

Growth of Neoliberalism and Corruption in the West. “The Regression of Democratic Institutions”

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Global Research, December 29, 2023

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Intelligence](#)

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The financial crisis of 2007-08, the worst economic meltdown since the Great Depression, badly damaged the international capitalist system and led to further erosion of confidence in the United States among its allies. US credibility was already undermined by its completely unjustified invasion of Iraq in 2003, and over the past 20 years America’s position has been declining as the single global power.

Following the 9/11 (11 September 2001) terrorist attacks against America, democratic institutions within the country have been regressing further. American scholar Francis Fukuyama admitted in 2014 that the decline of democracy in the US was more advanced than in other affluent Western countries.

Fukuyama highlighted the worsening corruption and incompetence within Washington, which was resulting in growing levels of inequality and the accumulation of money in fewer hands. By 2014 chief executives of the biggest American companies were paid 331 times more than the typical worker. The concentration of wealth among elites was also enabling them to manipulate the political structures to their advantage.

In 2022 there were more than 12,500 registered lobbyists in the US, groups who try to influence government policy, whereas in 1971 a modest 171 lobbyists were in existence. Economics expert Nouriel Roubini, who is based in New York, said in January 2015 that it would be very difficult for the US to remedy its huge problems with inequality because the country’s political system was centred on “legalized corruption”.

The US is recognised to have the world's largest economy, but living standards in Russia have improved much more so by comparison to America over the past two decades. In 1998 the number of Russians living below the poverty line was at more than 35%, mainly because of the USSR's collapse and implementation in the 1990s of neoliberal policies endorsed by the West. This century under president **Vladimir Putin's** government by 2013 the poverty rate in Russia was reduced to 11.2%, and in 2022 only 9.8% of Russians were impoverished. In addition, the average yearly wage of a Russian citizen by 2017 was almost twice larger than what it had been during 2005.

In America in 2002 the poverty rate stood at 12.1%, and by 2022 it was slightly higher at 12.4%, revealing that there are more poor people in America than in Russia. The poverty rate in Russia is also lower than in EU states like France, where 14.6% of the population was living in poverty in 2020. Relating to China it is predicted that its economy could become the world's biggest before long; but consistently in recent years the average yearly income of a Russian adult has been quite close to double that of a Chinese adult, as outlined by annual UN human development reports.

Russia belongs to the very high human development category while China is placed a bit lower down, in high human development. In recent decades China has undoubtedly achieved significant social advances and wealth, but the country still has some way to go. Extensive media coverage has been given to China's neighbour, India, often pertaining to the continued expansion of India's economy over the past generation. Yet a Russian citizen earns on average per year almost four times more than an Indian citizen.

From the early 1980s under the neoconservative Reagan administration, inequality levels grew dramatically in America, and also to a slightly lesser extent in European nations. **President Ronald Reagan's** economic policies went a long way to wiping out middle-income families in the US, while the most telling legacy of his British counterpart during the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher, was in the record levels of inequality that occurred in England when she was prime minister.

The lobbying groups in Washington have helped to craft legislation with the cash they give to politicians. Those with the financial means have a prominent role in dictating policy, as opposed to those who lack resources, which means the US is "not a true democracy, it's a plutocracy", Roubini noted.

Across much of America, factories were shut down and jobs shifted to cheaper sources overseas, resulting in deindustrialisation and urban decay. The two political parties, the Democrats and Republicans, have increasingly relied on the same sources of funding such as from Wall Street, the military-industrial complex, Israeli-linked groups, along with cash from energy and mining companies and agribusiness.

The system for funding elections in the US makes political candidates favourable to those with the biggest purses. Between 2007 and 2008, **Barack Obama's** election campaign received millions of dollars from major banks and corporations like Goldman Sachs, Microsoft, JP Morgan Chase, and Citigroup.

The campaign of Obama's rival, **John McCain**, received less funding from the same companies because they distrusted backing another Republican politician due to the unpopularity of the outgoing president **George W. Bush**, himself a Republican.

On 1 May 2008 an opinion poll by CNN/Opinion Research Corp stated that 71% of Americans disapproved of Bush's performance, and that he ranked as the least popular president in modern American history. By mid-January 2009 Bush's approval rating was at 22%.

Political and ideological differences between parties in the West have mostly disappeared since the 1980s, with many social democrat and communist parties having either fragmented or vanished altogether. The ideology that has persisted most of all in Western countries, liberalism, and which has become more entrenched with each passing year, is borne out by "movements" like lgbt, same-sex marriage, wokism, etc.

