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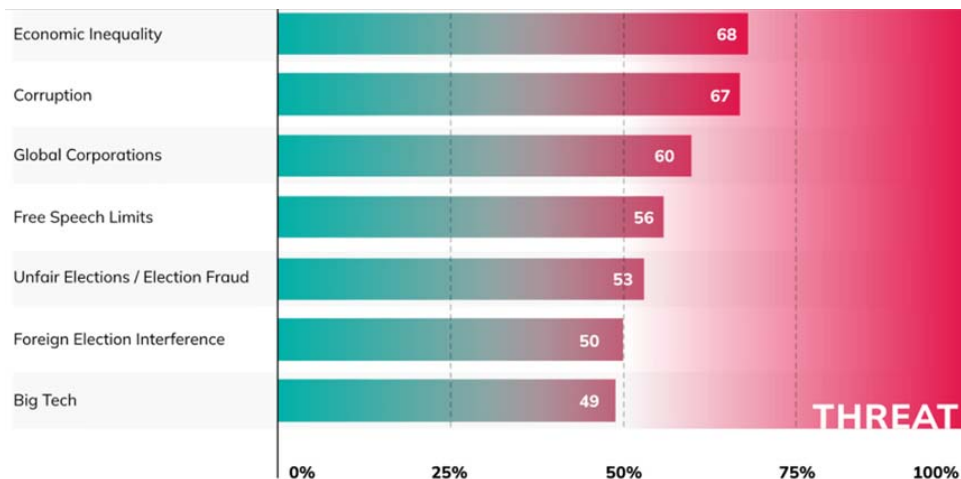
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The People Want Socialism, Not Fascism

In each of the last six years, the Danish NGO AoD (Alliance of Democracies) has compiled and published the Democracy Perception Index, an international survey of national sentiments regarding democracy. What sets the survey apart is the inclusion of economic reasons as threats to democracy. So, instead of having American politicians psychologize economic dysfunction as ‘anxiety,’ survey respondents are able to answer the questions themselves.

Surprise, the survey responses have nothing to do with anxiety. They reference the distribution of economic power. In descending order, the threats to democracy are 1) concentrated income and wealth, 2) corruption, and 3) corporate control over politics. And preceding Donald Trump’s first term was the conclusion by a near-majority of Americans that the US is not ‘a democracy.’ A far larger percentage of Chinese believe China to be democratic than Americans believe the US to be.

Economic inequality is viewed as the biggest threat to democracy worldwide



Graph: economic inequality, and not ‘Putin,’ ‘China,’ or ‘authoritarianism,’ leads the list of threats to democracy, according to AoD. In fact, the top three categories are economic in nature. It’s almost as if the US doesn’t want for its people to know what ails us. The threats that we (Americans) have been handed all serve the foreign policy interests of the US. How is this not authoritarian? Source: allianceofdemocracies.org.

By asking the citizens of the world for political assessments of their respective nations, what is revealed is both what is valued by citizens generally, and what is particular to each nation. The survey results are used below to illuminate the social ambitions of the peoples of the world, as well as their assessments of the impediments to realizing these ambitions. While the Americans are correct that citizen rule is valued, the US is amongst the least likely places to find it globally, according to the survey.

This essay proceeds from a generalized discussion of world politics, it applies the findings of the AoD survey (link above) to this politics, and explores the possibilities with the goal of crafting a new peoples’ politics. From the premises laid out here, none of this is intended to be imposed. Such an imposition would represent the opposite of citizen rule. Also, left unstated so far is the obvious problem of class relations. The global wish for more democracy seems a decent proxy for less rule by economic elites.

For the young, the young at heart, and those averse to learning from history, the purpose of ‘Trump!’ in 2025 is to give American-style capitalism one more try. Missed in the prior iteration were impurities in execution according the Trump & co., and not the conceptual flaws of capitalism. From Ronald Reagan to Bill Clinton to George W. Bush to Barack Obama, capitalism would have worked as advertised if only capitalism’s executors had been homicidal enough.

The immediately prior version (of capitalism) had it that abandoning industrial policy, deindustrializing the US, sending sensitive national production (e.g. defense, critical minerals, agriculture) abroad and handing national decision making to self-interested corporate hacks and inheritance wastrels was the necessary curative. The resulting rolling crises of capitalism were explained as temporary disruptions, as bugs, not features, to the point when the economic, and with it social, decline of the US became an embarrassment to our overlords.

When, around 2022, those two heads of the same coin, the Davos Man – Gold Toilet crowd, realized 1) that they were being offered fewer VIP room entries / swag bags while traveling internationally and 2) that other nations had learned the lesson that out-arming the US was the only way to get a decent night’s sleep, they decided to get radical. Ethnic cleansing in

Gaza that would have made Germans of the WWII era proud, combined with JFK-on-a-meth-and-cough-syrup-bender style nuclear gamesmanship became known as ‘leadership.’

