Systematic Analysis of Threats to the American Democratic Republic in 2025

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| Which **facet** of the American democratic republic is affected | **Legal threats:** “baked into” Constitutionand subsequent laws and court cases | **Societal threats:** S/E factors, practices of political and other interest groups |
| 1**Electoral** facet -Participation (voting and civic engagement) -Free & fair elections (“fair” means even-handed, not necessarily representative)  | **1 Constitution** does **not stipulate voting as a right.**  Supreme Court in *Bush v. Gore* and *Shelby County* hold that **voting is a privilege**, not a right, thus can be taken away by state. The ***Shelby County*** decision in 2013 overturned provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act, which permitted states to:-**reinstitute restrictions** on voting: e.g. requirement of **state-issued IDs**; limiting **absentee** and mail-in voting.**-purge voter lists,** making registration difficult.**-allow intrusive poll-watching.**The result is **lower participation by minorities**, elderly, and disabled.3 **Constitution** stipulates that national **elections be controlled by the states**; hence there is **no national** **election commission** to oversee elections.-**lack of uniform rules** and practices among states invites unequal voting privileges.-Reactionary state legislatures can disenfranchise minorities (e.g., **Jim Crow** laws).-US is only country that allows **partisan control** of electoral apparatus (Walter 2023).-Since 2010, extreme **partisan manipulation to suppress** opposition vote.6 **Gerrymandering** of state voting districts is **tolerated by the Supreme Court: in *Rucho v. Common Cause*** in 2019, it disabled any constitutional challenge to district maps on the basis that no objective test of “fairness” is possible.-The creation of **“safe districts” encourages apathy** (“my vote doesn’t matter”) hence **low turnout**.-Naked partisanship in district map drawing has led to **grossly unfair advantages** to the party in power. 4 **Hindering access to voting**: Unlike most other democratic countries, neither Constitution nor subsequent legislation have made **Election Day** a national holiday.-Difficult for **working people** to vote.-Sluggish **voter turnout** favors parties with greater resources for GOTV (get out the vote).7 **Partisan manipulation of election procedures**. Since 2010, Republicans have worked energetically in state legislatures to **alter election rules** under the banner of “election integrity”:-**overthrowing state election officials** through well-funded primary challenges-**centralizing control of elections** at the state level-making election board selection more **partisan**-giving **election boards the discretion to refuse to certify the** vote, based on “reasonable cause”-organizing **mass challenges** of votes in Democratic precincts.-**purging voter lists** to reduce participation, especially by minorities- harassing and **prosecuting individuals** who may have voted in error, to **instill fear of** **committing a voting “crime,”** reducing participation by marginalized groups.-reducing the days of **early voting**-imposing limitations on **absentee** voting-requiring onerous **citizenship tests** (not required in the US constitution)-**imposing hardships** on voters by shortage of printed ballots, reduced number of voting venues, prohibiting support of voters waiting in line, etc.8 **Selecting unverifiable voting machines:** Some state governments have adopted voting machines with **policies that inhibit verification of the vote** (e.g., no paper trail) and/or lack safeguards against tampering with machines to **alter the vote** (Hartmann, 11/17/24)9 **Inadequate civics education:** Only 23% of eighth-graders passed NAEP civics exam; only ten states require a year of civics education (Shapiro and Brown 2018).-Reduces citizens’ **knowledge of rights and duties** and of government processes.-Leaves graduates deficient in building **skills and agency for civic engagement** (Shapiro and Brown 2018). | 4 **Disenfranchisement as a means of racist social control.** Political disenfranchisement and disempowerment through voter suppression and gerrymandering has long been applied as a tool for a dominant party to maintain its dominance. In addition to that political motive, during the nearly 100-year era of **Jim Crow laws**, violent intimidation and selectively applied laws were **applied specifically to Black people** to impede their voting rights and the means of advancement in society.2 **False claims of voting irregularities**. Since 2020, Trump has proclaimed—and Republicans have consistently echoed—charges of **“rigged elections.”**-Encourages disdain for actual **facts.**-**Dilutes public trust** in election fairness.-**Endangers safety** of election workers.-Makes **recruiting** election workers more difficult.-Has led to the appointment of illegal **fake electors** (a felony).5 **Foreign interference:** The fairness of the presidential elections of 2016 and subsequent years has been undermined. The Mueller Probe determined that Russia interfered in the 2016 election principally through two operations.  First, a **social media campaign** that favored candidate Donald Trump and disparaged candidate Hillary Clinton.  Second, a **computer-intrusion operations** against employees and volunteers from the Clinton Campaign to steal and release internal documents (Special Counsel's Office, Department of Justice 2019).  Since then, Russian agencies have conducted a wide-ranging campaign **of social media disinformation** to distort the outcome of US national elections.6 **Inhibitors to voter turnout**: legal barriers and **social-psychological influences** combine to yield one of the lowest rates of turnout per eligible voter (51-65% in recent decades) compared to other democratic republics.-Rational Choice theory suggests that voters **weigh the costs and benefits of voting.** They ask, for example, Is my vote pivotal? Should I support my “team”? Do I derive personal satisfaction from doing my civic duty? Am I going to be confronted at the polls? **Legal and societal inhibitors add to the “cost” side of the equation**.1 **Implicit bias**: The Framers of the Constitution claimed to be speaking on behalf of “all men,” but they actually spoke for and implemented rules **for the** **benefit of men like themselves**—male, white, free, property-owning, literate, and deistic. 3 **Social Alienation** (“Bowling Alone”): Americans have become increasingly **disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and social structures**, including church, PTA, clubs, political organizations, or service organizations, such as Rotary, Lions, or Elks (Putnam 2020). -Leads to loss of ***social capital***—networks of relationships that help advance societal goals—and **lower civic engagement.** These losses stifle democratic impulses.-Also note the effects discussed under “Social Media.” |
