

# The problem of elections in an undemocratic system

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This is a presidential election year in the U.S. If the U.S. were a true democracy, voters might have a clear choice: either support President Joe Biden's policy of financing and arming genocide in Gaza or back the Palestinian struggle for their homeland.

Instead, this year's presidential politics is restricted to a verbal battle between a far-right Republican candidate — former president Donald Trump — and right-wing Democrat Genocide Joe Biden. Their actual policies are often indistinguishable. Biden has carried on almost all the Trump policies he had promised to end when campaigning in the last presidential election.

As a candidate, Joe Biden pledged to reverse Trump's policies on Cuba. However, he has not even removed Cuba from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List, a designation that represents Trump's most criminal act against Cuba. This is a move that Biden supporters believed would be swiftly addressed.

With Biden as president, U.S. police killings have increased to [record highs](#). Each of Biden's years has seen increases in police killings, each marked the deadliest year on record for police violence in the U.S. In 2023, Black people were killed by police at a rate 2.6 times higher than others.

In 2023, the country was gripped by a series of high-profile cases of police violence, including the fatal beating of Tyre Nichols in Memphis, the tasing of Keenan Anderson in Los Angeles, and the shooting of Niani Finlayson in Lancaster, California, who had called 911 for help with a domestic violence situation. These cases represent just a fraction of the hundreds of similar incidents throughout the year.

Through his budgets, Biden gave police a green light to behave violently. After entering office in 2021, Biden dramatically scaled up federal subsidies to police. [Sixty-eight percent](#) of Biden's discretionary budget for fiscal year 2024 (\$1.1 trillion)

is for military and police-related programs.

[Black Lives Matter](#) responded: "Biden's [increasing police] budget is showing Black people that he couldn't care less about saving Black lives."

### **The Vietnam War era**

To fully understand the current presidential election, it is essential to look beyond the immediate political contest. The current political atmosphere resembles the era during the Vietnam War.

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. was engaged in the Cold War against the Soviet Union and People's China.

The United States was conducting bombing campaigns in Laos and Cambodia. In 1965, the U.S. sent 42,000 troops to the Dominican Republic to suppress a popular uprising against the military dictatorship that had taken power in a 1962 coup.

In the 1960s, the U.S. had a significant military operation in South Korea, with an occupation army of 60,000. The U.S. military still occupies South Korea.

In 1965, the U.S. deployed aircraft carriers and destroyers to the Taiwan Strait in a direct threat to the People's Republic of China.

At the same time, a mass Civil Rights Movement was sweeping the country, as well as an anti-war movement that was particularly strong among students. Socialist ideas were spreading with these movements.

The ruling class itself was in crisis and divided, fearing a deepening polarization and instability at home, intensified by the emergence of endless wars abroad

These divisions were reflected in the presidential politics of the era, from the assassination of John F. Kennedy to the forced retirement of Lyndon Baines Johnson

to the resignation of Richard M. Nixon under threat of impeachment. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., leaders of the Black Liberation and Civil Rights Movements, were assassinated.

The cost of U.S. imperialism's endless wars on many fronts was devastating to the economy. Military spending goes to produce planes, tanks, missiles, and high-tech weapons systems. The product of the military-industrial complex has no use value. Military spending redirects capitalist production into producing means of destruction. More capital is consumed than is created.

"Military spending crowds out other spending," said Jason Furman, an economist at Harvard University, who noted that Vietnam War spending in the 1960s contributed to the soaring inflation at that time, which led to stagflation.

Living conditions in the U.S. deteriorated during the Vietnam War. The average inflation rate in the late 1960s was 6%, reaching 11% in Nixon's last year, 1974. Stagflation, that is, a stagnant economy with high inflation and high unemployment, was devastating the country.

### **Prices outflank wages**

The inflation rate under Biden peaked at just 9.1% in June 2022. It is currently at 3.4%. Prices have not gone down even when the rate of increase has gone down. Also, the services inflation rate, calculated separately, rose 19.32% between January 2020 and April 2024. Most of your daily costs are for services like rent or mortgage, transportation, health care, and so on.

Wages have fallen in the Biden years and have not caught up with inflation.

Biden's military budgets have been among the highest in history. According to the [National Priorities Project](#): "The United States broke records last year by continuing to ramp up its military spending. Consistently spending more than 50% of its

discretionary budget on militarism, the United States funds war at a level much greater than that of any other nation.”

As [Nikkei Asia](#) reports, Biden’s military budget is meant to support a multi-front war against China, Russia, Palestine, Iran, and Korea. [Foreign Policy in Focus](#) reports: “The United States is a heartbeat away from a world war.”

## **Decline of U.S. imperialist dominance**

U.S. imperialism, that is, U.S. monopoly capitalism, is facing a pivotal moment as its global dominance wanes. For 17 years, manufacturing productivity has stagnated. Simultaneously, China’s manufacturing sector has ascended, outproducing the next nine largest manufacturing countries combined.

Additionally, China is challenging the U.S. lead in digital technology. The ongoing trade war includes a significant focus on semiconductors. This “chip war” began in 2018 when President Trump banned U.S. agencies from using Huawei systems and further escalated with prohibitions on investments in Chinese companies. In 2022, the Biden administration imposed limits on semiconductor sales to China.

