

Democracies Rule, Everything Else Drools.

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Abstract

There are many threats facing American society and American hegemony broadly. However, the US still has some important traits when compared to the other dominant world powers of the modern era. The big three that come to mind when you ask most people who the mightiest nations in the world today are the US, Russia, and China. While this may be true, the US possesses one critical difference that separates us from those nations: democracy. At the same time, we may be struggling with this new world and a difference in opinion on whether we should continue to move in a more globalized direction or retreat inward for more nationalistic ideals. Alternatively, issues of wealth inequality led to a lack of trust in our elected leaders and the media broadly. Or problems with moving our economy further away from manufacturing and fossil fuels and towards green energy policies and more advanced industries like computer sciences, cybersecurity, or semiconductor production. These issues will not spell the end of US global dominance just yet, and recent history has shown us that in order to be a true global leader, democracy is not just a perk but a requirement. We will continue to face the threat of these other nations as they grow in strength militarily or economically. Still, some may argue that a more likely threat to US hegemony might be the continual advancement of countries like India, which now has the largest population and is a broad, diverse democracy, unlike Russia or China.

Democracies Rule, Everything Else Drools.

Is America in decline? The clear answer is a resounding no. We may be experiencing shifts and adjustments, political and economic turmoil, and environmental issues, but problems like these are natural in any country, large or small. We will find solutions to these problems as we have solved the issues of our past. Let us look fifty years into the future, with the exception of environmental disasters or asteroids. It is almost certain that the United States will still be the dominant world power. Democracy is not a perfect system, it is just the best we have currently, and let us examine some of the ways that democracy is best suited to deal with these issues that the US is facing and will continue to deal with in the future. Firstly, in political turmoil, the US can work in ways to solve these problems that allow for the engagement of its citizens. This process has a slow pace, but its effects tend to be more valuable when achieved compared to changes in authoritarian regimes. Further, political strife is natural in any country, but democracies are best suited to solving these issues. As we have seen in the past, during the mid-19th century, we have dealt with great political divides before, and if we must, we can do so again. Next, economic challenges are not uncommon or a cause for panic. The US is going through a phase of adapting to the new modern global economy, and that may mean leaving industries like manufacturing behind to make space for more advanced industries like tech or AI. These industries are better for Americans anyway because they offer higher wages and safer working environments. We should be begging for this shift instead of clinging to auto plants and coal mining. Finally, the US is still poised to stay at the forefront of figuring out ways to deal with our environmental issues. Countries like China are making investments in green energy technologies, but not out of a care for this planet, but rather out of economic interests. When taken together and examined from a more top-down view, it becomes clear that America is not in

decline, it is just going through its latest stage of growing pains. Unless there are new drastic changes to the world, an environmental disaster, a tragic world war, or other unpredictable circumstances, the US will still very likely be at the top of the totem pole when we reach 2075.

Political Turmoil

Political upheaval is natural in any country with any type of government structure, from ancient Rome to modern Western nations. The US is no exception to this rule, we are, however, better at confronting these challenges because of the advantages inherent in democracy. As one journalist points out, “Saying that America is exceptional is not, despite popular perceptions, the same as saying America is wholly superior and better than other countries. You could also say that America is unique from other countries... It’s a belief that this country’s laws and standards are different from other countries,” (Ingram, 2020). This is how our “laws and standards” set us apart from the other great modern nations. They give us an advantage that a leading nation should have, democracy, a system of checks and balances and a constitution. These features of the US are not just good for American citizens, they benefit the rest of the world as well. Systems that spread power and control of global trade and military efforts across multiple people with different responsibilities, instead of just a dictator, king, or monarch, benefit all people. We have faced periods of great strife before, the Civil War, the Great Depression, and World Wars One and Two are some clear examples. It may seem bleak at times, but it can be helpful to remember that it has certainly been worse in the past and the US has moved past it. Democracy is not the only reason the US rose to global power, but it is currently our largest advantage when compared to the other modern great nations.