| 2**Egalitarian** facet -equal representation -equal access to resources | 1 **Constitution** established the **Electoral College** for presidential election, which, together with designating **two senators** per state gave **permanent advantage**, initially to slave-holding states, and now **to rural states.**-Yields the election of Congresses with more **regressive agendas**.-Allows a minority of the national population to consistently **overrule the will of the majority.** Since 1998, Republican senators have never represented half the population, but they have been the Senate majority half that time.-Leads to **loss of faith** in the process.5 **Congress’s tax policies** (e.g., low corporate tax rate, low capital gains tax rate, myriad loopholes for those able to lobby for advantage) **have concentrated wealth** in fewer and fewer hands.6 **Plurality (or “First-past-the-post”)** tallying system is **unrepresentative of the true distribution of political preference**; that is, the number of a party's seats in a legislature is not based on total vote count, but rather on how those votes were geographically distributed (which is easily manipulated by gerrymandering). **Late Granting of Suffrage**: Constitution was initially silent on voting eligibility, thus state laws largely prevented women and minorities from voting. **Full suffrage not granted until 1870—for non-white males—and 1920—for all women.** Thus, **women and non-whites have been historically underrepresented** in the Executive and in Congress (e.g., no women presidents; historically women have constituted only 3% of Senate membership). -Under-representation contributes to **unequal access to resources.** Women and non-whites historically **earn less** than white men in same jobs (e.g. in 2025, women earned 85¢ for males $1).4 **Senate’s filibuster rule** leads, predictably, to **“tyranny of the minority,”** depriving the majority of their Constitutional right to pass legislation; 41 senators representing 15% of the population can block most legislation (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2023).2 **Constitution** allowed **slaves to be counted as 3/5ths of a person** in census count. Thus, slave-holding states gained **disproportionate seats in Congress**-Allowed generations of **laws** supporting slave-holders interests and accrual of **generational wealth**.3 “**Great Compromise**” agreements of early 19th century ordained that new ‘free’ states could be added only if **equal number of ‘slave’ states** were added…-Preserved **permanent Electoral College advantage**.7 **Racist Federal policies** through 1950s (e.g. **“redlining”** to limit minority access to home loans) consistently **inhibited wealth creation** by women and non-Whites (Rothstein 2017).-Families in the discriminated classes/castes have a **permanent financial handicap**.-thus are less able to **vote**, run for office, or **demand the attention** of candidates and representatives8 **Congress** ended the **military draft** in 1972, ending an institution that previously brought together rich and poor, White and minority individuals from all walks of life—an experience that was a form of **desegregation**.-Military services are now **less representative** of the total population.-Fewer young men have experienced working beside people different from themselves, thus increasing **social distance** between races and classes.-Makes **partisan divide wider**, compromise more difficult.9 **Presidential** misuse of military, as in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, has led to **decreased respect for veterans** by the public and **increased anti-government** **resentment by vets.**  -These resentments are spread among vets’ families and **fellow members of less privileged social classes**, who largely populate the military.10 **Constitution** **omits Education** as a public concern, thus **states vary** in quality, quantity, and equity of education.-Leads to **less “informed electorate**.”-**Inadequate *general education*** reduces citizens’ **ability to play a productive S/E role** in society.-**Inadequate *civics education*** reduces citizens’ knowledge of their rights and duties, and of government processes in general.-**Home schooling** evades all standards regarding the content or quality of civics education. | 2 **Growing income inequality**: since 1981, deregulation, tax cuts for wealthy, offshoring of manufacturing, and weakening of unions has moved $50 trillion from the bottom 90% to top 1%; now at historic highs, gap is among the greatest in the world. With far less access to money and clout, the **90% cannot compete equally for political influence.**-US has **highest income inequality among all developed nations.**-US income inequality **now comparable to France at the time of the French Revolution**.3 **American caste discrimination.** [*Caste* is a more accurate term than *race*because *caste* describes a **structural, systemic condition**, not a description of one’s color (the primary determinate of caste in US).] Caste is a hidden hierarchy of social ranking (Wilkerson 2020), which **consigns** **lower castes to subordination—less power, less representation, less access to resources.**-Middle class **demands a bottom rung** below them in order to experience empowerment; imagined competition creates an “outgroup.”-Economic gains **perceived as** **zero-sum game** where gains of lower castes are viewed as losses for those on higher rung.-Lower-caste status raises **barriers to** **entry to elected office**: lack of resources, lack of visibility in community, and “othering” make entry into politics difficult. **Misogyny and Patriarchy**: Women in US have historically been limited in their **ability to exercise power** equivalent to men.-**Property rights**: Married women could own property by 1900, but single women not guaranteed access to loans and credit on their own until **Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974**.-**Subordination**: Women, especially in lower socioeconomic status, are expected to play a **subordinate role** to men, a precept of patriarchy.-**Restoring 1950s patriarchal family conditions** is the underlying goal of the Heritage Foundation’s ***Project 2025***: heterosexual married couples; father as head of household and breadwinner; mother stays at home to care for (many) children (*Atlantic*). 7 **Deindustrialization** of the “Rust Belt” and the “Coal Belt” has been an ongoing, step-by-step process. Major causes include:* In 1950s, **labor union strength** increased cost of labor; manufacturers minimized innovation due to limited domestic or foreign competition.
* **Automation**, especially after the computer era began, eliminated many blue-collar jobs.
* After 1980, **free-trade policies** increased foreign manufacturing competition.
* After 2000 China gained Most Favored Nation status, accelerating the movement of manufacturing to Asia.

Consequently:* Blue-collar workers **lost economic and political power**, especially with loss of high-paying union jobs.