These activities have gained substantial public support in nations such as America and Britain, encouraged by the mass media and liberal philanthropists like George Soros. He has provided particularly big funding down the years for the above actions.

The general public is pressured into supporting lgbt and same-sex rights, which takes their attention away from important issues like unemployment, declines in biodiversity, and so on. A person's sexual orientation should of course not be advertised like a company slogan but should be strictly a private affair.

Western leaders are fond of boasting about the supposed freedom and openness of their societies, but there are in fact severe and growing restrictions for example on freedom of speech. Any public figure who has the temerity to criticise lgbt organisations is likely to be condemned and isolated.

The spread of liberalism in the West has coincided with a sharp decline in church membership and support for Christianity. Thousands of churches permanently close every year in the most powerful Western nation, the US, and less than half of Americans say they now belong to a house of worship.

From 2010 to 2020, between 3,850 to 7,700 places of worship were estimated to have closed each year in the US, amounting to between 75 to 150 congregations disappearing per week. In 1937 US church membership stood at 73%. The figure was still as high as 70% in 1999 before falling to 46% by 2022. This downward trend is expected to continue.

There is a steep fall too in the number of Americans who regard themselves as Christians; in the early 1990s around 90% of Americans identified as Christians, in 2007 it was down to 78%, and by 2020 the figure had dropped to 64%. The declining influence of WASPs (white Anglo-Saxon protestants) in America, those who had traditionally run the country, seemed to be summarised by the 2008 presidential election victory of Obama, an African-American.

A considerable number of Americans belonging to the WASP category, and who may have had racist prejudices, struggled to cope in their minds with an African-American as the country's leader. This was a key factor in the formation in 2009 of the hardline Tea Party phenomenon within the Republican Party.

Obama's predecessor, Bush, enjoyed critical support from white evangelical Christians which helped him to win the presidency in 2000 and to be re-elected in 2004. Bush received 68% of the white evangelical vote in 2000, rising to 78% four years later. Karl Rove, the senior adviser to Bush, believed that the backing of white Christians was decisive in Bush's election successes.

Racism has long influenced the opinions of some white Americans and a study conducted in

2011, with input from Stanford University and the University of Michigan, outlined that 51% of Americans had prejudices towards black people. This was an increase from 48% in 2008 when Obama was set to win the presidency.

The black community accounts for about 13% of the total American population, whereas three-quarters of the population is classed as white. Despite the disparity, black people in America are sent to prison at five times the rate of white Americans and by 2019 nearly a third of all inmates in US prisons were African-Americans; while the number of black people living in poverty in America is much higher than the poverty level of whites.

Regarding US imprisonment practices abroad, in 2006 president Bush signed the Military Commissions Act while the US Congress approved the National Defense Authorization Act, which effectively legitimised human rights violations including the imprisonment of “suspected terrorists” captured after the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

Already between 2002 and 2004, dozens of prisoners under the age of 18 were held in the US-run Guantanamo Bay military prison in south-eastern Cuba. By 2008 an estimated 21 children were still kept as prisoners in Guantanamo which has a notorious record concerning human rights.

Cuba itself had come under US control in 1898, when the Americans invaded Cuba on the pretext of freeing the island from Spanish colonialism. Washington’s aim consisted of assuming full authority over Cuba as part of its imperialist foreign policy. There were no historical or cultural links between the US and Cuba, as prior to 1898 Cuba had been under Spanish rule for around four centuries.

After the victory of the Cuban revolution in 1959 the US has to present times retained control over Guantanamo Bay, where the Americans have had a naval base since 1903. Continued US military occupation of Guantanamo is intended to undermine the Cuban economy, and to prevent Cuba’s government from developing that part of the island.

An American presence in Guantanamo is part of Washington’s encirclement strategy of Cuba and punishment of the country for its “successful defiance” of US hegemony over the Western hemisphere.

The US Supreme Court has stated that it can’t rule on the rights of prisoners held at Guantanamo, because the area does not fall under American jurisdiction as it is not part of the territory of America. The Bush administration and the US Congress had in effect said that Guantanamo is not under international law, so it has been a convenient place to send prisoners to.

Along with Guantanamo, the Americans established prisons in European nations such as Romania, Lithuania and Poland, and in parts of Asia and North Africa. The CIA extradited alleged terrorists to states like Pakistan, Thailand and Morocco, allowing the local security forces to interrogate the prisoners and in some cases inflict physical abuses on them.

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This article was originally published on Geopolitica.RU.

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