

# America's Two-Party System Is A Relic Of The Past And Bad For Democracy



*C.J. Polychroniou*

*07-22-2024 ~ An Interview on the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election with C. J. Polychroniou.*

The rematch between Biden and Trump is regarded by many as the most important election in modern U.S. history. It is also a rematch between two men that many voters have serious reservations about and feel that U.S democracy can do much better than having a raving maniac and someone who is too gaffe-prone and seems to be experiencing cognitive decline run for the highest office in the most powerful nation in the world. In this case, however, the real culprit is America's two-party system, argues political scientist/political economist C. J Polychroniou in an interview with the French-Greek independent journalist Alexandra Boutri, because it severely limits choices for the voters and discourages competition due to a winner-take-all system. Polychroniou also addresses the nature and character of today's GOP and why a second term for Trump could turn the U.S. into a neofascist dictatorship.

*Alexandra Boutri: For the next few months, U.S. elections will be under the spotlight. The rematch between President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump is pivotal for the future of democracy in the U.S., critically consequential to Washington's European allies, and potentially transformative for today's*

*geopolitical realities. The two men also differ radically when it comes to climate change and have different approaches regarding immigration and taxes. They are also quite apart across a broad range of issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Do you agree then with the often-made claim that the rematch between Biden and Trump is perhaps the most important election in modern U.S. history?*

*C. J. Polychroniou:* Before I address your question, let me just say that we cannot discount the possibility that we won't have a rematch between two men that many American voters don't want anyway because Joe Biden may drop out of the presidential race before next month's Democratic National Convention. Nearly two-thirds of Democrats want Biden to step aside, according to a new poll conducted by [AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#). Also, there are solid reasons why many American voters don't want to see another showdown between Trump and Biden. Trump is simply unfit for the highest office in the land, or any public office for that matter, while Biden, judging from the difficulties he is having with speech and memory, can't possibly be relied on to serve another 4 years.

Be that as it may, the 2024 U.S. presidential election is enormously important for at least some of the reasons you cited, although parochialism is what drives most American voters. This election is also unlike any other in modern history because American voters are so polarized that the threat of civil breakdown is real. This is the best evidence that binary politics is bad and possibly dangerous for contemporary democracies. American voters don't have a viable range of choices, but the U.S. political system is set up for two major parties because of the winner-take-all politics. It is mainly the [winner-take-all system](#) that has also allowed the superrich to hijack the political system and transform the U.S. from a flawed democracy to a plutocracy.

*Alexandra Boutri:* You may have an excellent point here about the downsides of a two-party system, but why does polarization run so deep in today's United States?

*C. J. Polychroniou:* Political polarization among Americans has deep societal roots, with religion and race playing pivotal roles, but has been steadily intensifying in the last forty or fifty years. There is now such a huge gap between Democrats and Republicans over political and social values that each side fears that the other side will destroy the nation if they are allowed to dictate policy. Democrats

tend to be quite liberal when it comes to social issues, but most Republicans identify themselves as social conservatives. However, it is interesting to note that an annual poll on values and beliefs conducted last year by [Gallup](#) found that more Americans identify themselves as socially conservative than at any time in about a decade, although the largest increase was among Republicans. The role of guns in society, abortion, race, immigration, gender identity and sexual orientation are among the issues that sharply divide supporters of the two parties, according to the latest findings from a [Pew Research Center](#) survey. Republicans and Democrats are also very much divided over [the role of government power](#) and [global warming](#). In sum, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Democrats and Republicans live in different worlds.

*Alexandra Boutri: How would you describe today's GOP?*

*C. J. Polychroniou: Today's GOP is the creation of one man alone—namely Donald J. Trump. What I mean by that is Trump can shift the party in any direction he chooses because he exerts a cult of personality over his followers. He can deliver fiery anti-abortion messages at some juncture during his political life, like he did when he first run for president because he needed the support of evangelical Christians, but then decline to endorse a national abortion ban at another juncture because he fears that it would cost him votes if he did so.*