-**Income inequality** accelerated.-Shrinking of the **middle class.**-The losers feel **betrayed** and seek **scapegoats;** populists encourage them to blame “the government,” specifically Democrats (e. g. supposed “War on Coal”).8 **Demographic “Hollowing Out”**: **Rural counties are losing population**, especially of most capable youth.-**loss of economic vitality** leads to loss of hope, contributing to “white rural rage.” (Schaller and Waldman 2024)1 **The wealthy** have always had an advantage in the legal system.-Able to afford **powerful lawyers.**-Able to **shape** **public opinion.**-**High social position** perceived as more valuable to society, leading to more lenient legal treatment.5 **Othering**: labelling people as belonging to a socially subordinate category in order to **exclude and displace them from the social group** to the margins of society. A trait of the MAGA movement is to promote “othering” of women, non-Whites, immigrants, Muslims, and gender nonconforming people.-E.g., historically, “othering” of non-Whites was formalized into Jim Crow laws, which not only prevented voting but also **subjected non-Whites to economic and incarceration discrimination**.-Once “others” are **identified as dangerous** as well as outcast, discrimination against them--even **violence**—is acceptable.6 Conservative parties have historically **represented the interests of the wealthy** and business classes—a minority of the electorate. To attain majorities, they raise **issues of identity and caste**, appealing to the fears of white males (Walter 2023). 9 **The shortage of affordable housing** caused by:* **Housing construction plummeted** after Great Recession of 2010.
* **Cost of construction** increased, especially after COVID crisis.
* **Mortgage interest rates** sharply increased in 2022.
* **Speculative buying** of properties by private equity investors raises cost of rental or purchase (unoccupied houses kept off the market).

Consequently:-**reduced labor mobility** and productivity, thus slowing economic growth.-**reduced social mobility**, denying opportunity to less privileged groups, stoking **social frustration and rich-poor divide.**-increasing **homelessness**, placing a burden on local government-**End result is voter hostility toward “the government,”** support for dissident factions.10 **Gilded Giving**: Because of historic reluctance to invoke government power to deal with social injustice/inequality, **philanthropy** has emerged as a major mechanism for addressing S/E problems in the US. -**Creates dependence** on good will of billionaire donors.-**Tax breaks** given to philanthropists **increase the tax burden** of lower-tier taxpayers.-Increases **resentment against “elites,”** used by populist politicians to arouse partisan animosity. 11 **US education system** has historically served to sort the population into “academic” and “vocational” streams. -I**ncreases social distance** between SE classes.-Spurs **animosities exploited** by populist politicians.13 **Late Capitalism** (in Marxist theory) is characterized by globalization, the **dominance of multinational corporations**, broad commodification and consumerism, and extreme wealth inequality. In this view, the **American economic system itself creates inequality in wealth and power**. |
| 3**Civil Liberties** facet -rule of law enforced -checks and balances upheld -civil liberties observed | 1 **Alien Enemies Act of 1789** allows President in time of war to **arrest, relocate, or deport people** from a foreign enemy country. It was previously invoked in War of 1812, WWI, and WWII against people from enemy nations.-Used in 2025 to **deport Venezuelans** to El Salvador prison. On April 7, 2025, the Supreme Court allowed program to continue, with some due-process qualifications.2 **Emergency Declarations:** The **National Emergencies Act (**NEA) of 1976 **empowers the president to activate special powers during a crisis**…with certain procedural formalities (which are often neglected). Since 1976, 60 national emergencies have been declared, more than 30 of which are still currently in effect. A subset of the NEA is the **International Emergency Economic Act** (IEEPA), which allows the president to **block transactions and freeze assets** of foreign entities.  **There is great potential for abuse of “emergency” powers** as the Act grants discretion to the president; his invocation of the Act can be overridden by Congress, but the president can veto the override. Examples that could be considered abuses include:-Used by Biden in 2021 to **forgive student debt**.-Used by Trump to divert funds to **build a wall** at the Southern border in 2019 after Congress denied funds.-NEA invoked by Trump in 2025 to enforce an **aggressive crackdown on undocumented immigrants.**-IEEPA invoked by Trump in 2025 to impose a **sweeping regime of tariffs**.4 **Supreme Court’s lack of accountability**: Constitution stipulates **lifetime tenure, but establishes no accountability** mechanism.-**Lacking enforceable ethics rules,** Supreme Court is the one branch of government that has unchecked power.-**Superannuated justices** -less likely to represent **current sensibilities.**-**competence** degrades with advanced age.-As appointments have become more politicized [See “Stonewalling” below], **Court rulings become more partisan**.8 **Broadcast Media increasingly partisan**. Radio Act of 1927 and Communication Act of 1934 granted **radio and TV licenses to for-profit corporations.****-Air waves controlled by corporations**, not the public; operated for shareholder profit, not public interest. Thus, tend to reflect pro-business, **conservative bias**.-**FCC repeal of Fairness Doctrine** in 1987 allowed **unfettered partisanship** by mass media.-To maximize profit on AM radio, stations turned to **“conservative talk radio,”** where loudest and most outrageous opinion garnered audiences (ergo, most profitable).-**Reduces public access to balanced news** and public affairs information.**-**Broadcasters **no longer serve as checks** on government power.3 **Abuse of war powers:** the balance between the President’s and Congress’s authority to wage war has been renegotiated constantly since the formation of the republic. However, in recent decades, presidents have gone beyond their explicit authority to use military violence for causes they deemed worthy.  Specifically, the **2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF)** and the **2002 Iraq AUMF** have been used as **the legal basis for military operations against suspected terrorist groups**, including some that did not even exist when the AUMFs were passed.President Trump has issued memos and orders that threaten to expand these abuses even further.6 **Congressional concentration of power**: As legislative business has become more complex and partisanship more intense, **more power is concentrated in committee chairs** (e.g. Ways & Means), who can single-handedly determine which bills advance; **majorities don’t matter**. Consequently: * **Reduces the checks and balances** within the legislature (leadership vs. members).