China is, as most agree, the second in command globally in the modern age. They are strong militarily and economically, and they have a vast, diverse countryside that is rich with

resources, not unlike the US in size or value. However, China is not without problems. One Professor elaborates, “China is an impressive peer competitor with great strengths but also weaknesses... One is geography. The U.S. is surrounded by two oceans and two friendly neighbors, while China shares a border with fourteen other countries and is engaged in territorial disputes with several. The U.S. also has an energy advantage, whereas China depends on energy imports. Third, the U.S. derives power from its large transnational financial institutions and the international role of the dollar. A credible reserve currency depends on it being freely convertible, as well as on deep capital markets and the rule of law, which China lacks.” While we were on good terms with our neighbors at the time this was written, it is true that things are a bit rockier at the moment with the current administration. However, the US has a long history of cooperation with Mexico and Canada, and we can weather this current geopolitical struggle and come out stronger again. Further, “China, of course, is investing heavily in research and development and scores well in the numbers of patents, but by its own measures its research universities still rank behind American ones, (Nye, 2024). China may overtake the US someday as the global leader, but it does not appear this will be possible unless it switches to a more democratic system of government. Authoritarian states of any size struggle in the long term because when the majority of their citizens do not feel prosperous, it creates a situation where revolution is likely. Additionally, human rights violations are more likely under authoritarian regimes because of the lack of oversight. For instance, Diplomacy & Law report, “Authoritarian regimes often violate these fundamental [human] rights to maintain control and suppress dissent. The denial of basic freedoms, such as freedom of speech, assembly, and the press, is a common feature in these regimes,” (Santos, 2024). China must contend with this problem because while it is economically prosperous now, there is no guarantee that this will continue, and much of its

prosperity is based on its globalized economy. China also has quite a large population of over 1.4 billion people. Not even the strongest military could withhold that many people in a state of rebellion or revolution. If the great people of China decided to turn on the CCP or Xi Jinping, they would be out of power. As the world has seen in the last decade or so, there has been political upheaval in China also, for example, the situation with the Tibetan and Uyghur genocides that have taken place, the dystopian COVID lockdowns, or the protests in Hong Kong. For now, the CCP has maintained control through these struggles, but anyone can see the cracks in the armor and the future brewing conflict in the South China Sea and with Taiwan may be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Russia is undeniably another great nation, but it suffers from some of the same problems as China, as well as some different ones. Primarily, Russia, the largest country in the world, is almost twice the size of the US or China in raw land mass. Statista reports that Russia is over seventeen million square kilometers, compared to the US and China at just over nine million square kilometers (O'Neill, 2024). However, its more northern longitude means that its land comes with significant challenges. Russia does not have the same agricultural abilities as the US, China, or Europe. Because of its northern location, its growing window is significantly shorter than those of previous areas due to the extreme cold faced in Russian winters. Additionally, much of the Russian population is spread out across the country because of the soviet industrialization, which means resources are farther apart and goods are more expensive to ship or transport. Russia is also more dependent economically on its vast oil reserves. Statista states that Russia is getting roughly 20% of its annual GDP from its oil and gas sector (Statista Research Department, 2024). In contrast with the US, which gets roughly 8% of its GDP from oil and gas (American Petroleum Institute). Something we now recognize as a resource with

shrinking value on the global stage, considering its effects on global warming. Beyond that, Russia will not be able to overtake the US or China globally because of its smaller population size. There are simply not enough people to put that mighty land mass to its optimal use currently.

Finally, political division at home is a growing and present issue, but one we have successfully defeated before. Political division is nothing new to the US, but it is not time to panic just yet. America needs to focus on what we do well and figure out reforms to news and media that will allow us to feel more connected. We need to remember that it is precisely our differences that give us strength. If it is time for laws or revisions of laws we already have, then democracy allows us to make those changes in a cautious and careful manner with appropriate checks and balances. Hopefully, these problems can be solved without violence. It is certainly possible; we just need to have faith in the system and convince people to engage and that their voices matter.