Trump is not about ideology, values or beliefs. Trump is the penultimate political opportunist who will say and do anything that might help him to achieve his goals. He is a clown, but a dangerous one who poses a real threat to democracy and the rule of law. The Republican Party has always been a reactionary political party but has now become an extreme political organization that fires up its base with lies and conspiracies. Trump employs the rhetoric of conservative populism, mocks the elite class, and pretends to be pro-worker. Never mind that Trump has no ideological convictions of his own and spent four years in office weakening unions and catering to the interests of the superrich. Most GOP voters have become blind followers of Trump and have neither the critical thinking skills nor the will to face the truth. They live in the political bubble that Trump has created for them. They would gladly take part in any political scheme conceived by Trump and even allow him to govern by dictatorial means. Moreover, virtually no Republican dares to stand up to Trump. He mocked and humiliated all his Republican rivals but in the end they all fell in line and kissed his ring. I have a hard time coming up with politicians anywhere else on the planet who are so

cowardly and obsequious as the Republicans are in the “land of the free.”

*Alexandra Boutri: By the same token, the Democratic Party also went from being the “party of the people” to the party of the financial elite. Would you say then that it is the Democrats who paved the path for the rise of someone like Donald Trump? Also, do you think that Biden can defeat Trump?*

*C. J. Polychroniou: The Democratic Party has always been a pro-business party. Until recently, the differences between Democrats and Republicans were not that great. Indeed, as Noam Chomsky used to say, “the United States has essentially a one-party system and the ruling party is the business party.” So, it was largely a myth to say that the Democratic Party was the “party of the people.” Nonetheless, Bill Clinton remade the Democratic Party to such an extent that it abandoned all pretext of being a party representing the working class. Clinton had revealed his anti-union credentials long before he made it to the White House. He had been working ceaselessly toward undermining the labor movement in [Arkansas](#) since the mid-1970s.*

The working class ditched Hillary Clinton in 2016. Working-class voters, feeling betrayed by the Democratic Party and its economic policies, were a key demographic element behind Trump’s rise. Of course, it wasn’t just economics that drove white working-class voters to Trump’s camp. An equally important factor was racial and cultural resentment. Anyone who thinks that racism and xenophobia were not important factors in Trump’s rise or that they don’t figure prominently in the support he has been receiving since by the millions of his followers needs a reality check.

What is unusual is that President Biden, who has not only been very outspoken about supporting organized labor but leads in fact the most pro-union administration since that of FDR, may not be able to count as much as he should on working-class people and even on [all union groups](#) in his effort to get reelected. And the support of union groups will be crucial in swing states. It is also likely that many progressives angry over Gaza and who also think that Biden should suspend his campaign because of his cognitive decline will abstain from voting. Of course, I have no crystal ball, but if Biden can somehow manage to focus on his record and the huge differences between him and Trump, he can win. If he fails to do so or ends up having another disastrous performance in the second presidential debate on Tuesday, September 10, Trump will win by a

landslide and there will be no one to blame but Biden himself.

If Trump returns to the White House, we should all brace ourselves for major shocks. We should expect to see mass deportations, systematic efforts to undermine democracy and rights in the U.S. and even abroad, the sacking of thousands of civil servants, the dismantling of the Department of Education, the expansion of presidential power (and bear in mind that an ultra-conservative Supreme Court gave presidents total immunity from prosecution for all official acts), major tax cuts for the rich, the end of policies to tackle the climate crisis, and even a rollback of policies that have aided minorities economically and socially. This is what's behind [Project 2025](#), a blueprint of over 900 pages for a second Trump term developed by the arch-conservative Heritage Foundation. Trump has tried to distance himself from Project 2025, but many of the policies that he has said he will carry out if he returns to the White House are already included in this extremist far-right agenda.

*Alexandra Boutri: One final question, and it has to do with third-party and independent candidates running for president. Could they affect the 2024 vote?*

*C. J. Polychroniou: One could and should be in support of third-party candidates for all sorts of reasons. The problem however with the U.S. political system is that they have no chance of winning a presidential race. I doubt that they can even shake up the two-party system. You need some form of proportional representation, like the system that exists in many European democracies, for third parties in the U.S. to make a real impact on national politics. But third-party candidates can easily end up having the opposite than the desired effect, which is help the candidate they least want in the White House emerge victorious. This is yet another reason why America's two-party system, a relic of the past, is unquestionably bad for contemporary democracy.*

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