5 **State legislatures** (with Republican super-majorities) are currently passing **anti-protesting legislation.**-**Criminalizes peaceful protest with** **liability** for organizers for any damage or disruption.-Invokes “organized crime” **RICO** principles to deal with organizers.7 **Stonewalling judicial appointments**. Appointments to Supreme Court and lower courts have become **politicized**, which jeopardizes fair balance in court system.**-**The most egregious example has been Republican **refusal to even consider Supreme Court appointments that are “late” in the term** of recent Democrat incumbent presidents. 10 **Militarization of police forces**: the Safe Streets Act of 1968 birthed the **Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA)**, which granted federal funds to local governments to **obtain military resources** to quell potential riots. -Now, **police shootings of unarmed citizens**—typically of marginalized groups—are common, often provoking flare-ups of violent protest.-With military equipment and military tactical training, police more likely to **intervene forcefully in peaceful protests**.11 **Unequal justice of plea deals**: Almost all criminal convictions are the result of a plea bargains. * This practice produces a **massive underclass** of people—disproportionately poor and non-White—who are **restricted from voting, working, and otherwise participating in society** (Canon 2022)**.**
* Facilitates **“framing” innocent people** to resolve the case.
 | 1 **Dark Money undermines the independence of the judiciary:** Since the 2010s, **Leonard Leo has built a secretive network of think tanks and advocacy groups**—accelerated by a $1.6 billion grant in 2022—devoted to installing highly conservative judges on the Supreme Court and lower courts.-Trump has **appointed three conservative justices**—Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett—all selected and shepherded through the confirmation process by Leo and **the Federalist Society**.-Leo’s network supported Senate Republicans who **changed the Supreme Court confirmation rules in 2017**, requiring a simple majority rather than 3/5ths supermajority.2 **Military and Law Enforcement members** (e.g. police, FBI) are **historically conservative** in their perspectives and practices.-**Minorities, marginalized groups**, and unpopular advocacies have historically been suppressed (German 2024).-A 2019 poll showed that 36% of soldiers have seen evidence of **white-supremacism** among their peers (Marche 2023). **Intruders gaining access to private data**: DOGE operatives embedded in Federal agencies have illicitly **gained access to a wide swath of databases containing sensitive private information**, such as: tax returns, medical records, social service benefits, educational history, student loans, and immigration information.-“Read-access” allows intruders to **copy data** for unauthorized purposes; **expose secret agents**; **deny access to public services;** **“doxx”** individuals for public scrutiny; or sell **data to foreign governments, data brokers, or private companies.**-“Edit-access” allows **records to be altered** (Pascal, Stanger and Others 2025). **Vandalism and arson against Black churches** has long been a tactic of **white supremacist terrorists**, predating the Civil War. -In the 1950s and 1960s churches were targeted as the gathering places for **civil rights activists.**-Since 2015, **racist rhetoric in the Presidential campaign** fueled a spike in vandalism and arson against churches.3 **Lawfare.** Although all parties have used litigation to advance their interests, since 2020, Republicans have used a **blizzard of lawsuits** **to delay justice**, particularly around elections, interfering with the normal democratic government processes. |
| 4**Communal** facet -government decisions made with deliberation and in best interests of the people (collective interests) vs. special interests | 2 **Supreme Court decisions (*Bellotti*, 1978; *Citizens United*, 2019)** declare corporations as persons and **equate money with speech**.--*Citizens United* has allowed **super-rich to replace parties as primary funding source** for politics; partisanship more extreme because parties used to be a force for ‘centering.’ -Led to vast increase in corporate political activism, drawing **hordes of lobbyists** to DC (“K Street”).-Accelerated the **“revolving door”** of legislators and govt. officials who become lobbyists and vice versa (Hart 2022, 39).-Lobbyists who were formerly in the government leverage their **informal networks** among legislators and bureaucrats to promote corporations’ special interests.-Lobbyists who were formerly corporate experts become bureaucrats who use their **insider knowledge** to promote policies and regulations that benefit the special interests.-In essence, **lobbyists write the laws**. Consequently, since *Bellotti* decision, the **top 1% gained $21 trillion** in wealth (Hartmann, 3/20/24).3 **Supreme Court’s** ***McDonnell*** decision (2016) has erased the line between **“gifts” to political leaders and bribery**.- Wealthy individuals and corporations can **purchase the favor of government leaders** through campaign contributions and even personal gifts, thus stacking the deck even further in their favor. -Those corrupted leaders reciprocate by **rewarding wealthy donors** out of public sources (Hart 2022, 67).4 **Industry-Congress co-dependency**. Since the beginning of the Cold War, **Congress has devoted greater resources to “national security,”** building what Eisenhower called the **“military-industrial complex.”**-Defense contractors control vast sums of appropriated funds, necessitating powerful lobbying efforts, establishing **co-dependency between business and congressmen** to the detriment of the people’s collective interests.6 **Populist politicians attack universities** under guise of subjugating the “elites.” They push legislation to:* **Scrutinize endowments**, as a threat to force administrators to fall into line.
* **Question research grants** to control research into unpopular or controversial subjects.
* **Undermine tenure** as leverage against outspoken faculty members.
* **Control the curriculum** to privilege conservative ideology and suppress unpopular or controversial views.
* E.g., by encouraging **students to politically critique their instructors**.
* Define **professors’ work as “work for hire**,” meaning the university owns their work products, thus reducing the independence of faculty members.

