

American Disillusion; American Dissolution

By Mx. Frog

I am writing this piece in the wake of the US Supreme Court overturning *Roe v Wade*, the landmark court decision which was said to provide the constitutional right to abortion access to all who needed it. Though it was a contentious decision from the start, and one that remained contentious throughout its years in effect, in practice *Roe v Wade* held as much sway, and set as much of a legal precedent for what is constitutional, as any other US Supreme Court decision. Now, it has been overturned, and the current court argues that it was unconstitutional from the start. The Constitution itself, of course, doesn't mention abortion at all.

Per a June 2022 Pew Research poll, 61% of Americans believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Only 37% believe that it should be illegal in all or most cases.¹ This shows that a clear majority of Americans do believe in widespread access to abortion. Yet, many states now ban it entirely, somehow on the basis of a Constitution which doesn't mention it at all, and in the face of popular opinion. Given these facts, one must ask: What does this say about American democracy?

The Supreme Court Justices who made this decision, and who make many other landmark decisions which have significant impact on the lives of all Americans, are not elected. They are not term-limited. They are not recallable. If this were the case in another country, American leaders surely would not call *their* government a democracy. Well, that is unless their political elites ensured US interests. But I digress.

In response to this assertion that America is undemocratic, one may rebut that there are two other branches of government, meant to balance the power of the judiciary, which are democratically elected. I would have to question the validity of this assertion in practice. There are 435 voting members of the House of Representatives, 100 members of the Senate, and one President of the United States. These are meant to be the democratically elected representatives of the people in the federal government. Out of the 536 individuals noted above, 529 are members of one of the two major political parties, these being the Democrats and the Republicans. Of the seven who are not, five are vacant seats in the house. Only two senators, or 0.37% of the elected federal officials, are not affiliated with one of these parties.

One may ask what the issue with that is. They may posit that if the values of most Americans align with one of these two parties, such a system could certainly be democratic, be representative of the people's will. But is that the case? In their May 2022 poll on party affiliation, Gallup found that 29% of Americans consider themselves Republicans, 31% of Americans consider themselves Democrats, and 39% of Americans consider themselves independent.² This by itself should start ringing alarm bells in the head of any reader, as I already

¹ Hannah Hartig, "About six-in-ten Americans say abortion should be legal in all or most cases," *Pew Research Center*, June 13, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/06/13/about-six-in-ten-americans-say-abortion-should-be-legal-in-all-or-most-cases-2/>.

² "Party Affiliation," *Gallup*, accessed June 29, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/15370/party-affiliation.aspx>.

mentioned that only 0.37% of elected federal officials are independents. That percentage would have to be over 100x higher in order to be representative. How is that democratic?

Digging further into this, a September 2021 Gallup poll showed that 92% of Democrats held favorable views of their own political party, while 83% of Republicans held a favorable view of their own political party.³ Given the party affiliation numbers presented above, this means that only 28.52% of the American public are Democrats who hold favorable views of their own party, while 24.07% of American public are republicans who hold a favorable view of their own party. Overall, then, only 52.59% of the American public are satisfied with a major political party. Despite this, these major political parties represent 99.63% of elected federal officials. If democracy is government by the people, this disconnect between the two-party system and the public will makes it abundantly clear that the United States of America is not a democracy, or is at least not functioning as one.

So, how can America have this anti-democratic two-party system while still presenting the façade that it is a democracy? How have these two parties become so entrenched in our political system against the will of the people? The answer to this is, of course, multifold, but a good place to start would be with big-money interests. In America, money and power have a direct, positive correlation, meaning that the more money you have, the more power you have. Given greater access to money, an individual in America will be able to buy-in to better housing, food, clothes, jobs, and overall opportunities than an individual with less money. Many Americans argue that this is an optimal way to organize your society. However, such monetary power has infected our political system and undermined the power of the democratic processes outlined in the Constitution.

In the 2020 general election, those running for the 470 available seats in the house and senate spent a total of \$2.2 billion on their election campaigns.⁴ This is \$4,680,851 per seat, or \$2,340,425 per candidate. Given that real median earnings in the US are \$41,535 per year,⁵ it is clear that almost no Americans could afford to run for a seat as an elected federal official with their own money. You might ask, in response, why they couldn't raise funds from those in their community. That would be a fair method of fundraising which would allow them to maintain a position truly representative of their constituents. Unfortunately, this would be putting them at a clear disadvantage in our political system. Because there are few caps on big-money donations in US politics, wealthy corporations and industry associations are able to give large amounts of money to parties or candidates who represent their interests, thereby diluting the power of communities to elevate their own candidates. Although small donors raised \$752,635,710 for candidates running for the US Legislature in 2020, this averaged out to only 11.06% of each

³ Jeffrey M. Jones, "Party Favorable Ratings Near Parity; Both Viewed Negatively," *Gallup*, October 5, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/355280/party-favorable-ratings-near-parity-viewed-negatively.aspx>.

⁴ Ally J. Levine and Minami Funakoshi, "Financial Sinkholes," Graphics, *Reuters*, November 24, 2020, <https://graphics.reuters.com/USA-ELECTION/SENATE-FUNDRAISING/yxmvjeyjkpr/>.

⁵ Emily A. Shrider et al., "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2020," Publications, *United States Census Bureau*, September 14, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html>.

candidate's total funding for primaries and the general election,⁶ and was only 24.06% of all donations.⁷ Large donors, defined as those contributing more than \$200, raised \$2,436,619,910 for legislative candidates, completely blowing small donations made out of the water.

