workforce expansion. They also complain about bureaucratic zealots who interfere with their businesses. General attacks on government officials by elites are designed to apply pressure that will influence their most reliable allies.

Attacks on the government also reveal a fear among elites that the idealism of the American Revolution might cause the public to put pressure on the government. They are aware of the fact that the reality of a dominant class in America violates our sacred traditions, so they have to hide their efforts.

In chapter six, we discussed the organization of the power elite and its link to corporations. You may remember the four components of this network we discussed: the special interest process, the policy-planning process, public opinion, and the election process.

The special interest process is how wealthy families, individual corporations, and business sectors solicit assistance from the government. It operates through lobbyist contacts with elected officials and their staff, who communicate information on the financial support they have to offer. These individuals come from diverse backgrounds, including former elected officials, corporate executives, and employees of trade associations. Many are employed by large firms, which are businesses themselves. Corporate lobbyists are supported by PAC donations from their corporate employers to members of Congress. In addition, corporations use foundation donations to help the local chapters and charity members establish credibility in their districts, keeping their name recognition high and polishing their image.

How can we gauge the influence of the lobbyists? The impact of the influence exerted depends on the status of the

target. If the target is my neighbor, their influence is not high, so the effect of influencing them will be low. If the target is 1000s of people like my neighbor, and they are influenced, the impact increases. The opposite case holds for lobbying Congress. Because each member has significant power, the impact of influencing a single member is very high. The tool for creating that influence is campaign money.

Domination of the federal government in the interest of the power elite is carried out through the **policy-planning network**, a complex network of people and organizations that engage in research to produce policy recommendations for the government. Efforts of the PPN reach the government in various ways, including news releases, opinion page articles, reports from think tanks, and information from policy discussion groups. Leaders of the policy discussion groups testify before Congressional committees and subcommittees. These representatives ask to speak on the first or second day of the hearings, a showcase for their prestige. In addition to congressional testimony, the power elite has other access channels to Congress. They serve on presidential and federal advisory boards and committees of departments and agencies of the executive branch.

Government appointments to executive branch positions are the power elite's third method of influence. Those appointments place them in a position to endorse and often directly implement the recommendations of the power elite through Congressional testimony and personal conversations between government officials and members of the business council and the Business Roundtable.

Numerous studies have shown that most Republican and Democratic administration appointees have previously served as corporate directors, corporate lawyers, or members of the board of trustees of the policy planning network.

Looking at the Trump and Biden cabinets provides examples of this influence in action. The Trump cabinet was the wealthiest of all time but less experienced than the Biden cabinet. Biden's cabinet is the most diverse in history, with governors, members of Congress, federal prosecutors, and government advisors. Trump's first secretary of state was a former Exxon CEO and member of the Business Roundtable. His second Secretary of State was a West Point graduate who, as a Congressman from Kansas, received support from the Koch brothers, a leading conservative funding organization. Trump's Secretary of the Treasury was an alumnus of Goldman Sachs. The Biden cabinet featured a Secretary of State who had been a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, an Attorney General who served as a corporate lawyer, federal prosecutor, and federal judge, a Secretary of Defense who had an army career, and a Secretary of Agriculture who was a former governor and cabinet member. All these individuals are millionaires.

The Supreme Court is another bastion for the power elite. The Obama court included five from Harvard, three from Yale, and one from Columbia. The current court has four from Harvard, four from Yale, and one from Notre Dame. The credentials of appointed officials are a reliable way to identify elites. Almost every member of the elite class attended a prep school. Nearly every elite class member

attended a highly rated university, most often an Ivy League University. Most have worked in one or more areas: think tanks, large non-profits, Wall Street, prestigious law firms, or government.

Public Opinion

Throughout history, polls have shown that American public opinion accurately reflects people's view of their society. Those opinions often differ from those of the power elite and corporate leaders within the policy-planning network. For example, the public wants more federal health, education, and employment support. Americans also like to see a more cooperative and less militaristic relationship with the rest of the world. No matter how strongly the public is engaged in a particular issue, it is not usually adopted if the power elite opposes it.

Strength of Group Influence on Policy Change

Preferences of average citizens	.03
Preferences of economic elites	.76
Alignment of interest groups	.56

Chart 4²⁶

The above chart shows the correlation between each group and the likelihood of that group's preferences being

²⁶ Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page. *Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens*. Perspectives on Politics, Cambridge University Press, September 18, 2014.

approved by Congress. When the average citizen's preferences are correlated with bill passage, the result is .03, meaning that only rarely are citizen preferences aligned with bills passed by Congress when the elites disagree with the public. Economic elites have a .76 correlation because they are the power behind Congressional decision-making. Special interest groups enjoy a .56 correlation because their influence is more significant than the public, and they are often aligned with elites. When the power elite is aligned with the public, the public benefits.

Even though the public has little influence on government, the power elites are still concerned about what the public thinks. They seek control of public opinion to avoid conflict with their priorities. The power elite understands that many Americans are critical of corporations and don't like some domestic and foreign policy views. To counter that criticism, they spend millions of dollars annually to shape public opinion. This effort operates through an organization called the opinion-shaping network.

The Opinion-Shaping Network

The most influential groups in the policy-planning network, such as the Business Roundtable and the Council on Foreign Relations, have a central role in the opinion-shaping network. They work with other groups to decide which ideas are a priority to the power elite. Those ideas are presented to the public or marginalized activist groups. Policy discussion organizations do not directly participate in the opinion-shaping process other than releasing their reports. Within the policy-shaping network, the public affairs departments of

major corporations and extensive public relations firms carry out the tasks of coordination and execution. These firms are connected to a vast network of local advertising agencies, local media organizations, and special committees formed to manage specific issues. That means the opinion-shaping network is highly diverse at the point of intersection with the public.

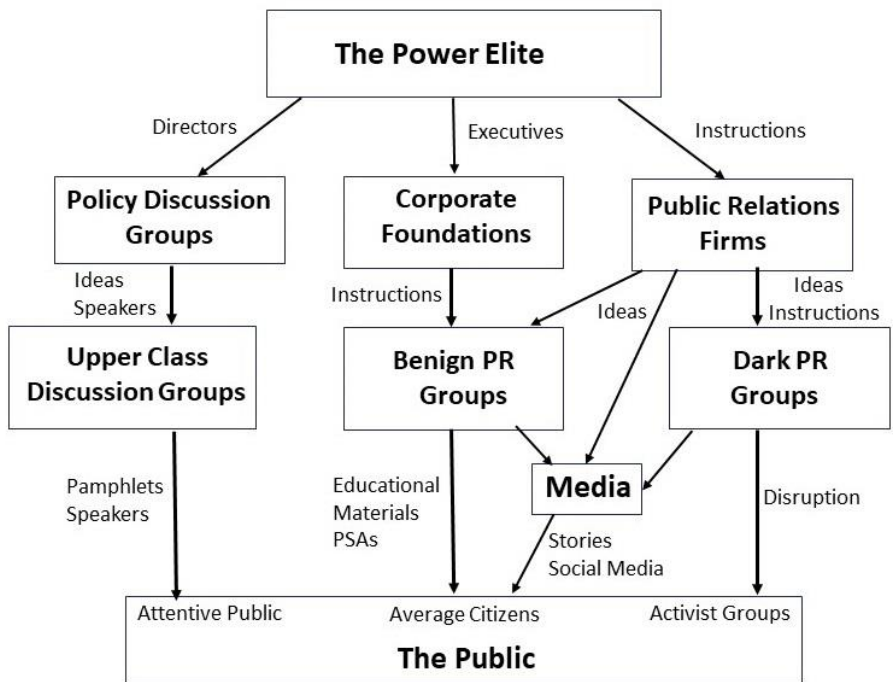


Chart 5

The above chart shows the components of the opinion-shaping network. There are opinion-shaping paths to address each citizen type using a specific strategy. Each strategy is

managed by advocates, acting under the power elite's control.

Policy-planning leaders seek to prevent the development of attitudes and opinions that might interfere with their programs' acceptance by emphasizing the traditional principles of the American ideal. They broadcast support of individualism, free enterprise, competition, the fairness of economic markets, equality of opportunity, and a minimum reliance on government. This approach seeks to frame the American experience as a battle between liberty and democracy while trying to maximize freedom. It also asserts that the government must protect markets, private property, freedom, and the people through their votes.