5 **Referenda or** **“ballot initiatives”** have the force of law in some state constitutions.-Although intended to increase “direct democracy,” they tend to favor **moneyed special interests** that can out-spend opponents.-Tend to favor **demagogues** who can arouse populist fervor.1 **Constitution** intentionally made **amendments difficult**, favoring the status quo, i.e., established interests. | 1 **Lobbyists (“K Street”) overwhelm congressional deliberation:** Well-financed **special interest groups** support lobbyists who suborn Congress members to **favor their interests** **as opposed to the common good.** Business groups are the dominant players; they promote **pro-business policies** in general, such as low corporate taxes and reduction of government regulations. Examples: US Chamber of Commerce, Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturing of America, and American Hospital Association.-Other **special interest groups occupy specific niches**; e.g., the **NRA** vigorously opposes all laws that would limit possession of firearms; it is **heavily subsidized by the gun industry** and is considered to wield outsize influence since many gun-owners are “one issue voters” and NRA endorsement can be decisive.-contributes substantially to **epidemic of gun violence.**2 **Decline of the** “**Free Press**,” long viewed as the “watchdog of democracy,” traditional mass media are shrinking in size and influence due to market forces (e.g., **newspapers, radio, and TV consolidating** **and disappearing**; **advertising revenue** diverted to social media).-Fewer markets have **competing voices, diminishing pluralism.**-Less coverage of **local issues** and opinions.-Yields a **less-informed electorate**, more prone to persuasion by demagogues and special interests.-**Reduces civic participation** in general.3 **Corporate Bias of newspapers, TV stations** and other media companies that **operate for shareholder profit**:-21st C. prioritization of **bottom-line commercial and entertainment interests** vs. journalistic and democratic values.-**Outright MAGA partisanship**: **Sinclair** Broadcast Group (193 TV stations) **requires its stations to broadcast packaged video** segments and its news anchors to read prepared scripts that contain pro-Trump editorial content. **-Conservative talk shows dominate AM radio,** the medium that people listen to while driving, a virtual monopoly. Besides travelers, AM radio is crucial for people who are **geographically isolated**, out of reach of other media sources; thus contributing to right-wing leaning of rural areas. Listeners are bombarded with **non-stop right-wing propaganda**, which:-spreads **misinformation** and **disinformation** (e.g. conspiracy theories)-rhetorically **demonizes** opponents.5 **Social media platforms** are efficient and addictive conveyors of **mis- and dis-information** to unwary users. They are unregulated, virtually uncensored (e.g., X has fired all moderators) and users may remain anonymous, thus attract heavy use by **bombastic voices and malevolent propagandists**, including foreign adversaries. Because social media platforms have become the major battleground for advertising dollars, their **algorithms reward clicks**, ergo sensational or salacious gets prioritized [“attentional salience of negativity” (Hayes 2025)]. Thus social media:-spread **misinformation**, e.g. New Deal policies are “socialist” or “communist.”-spread **disinformation,** e.g. conspiracy theories, foreign trolling.-rhetorically **demonize** opponents—not only wrong, but malicious; e.g. “Journalists are enemies of the people.”6 **Individualism as a political ideology,** often phrased as **“rugged individualism”** since the time of Herbert Hoover (Hoover 1928), prioritizes realizing one's own goals and desires, and valuing independence and self-reliance above the interests of the group or the state. - since it **downplays “the common good”** versus individual interests, individualism supports such political stances as: anti-union, acceptance of ‘tipping’ culture, reluctant support of public schools by childless people, disinterest in public support of mass transportation, and opposition to public health insurance.**-**People who implicitly accept this view and who then lose their jobs, **suffer shame** and loss of self-esteem; **seek scapegoats** to rationalize their perceived failure.-Individualism rejects viewing the world as a “global community;” it promotes **suspicion of “Globalism”** or the “New World Order.”**-“Competitive individualism”** claims that achievement should be based on **merit**; thus it provides the basis for **opposing efforts at diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).** **-**This ideology has taken root in the American mind through the film and TV portrayals of **“cowboys” and vigilantes as American ideals.**7 **“Low information” voters** have little understanding of the issues and the consequences of policy choices.-Have **less exposure to objective news sources**, less participation in civic service organizations.-Easily **misled by demagogues**; see “Social Media.”-Tend to be **close-minded** about their positions.-Lower participation rate in voting or civic engagement.8 **Complacency of democracy supporters**. Post-Cold War, an era of affluence, Americans have become **complacent about democracy**; the Left do not see the world in “survival” terms as do the Right.9 **“Wokeism” as a political epithet:**  People take offense when “Progressives push their cultural agenda down their throats.” Advocacy for minority rights and identity politics tend to heighten the reactivity of straight white people.-Triggers **feelings of being marginalized** and discriminated against; **frustration breeds aggression** (Hochschild 2018)).10 **Prejudicial, focus-group tested rhetoric**, pioneered by Frank Luntz, was adopted by Newt Gingrich in 1980s to 1990s to replace neutral terms with **wording intended to produce an emotional response**. Prejudicial terms, such as identifying “capitalism” rather than “democracy” as the basis of American system, and labeling rightists as “real Americans” while labeling Democrats as “radical,” “corrupt,” and “liberal;” and describing current situation as “decay,” “failure,” and “crisis” have become standard terminology among “conservative” and populist spokesmen and media outlets (Corn and Murphy 2011) (Richardson 2023). Such **weaponized language**-is increasingly promulgated by social media platforms with zero or **weak moderation.**-promotes **“othering”** of political opponents.-when couched in violent terms, stimulates **violence.**-intimidates peaceful people into **submission**.11 **American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)**, while posing as non-partisan, has used its vast hidden funding to promote pro-business and politically conservative policies.-Misleads state legislators to attend **supposedly non-partisan summer conferences** masquerading as family holidays.-Provides state legislators with **cookie-cutter legislative language** ready for introduction.-Stealthy **undermining of regular political functioning**.-A leader of the movement to call for a **Constitutional Convention**, which would be dominated by conservatives. 12 **Malignant autocrats**, such as Russian oligarchs, covertly influence American elections. -**Troll farms** spread misinformation and disinformation.-Use “cutoffs” (e.g. NRA) to **relay money to right-wing politicians** and institutions that promote their interest in weakening American institutions (Applebaum 2024). |