When you add up all these problems and examine them with a more top-down view, it becomes clear that we are not on the ropes quite yet. We need to spend more time focusing on our strengths and listening to each other, and less time demonizing the other side. But the same things that made America great in the past are still here, and the American dream is still alive, albeit bruised and battered in some ways. That does not mean the dream is dead.

Economic Strife

Economic issues tend to be a constant of the world, maybe that is a failing of capitalism, or maybe it is just another problem we have yet to solve. However, much like political turmoil, economic strife is a normal and predictable phenomenon, not something that should be a cause for panic. Whether that be the Great Depression or wartime economic struggles, the US has

solved these problems in the past. Wealth inequality may be one of the most significant threats facing this country currently, but even this has been solved in the nation before. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “The years from the end of World War II into the 1970s were ones of substantial economic growth and broadly shared prosperity. Incomes grew rapidly and at roughly the same rate up and down the income ladder, roughly doubling in inflation-adjusted terms between the late 1940s and early 1970s.” Furthermore, “Federal Reserve data show that the least-wealthy 50 percent of U.S. households hold very little of the nation’s wealth (less than 4 percent), while the households with wealth in the top 10 percent hold over two-thirds. The concentration of wealth at the very top has increased over the past 35 years,” (Sherman, 2024). These problems are not new, however. The late 19th century saw massive levels of wealth inequality, which was eventually solved (to some extent) by the power of democracy and the implementation of solutions like labor laws, unions, and social security/Medicare. History reports, “By 1890, the top 1 percent of the U.S. population owned 51 percent of all wealth. The top 12 percent owned an astounding 86 percent. The lower 44 percent of the U.S. population—almost half the country—owned just 1.2 percent,” (O’Donnell, 2018). We created solutions to these problems, and while they have been eroded over time, we can implement them again. These changes and a post-war economy gave way to the greatest period of American expansion. Oxford Research Encyclopedias explains, “The labor and working-class history of the United States between 1900 and 1945, then, is the story of how working-class individuals, families, and communities—members of an extremely diverse American working class—managed to carve out positions of political, economic, and cultural influence, even as they remained divided among themselves, dependent upon corporate power, and increasingly invested in a individualistic, competitive, acquisitive culture,” (Helgeson, 2016). This source explains

how American workers of the time protested, rallied, and organized to improve their lives, and their efforts succeeded. We should return to policies like these, which are tested and proven.

Additionally, it is clear that the shift away from a manufacturing and agriculture-based economy to one that is more focused on technology, healthcare, and AI has been challenging. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reports, “Despite being a leading driver of employment growth for decades, manufacturing has shed employment over the past 40 years as the U.S. economy has shifted to service-providing industries. In June 1979, manufacturing employment reached an all-time peak of 19.6 million. In June 2019, employment was at 12.8 million, down 6.7 million or 35 percent from the all-time peak. Since 1979, employment fell during each of five recessions, and in each case, employment never fully recovered to prerecession levels,” (Harris, 2020). Nevertheless, this shift is a necessary one for the advancement of our planet and our country. Like it or not, jobs working in computer science or cybersecurity pay more than those at the auto plant, and they offer a safer working environment with better outcomes for employees. The Cato Institute explains, “Unsurprisingly, the shift out of heavier industrial work also coincides with a steady decline in workplace injuries and deaths.” Additionally, “The truth is that the service sector has always been a major driver of America’s success. For decades, even more so than manufacturing... Trying to “bring back” manufacturing jobs, through harmful tariffs or other industrial policies, is destined to end badly for Americans. It makes about as much sense as trying to “bring back” all those farm jobs we had before the 1870s, (Michel, 2025). One professor reports similar concepts, “Technology is creating an enormous range of opportunities and risks that my grandchildren will face as they cope with the Internet of Things, AI, big data, machine learning, deep fakes, and generative bots—to name but a few. And even larger challenges are approaching from the realms of biotechnology (Nye, 2024). Sure, we still have