Within this context, organizations in the opinion-shaping network try to frame conflicts between the corporate-conservative and minority advocates as a struggle to define the true America. They describe “good America” as individualistic with a small government and state’s rights. Some organizations in the opinion-shaping network attempt to stigmatize proposals put forth by those who want greater inclusion by calling them collectivists or socialists. The strong effort to tout personal effort indirectly blames the victims of a system they can’t control.

Corporations engage in three types of benign public relations through the opinion-shaping network, all of which rely on financial support and materials for a wide range of non-profit organizations. The first relies on corporate public relations

departments, the second public relations firms, and the third financial support for non-profit organizations.

Public affairs departments within large corporations are primarily involved in benign forms of public relations. Their goal is to polish their company's reputation, and they employ two strategies: Monitor the news and run favorable stories to counter negative commentary and develop connections with schools, churches, and volunteer organizations to offer them speakers and educational materials.

Public relations firms do not run general campaigns to shape overall public opinion. They are hired to work on special issues and narrow target audiences. The goal is not to change public opinion but to block activities that might harm the image or profits of their clients. They do this by claiming there are contending voices or attacking critics as unreliable. These efforts have not been entirely successful in overcoming negative opinions about corporations. They have successfully created a positive attitude about specific corporations in communities where they are located under Don't Bite the Hand, which feeds the voluntary associations.

The second type of public relations is delivered through corporate foundations and the non-profits they support and direct. They have a strong voice in nationwide organizations that reach thousands of communities. Most of the money for these activities goes to help low-income families and their children. Grants are provided to highly visible voluntary organizations that depend on this money to survive. In addition to their relationships with specific non-profits, the

corporate leaders and their public relations departments have developed a wider penetration using nationwide non-profit groups like the United Way. They also run programs for their employees to give. In return, United Way prints lists of contributors in newspapers. In 2021, the United Way board included the corporate vice-president of National Mutual Insurance, the Vice-Chair of US Bancorp, and the chief marketing officer of Prudential. Between 2014 and 2019, Citicorp contributed \$ 105 million to United Way.

Corporations attempt to establish good relationships with a wide variety of voluntary organizations. Through their public relations organizations, they reinforce the ethic that those organizations should steer clear of politics.

Some influential non-profit organizations attempt to engage in educational efforts on important general issues. The Ad Council was created during World War II to urge people to buy war bonds. Today, it provides free advertising for various non-profit organizations and government initiatives. The Ad Council also contributes to non-profit organizations sponsored by the corporate community. Its board of directors consists of marketing executives from major corporations. Shaping public opinion on foreign policy is in the hands of several organizations. Polls have shown that the public is more liberal and less militaristic than the policy-planning network. Despite this truth, foreign policy experts insist that the public agrees with them, has little knowledge of specific issues, and is likely to accept foreign policy programs based on patriotism. Opinion leaders spend the most time on a small stratum of highly interested citizens with a college

education, who might cause them trouble. The most crucial organization of influence is the Foreign Policy Association, which focuses on shaping opinions outside the power elite. One-third of its governing council are members of the Council on Foreign Relations. Its methods include providing literature and creating discussion groups in middle-class organizations and college campuses. It also works with the United Nations Association, which works to counter ultra-conservative claims that the UN is unnecessary and spies on the US.

The soft sell technique used by corporate public affairs departments and the gifts that target schools and religious organizations do not work for corporations that sell products detrimental to people's health. To create an atmosphere that the public can accept, corporations try to cast doubt on the credibility of scientific findings and generate uncertainty about a consensus that has developed about a product.

There are limits to the tolerance within the power elite for the general public's disagreements about policy issues, although these limits vary from era to era. Corporate community members, working most often through the trade association for their specific business, hire organizations to employ coercive measures to limit the change in public opinion.

For example, advocates of charter schools use front groups to attack their critics, such as experts on academic outcomes. Those who become public critics of corporations receive harsh treatment. Their motives are questioned, and negative

stories about them appear in the media. They are portrayed as irrational.

Parties and Elections

Electoral rules in all democratic countries result from begrudging, strategic retreats by business owners and landlords in the face of insurgencies by the public. Electoral rules are, in essence, containment strategies. History books focus on the gradual acquisition of voting rights in the West, an effort not completed until the 20th century. The established political parties and their wealthy backers worked to create containment strategies to safeguard their interests.

Why are there only two Parties?

The two-party system in America evolved because of winner-take-all elections, which offer no benefits to the loser. The fear of third parties leads to stronger coalitions in the two main parties to prevent their development. The major parties try to block third-party qualifications by creating rules that make it difficult for them to get on the ballot. Third parties typically garner minimal percentages of the vote, although they can have an impact in rare situations.

The Founders did not like parties and didn't design the American system to accommodate parties, so their existence was an unintended consequence of the American political system. In the early decades of America, candidates ran strictly on the issues. Today, they run on their personality and name recognition, allowing wealthy donors to give large

campaign donations to improve their candidate's name recognition and attack their opponents.

Party Primaries

As developed in America, the two-party system produced another unique feature: election primaries, which are state government-managed and used to pick party candidates. Primaries were first created in 1903 by reformers who believed third parties were dead. As they grew in frequency, primaries became more accepted due to pressure from liberal reformers. By the 1970s, government-regulated primaries combined with long-standing government control over party registration transformed the major parties into the government's official office-filling agencies. Government-sponsored primaries took control of party membership and the selection of candidates away from party leaders. This created the possibility of wildcards being nominated.

Campaign Finance

Campaign financing presents a massive opportunity for power elite influence. Because character and image are critical to electability, wealthy donors can buy ads to enhance the public's view of a particular candidate. Big donors don't attach strings to their contributions but make sure the candidate understands their opinions on the issues.

The corporate funding escalation peaked in 2010 when the Supreme Court gave its opinion on corporate gifts to campaigns in the Citizens United Case. The court determined that corporations had the same rights as individual voters to contribute to political campaigns. That

ruling allowed political action committees (PACs) to contribute unlimited funds to organizations not controlled by a candidate or party. The organizations that received the donations run their ads while coordinating with the campaign people.

There is also an IRS classification called the 501C3, which describes organizations that do not serve private interests. A 501C3 can deduct all contributions to super PACs that meet the IRS requirements as “charitable organizations.” In addition, these organizations do not have to disclose their contributors.

Is all this money effective in getting people elected? The answer is yes. An article from 538²⁷, written in 2018, documents the impact. For elections to the US House of Representatives between 2000 and 2016, with one exception, the candidate who spent the most money won. For the Senate, the number is about 80% on average. These numbers imply that publicity exceeds all other factors in predicting whether a candidate will win. It also means the public does not pay attention to party platforms or candidate issues, only to a candidate’s image.

The Results of the Candidate Selection Process

Politicians come from the top 10-15% of the occupational and income ladders. Only a small percentage come from the corporate community, but in the majority of cases, they share a business or legal background with the power elite. Of

²⁷ Maggie Koerth. *How Money Affects Elections*. 538, September 10, 2018.

course, most politicians like to represent themselves as coming from humble origins. They are personally ambitious to receive public recognition and money. That ambition leads them into relationships with people who can help them achieve their objectives.

The power elite exerts control over the American people through institutions they have created, leverage exercised over government action, and information broadcast to the public. This structure has existed for decades and grew from an alliance between wealthy individuals with the same goals. The public assists the power elite by not exercising their role as an engaged electorate. They do not vote in sufficient numbers and do not carry on their responsibility to understand the issues and choose candidates who will best serve the nation.

Today's public does not understand where the truth lies because elite-biased information has overwhelmed the communication channel with their views and those they want the public to believe. As a tribal nation, we see each side parroting back the words they hear from their party rather than those they have validated for themselves.

CHAPTER TEN

Why America is not a Democracy

We're not a democracy. It's a terrible misunderstanding and a slander to the idea of democracy to call us that. In reality, we're a plutocracy: a government by the wealthy. - **Ramsey Clark**

There are two parts to the discussion that support this book's title. The first is **definitional**. Does the United States operate in a way that meets the definition of democracy? We've discussed the three stages of democracy: the Greek version, the Enlightenment version, as exemplified in the United States, and the Robert Dahl version, called polyarchy, which exists today. How well does America fit a stage three definition?