| 5**Existential** facet -undermining integrity of government -directly threatening foundations of govt. | 1 **Insurrection Act of 1807** authorizes the employment of US military forces inside the US in cases of insurrection or civil disorder.-has been **invoked** during labor conflicts of early 20th century, by Eisenhower and JFK to enforce desegregation, and as requested by governors to deal with disorder during 1989 Hurricane Hugo and in 1992 during the Los Angeles riots.-**Trump signed an executive order** on Inauguration Day 2025 ordering a study of necessity of invoking Insurrection Act.2 **Originalism,** the fringe legal theory that the meaning of a constitutional provision is fixed when it is adopted, is now embraced by five Supreme Court justices and increasing numbers of judges in the lower courts. “Originalists” **cherry-pick historical points to buttress their extremely conservative preferences,** using the Constitution as a front for their own ideology (Chemerinsky 2022).7 **Courts altering the Constitution through partisan interpretation**: Even without formally amending the Constitution, by Republicans’ **stacking the courts**—the Supreme Court and lower courts—with right-wing activists, policies that could never succeed through legislation are **being made the law of the land under the guise of “judicial review.”** 8 **Irregular revision of agency regulations**: two recent cases have altered long-standing procedures for how federal agencies establish and change regulations. First, in the ***Loper Bright* case** in 2024, the conservative majority of **the Supreme Court overturned the long-established “Chevron deference”** which **gave agencies discretion** in interpreting ambiguous federal laws and regulations. -In effect, **courts will now interpret federal regulations, not agency experts**. Second, in 2025, President Trump issued a **Memo directing agency heads to move forward quickly with a “review-and-repeal effort”** to expunge recently overturned long-standing regulations **without the normal “notice-and-comment” process**, in spite of the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Loper Bright* that rules should not be changed retroactively. Trump claimed the authority to change procedures mandated by the 1946 **Administrative Procedure Act (APA)** **under the “Good Cause Exception”** written into the APA. -**Allows** **presidents to halt or quicken the implementation of new regulations to suit their political interests.**3 **Deregulation of firearms: Second Amendment**, as interpreted by recent **Supreme Court rulings** (*DC v. Heller*, 2008; *McDonald v. City of Chicago*, 2010), gives individuals virtually unlimited rights to possess all sorts of arms, including military type.-**Gun ownership** is rising rapidly, about 1 million sales per month; now **more guns in circulation than total of US population**.-Most popular gun is **AR-15**, which is useless for hunting or home protection, so gun-owners claim of **“self-defense” essentially means defense against possible government intrusion**.4 State **“Stand your Ground”** laws plus unregulated proliferation of guns leads to more **wrongful shootings**.5 **Constitution** makes it **difficult to amend** the Constitution. In the interest of stability, the document has become a **“dead hand,”** subjecting newer generations to the human fallibility of the Founders. (Chemerinsky 2024)6 **New** **Constitutional Convention:** Article V specifies the rules for invoking a **Constitutional Convention**. Dark-money-funded ALEC is striving since 2013 to obtain the consent of 34 states to require a new Constitutional Convention, **which ALEC’s allies intend to return to the “states rights” conditions of the Articles of Confederation**, ending our current American Democratic Republic (*The Progressive*, 1/24). | **1 Anti-democracy political ideologies**: Several political ideologies with overlapping tenets—such as monarchism, anarcho-capitalism, right-libertarianism, and **neo-reactionary movement (NRx)**,have gained significant following in recent years. The latter, which has received explicit support from a number of tech billionaires associated with Elon Musk and JD Vance, is notable for its total rejection of democratic values and institutions.  NRx specifically **rejects pluralism**, the belief that democracy is best served if a **wide range of interests are included in political deliberations** and their concerns seriously considered. The goal of NRx is to **replace the current democratic republic** with a more “efficient” and historically established system, such as **monarchism or feudalism** (Hartmann 2025) (Gunitsky 2025). 2 **Authoritarian Playbook: Guidelines for the conversion of a democratic state to authoritarianism** can be inferred from the experiences of Russia, Hungary, Turkey, and Poland in recent times. Process begins with gradual reduction in democratic safeguards; may continue gradually or succumb to a **“decapitation strike”** (Snyder 2017).  The US is not immune to these processes. Some of the gradual steps can be found in the doctrines of a major political party; see provisions of **“Project 2025,”** such as: -**Dismantle civil service**: replace career civil servants with political appointees whose mission is to undermine their agency.-**Reduce civil liberties**, e.g. **draconian immigration** policies; ban on “pornography;” restricting rights based on gender, “wokeism,” reproductive freedoms, etc.-President could invoke a **national emergency** to implement a “decapitation strike,” a sudden imposition of authoritarian rule.5 **General anti-government bias.** Began in Colonial times as **resentment against monarchical misrule**. Inflamed in Antebellum times by Southern resistance to imagined Northern dominance. Currently,many citizens have few personal interactions with government agencies, and those **are usually negative** (e.g., building permits, obtaining licenses, traffic citations). -Also, see “Individualism.”10 **Conservative revolt over School Desegregation**. Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision found that separate schools were not equal, calling for school integration. This immediately led to call for **“Massive Resistance” in Southern states** (see Sen. Byrd’s “Southern Manifesto” 1956).-Southern politicians **closed public school systems**, shifted state support to segregated schools, started “segregation academies” as alternative schools, etc.-Voucher plans implemented by conservative legislatures have increasingly **shifted students from public schools to “charter”/private schools**, most of which are not mandated to require racial integration.**-“White Flight”**—Americans began self-segregating by moving to locales that suit their socio-political preferences.-**Big-city public schools** **become more homogeneous** by SES, race, and caste.-**Suburban public schools become more heterogeneous** (Meckler and Rabinowitz 2019)-Accelerated transition of **Southern voters to more conservative party(ies)** (Kruze 2007)**.