These are the lofty heights from which the current crop of maladministrators descended. What appears to upset the American commenting class, the PMC, are threats that could plausibly apply to them. The American-led WWII-style genocide in Gaza might be unpleasant to watch, but it doesn’t rise to the level of fascism unless it is happening to Americans? And what of the definition of fascism as ‘capitalism that really means it?’ This surely seems a better description of inheritance-baby Trump. He only wants to get ‘the help’ in line, can’t you see?

Economic questions risk muddying the so-carefully-filtered American view that capitalism enhances democracy via choice. Never mind that the logical end of skewed economic distribution is concentrated political control, the American view is that concentrated political control can coexist with democracy as long as voters don’t get to decide anything. This social media ‘like’ view of democracy, where citizens offer a preference for which political toll booth attendant they want to serve the oligarchs, is utterly divorced from political control.

For most of the last several decades, although not so much recently, the powers-that-be have been telling Americans that the US is a center-right nation. The logic has been that the Democrats represent the left, the Republicans represent the right, and with the Democrats moving right, the arithmetic says right of the mid-point between right and left. What emerges when economic questions are asked, rather than ideological ones, is that not only Americans, but the people of the world, want broad economic distribution, an end to corporate control, and an end to corruption.

Western propaganda regarding the natures of imagined foreign adversaries lost its potency in 2024 (date of latest AoD survey). hilariously, of sorts, the Western distinction between ‘democracy’ and ‘authoritarianism’ merged toward singularity in the eyes of the people of the world. Again, a much larger percentage of Chinese believe that China is democratic than Americans believe that the US is. In the survey, Americans aren’t blaming foreigners, they’re blaming oligarchic and corporate control of the US.

Given that ‘promoting democracy’ requires contrast to distinguish it from possible alternatives, the merging of democracy with authoritarianism in the eyes of the world is a problem for both AoD and US foreign policy. With the US continuing to market itself as the world’s premier 1) capitalist, 2) democracy, the growing understanding inside the US that economic factors are the greatest threat / impediment to democracy illuminates a paradox.

Capitalism is a threat to democracy. While this observation is old enough to be a cliché, the US has nothing else.

Decisions made during the ‘free markets’ fiasco of the Clinton – Bush – Obama years led to the current limited menu of economic choices that the US has. Many of the same people who imagined that deindustrialization was the panacea for Western imperial decline currently imagine that AI, finance, technology, and military production will save us. These are elite fantasies to line their own pockets. Further, with genocide and endless wars for resources, how does the recent American project differ from the German fascist project of the WWII era?

The domestic result has been the financial crises of 1989 – 1995, 2001 – 2003, and 2006 – 2015. What were the domestic policy responses to each of these crises? In the first, investigations were had, a few culpable bankers were sent to prison, and rich people were made whole. In the second, a ‘few bad apples’ were chided, a few even went to prison, and the rich were made whole. In the third, twenty trillion dollars USD was committed to rebuilding ‘the system,’ bankers and the rich were made whole, while the rest of the world was left to its own devices.

Note the approximate end date of the last financial crisis above, 2015. Donald Trump was elected for the first time in 2016. Question: how would the citizens of the US register their dissatisfaction with twenty-five years of crisis caused by bankers gone wild? Recall, at the start of this epoch the banks were heavily regulated to prevent crises before they occurred. That system worked. Then Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush deregulated. Question: how is Mr. Trump a radical departure from this history?

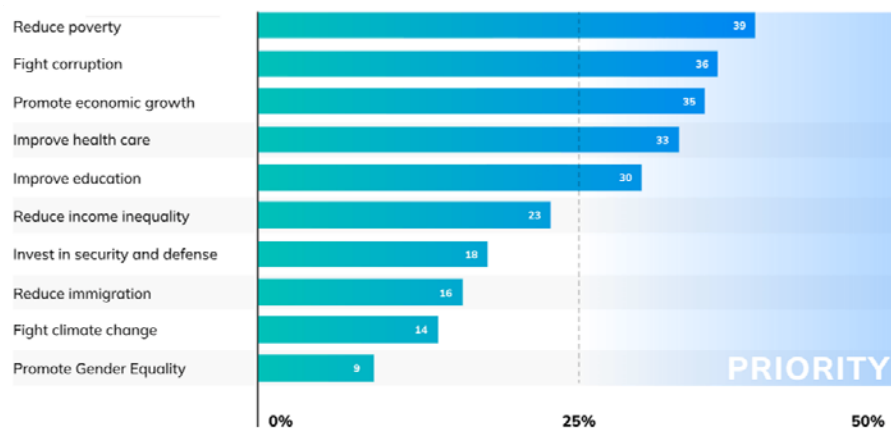
While the US has spent the last century declaring Russia to be authoritarian, only a slightly smaller proportion of Russians believe that Russia is democratic than Americans believe the US to be. What happened was that Cold War animosities were revived with Russiagate, and the light-thinkers who found it convincing are stuck with the residual remembrance of Cold War clichés filtered through news content intended to sell breakfast cereal. The challenge, again, is that the 0.01% richest, the oligarchs, plus the next richest 9.99%, the PMC, only total to 10% of the US population.