The second part of the discussion is about **structure**. A democracy is supposed to be the rule of the people, based on the political model that arose in the Enlightenment and recognized rights for the individual for the first time. But the definition of democracy can get messy. What percentage of the people must be eligible to vote to make a political system a democracy? According to Dahl, it's nearly 100%.

The Definition

Through the centuries, Athens has acquired a mythical status as the greatest of political systems. Facts reveal that the Athenian polis fell short of its democratic ideals. Like all societies, the Athenians had factions based on family ties and

friendship that influenced the political system. The practice of ostracism and its ten-year banishment was used as a threat to gain leverage. Although citizen involvement was high, the degree of participation from the general public is unknown. Most of Athens's great politicians and generals came from wealthy families and gained nobility at birth. Elites worked together to guide the direction of the polis, and they made many bad decisions.

Still, the Athenians had a legitimate interest in free speech and rights for all. As Plato says in *Protagoras*,

But when they come to discuss political questions, which must be determined by justice and moderation, they properly listen to everyone, thinking that everyone shares these qualities or cities wouldn't exist.

Freedom in the Athenian polis was not available to everyone. Voting rights were only granted to male citizens, and individuals could only become citizens if they had two parents who were citizens. Women, resident aliens (*metics*), and slaves had no rights. For the Greeks, democracy only existed *within* a single polis. If someone traveled to another city, they had no rights there. The Greeks did not accept universal claims to freedom or equality because personal liberty depended on citizenship in a polis.

As human society moved forward from the time of the Greeks, the notion of democracy began to evolve, influenced by new ideas about government.

Aristotle, the great philosopher of Athens, was critical of Greek democracy, saying it gave the people too much power. He felt that the best government would have to combine the elements of a democracy and an aristocracy into an aristocratic republic. Republican ideas provided freedom and rights to the people; aristocrats provided experts who would use their experience and good ideas to manage the government. Aristotle suggested that there was also a third element, the middle class. The middle class stabilized the political system by standing between the rich and the poor. The rich and poor distrust each other and never see eye to eye. The middle class is trusted and sits as arbiters with the different classes. To Aristotle, the republic was a constitutional model that balanced the views of the one, the few, and the many.

Aristotle's model became a reality in the Roman Republic, but not initially. When the Roman people deposed the last of their kings and implemented their model of government, it was an aristocracy, not a republic. Patricians had complete government control via the Senate, and the plebians had few rights. Over time, the Roman political system changed under pressure from the plebians, who wanted rights. As the plebians fought to extend their rights, a middle class, the knights, emerged to fill the space between the upper and lower classes. Rome became a republic when the lower and middle classes gained power.

After Rome, there were a few isolated attempts at building aristocratic republics before the Enlightenment: The

Republic of Florence, Italy, in the early 12th Century, the Confederacy of Switzerland under William Tell in the early 14th Century, and the political philosophy of John Calvin in the early 17th Century. All were short-lived, and none reached the pinnacle of Rome.

By the mid-17th Century, a new democratic theory had emerged. Rather than having elites concerned with the dangerous behavior of the masses, the new focus was on the people's view of the abuse of power by elites. This idea came directly out of the Enlightenment and was designed to validate the rights of the people to have a say in government. Its proponents believed that good government rested on the quality of the people and that public good did not depend on balancing power between the classes; it rested on the welfare of the people. Those responsible for building political systems must create safeguards against the accumulation of influence by the few. This new theory was called the democratic republic.

Which version of the American political system is it - mob rule of the masses or elite rule by the wealthy? To answer that question, we will compare the American system to standard definitions of democracy and how Americans define democracy.

The definitions of democracy and republic overlap, and people use the terms interchangeably. Democracy comes from the Greek word *demokratia*, which combines *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule), literally the rule of the people. The term republic comes from the Latin *res publica* (public

affairs or government). To the Greeks, democracy meant individual freedom and direct participation in government. To the Romans, a republic meant a political system with no king. The Romans allowed the people to participate by voting at assembly meetings. They could vote for new laws and elect magistrates. Professional politicians managed the remainder of the Roman government, the executive branch, and the Senate. The path to higher office required election to a series of lower offices that allowed a politician to gain experience.

The word “democracy” is not mentioned in the Constitution because the framers associated it with the classic Greek Political system, which they rejected. They made it a republic once they decided the American political system would be a representative model.

One hotly debated subject of the Constitutional Convention was the relationship between the states and the new Federal government. Which one would hold more power? Democrats like Jefferson wanted the states to have the most influence. Aristocrats like Hamilton wanted the Federal government to be in control. The argument amounted to comparing an Enlightenment democracy against a monarchy. Neither political faction at the convention could tolerate the views of the other. More importantly, neither side knew what would happen after implementation. Would Hamilton’s system devolve into a monarchy? Would Jefferson’s agrarian republic devolve into anarchy?

Compromise brought the American political system to a place in between the extremes. But this new system was called a republic. Madison's term for the American political system was a "republic of republics," including the states with the federal government.

Again, we consider Aristotle's definition of the aristocratic republic, a balance between a democracy and an aristocracy. This model was the model chosen by the founders. The American system was never a democracy in the Greek sense. That definition was altered, first by Aristotle and then by 17th-century political philosophers, who created the concept of a democratic republic. The critical question is, "Is the American system still a democratic republic." The answer has to be no for reasons I will explain.

America's representative democracy developed as the second stage in the history of democracies. The Greek model was impractical for any modern society vast in geography or number of citizens, so representation appeared to overcome that problem. As described by Robert Dahl, polyarchies were stage three in the development of democracies. They featured an extension of voting rights and created rules designed to maintain honest elections, both of which were critical to the stability of democratic systems.

If we put aside Robert Dahl's low rating of American Democracy and work only with his definition of polyarchy, we can see that the United States fits his definition of a third-stage democracy.

The Operating Structure of America's Democracy

The operation of the American republic has always depended on the acceptance of two principles: the willingness of the government to heed what the people are saying and direct government action in that direction, and the ability of the people to engage in the political process, understand the issues, and vote for candidates that represent them effectively. Neither principle operates today.

1. Control by the Power Elite

The power elite has been the most significant impediment to democratic ideals in the history of the United States. It became a force when America's elite founders built its political system. The structure they created provided the environment American businesses needed to prosper and enrich their wealthy owners. Elite control was in flux for the 40-year interval between 1820 and 1860 because of the division between the North and South over slavery. The post-Civil War period laid the groundwork for the modern American power elite when the Republican Northern elites allowed the Southern elites to maintain their status after the war. They joined the Democratic Party and began to compete with the Northern elites again. The burgeoning Industrial Revolution and changes to the laws regarding corporations made the Northern business owners members of a new elite. The New Deal period and World War II further aligned the government with the military-industrial complex, giving the elites greater access to elected officials. Elite control accelerated again when technology began infiltrating American business in the 1970s.

The wealth and power of elites allow them to exert control over all aspects of the American political system. They override the power of voters by putting their own candidates in place. They influence the government by serving on influential committees in the executive and legislative branches. They also manage the national opinion-shaping network that fills the airwaves with information that supports elite priorities.

2. Weak Public Participation

The second player in the democratic model is the people. The democratic ideal expects the people to vote for candidates based on their knowledge of the issues and which candidates best represent those views. Electing the most qualified candidates depends on selecting those with the best credentials.

Most American voters have not and do not follow this rule, although some do. First, only 60% of the eligible voters cast ballots. Second, many voters are told how to vote by coercion or suggestion. Often, voters cast ballots based on ideology, which is happening now during America's tribalist state.

If Americans do not research the candidates and vote based on a reason unrelated to candidate quality, the odds of the best candidate winning are reduced. This statement is validated by surveys showing that the candidate spending the most money wins most of the time.

The United States is below the mid-point in voting participation compared to other Western countries. Sweden is near the top, at 80%, Australia at 76%, and France at 65%, while the UK, Spain, and Italy have a lower participation than the United States.

3. A Mass Behavior Society in Operation

We discussed the concept of a mass behavior society in Chapter 8. A mass behavior society occurs when elites *and* the public are exposed to each other. That exposure is not a problem as long as the communications between the two groups are balanced, but communications have become unbalanced, and elites dominate the traffic flow. That imbalance creates two problems. First, the public cannot express their opinions in a united form that reaches the elites. Second, elites control the media, which means they control the messaging. Control over messaging allows them to use coercion and influence through what the public hears.