**14 **Tribalism**: **Political identity has been replaced by “tribal” identity** (based on vague socio-cultural leanings, such as family traditions, religious affiliations, or even sports fandoms vs. coherent political issues. People evaluate political issues based on coherence with tribal beliefs rather than on consistency with political ideology.-Some tribalisms originate in colonial migration from different parts of Great Britain (Puritans, Cavaliers, Scotch-Irish) (Hart 2022, 32).-Politicians promote **“wedge issues.”** Keeping their partisans inflamed increases voting support.-Consequently, **divisions among different factions** are accelerated.**-Congress members** increasingly **refuse to support *any* legislation**, including funding basic government operations, because it would give a “win” to the opposing tribe.-Reinforces notion that the **government does not work**, thus offering autocracy as more efficient model.21 **Conflict between tenets of “conservative” religious organizations and democracy.** Many of the world’s religious organizations prescribe **leadership by anointed elites**, which inherently conflicts with democratic civic values.  Further, certain **religious groups**, by taking strident positions, **sow division** between themselves and other faiths and with secular society.-**Christian Identity movement** is an interpretation of Christianity (not a specific sect) which proposes that only Celtic and Germanic peoples, or the Aryan race are the descendants of the ancient Israelites and are therefore God's "chosen people". Labeled as racist, antisemitic, and white supremacist by the ADL and the SPLC.**-Christian Nationalism** movement promotes belief in **charismatic prophecy**, which fuels political radicalization (Taylor 2024).-**‘New Apostolic Reform’** churches constitute a **cult: leaders are prophets** who get messages from God, **demand obedience** of followers, direct them to “cult of Trump” (Hassan 2020).-**Fundamentalist Christian churches** are losing members like other churches, but they have become **more active politically**:-Since church attendance is declining, those remaining feel more beleaguered, hence more t**ribal identity and more militant attitude** (*N. Yorker*, 4/3/23).-Congregations have become substitutes for extended family, adding **emotional traction** to their hold on congregants.-Their clergy are credentialed by **bible colleges** instead of by traditional college education, making them more narrowly focused and doctrinaire.-Messaging from the pulpit encourages fusion into a **tribal** identity, separation from mainstream; see the **Christian Nationalism** movement. See “Tribalism.”-**Jewish advocacy groups**, such as Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, etc. are quick to take offense, e.g., labeling anti-Israeli government protests as “antisemitic.” **Promotes divisiveness** and **invites backlash**.-**Muslim advocacy groups**, such as CAIR, may provoke backlash for pointing out acts they view as “anti-Muslim”-**Catholic advocacy groups**, such as Opus Dei and **Leonard Leo**’s groups, including Marble Freedom Trust (beneficiary of a $1 billion inheritance) and Concord Fund, have funneled tens of millions of dollars into appointing conservative Catholics to the courts, esp. Supreme Court.-by **supporting unpopular, divisive issues, such as anti-abortion**, Catholic pressure groups exacerbate **political wedges** dividing the public.-judges take extremist stances, overruling precedents and **undermining democratic values**. 25 **“Dark Money”:** foreign autocratic regimes undermine the integrity of US governmental institutions (Applebaum 2024).-They hire US **lobbyists** (often former govt. officials) to whitewash their heinous regimes.-Lobbyists give **political contributions to congressional campaigns** in exchange for access (ergo, the lobbyists serve as “cutoffs” for dirty $ payments).-They **subvert** **non-profits** (e.g. Clinton Foundation) with major donations, betting on which will have influence in next administration.-**Recruit universities** through huge donations in an attempt to **influence research directions** and to curry favorable treatment by faculty (Applebaum 2024).-Take advantage of the greediness of American **financial institutions** to build connections and draw them into their web (Applebaum 2024).19 **American militia movement.** Anti-government groups, often styled as militias have increased dramatically since election of Obama in 2008. The SPLC identified 334 militia groups at a peak in 2011, since then, up and down, hovering around 200 groups (SPLC, 2016).3 **Republican operatives** attempted after 2020 presidential election to substitute **fake electors** for those duly elected—a clear, felonious attack on the foundations of democratic government (The 2020 Fake Electors Scheme n.d.).4 **General loss of faith in institutions**, especially the presidency, Congress, and Supreme Court (Chemerinsky 2024), as documented in Gallup Polls (Jones 2022). Contributing factors include:-**Gridlock**, as parties are forced by base voters to abandon any attempt at compromise.-**Futility of voting**—“my vote doesn’t matter”—due to gerrymandering and general “tyranny of the minority.”6 **Public opinion shaped by lived experience, not objective data.** In 2010s, majority of respondents feel country is “headed in the wrong direction” and not doing well economically, despite many positive economic indicators.* Voters seem to be **“voting against their own interests,”** wherein they want to send a message that their lives are difficult.

7 **Demographic Peril:**  US Census projects US will become **'minority White**' by 2045. People generally want themselves and their **“blood” to survive,** thus groups centering their **White identity are becoming more militant** (Walter 2023) (Hochschild 2018).-Their **fear of slipping lower on the ladder** elevates their desperation, hence propensity to resort to **violence**. See **“othering”** (Wilkerson 2020)**.****-Election of Obama** in 2008 accelerated the rise of militant hate groups (Wilkerson 2020).8 **Migration Peril**: ongoing domestic **migration from rural areas into metropolitan centers**—both North and South—puts (conservative) rural counties at risk of losing dominance in their state. -The struggle to maintain rural dominance leads to increasingly **polarized and bitter** partisan competition.9 Historically, the **law enforcement and** **justice system targeted and penalized minorities**: -**eroding minorities’ trust** in the justice system;-weakening minorities’ **support of government** generally.11 **New media environment: Social Media platforms and podcasts have replaced journalistic news media** as most people’s sources for news. This makes the dissemination of **dis- and mis-information** faster and cheaper. *Daily Wire*, for example, operates podcasts, websites, streaming service, social media, YouTube channels, and theatrical films, providing ‘content’ reaching 220 million/month with **divisive far-right propaganda** (*Globe & Mail*)* People’s **lived experience** plus their perceptions based on media consumption—not economic data—controls their vote
* Allows formation of **“alternative reality”**; people can hold onto a different set of “facts,” which makes communication with “outsiders” impossible. That is, **“truth” no longer matters.**
* Unregulated “free speech” allows dissemination of **hate speech** as well as false, defamatory claims, e.g. about immigrants’ behavior.