economic issues presented by the lack of a universal healthcare system, such as a single-payer or a public option. The Economic Policy Institute explains, “Fundamental reforms like [Medicare for all] could greatly aid labor market outcomes for U.S. workers. The most obvious benefits would be higher wages and salaries, increased availability of good jobs, reduced stress during spells of job loss, better “matches” between workers and employers, and greater opportunity to start small businesses. Furthermore, “Medicare for All could increase wages and salaries for U.S. workers by reducing employers’ costs for health insurance—freeing up fiscal space to invest in wages instead. The share of total annual compensation paid to American employees in the form of health insurance premiums rather than wages and salaries rose from 1.1% in 1960 to 4.2% in 1979 to 8.4% in 2018. If this post-1960 increase had been only half as large—and employers had spent the health cost savings on wages and salaries—the take-home wages of American workers would have been almost \$400 billion higher in 2018 (Bivens, 2020). Throw in the challenges created by not having laws on the books for maternity and paternity leave, paid vacation, as well as childcare and higher education being quite expensive. These are all issues that could be solved legislatively, and the best part is that we have seen these laws work in other parts of the world to great success. Instead of fearing this economic restructuring and clinging to the industries of old like manufacturing, oil, or coal, Americans should be begging and first in line for these newer, more advanced, better-paying jobs. This shift will likely happen inevitably because the world will continue to march on regardless of what the Luddites of US society choose to believe. With the continual push of AI in the economy, this shift is also a must, and the US may have to take further legislative steps to ensure that we maintain a healthy working and middle class through this transition.

Environmental Issues

Globally, the problems with climate change and maintaining our environment are of critical importance, some have called it the defining issue of the 21st century. While the current administration may not value these policies as much as some may hope, ultimately, the US is still ahead when it comes to climate policy, carbon emissions, and green energy. Chatham House describes, “On climate change, while the US – the world’s largest CO2 emitter (true at the time in 2015, but today China has taken that spot) – has been accused of dragging its feet, a solution will not be found without American involvement... While the US government may not be the main driving force, American companies and cities are often leading the way to finding new solutions,” (Chatham House, 2015). This supports the claim that the US will be pivotal in tackling our climate change challenges, this was true in 2015 and it is still true today almost ten years later. Considering that Trump will only be able to serve for the remainder of this term, there is likely to be a pivot back towards more robust climate policy in the coming years, especially as younger more climate focused voters become a larger part of the electorate. Despite political fluctuations, America’s long-term contribution to addressing climate change is sustained by grassroots innovations, through private industry or state, and local governments. As Americans continue to see the effects created by climate change, we will begin to take it even more seriously. We have already had effects like massive hurricanes, wildfires, or intense winter storms, but these will only continue for now. Once America gets fully onboard with this issue and swings the might of US industry at this problem, one could only guess what kinds of solutions may arise. As public awareness grows, the political appetite for climate-focused legislation is also likely to increase, especially among younger voters. With the right incentives, such as tax breaks government and private sector partnerships, and research grants the US could

rapidly scale new solutions as we have done for problems in the past. Additionally, China is currently the largest polluter on a global scale. If the world is going to seriously combat climate change, that means reducing pollutants emitted into the atmosphere.