The public becomes isolated when a one-way mass society operates under elite control. To overcome that isolation, the people react by coming together through advocacy groups. These groups wish to gain influence over government action through their protests, and this behavior is the only one they believe can make their voices heard. Those not involved with the advocacy groups remain isolated and are susceptible to elite influence.

Advocacy group action accelerated the tribal state in America. After the Biden election, the left began to push radical ideas out into the public. Their agenda was to pursue

equality for all special interest groups. Over time, the progressive tribe absorbed many of the left who shared their views. Meanwhile, the right reacted strongly against the views of the left, and the conservative tribe came into existence. Name-calling increased the anger levels on both sides, strengthening each tribe's beliefs.

Mass behavior is associated with activist interpretations of democracy and increasing reliance on force to resolve social conflict. The breakdown of social controls, including standards for legitimate conduct and established channels of action, frees the masses to engage in direct, unmediated efforts to achieve its goals and put its hands on the most readily available instruments of action.

4. Tribalism

Although we're discussing the danger of elite power here, we must bring up the current state of tribalism in the United States, which is a more immediate threat to democracy than the power elite. Tribalism was caused by various factors that reached a state of maximum disruption after the Trump election in 2016. Trump's personality offends many on the left and the right, and his behavior raises tribal anger to a fever pitch.

Summary

Our tribal state is an acute situation that must be eliminated to get American Democracy back on track. Concerns over the power elite don't matter if the country is tribal because tribalism masks all other political activity in America, preventing the government from functioning.

The stability of a democracy depends on the balance between elites and non-elites and the avoidance of an unbalanced mass behavior society. When democracy becomes unstable, the public exhibits the symptoms of mass behavior, as we have witnessed for the last eight years.

America is not a functional democracy because too many obstacles block its efficient functioning, including the public's isolation from the elites, the elite concentration of power, the elites' control of the media, and disruptions of the lower and middle class caused by various shocks, such as the Great Recession and COVID-19.

The Constitution, which contains too many controls, hampers the American political system, making it hard to adopt the changes required for a complex 21st Century society. The complexity of legal, technical, and social issues requires an understanding beyond the capability of the public and the lawmakers.

America uses a two-party system political system, which is rigged to prevent third parties from participating. Third parties are an important way to give the public a say in government, and they appear when the public is dissatisfied with the traditional parties. Third parties help diffuse the anger directed at a government when it doesn't serve the needs of the people.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Into the Future

*America's future will be determined by the home and the school. The child becomes largely what he is taught; hence we must watch what we teach, and how we live. – **Jane Addams***

In the first three chapters of this book, we discussed the history of governments, highlighting the Greek model. Chapters Four and Five outline the history of politics in Britain and the United States, concluding with a review of American democracy today. Chapter 6 introduced the proposition that American politics is dominated by a power elite of wealthy families and their associations with corporations they own or influence. Chapter 7 explains how the power elite has changed since C. Wright Mills defined the term in 1956. Technology and finance are the new players, and they exert enormous influence on the American economy with their products and advisory expertise. In Chapter 8, we presented the concept of a mass behavior society, which America is experiencing today. A mass behavior society is one where communication between the dominant class and the people flows only one way. The people are missing the grassroots organizations that used to create information that flows back to the government.

In Chapter 9, we discussed how the elites control the American public through their influence over the government and their strategy for manipulating public

opinion on issues that matter the most to them. We reached Chapter 10, which sets out to justify the title of this book: *America's Counterfeit Democracy*. Recall that there have been three stages in the evolution of democracies: the Greek version, the colonial American version, which introduced representative government and checks and balances, and the 20th Century version, which achieved universal suffrage. America has never resembled any of these versions because the power elite has always acted as a controlling mechanism over American politics.

In Chapter 10, we explained why the United States is not a democracy. We arrive at this point with two questions. What happened to the idea of American democracy, and what does that mean for the future? Let's start with some history.

The American people embraced two fundamental beliefs at the country's founding, which remain today: competition in a private enterprise capitalist system and control of government by the voters. Colonial America was built on mercantilism, particularly in New England, where farming was not possible. With virtually no limit on available land, motivated individuals could succeed by starting a farm or business. The ability to vote and have a say in government matured during the colonial period in state governments. As a country of small communities, everyone is connected to the politics of their town or village.

Beneath the surface, a power elite was developing. America's founders were its first power elite. Those wise men, undoubtedly idealistic, wanted to create an

Enlightenment political system. They did so without the public's involvement or knowledge.

This idealized view of early America makes it difficult to imagine the rise of a power elite. How could today's owners and managers of corporations shape government policies if they compete? Even with unity, how could they have enough power in a democratic country where voters select officeholders at every level of government?

Class domination developed in the US after centuries of conflict among contending classes, ethnic groups, and racial groups, which resulted in legislation and legal precedents. These past battles and people's desire to carry out their lives routinely meant that the rise to domination of a group or class was carried out with little resistance.

Domination is possible because the wealthy, who control large income-producing properties, have created the organizational structures they need to retain power. They use corporations to protect their fortunes from non-owning workers and small farmers. They have also built tax-free non-profit organizations, which allow them to save the money they need to exert power.

Domination is the application of distributive power. The corporate rich are a dominant class because their application of power leads to a situation where most Americans generally accept or consent to that power. Moreover, the U.S. government and its people follow the rules and regulations that help the corporate community grow and

generate profits. The corporation's power to invest or not invest and hire and fire employees leads to a political context in which most elected officials will try to do as much as they can to create a favorable investment climate and, in doing so, protect their incumbency. Corporate owners' legally based structural power within the economy is augmented by their ability to create new policies through a policy-planning network. The corporate rich developed these organizations slowly over decades because their shared economic interests and social cohesion gave them the stamina to engage in long-term endeavors.

The Constitution unexpectedly produced a two-party system reinforcing a personality-oriented candidate selection process heavily dependent on large campaign donations. This result increased the impact of domination because it essentially prevented third parties from operating. Third parties should be available to the public as a tool to put pressure on the two major parties, but Republicans and Democrats prevent their operation.

Structural power and policies generated by the policy-planning network and control of both political parties in the early 21st Century resulted in a political system without organized public opinion on specific legislative issues. People always have thoughts and positions on topics but are not heard if they cannot add their views to existing intermediate groups. It's relatively easy for wealthy organizations to influence government through the special interest and policy planning process. They maintain close connections to Congress, the separate departments of the

executive branch, and regulatory agencies. Donations and gifts to elected officials also help create influence.

These all add up to a high score for the power elite in the three power indicators discussed: who occupies the seats of government power, who benefits the most regarding wealth and income, and who wins when there are alternative policy proposals.

Power Elite in Control Is Bad?

The first reactions to the realization that the power elite controls America are anger, disappointment, and confusion. It's shocking to think that the ideals of America are not in operation and never have been. A cynic might conclude that the Constitution was created as part of a marketing campaign designed to fool the public.

Control by the power elite means their policy agenda rules over the public's wishes. It focuses on maintaining a stable society with the status quo operating to protect and increase elites' wealth. Their ability to grow their wealth depends on the country's economic, political, and social stability, so they want to apply the levers of power in each area. Stability results from predictability, so elites go out of their way to forecast future events so they can plan for them. Poor predictions cost them money.

The reality here is that power elites exist in virtually every democracy because the structure of democracy produces wealth, and those who accumulate the most wealth have the most power.

Power Elite Agendas Versus Public Agendas

To what degree are the objectives of the power elite different from the public? They are significantly different because the public is interested in opportunities for success and actions the government can take to support the people's lives. The power elite is focused on their specific agenda to increase wealth.

In managing the economy, the power elite uses the “rising tide lifts all boats theory,” meaning that managing the economy well will pay off for them *and* help the public. The power elite resists expensive welfare state programs because of the cost. Large expenditures waste money and lead the public to *believe* it has power.

The power elite sits in an enviable position of controlling business in a way that lines their pockets, like a stockbroker with inside information. For example, the climate change controversy has divided the country. Most people on the left say it is urgent to sunset fossil fuels because of their impact on the atmosphere. Most people on the right disagree with that position and do not believe a crisis exists. Where would the power elite be on this issue?