* Some false rumors (or “conspiracy theories”) originate **from foreign adversaries** aiming to divide Americans.
* Social media platforms derive revenue **from advertisers, who pay for clicks**. Thus, algorithms intentionally support sensational and salacious claims because they propagate more clicks.
* Anonymity and inflammatory language encourage more and more **extreme reactions, exacerbating hatred** and division.
* Advances in **AI make “deepfakes”** easier and more common, adding visual fuel to verbal deceptions; currently unregulated.

12 **Replacement of first-hand, face-to-face relationships** with immersion in **mediated experiences**, e.g.:* **Decline of broadcast (or even cable) media** with replacement by separate “streaming” services and social media platforms leads to **reduced shared culture** **and shared reality**.
* Membership in civic service organizations, church attendance, and other **face-to-face relationships replaced** by virtual social bubble.

Consequently:* **Anomie**, including for young men looking for meaning in their lives
* Loss of **common basis for logical debate**.

13 **Entertainment dominates our media consumption** or “amusing ourselves to death” (Postman 2006). As our attention is devoted increasingly to screens—TV, movies, Internet, and social media—we have become conditioned to expect mediated experiences to be entertaining. Thus, **we expect news, politics, science, education, commerce, and even religion, to entertain us.** -**Diverts public attention** from real-world issues.-Leads **public discourse to be less serious**, less logical, less factual, and requiring less critical thinking. E.g., presidential debates are about gaffes and emotional zingers rather than about policy differences.-The **entertainment business becomes the content of news** (e.g. box office revenues of movies, lives of media personalities).-**TV celebrities can easily transition into politics**, reducing political debate to drama and scandal.15 **American Exceptionalism as a political ideology** is deeply ingrained in national identity. Since 2012, has been a plank in GOP platform. It impels Americans to disregard other models or foreign examples; at worst, it **induces an arrogance, self-regard, and sense of moral infallibility in ‘patriots**.’ -adds an element of certainty, **validates emotional commitments** to “patriotic” actions, **even violence**.18 **Right-wing attack on public education**-Conservatives want to replace public ownership with private to align with **capitalistic ideology**.-Entrepreneurs view schooling as a vast new **profitable sector to exploit**.-**Voucher** and **charter** programs allow **religious schools** to siphon off public funds.-**Extremist rhetoric inflames parents** by claiming that their children are being “poisoned,” “groomed,” or even subjected to sex-change operations in school.-**Partisan efforts to politicize** **school board** elections:-**Castigating** board members for decisions made on educational grounds.-Demonizing opponents so that citizens **fear to run** for or serve on school boards.-Attacking **“progressive” curricula** (e.g. “Wit & Wisdom” reading program, SEL).-Attacking **“progressive” administrative practices** (e.g., DEI).-Motivated by a range of ideologies, often **racially based, i.e., White Supremacy** and/or antisemitism.-E.g., **Sovereign Citizen movement** claims that federal government is totally illegitimate; instead, individuals hold sovereignty and decide which laws to obey (Schaller and Waldman 2024).-They are **well-armed and increasingly trained** in military tactics in preparation for civil conflict.20 **Stochastic terrorism**: lone wolf and semi-organized attacks (e.g., 1960s racial riots, Charlottesville rally, and Jan. 6 insurrection) often fueled by radical propaganda. This includes loosely organized groups, such as **Antifa**, which, in the cause of anti-fascism sometimes provoke violent responses.-**Young men** are more attracted to “macho” values of the Right; many are sad and angry, potentially explosive. See the **Proud Boys** and similar neo-fascist groups.-Such groups upset the social order, adding **fuel to the fire of authoritarians** who advocate sacrificing democratic values to “restore law and order.”22 **“Rural white rage:”** lower-SES people fear falling behind other racial and economic groups (Schaller and Waldman 2024) (Hochschild 2018).-Those perceived as supporting the “out groups” are easy targets for demagogues who **demonize the “elites.”**-Dollard & Miller’s **Frustration-aggression** hypothesis points out that aggression is commonly a result of frustration (Dollard and Miller 1939), thus providing the basis for **hate groups** and **stochastic terrorism**.23 **Russian disinformation campaign:** false news and conspiracy theories are flooding into US social media through **Russian “political technology”** knowingly **passed along by rightist media organizations**, such as Fox News, Breitbart, Cambridge Analytica (Richardson 2023) (HCR, 10/6/24) -**degrades trust** in government and fuels **political radicalization** (McQuade 2024) 24 **American conservative alliances with foreign autocrats**. Autocratic and hard-right regimes have been gaining support over centrist and more democratic parties around the world. This supports the rise of authoritarianism in the US.* For example, Hungary’s neo-fascist **Orban regime** is intertwined with MAGA Republicans; they see Hungary as model for conversion of a democracy to an autocracy.

26 **Political extremism growing** (Anti-Defamation League 2021)**:** that is, adherence to a political stance that departs from socially acceptable norms. Extremists may fall anywhere on the right-left spectrum or not on that spectrum at all. Common characteristics are:-**rejection of compromise** (e.g. contemporary conservatives define compromise as **betrayal of principles**, causing legislative **gridlock**, increasing disdain for government.)-unshakeable **confidence** in their position-**intolerance of internal dissent**-**demonize** opponents-advocate **violence** to achieve their ends. |

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