

College Park High School – U.S. Government
Spring 2026 Research Project One

“What Kind of Government Do We Have? Institutional vs. Structural Approaches”

Final Due Date: Friday, March 13, 2026 (late papers will be marked down one letter grade).

Question: Our task this semester is to answer two basic questions: What kind of government do we *have* and what kind of government do we *want*? Your textbook tends to downplay the effects of the economic system on politics, choosing instead to focus on the *institutions* of government, and not how those various institutions exist within the larger *structure* of capitalism. It therefore has a somewhat benign description of the relationship between capitalism and democracy. Beginning with an analysis of the textbook’s (democratic / bureaucratic theory) position, review some of the *critical interpretations* on the interaction of economics and politics and give your own evaluation as to whether we can answer these two questions only using a textbook.

Sample Outline
(But feel free to set this essay up as you wish)

I. Introduction / Thesis Statement – a brief statement outlining your position or something relevant about this issue. (approximately 1 page)

II. Body – the bulk of the paper is here, in data taken from the readings and other evidence that you have found to support this position. (approximately 4 pages)

- a. Text DPE – what does the textbook say about whether or not the US can be considered a democracy and how capitalism enhances or distorts this reality (check pages 38 - 40, and 628 - 631).
- b. Other Traditional DPE – supporting positions from the pluralist perspective.
- c. Critical DPE – what do some of the readings say on this issue. You should include but are not limited to the following scholarship: Parenti, Boyer, Alperovitz, Hightower, Street and Kelly.
- d. Outside DPE – are there other authors that you have examined that have a unique and/or important position on this question. They can come from any theoretical perspective.

III. Conclusion – from your reading of the various authors and theoretical positions, it is clear that using the institutional / structural approach, is the most effective way to answer the question of whether the U.S. can rightfully be described in democratic (either direct or indirect) terms. (approximately 1 page)

Extras:

1. Make sure to use the APA form of citation *every time you use a statement or an idea from the readings that I have provided, or that you found in your own independent research*. Using other’s work without providing proper citation is plagiarism and grounds for immediate failure on this essay.

2. Please type all work on a computer and print only one copy.

3. An “A” paper will be: a) fully documented and cited; b) a *minimum* of 9 pages (including the title page, abstract, and reference page, meaning **6 full pages of text analysis**); c) research *beyond* the authors I provided; and d) turned in *on time* (March 13, 2026).