The power elite represents both political parties, so there will be internal tension around this issue. But remember that even though the power elite has internal disagreements, they remain aligned in their most important objectives. The power elite exerts control over corporations and the investments they make. What if the elites decide they can make money investing in renewable energy versus some

alternative? Climate crisis-supporting elites would invest because they believe in the cause. Climate change denier elites would still invest because making money means more than debating climate theory.

The power elite drives policy change in the United States for ideological reasons *and* when they can use those policies to enrich themselves further.

Power Elite in Control Is Good?

Let's look at the operations of the power elite from another standpoint. Could we believe the operations of the power elite are a good thing?

We start with the idea that the power elite is part of every democracy. If this is true, we can examine why some countries do not become democracies. The number one reason is that violent coercion is not controlled. The military and the police must be under civilian control to prevent them from abusing their power. Any country with an uncontrollable military is unstable.

Most countries with stable democracies are labeled modern dynamic plural societies²⁸. MDPSs have common characteristics. They disperse power to prevent it from being controlled by one group. Despite that dynamic, there are inequalities in the distribution of power. MDPSs have often emerged from agricultural societies, as in the case of the United States.

²⁸ Robert A. Dahl, page 251.

Many democracies have prospered even though they exhibit some cultural differences. Strong sub-cultures did not develop in the United States because of the rapid assimilation of immigrants. Even more critical was the white Southerner black slave culture in the South, which survived until the 1960s. The Colonial Southern society existed as a sub-culture that could not be resolved without civil war. After the Civil War, white Southerners returned to their distinct cultural heritage, which continued to exclude blacks. Blacks were granted additional rights under the Civil Rights Act in the 1960s and behave as a homogeneous plurality today. However, they do not constitute a significant enough minority to force recognition as a voting bloc. America is culturally homogenous enough to prevent instability caused by cultural factions.

MDPs generally possess a political culture and belief, particularly among activists, which support democracy. They must also be free of influence from a foreign power.

In India, where many subcultures exist, the groups have power and compete to have a stake in government activity. These groups are not large enough to hold power directly but large enough to fight among themselves for influence.

The success of the United States as a democratic system result from its unique identity, so what does that mean for the power elite?

Dahl has a chapter in his book titled, *Is minority domination inevitable?* He starts from a position of disbelief because he

accepts the truth of classic democracy without domination. Dahl debates the significance of inequalities in a democracy and whether they can be mitigated. In his mind, if the inequalities are significant, as they would be in his definition of a power elite-controlled political system, they would be detrimental to the operation of democracy. The only way to remove that power would be through a *revolutionary transformation*.

Dahl believes that ideas about a dominant elite are popular because they fit with human experience. Someone is always in charge of a group, so how could a dominant element not exist in a political system? He answers that inequality exists in every democracy but doesn't rise to the level of domination. To accept domination is to believe that democracies have never really come close to their ideal principles. Dahl believes domination theories are weak because they are ambiguous, vague, and lack proof, so they do not portray reality correctly.

Let's move on from Dahl and accept that the power elite is operating in the United States. We come back to whether the power elite is good for America. If all democracies have a power elite, this feature must be a structural part of the political system. It must be a feature all democracies require.

The benefits of domination by a power elite immediately present themselves. First, the uncontrolled and disorganized behavior of the public will be filtered and distilled into meaningful policy by the power elite. They have the policy planning organization working on their behalf to develop

policies for Congress and the administration to consider. Although the PPO works for the good of the elites, it must also work on the public's behalf in many cases. For example, suppose the elites seek a more robust economy to improve the return on their investments. In that case, the resulting strong economy will benefit all Americans. The same can be said for foreign policy. The power elite uses experts to suggest the most practical foreign policy positions. They have a significant stake in the success of these initiatives because they may suffer harm if mistakes occur.

The power elite and the public sector do battle over welfare state programs. The power elite sees these programs as costly, which results in the people gaining too much power. Since the power elite are aligned with the corporate world, they see welfare programs as profit-reducing. With enough pressure from the public, new programs can be introduced, but the power elite will give away as little as possible. Still, applying pressure is the way a democracy is supposed to work.

The Danger from Mass Behavior

Mass behavior can impact the balance between the power elite and the public, tilting the scale in one direction of the elites. As we discussed in Chapter 8, mass society can function well in a democracy if it is balanced. Since both elites and the public are accessible, instability rises when their communication becomes unbalanced, causing one or the other to dominate. When elites dominate, they move toward authoritarian behavior. When a public dominates, it moves toward anarchy.

In the United States today, the elites dominate and employ the media for coercion and influence. This situation has accelerated since the media companies merged into a few conglomerates that control the market. With the assistance of social media companies, traditional media companies generate a wall of information-supporting corporations. Communication with the government through local associations is degraded for two reasons. First, people participate less in local organizations because they have less time. Second, the local organizations have grown into national organizations, and their leaders have begun to adopt elite behavior. That leaves activism as the only communication tool available to the public. Activism is an inefficient form of communication and cannot affect change.

The Power Elite Operating Structure

Power Relationships in America

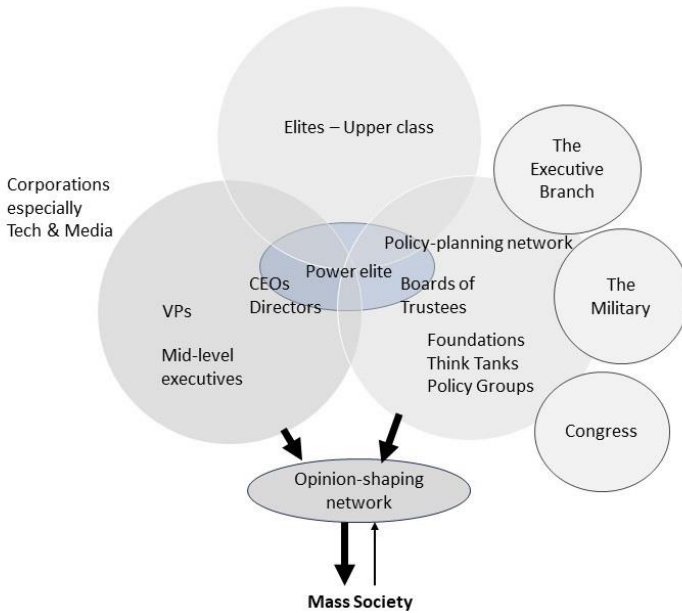


Chart 6

In the chart above, we see the power relationships at work. The power elite is tightly coupled with large corporations through elite business ownership and corporate CEOs who have gained entry to it. The power elite employs an opinion-shaping network to coerce and influence the public. Meanwhile, the public has limited government access. The power elite and corporations influence the government by exploiting their positions in government as advisors and consultants.

Societal Dynamics

We've discussed that the American political system is not a democracy and described how it operates. We must now bring societal factors into the discussion to complete the picture. Democracy has stood as an ideal for 2500 years, but elites have been in control longer than that. The circumstances that make up each society are also a factor in its political development because each nation is unique. America is one of the countries that began as a colonial system. The colonies were heavily influenced by the Enlightenment in Europe but did not carry the baggage of the old monarchies. America was created as a new nation. Its appearance coincided with Enlightenment thinking, so the new forces that drove Western civilization forward carried America along with it. Those forces pressure democracies to be agile enough to accommodate change.

Using concepts developed by Higley and Burton²⁹, we can think of American society as advancing in stages. According to the authors, American society began as an agricultural nation, a level-1 society. The people are primarily egalitarian because there is not much stratification. The public is distrustful of elite groups. A level-2 society is labeled pre-industrial. Industrial, bureaucratic, and service workers have been introduced to the economy here. Elites don't have much control over the public and spend their time competing with each other for power. If the elites settle their differences, society becomes more stable. A level-3 is a society with

²⁹ John Higley and Michael G. Burton. *A New Elite Framework for Political Sociology*. *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 1990, T. 28, No. 88 (1990), pp. 149-182.

large industrial and bureaucratic service sectors. This society is stable because workers can buy homes and move out of the lower class. The last stage is a level-4 or post-industrial society. At this stage, both industrial and autonomous workers (self-employed) decrease. This stage is disorienting for elites because too many groups have conflicting objectives to manage.