But what does this actually mean? In the most basic sense, it means that the priorities of the leaders of the world differ from those of its citizens. The citizens want greater control over the political decisions being made than they currently have. For a nation like the US that uses the fiction of citizen control for authoritarian purposes, it means that the hold of the uniparty

is waning. Voters have been fleeing it since the launch of the second Gulf War in 2003. But with no Independent party to vote for, the fiction of democratic consent has been maintained. However, a more interesting question is raised by the survey results. What type of government do people want? The second-order result of people wanting ‘more democracy’ is that they want more economic fairness. They want much flatter income and wealth distribution, less control by corporations, and less corruption. Question: how can corruption be reduced when campaign donors control both electoral outcomes and the donor-friendly policies that follow? This type of system has a name, and it isn’t democracy.

One irony that emerges from the Democracy Perceptions Index is that the Alliance of Democracies seems a typical agglomeration of propagandists, politicians, and technologists who are dedicated to producing whatever product that the CIA (formerly USAID) is paying for. And yet the priorities it reported for government action inside the US and around the world are straight socialist programs (graph below). From reducing poverty to improving health care and education, the wish list has distinguished socialism from capitalism and fascism since 1917 at least.

People around the world want their governments to focus on poverty reduction



Graph: what it is that the people of the world say that they want reads like an advertisement for world socialism. Poverty reduction and improving healthcare and education have been basic to every socialist program since 1917. The only culture war issue that made the list came in dead last. And the low relative position of ‘Fight Climate Change’ relates to Americans having never heard of it. Source: allianceofdemocracies.org.

Ironically, in the 2024 Democracy Perception Index, hoops had to be jumped through to maintain a distinction between democratic and authoritarian states. While the related facts have been interpreted inside the US as an upsurge in global authoritarianism, what the AoD survey suggests is that it is capitalist states abandoning the pretense of democracy that is

responsible for the difference. For instance, liberal ‘rights’ lasted in the US until they became inconvenient for the powerful.

For the people of the world who want more say in the affairs of state and world, we have the current state of the world to contend with. Question: why would we defer to politics to solve problems of economic distribution, corruption, and corporate control? Well, how else can they be addressed? The American conception of economic governance is regulatory, not directly political. With every American president since Jimmy Carter (1976 – 1981) supporting the deregulation of business, how would legislation to reduce the power of business even proceed?

The question that the peoples of the West appear to want answered is: how do we shed ourselves of these imposed leaders to lead ourselves? A clearer ‘signal’ could not have been sent in the US in 2016 that it was a change in the form of political organization that people wanted, and not more of the same. Following decades when simply describing oneself as liberal would limit careers and the reach of social networks, Bernie Sanders openly described his policies as socialist. Younger readers can’t imagine how constrained the politics had been. The same was true again in 2024. Given a choice between a demented warmonger and a lottery ticket, the people chose the lottery ticket. As is usually the case with lottery tickets, the choice didn’t pay off. But the question of why the safe choice in 2020 went so far off the rails needs to be answered. With oligarchic rule, the US is now ungovernable. The people don’t want elite policies, and the American ruling class has no knowledge of how the rest of us actually live.

This inference of a left imperium is important to understand. The American right has a long history of wavering between isolationism and imperialism. And liberals speak of peace, but are the first to launch wars (e.g. Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton). The left imperium sees itself, like liberals, as the policeman of the world. This is quite different from Marxist internationalism, which, to the extent it exists, is a coalition of allied movements, and not state-sponsored external change agents.

China had the benefit of the Russian Revolution preceding China’s entry into international capitalist competition. This isn’t to define Chinese political economy as capitalist. That so many Chinese believe (link above) that the Chinese state acts in the interests of the Chinese people implies that a capitalist predator class doesn’t (yet) control China. This makes the coming decades important to watch. Concentrated wealth can be used as a form of colonialism, granting power over others, such as Westerners buying farm land in Africa that is needed by peasants for agriculture.

In [this brief video](#), economist Rick Wolff explains the different development paths that China and the USSR (Russia) took that resulted in China's current economic success. According to Wolff, the Chinese always maintained a private property component to Chinese communism. Missing in this explanation, as I am quite sure he knows, is the effort by the US, Brits, French, and Japanese to reverse the Russian Revolution by sending standing armies into Russia to accomplish the task. This didn't benefit the Soviet economy.

So, while the argument here is that point-in-history probably better explains China's relative success than its residual private property component, the point is moot. American industry wasn't taken from the US, it was freely handed over under the theory that the US would produce high value goods while the rest of the world would produce low value goods. Missing from the plan was what would happen to the millions of people employed at decent wages producing low value goods in the US?

There is little to be gained from turning poll results into a political Talisman. The issues still need to be decided democratically. But by incorporating economic explanations, the AoD appears to have actually considered what democracy is. And the answer that emerges is that economic democracy, aka socialism, is the path to citizen control. Americans need to consider that our choices are getting a lot smaller. Those expecting Pete Buttigieg or Amy Klobuchar to chart a brave new path forward will need to get past the still-burning embers of the world that the neoliberal consensus has stuck us with.

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Rob Urie is an artist and political economist. His book [Zen Economics](#) is published by CounterPunch Books.