But why would the rich want to undermine democracy? And what does this have to do with the two-party system? The filtration of much of this money through Political Action Committees (PACs) can help us to answer these questions. Many of these PACs are put together by those in specific industries in order to secure their interests in law. For instance, two of the largest PACs are the National Association of Realtors and the National Beer Wholesalers Association. Those PACs generally split their donations between the two major parties,⁸ as both parties are committed to protecting the current political and economic orders, which benefits these industries regardless of which party holds power. So, they give money to both major parties in order to continue to prop up the two-party system as a whole. However, when these PACs represent groups more directly interested in social and environmental issues, where the difference between the GOP and Democratic Party is much more apparent, the money tends to skew directly towards the party which will most clearly support their interests.

Recently, for example, the GOP has emphasized a continued reliance on fossil fuels, while the Democratic Party has pushed for reduced reliance on fossil fuels, culminating in the Biden administration's goal to "achieve a carbon pollution-free power sector by 2035."⁹ Corresponding with these political party policy trends, big fossil fuel PACs spend most of their money on Republican candidates in order to secure continued profits, while big green energy PACs spend most of their money on Democratic candidates for the same reason. For example, the PAC representing multinational oil and fracking corporation Halliburton spent 85.7% of its political contributions to federal candidates in the 2020 election cycle on Republicans,¹⁰ while the American Clean Energy Association PAC gave 60.6% of its political contributions to federal candidates in the 2020 election cycle to Democrats.¹¹

There are billions of dollars flowing from industry to Democratic and Republican political candidates each election cycle, and profits have never been higher. The economy has never been larger, and politicians have never been richer.¹² Industry and the major political

⁶ Large Versus Small Individual Donations, Elections Overview, *Open Secrets*, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/large-vs-small-donations>.

⁷ Donor Demographics, Elections Overview, *Open Secrets*, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/donor-demographics>.

⁸ Top PACs, *Open Secrets*, accessed July 13, 2022, <https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/top-pacs/2020>.

⁹ The Biden Plan to Build a Modern, Sustainable Infrastructure and an Equitable Clean Energy Future, Biden Harris Democrats, accessed July 13, 2022, <https://joebiden.com/clean-energy/>.

¹⁰ Summary, Pac Profile: Halliburton Co., *Open Secrets*, accessed July 13, 2022, <https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/halliburton-co/C00035691/summary/2022>.

¹¹ Summary, Pac Profile: American Clean Power Assn, *Open Secrets*, accessed July 13, 2022, <https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/american-clean-power-assn/C00259572/summary/2022>.

¹² Karl Evers-Hillstrom, "Majority of lawmakers in 116th Congress are millionaires," News & Analysis, *Open Secrets*, April 23, 2020, <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2020/04/majority-of-lawmakers-millionaires/>.

parties are both invested in maintaining the established political order, and they have largely cut the increasingly unhappy populous out of the equation, severing our ties to the levers of power, in order to maintain this balance and feed their self-interest. To make matters worse, and emphasize these ties, there is a well-known ‘revolving door,’ where individuals regularly rotate between high-level politics and industry lobbying.¹³ Clearly, ours is a government by money and for money. If the American people are unhappy with this order, then, and it is sustained by strings-attached money flowing under the table, we have no right to call this a government either by or for the people.

I could talk more about America’s failed democracy. I could talk about the inequities of the electoral college, the fact that the people have no say in American foreign policy, and that most high-level federal officials aren’t even elected. I could mention how there is no system for a federal referendum so that popular policies, such as the legalization of marijuana and abortion, can actually go into effect without the approval of economic and political elites. But you get the point. You see where I’m coming from. Plenty of ink has been spilled on these topics already, in much more depth than I am willing to go right now. The faults there are clear.

But do you know where referendums are alive? Where elections are direct and recallable? Do you know where people’s votes mean somewhat more, and money means somewhat less? In many of our states and localities. In fact, while Americans are dissatisfied by the federal government, they are much more satisfied with their localities. A June 2022 Pew research poll showed, in fact, that 54% of Americans were satisfied with their state government, and 66% were satisfied with their local government, while only 32% were satisfied with the federal government.¹⁴

Given all this information, the key question is this: does America aspire to be a democracy? If it does, then some serious changes need to be made. We need an elected and term-limited supreme court, a ban on lobbying, major donor limits, a multi-party system, the dissolution of the electoral college, and the institutionalization of federal referendums. Then, maybe, America could begin to look like a democracy.

If America doesn’t aspire to be a democracy, on the other hand, there are a few choices. The most obvious two are these: We can continue to barely function as an obese and unhealthy plutocracy, or we can break up.

We can end this. We don’t need this massive burden of a state with its many hands reaching everywhere they shouldn’t and nowhere they should. We don’t need to continue to follow the rules set by a group of people hundreds of years ago on the foundation of racism, elitism, and land speculation. The world has changed dramatically over the last two hundred years, and while America can, potentially, change with it, it doesn’t need to. We can let it go, and start something, or some *things*, which are more democratic, more flexible, and better aligned to

¹³ Thomas B. Edsall, “The Trouble with that Revolving Door,” *New York Times*, December 18, 2011.

¹⁴ “Americans’ Views of Government: Decades of Distrust, Enduring Support for its Role,” Trust in Government, *Pew Research Center*, June 6, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/06/06/americans-views-of-government-decades-of-distrust-enduring-support-for-its-role/>.

the values of the people living within them than the USA is or could ever be. We can dissolve the USA, and live as autonomous states, or groups of states, where people can live among those who share their interests, their values, and who will govern alongside them. Ideally, we can get to the point where states are no longer needed, and we can simply live in borderless, interdependent communities. We don't have to fight over interpretations of an old, dead document, and we don't have to try to force everyone else to get along with us while the nation descends further into chaos. There is so much hope for the future outside of the bounds of the past. Let us throw aside the shackles of America and start smaller, with purpose. Let us be free.