Here is how Higley and Burton describe the path of a level-4 society:

A level-4 society creates ominous new problems and conflicts, apparently rooted in spreading employment uncertainties and insecurities among much of the mass public. Because the output of bureaucratic service workers is hard to define and measure, it is frequently unclear whether more or fewer of them are needed. To protect and advance their employment prospects in this uncertain situation, bureaucratic and service workers increasingly try to judicialize and democratize organizational processes, justifying these measures with a strongly "anti-elitist" rhetoric and political stance³⁰.

This conflict falls short of revolution because the groups involved have no vision of what should happen next. Still, the result is fragmented political alignments, volatility in electoral politics, and isolation of the elites from their

³⁰ Ibid.

support base. Employment insecurity is accompanied by the emergence of an underclass of outsiders who have no place in the economy. These groups have become demoralized outside the work-based social structure, generating destructive anti-social behaviors. Their actions alienate them from insiders who lose sympathy for them, causing a conflict between the groups.

This conflict has no solution because the Level 4 configuration fails to generate enough plausibly "necessary" work to absorb and satisfy all those seeking it. It prompts a shift in dominant political sentiment away from welfare statist policies that do little to alleviate outsiders' employment-based discontents and actions. Many "insiders" begin to espouse less generous, more draconian measures for dealing with the "outsiders." Threatened by those who lead and mobilize this shift in dominant political sentiment and disillusioned by the shortcomings of the welfare statist policies they once enthusiastically embraced, elites become more divided and more inclined to pursue unrealistic, semi-utopian panaceas. Thus, the last possibility identified in Level 4 societies is spreading political and intellectual disarray among elites and pursuing more or less fantastic goals, signaling much desperation and a severe loss of nerve.

The Design of the American Democracy

In addition to the impact of the power elite and the societal factors that explain the stages of democracy, another factor influences the operation of American democracy. That factor is the adaptability of its design. There are two parts to that

discussion: 1) the founder's original design and 2) changes made since the American government began operating. The original design by the founders worked fine for a level 2 democracy but not the level 4 political system we have today.

The founders were worried about the accumulation of power, particularly by the executive branch. For that reason, they introduced the separation of powers and checks and balances systems into the design. The Constitution lacked detail because the founders believed some issues were too complex to resolve and put down on paper. In addition, they wanted to create flexibility for the future, knowing the document would have to be changed. Remember that the Constitution was designed to protect the people from government while providing the essential functions a nation-state would require.

The convention delegates signed the Constitution without amendments or a Bill of Rights, which angered some states. That omission was corrected the next year to ensure ratification. Some believed the Constitution would require significant future changes, and in fact, Washington said he hoped it would last 25 years. History shows us that few changes were made, and the complexity of the amendment process has limited the government's capability to utilize that tool.

The pressure to build flexibility into the Constitution was so great that courts assumed the interpreters' role, starting with the 14th Amendment, passed after the Civil War. That

amendment gave all Americans the right to “due process,” which defines fundamental rights. This clause was used to add homosexual and same-sex marriage rights. Programs like Social Security and Medicare came about through liberal interpretations of the welfare clause of the Constitution. The Supreme Court’s role was crucial because it allowed the American political system to be changed, overcoming the framers' inability to see into the future.

Inefficiency and Fixing It

In a 2014 paper,³¹ Richard Pildes, Professor of Constitutional Law at Yale, discussed inefficiencies in the unique American Democracy. Pildes makes two points in his article. The first is that the American approach to voting is a romantic idealization of what Americans think of as democracy, which has led us to create inefficient voting and governance systems. Second, the idea that tribalism hinders government effectiveness points to the wrong target. The real reason for government ineffectiveness is fragmentation within government operations.

The idealization of American governance is based on the belief that politicians can't be trusted, so America tries to maximize the voting control of the public. This idea has led to operational structures that are cumbersome and inefficient, both in the election process and governance. Primary elections are too expensive and take too long. Other

³¹ Richard Pildes. *Romanticizing Democracy, Political Fragmentation, and the Decline of American Government*. The Yale Law Journal, December 2014, Vol. 124, No. 3 (December 2014), pp. 804-852.

countries don't have primaries. In the UK, the campaign period is 25 days. Think of the enormous savings to the candidates if there were no primaries. Nicki Haley spent \$ 37 million just on the Iowa caucuses in 2024.

Primaries emerged during the Progressive Era when the party selection of candidates was criticized for not including the people's votes. Today, with the people engaged in the process, the same corruption occurs when the parties rig the delegate counts and select their candidates. 2016 Hillary Clinton used super delegates to ensure her victory over Bernie Sanders. In the 2024 election, the Democratic Party is skipping primaries in some states to improve the chances of Joe Biden being nominated.

The political parties are weak and unable to help members raise money, forcing them to solicit contributions independently. Campaigning costs are insane, and candidates must be independently wealthy or have a body of wealthy patrons available to fund them.

The fragmentation problem in Congress arose when members of the legislative bodies stopped listening to their leaders. Part of the cause for this change was the elimination of seniority in committee chairmanships. Each party's delegation has become fragmented and often cannot reach consensus. This fracture is particularly acute in the Republican Party, where fiscal conservatives try to block most spending programs. This fragmentation prevents important initiatives from becoming law.

Another example of unnecessary complexity is the number of positions in the federal government that need Senate approval (1300). That is a painstakingly complicated activity to complete. Many of these approvals could be handled differently without the risk of corruption.

Lastly, we note the inefficiency caused by the terms of office in the House being too short, forcing members to campaign constantly.

Ending Tribalism

As every American knows, tribalism is a disease affecting all Americans. There are too many causes to describe in detail, so we will present the most important ones. Two leading causes are party politics and the uncontrollable changes in American society over time.

The Democratic Party moved to the left after the Obama years, pushed by the Populist ideas of Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, who campaigned on the evils of Neoliberalism. Hilary Clinton fought the populist tide in her party to win the Democratic nomination for president in 2016. Her defeat and the election of Donald Trump created an increase in tribalism because of Trump's behavior. Then, Joe Biden's choice to embrace the far-left ideology further widened the divide. The right is opposed to the left's agenda, from climate to racism to equality, seeing them as a disguise for a socialist objective.

Political parties have changed to adopt the ideology of their tribe rather than a practical party platform. Studies have

suggested that elites' tribalism filters down to the parties. The parties often use tribalism as a tool for their benefit when they employ it to win elections.

The tribalism due to changes in American society is beyond anyone's control because the demographics of the American people change over time through immigration, relocation, and employment opportunities.

The media, including TV and the Internet, has changed communication between people and expanded the number of resources providing information to the public. The media is motivated to exaggerate tribalism because it increases interest among readers and viewers. Social media has corrupted traditional media and turned it into a clone of itself.

What Now?

Let's take a minute and summarize the impact of the power elite in America. It benefits Americans in areas where the elite and public interests align. That alignment exists by coincidence and not because the power elite is trying to serve the public. The power elite proceeds in areas opposed by the public based on its internal objectives. In either case, it is not the design of the democratic system that determines the path America takes. The set of objectives pursued by the power elite moves the country forward.

Comparing reality to the ideal shows that democracies don't work as advertised because they can't. A pure democracy, without elites in control, would be too unstable to function.

That means those of us who live in democracies must give up the ideal and accept the way things are. That is not all bad, however. As I mentioned, the elites' policies sometimes help the public. Remember that even though the power elites aim to enrich themselves first, they also want a stable society, so they must act in ways that maintain a reasonably satisfied public.

More importantly, democracies bring personal benefits to their publics in the way of freedom. That allows people to live their lives without much interference and enjoy the freedoms delineated in the Bill of Rights.

What are the risks to our democracy?

As Kornhauser points out, the transformation from minority rule to popular sovereignty undermines the hierarchical structure of society and leaves the masses unrestrained. Aristocratic critics of democracy have always seen equalitarianism as the primary factor undermining the insulation of elites and permitting the rise of mass movements.

Nietzsche wrote, "The democratization of Europe is at the same time an involuntary arrangement for the rearing of tyrants."