In contrast, China is now the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases. It used oil and coal to fuel its massive industrialization over the last few decades, but this level of consumption and pollution cannot continue indefinitely. As the World Resources Institute reports, China is the largest emitter of CO₂, as of December 2021, emitting over double the amount of CO₂ as the next nation on the list, the US. These emissions primarily come from energy production, “the energy sector — including generation of electricity and heat... remained the largest contributor to GHG emissions over any other sector, representing 76% of global emissions in 2019,” (Friedrich, 2021). The US Energy Information Administration reports, “Energy production from renewable sources increased 28% since 2013.” Additionally, they state that in 2023, the US got approximately 40% of its energy from non-fossil fuel sources like renewables or nuclear. On the other hand, Reuters reports, “Coal-fired power plants generated 59.6% of China's total electricity output during the opening half of 2024” (Maguire, 2024). Coal is one of the dirtiest ways to generate electricity. The US only gets 16% of its electricity from coal as of 2023 (USEIA, 2024). This stark contrast in energy composition shows that the US is not just theoretically but structurally better prepared to shift towards a sustainable future. With climate change as the premier issue of our time, the global leader cannot also be the leader in pollution. This would all but guarantee a great catastrophe for humanity. This is not to say the US should act adversarial towards Chinese climate advancements and technology, the two largest and most powerful nations must work together for this to be successful, and the US should lead the way in this effort. The global leader must also be a leader in solving this problem and setting the correct

example for the rest of the world on what a modern nation does for the environment. Countries that lead in climate innovation will shape international norms and trade standards, especially as carbon tariffs and climate-linked trade agreements become more common. The US is the best-positioned nation to do this. If climate change is the defining issue of the 21st century, then global leadership cannot be separate from environmental safe keeping. We have the ability to develop, engineer, and manufacture cutting-edge solutions to these problems. In fact, the climate crisis presents not only a threat but also an immense economic opportunity. Moreover, investing in climate solutions is not just morally valuable, it presents a powerful opportunity for the US to dominate the next wave of global industry in a way that we have done with technology or vehicles in the past, and in some ways still today. Emerging sectors such as clean energy, electric vehicles, carbon capture, green building, and sustainable agriculture offer high-growth markets that could define global economic leadership for the next fifty years. This will give us environmental resiliency and extend American prosperity. We need to focus on this problem and push our best and brightest, in addition to as much funding as we can possibly afford, to solve this problem, and we will be rewarded in the long term. With focused investment, smart regulation, and international cooperation, the US can both protect the planet and secure its future as the world's leading innovator.

Conclusion

Finally, when you boil it all down and take a bird's-eye perspective, one thing remains clear. As we stand currently, in the next fifty years, it does not look like the US will be knocked off the top slot on a global scale. Sure, there are problems, every nation has problems. This is not to diminish them either, some of these problems are very serious and need to be eradicated with force and vigor. However, these problems in the grand scheme are nothing that America cannot

solve. As Professor Nye puts it, “America has many problems—polarization, inequality, loss of trust, mass shootings, deaths of despair from drugs and suicide—just to name a few that make headlines. There is a case for pessimism. At the same time, we have survived worse periods in the 1890s, 1930s and the 1960s as I have described. For all our flaws, the U.S. is an innovative society that, in the past, has been able to recreate and reinvent itself (Nye, 2024). When you examine the evidence and the different factors at play in the American empire, this result becomes clear. Nye is spot on in his analysis, and American citizens should be shown this proof. Not to belittle their problems or diminish their points of view, but to remind them that we still do have a great many strengths, and things are not always as bleak as they seem. Nevertheless, problems with political turmoil, economic strife, and environmental issues are present. The US has every available solution to address these problems. Our system of government is also far superior in many ways to the other systems of government being deployed by the other great global powers. Lastly, many would have chosen to discuss the US military might when discussing our spot as the continual global leadership. But our military might is of less importance than these other features of America. Further, we should not view these other great powers as our enemies either, and we should not seek to use our military might against them until it is the last available option. Two quotes come to mind about the greatness of the American idea.

“When they go low, we go high.”

– Michelle Obama.

“Speak softly and carry a big stick—you will go far.”

– Teddy Roosevelt

These two quotes perfectly represent why the US will continue to lead going forward, and why, although we are not perfect, we must continue to strive to be better and set the right example for the rest of our global neighbors and for future generations to come.

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