Microchips are essential to modern economic and geopolitical power. While the U.S. once led in chip design and production, its advantage has been eroded by competitors in Taiwan, Korea, Europe, and especially China. Now, China spends more on importing chips than oil and heavily invests in domestic chip production to catch up to the U.S.

The decline of U.S. imperialist dominance is evident. Its share of global GDP relative to the G7-plus nations has shrunk significantly compared to China’s.

The decline of U.S. dominance in manufacturing, trade, and technology echoes the fall of British imperialism in the 19th century. The G7-plus nations’ share of global GDP is now only twice that of China, compared to 300 times in 1970.

This situation also mirrors Britain's shift from free trade to protectionism in the late 19th century.

Protectionism becomes the rallying cry in times of economic distress, especially for a threatened imperialist power. The United States can be expected to impose more tariffs, protectionist restrictions, and sanctions.

### **Workers and oppressed peoples of the world unite!**

In Marx's era, the fight against capitalism was primarily seen as the working class's unified struggle against the bourgeoisie. This struggle aimed to secure democratic rights not just for workers but for all others deprived of democratic rights. However, it was apparent that only minor reforms were achievable under capitalism.

Socialist propaganda focused on abolishing capitalism altogether, highlighting its inherent contradictions, the exploitative nature of wage labor, the impoverishment of farmers, and the rise of monopolies at the expense of small businesses.

The rallying cry for the socialist movement was "Workers of the world unite!" as it says in the Communist Manifesto.

Lenin updated this to reflect capitalism's changed character. Competitive capitalism had evolved into monopoly, which not only required vast expansion at the expense of oppressed peoples around the world but also exacerbated and intensified every type of national oppression at home. Lenin added the oppressed peoples to the slogan, which now reads, "Workers and oppressed peoples of the world unite!"

Marx said in Capital about the class struggle in the United States: "Labor in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded [enslaved] in a black skin."

The liberation of oppressed peoples in the U.S. is essential for the working class struggle. As a settler state, its colonies are internal, starting with the brutal

subjugation of the Indigenous population and the enslaved African American colony. These are oppressed nations.

In current day-to-day terms, this is the fight against racism. The African American population still does not have economic or political equality, nor do the Indigenous peoples. Reparations are owed and necessary.

Voting rights have been a battle that continues to this day. In 2013, the Supreme Court nullified the Voting Rights Act. In 2016, the Trump campaign used the Court's ruling in an effort to suppress the Black vote.

### **Not a democracy**

Which brings us back to the fact that the U.S. is not an actual democracy.

The U.S. was never a full democracy. As any college history professor could tell you, the 18th-century founders of the U.S. were quite familiar with the classical Western history of ancient Greece's ideal of democracy and the Roman Republic. They chose the Roman imperial model.

The U.S. Constitution closely mirrors that of ancient Rome, a president (Roman Consul) selected by the Electoral College (Roman Assembly of the Centuries - military officers). The Senate (like the Roman Senate) was appointed (until 1913) and doesn't represent populations but rather "states." The U.S. Constitution does not have a popular democratic assembly (Roman Plebeian Council) but instead substitutes a House of Representatives based on elections (which are funded by the wealthy).

They added a Supreme Court so that ultimately, the law is not decided by Congress, the elected branch of government, but by an appointed-for-life elite coterie.

The right to vote was given to white men (no women allowed) who were property

owners. The Constitution specifically bars all rights to the Indigenous Native peoples. And the Constitution says that enslaved people are property and have no rights.

The Supreme Court's 1857 Dred Scott decision found that not only were enslaved people property, but the Constitution also forbids citizenship to anyone of African ancestry.

Not until the victory of the Civil War were the Reconstruction Amendments made to the Constitution. The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, granted citizenship to all persons "born or naturalized in the United States," including formerly enslaved people. In 1870, Congress passed the 15th Amendment, stating that voting rights could not be "denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

In 1919, the 19th Amendment granted women the right to vote.

Not until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were Indigenous peoples' right to vote put into law.

While the political system appears more democratic with wider participation, a stronger social and economic process has been unfolding. This process involves the consolidation of power within undemocratic institutions, stemming from the concentration of the means of production in the hands of a ruling class that wields and allocates power in ways most beneficial to their interests. It is no surprise, then, that the Supreme Court holds the ultimate authority in exercising power. With its lack of direct accountability and conservative nature, the Court is the most dependable institution for the ruling class.

The Electoral College system for presidential elections means a candidate can win the presidency without winning the popular vote. This system has dominated all

presidential elections this century. In 2000, Al Gore received more votes than George W. Bush, but the Supreme Court intervened and gave the Electoral College selection to Bush. In 2016, Hillary Clinton received almost three million more votes than Donald Trump, but the Electoral College gave the presidency to Trump.

Donald Trump is counting on the undemocratic Electoral College system to bully his way back into the White House. In fact, because of the Electoral College system, the election, it is said, will be decided by only six “[swing states](#)” — Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Nevada. So what about everywhere else?

Fight for what you want. But not for Biden. Nor for Trump.

That message might be sent with a vote. In some states, socialist candidates have overcome many obstacles and gotten on the ballot. Give them your vote and say you’re against genocide in Gaza and for Palestinian rights.