Aristocratic and democratic critics alike believe that mass society is vulnerable to totalitarianism rather than traditional forms of dictatorship. Why? Mass behavior society comes into being partly because of the influence of mass media

broadcasts, so it is vulnerable to a totalitarian voice. While totalitarianism is a dictatorship based on mass support, and it is also based on elite domination of a centralized organization, its distinctive character lies in the fact that it is a permanently mobilized mass movement that seeks to control all aspects of life. Totalitarian dictatorships involve total domination, limited neither by received laws or codes nor even by the boundaries of governmental functions since they obliterate the distinction between state and society.

At the same time, a mass behavior society is *not* vulnerable to authoritarian or socialist regimes because those operate within an environment of constitutional order.

What will happen to the United States in the future is determined by its society's ability to retain communication channels between the public and elites that will check the expanding mass behavior society. A mass behavior society need not evolve into a totalitarian state if controls are placed on it.

Conclusion

I have made a case here for the existence of an American power elite who effectively controls the government and economy of American society. There is enough data about the power elite to validate its expression of power. Some skeptics hold that the United States still operates as the founders envisioned it would. Others assert that a power battle between the economic classes drives the country forward. That would see elites competing with each other and the middle class doing the same.

I'm afraid I disagree with those positions. The power elite has existed as long as there have been governments. Despite the notion that this model takes power away from the people, it offers at least two compensating benefits: it creates stability, which would not be possible if the public carried significant power, and it ensures that freedom is not compromised by its actions.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Afterword

A book section after the main content is called the AFTERWORD, and its typical use is to represent an alternative perspective to the book's thesis. Here, we discuss dissenting opinions on the existence and operation of the power elite. Readers may use this information to draw their own conclusions.

What is your opinion of the book's thesis as a reader? Do you accept the truth of the power elite or reject it as a conspiracy theory? Let's add additional context to help you arrive at an answer.

The original work on elite theory evolved from the work of three men: Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels. Their research occurred in Germany and Italy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. All three supported the idea that few elites control human societies. The work of Elmer Eric Schattschneider at the New Jersey University for Women (later Rutgers University) provided a mid-century American context to the work of his predecessors.

In the second half of the 20th Century, two men further defined and expanded the idea of a power elite: C. Wright Mills (1916-1962) and G. William Domhoff (1936-).

Mills received a bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of Texas at Austin and a Ph.D. in Sociology from

The University of Wisconsin Madison. He was the type of person who no longer exists: a public policy intellectual popular among the mainstream media despite his behavior as a gadfly. Mills was widely known among the politically active population and wide circles of academic and independent intellectuals. He did not support the mainstream parties nor those on the fringes of mainstream politics. In the late 1950s, Mills sensed that radical social change was coming, and that realization put him in opposition to mainstream sociology. The central category that drove his social thought was power, especially the mechanisms by which it is achieved and retained by elites in the economy and social institutions.

Naming the power elite as the only “independent variable” in American society, Mills was forced to revise his earlier estimation of the labor movement's power. Eight years after designating the labor leaders “new men of power” (1948) who had to choose whether to lead the entire society in the name of working people and other subordinate groups, he designated them a “dependent variable” in the political economy. He lost hope that working people and their unions could gain power as autonomous actors until a powerful new left of intellectuals and other oppressed groups emerged to push them.

Mills believed American society was becoming divided, and the relationship between the elites and the powerless shaped that division. He worried about alienation, society's impact on the individual, and elites' manipulation through mass media. Mills considered Marx's concerns about the

proletariat and Weber's beliefs about personal meaning and small-group motivations.

Before his death, Mills expressed sympathy with America's New Left, which included the liberal, radical, Marxist political movements of the 1960s. In 1960, he wrote an open letter to the New Left Magazine, encouraging them to develop a new ideology for America rather than just criticizing the existing system.

G. William Domhoff received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Duke University and a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Miami. He was an assistant professor of psychology at California State University, Los Angeles, for three years in the early 1960s. In 1965, he joined the University of California, Santa Cruz's (UCSC) founding faculty as an assistant professor at Cowell College. He became an associate professor in 1969, a professor in 1976, and a Distinguished Professor in 1993. After retirement in 1994, he continued publishing and teaching classes as a research professor.

Domhoff's relevance here is his series of books titled *Who Rules America?* The first edition was published in 1967 and revised seven times, the last in 2022. Domhoff accepts and builds on Mills's theory and applies it to American political changes over the past 55 years. Domhoff has kept Mills relevant even though Mills died 11 years before the first edition of Domhoff's book.

Mills and Domhoff accept the economic-elite domination theory in American politics as reality and use it as the basis for the concept of a power elite. Its rival tradition is the *Majoritarian Electoral Democracy*, which we introduce below.

Economic-Elite Domination

Economic-elite domination argues that U.S. policymaking is dominated by individuals with high income or wealth levels, including ownership of businesses. Not all elite theories embrace this focus. Some emphasize social status or institutional position as the critical power factor. Others postulate that elites are nothing more than a collection of characteristics, such as status and wealth, that give them a common objective.

Majoritarian Electoral Democracy

Theories of majoritarian electoral democracy attribute U.S. government policies chiefly to the collective will of average citizens whom the Constitution has empowered. In other words, the people play their part in operating a democracy and have power over the government. Majoritarian electoral democracy is the traditional idealistic view of the American system.

If the term majoritarian is unfamiliar, we define it as elections based on winner-take-all rules. In the United States, if one party wins an election, the other party has no right to claim any consideration of their ideas and issues. There are political systems outside the United States where the losing party retains some rights. For example, some

federalist systems divide power among all parties who belong to the federation. A pure democracy would involve ruling by consensus, meaning power is shared equally among the participants.

As mentioned in Chapter 9, a research study was done in 2014 by Gilens and Page to assess the applicability of different political power theories and determine which most accurately characterizes the American political system. The authors compared economic-elite domination with majoritarian electoral democracy theory and others.

The results showed that the American public has little influence on government action. By contrast, economic elites have a substantial, highly significant, independent impact on policy. The article includes a chart showing the correlation between various group interests and the likelihood Congress will pass a law reflecting those interests. The correlation between general public interest and the possibility of passage was .03, while the correlation between elite group interest and the possibility of passage was .78. This study strongly supports the influence of the power elite and brings into question the historical view of America as a Majoritarian Electoral Democracy.

The Views of John Higley and Michael Burton

In Chapter 6, we reviewed the research of John Higley and Michael Burton outlined in *The Elite Foundations of Liberal Democracy* (2006). The book argues that successful liberal democracies always contain a consensually united elite, which is required to stabilize the political system. Higley and

Burton quote Samuel Huntington, who said: "The beliefs and actions of elites are the most immediate and significant explanatory variable for explaining democratization waves³²."

Higley and Burton state, "A political elite whose members and factions are always disposed toward mutual deferential and restrained political behavior always forms before liberal democratic precepts and practices are adopted by any larger number of citizens³³." Liberal democracy is an elite creation that the public gradually and slowly accepts.

Political elites are inevitable in all complex societies because there will always be elites who accrue greater power and influence than others by creating small organizations that outwit majorities by way of their agility. The authors speculate that the power elite in the United States amounts to a few thousand individuals.

Higley and Burton describe the role of elites in colonial America to show how it was a part of the American political system from the beginning. The political elite that founded the United States inherited its consensually united form from Great Britain. It was not a copy but a reasonable facsimile. The struggles Britain went through regarding the power of the monarchy and the role of religion echoed in its colonies.

After the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when the British Declaration of Rights was adopted, the American colonial

³² Higley and Burton, page 3.

³³ Ibid.

legislatures moved to pass similar documents. The British monarchy's loss of power distracted the British, which set the colonial governments free to control themselves and allowed them to gain experience in governing. As a result, elites in America became established in positions of power.

After the Revolutionary War and the Constitution period, America's new political system reflected the formation of a consensually united elite. Despite the elite's shared interest, many points of disagreement still needed to be resolved. There would have to be compromises. Those compromises included creating a federal system to divide up power and a checks and balances system designed to decrease the likelihood of accumulation of power. The Bill of Rights was an elite compromise to satisfy some states who feared federal government power.

The question of whether slavery should be permitted was left unanswered by the Constitutional Convention. Once America expanded beyond the Mississippi River and new states were added, the South realized its power would diminish in favor of the non-slavery states. The Civil War broke out because the South wanted to retain its economic model, including slavery. The North held together because of patriotism and the desire to unite the country again. Northern elites restrained themselves and remained consensual.

When the presidential election of 1876 ended in an electoral tie, a commission was authorized to select the next president. The commission voted for Hayes, but Southern Democrats

questioned the panel's legitimacy. To appease them, a compromise was negotiated. The votes needed for Hayes's election were provided by Southern Democrats, who, in return, received a guarantee that Reconstruction would end. That outcome allowed Southern elites to retain their economic model and power. Ultimately, Northern and Southern elites would unite into the power elite we see today.

Opposition From Arnold Rose

After Mills published *The Power Elite*, the opposition began criticizing his concept of the power elite. That opposition is discussed below to offer an alternative point of view.

One of the early opponents to the Mills/Domhoff concept of a power elite was Arnold M. Rose (1918-68). Rose stated his position in the book *The Power Structure: Political Process in American Society* (1967). Rose was surprised Mills believed that all of the institutions of America, like technology, economic organization, and religion, were controlled by one group because he firmly believed cultural values were immune to large-scale manipulation. Rose also suggested that Mills was fooled by the similarity of action between different groups in society, which made him think that similarity indicated control by a single entity.

Rose attacked three factors that Mills used to validate the power that elites hold.

1. *The Constitution gives free rein for corporations to operate.* Rose says that Mills ignores the powerful

limitations on corporations, including taxation, licensing, interstate commerce rules, and marketing conditions, all under government control.

2. Mills stated that *large political contributions are efforts to control government*. Rose believes those factors are negated by other factors that lessen the power of campaign contributions, such as competing priorities and support from different sources.

3. Mills stated that *connections between corporate leaders and politicians allow corporate types to gain influence*. Rose believes Mills does not explain how power works in practice; his data showing the movement of people between corporations and government is an inadequate justification.

Rose strongly objects to Mills' belief that economic determinism describes the power elite. In other words, if those elected come from the upper class, they will represent upper-class interests in office. Rose believes that social legislation, undertaken against the wishes of the upper class, was passed because elected officials ignored corporate and elite interests.

Opposition from Robert Dahl

Robert A. Dahl was mentioned earlier in reference to his book *Democracy and Its Critics* (1989). Dahl is recognized in academic circles as a champion of democracy and an authority on the operation of modern political systems. Dahl, like Rose, takes Mills to task for neglecting a detailed analysis of how the power elite do their work. Dahl asks

what mechanisms and strategies are utilized by the power elite. Mills didn't take his research to that level of detail, so there is no answer to that question. Dahl believes that Mills' documentation of the upper-class occupation of key positions in government and the corporate world does not concretely prove the existence of a power elite.

Dahl considers theories of elite power to be unnecessarily and excessively vague, making them impossible to prove or disprove. Without proof, their validity depends on how well they align with commonly held world views. He feels that accepting the notion of a power elite is a distraction to research about the operation of democracies. Dahl's view of America as a pluralist society suggests that multiple groups compete for power, and power can change from one group to another. There is no dominant source of power.

Conclusions

Here, we have reviewed arguments for and against the idea of power elite control in the United States. The opposition has come from Rose and Dahl, while Higley and Burton's work broadly supports Mills and Domhoff. Two factors strengthen Mills' arguments: the passage of time and changes in American society.

Rose's book appeared in 1967, five years after Mills' death. At that time, there was little research on power elites for or against Mills. Rose could not accept the existence of a power elite because of his idealism. He saw America as a pluralistic society that was too complex to be controlled by any one entity. Dahl was a committed democrat whose work focused

on how democracies operate and evolve. He thought the weakness in Mills was that he could not provide definitive proof of the operation of the power elite.

I believe that changes in American society have strengthened the validity of the power elite concept. Three changes stand out. The first is the growing influence of technology and finance over government and corporations, increasing the need for experts to guide the American government forward. Second, elite media control allows the elites to generate information that furthers their interests. Third, the American public has adopted mass behavior because there is no organizational leverage to pressure the government to respond to its interests. The evidence for that is the expansion in the number of protest groups who feel their strategy is the only means of getting the government's attention.

Most of these studies referenced here came from the period between the 1950s and the 1980s. Since then, there have been significant changes in American society, including the expansion of neoliberalism to the global platform, the explosion of communications systems that make information immediate to everyone, and the influence of technology across all businesses.

These ideas are not wrong or misguided, but their conclusions were drawn when American society had a different character. Changes since the 1950s and 1960s suggest that the older approaches to analyzing democracy

and its effectiveness must be reevaluated to fit the postmodern world we live in today.

What About the Data?

One of the arguments against the power elite is that no collected data proves its existence. What evidence do we have that meetings between the power elite are taking place and are producing actions that propel the United States forward? Of course, there are no meeting notes because their meetings are secret.

Robert Dahl expressed this criticism as follows, “What these studies [power elite] fail to do, however, is provide much evidence on the chain of control from these elites to the outcomes – e.g., beliefs, agendas, or government decisions – over which they presumably dominate.³⁴”

Although the data is circumstantial, it still makes a case for a power elite operation.

The Power Elite at Work

The policy planning network is constantly researching new policy positions and validating old ones, effectively running itself. The power elite understands the overall strategy, so its members only engage when needed. Two types of situations require power elite response: slow-moving and fast-moving. Slow-moving issues are not urgent and are analyzed over time to reach a policy position. An example of this type of policy is whether the Federal Reserve should raise interest

³⁴ Dahl, page 367.

rates. When a fast-moving issue appears, a team must solve the problem as quickly as possible.

For an example of the latter case, consider the financial crisis which began in 2008. There were many emergency meetings between the government, the Federal Reserve Bank, and corporate bankers designed to respond to the crisis. Two examples follow:

September 15, 2008: After the Federal Reserve declined to guarantee its loans, Lehman Brothers stock collapsed, which led to a 504.48-point (4.42%) drop in the Dow Jones Industrial Average, its worst decline in seven years. In a separate case, Bank of America acquired Merrill Lynch for \$50 billion in a government-facilitated transaction. These decisions were made to stabilize the American financial system.

September 18, 2008: In a crucial meeting, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson and Chair of the Federal Reserve Ben Bernanke met with Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, and warned her that the credit markets were close to a complete meltdown. Bernanke requested a \$700 billion fund to acquire toxic mortgages and reportedly told the congressmen: "If we don't do this, we may not have an economy on Monday."

The all-hands-on-deck team consisted of central figures in the Power Elite: The Federal Reserve, Congressional leaders, bank CEOs, financial experts, lawyers, and

accountants. These were power elites working without public input.

Behind them was the opinion-shaping network of the giant media companies who were told how to spin the story. The main objective was to calm the American people and convince them there was no permanent damage to the American economy.

We measure the power elite's workings by examining the outcomes of their actions. The banks were bailed out in the above case, and the public suffered. The power elite prioritized its members' needs over those of the people.

Power Elite in Government

A second set of evidence regarding the function of the power elite is the way they operate in positions of power in the federal government. In chapter 9, we discussed the invasion of elites into the executive branch.

The president's cabinet typically includes ex-governors, members of Congress, federal prosecutors, and government advisors. Secretaries of the Treasury might be former leaders from Wall Street banks like Goldman Sachs. Most of these are millionaires who attended Ivy League Universities and belong to the same social circles. They may move from government positions to the cabinet and leave to join think tanks or become consultants. It stretches logic to imagine these people putting aside their personal or peers' objectives for the good of the American people. The resumes of the people named to powerful positions in government and the

associations they are known to have with peers demonstrate that power is concentrated among the elites.

Globalism

The global elite is a worldwide power elite that comprises the world's most influential businesspeople. American representation in the international elite includes CEOs of the largest corporations, bankers, large investment firms, and financial people from the American government. Because the United States has the world's largest economy, its elites have more influence than other members.

For insight into how the global elite operates, I refer you to the book *Superhubs*, published in 2016. The author is Sandra Navidi, CEO of Beyond Global, a worldwide financial consulting firm. The book provides a rare insight into how power elites operate, as described by Ms. Navidi, who was often present at meetings between elites.

The author uses the word “superhubs” to describe people who act as super connectors in the international financial network. They are associated with the wealthiest individuals and business groups and act to coordinate group activities. The wealth provides them with the power to be influential in international business matters.

The international power elite gathers yearly at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where they actively network and rub elbows with their peers.

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