

The Dangerous American Election

written by Dan La Botz | October 7, 2024



This article was originally written two weeks ago for publication in French in the European journal Adresses, internationalisme et démocratie and therefore explains some things that may be obvious to American readers.

The American people will go to the polls on November 5 to vote for the U.S. president—some in a few states will already have been able to vote earlier—choosing between former president Donald Trump, the authoritarian leader of what has become a far-right Republican Party, and Vice-President Kamala Harris, a somewhat progressive Democrat, who had now moved to the right and become a moderate, and who continues to support Israel unconditionally, despite its genocidal war on Palestine. The election poses several related dangers, from a Trump victory that could end American democracy to a close election that could lead to violent protests and perhaps another coup attempt, and then too the danger that if Harris wins, she will be unable to keep the United States out of a widening Middle East war. We'll come back to these below.

The two-candidates are statistically tied in the polls in overall votes, but to win the election, a candidate must win not a majority of the popular vote, but a majority of the Electoral College vote. In this contest, the key thing becomes winning the “swing states,” that is, the states that are not decisively for one party or another, and might vote either Republican or Democratic. In this election the key swing states are Georgia, North Carolina Arizona, Nevada, , Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. There are three million undecided voters in those states, but the election in those states will be decided by a few hundred thousand or even only some tens of thousands of ambivalent or so far undecided voters. All the candidates' attention, money, and travel plans are concentrated on getting those votes.

The election is taking place in an atmosphere characterized by violence. There have been two assassination attempts on Trump and shots have been fired into a Harris campaign office in Tempe, Arizona. And 40% of election officials, those who manage polling places or count the votes, have been threatened or harassed.

Trump campaigns largely on the economy, which includes the high cost of living, taxes, and foreign trade; and he promises to stop rising inflation, to cut taxes, and to improve foreign trade through huge tariffs—10, 20, 50%—on imported goods. But at his rallies and interviews, he offers little explanation of how his economic policies will work, and economists of all stripes say his tariffs could destroy the U.S. and perhaps the world economy. Most recently Trump speaking at a rally promised a “manufacturing renaissance,” attracting foreign investment by creating manufacturing zones,

cutting taxes, and eliminating environmental regulations, and “stealing” millions of jobs from other countries.



Mostly, however, Trump in his rallies of thousands, rails against what he calls an invasion of immigrants who he says are “animals,” “vermin,” and “poisoning the blood of our country.” He claims that immigrants are criminals from the world’s prisons and insane asylums and that they have invaded and taken over some cities and are “destroying the fabric of our country.” That’s why he says crime is down in other countries but up in ours—though in fact crime is down in the United States. His claims about the immigrants being criminals and mentally ill and about rising crime rates in the United States are both false. He most recently claimed that Haitians had taken over the city of Springfield, Ohio, and that they were eating the cats, dogs, pets, and geese in that city, claims for which officials from the mayor to the state governor have said there was absolutely no basis. Trump’s son, Donald Jr., has said Haitians have lower IQs than other people. Trump has promised that the immigration authorities and the National Guard will be used—in violation of current law—to round up millions of immigrants, put them in concentration camps, and deport them to their homelands. And, he says, he will start in Springfield.

A Nation Divided from Top to Bottom

Who supports this reactionary, racist demagogue? Trump’s Make America Great Again (MAGA) base is made up overwhelmingly of white supporters at the core of which are small- and medium-sized business people—lawyers, realtors, store owners, salespeople, corporate middle managers, etc.—who live in the suburbs or rural areas. (Chris Dite, Jacobin, April 16, 2024) A high percentage of white workers, usually defined by the polls as those without college educations, also support Trump, though he has been losing the support of some of them recently. He has also won the support of some Black and Latino men. Many Trumpers are Evangelical Christians who, whatever his personal behavior, see Trump as a defender of their faith, a strong opponent of abortion and anti-gay and anti-trans. God is making use of him, they say. Over half of all Protestant pastors say they will vote for Trump, a quarter are for Harris, and almost a quarter undecided. (Aaron Earls, Christianity Today, Sept. 17, 2024). Some Trump supporters are Q-Anon followers who believe that a cabal of pedophiles runs the country and engages in sex-trafficking children. Gun manufacturers back Trump, as does the National Rifle Association which has endorsed him because of his promises to fight firearms control.

What about big business? Does it support Trump? The American capitalist class, historically divided between the two parties, often supports both of them to different degrees, and capitalists frequently shift from one side to the other, altering the balance. After president Ronald Reagan’s conservative “revolution,” the Republican Party put itself at the disposal of the corporations. Trump, despite his populist talks against the elites, has also served big business and the wealthy, cutting their taxes, removing regulations, and hampering unions. And he promises more of the same in his next term. In

a meeting with oil executives in May of his year, for example, he told them that if they gave him a billion dollars to return to the White House, he would get rid of Biden's environmental regulations.

The big corporations and the very wealthy are as always divided, some supporting Trump and some Harris, though she has done better. According to their official filings with the government, as of September 21, the Harris campaign and the Democratic National Committee go into the final two months of the 2024 election with \$286 million in the bank, compared to the Trump campaign and the Republican National Committee's \$214 million. Political analysts have always looked closely at what sectors—finance, industry, commerce, etc.—form the bourgeois support for different U.S. political presidential candidates. For example, some historians argue that Franklin D. Roosevelt, the president who created the modern American welfare state, was backed by consumer industries—automobiles, petroleum, electricity, department stores—while his Republican challengers were backed by high finance and heavy industry, such as the Morgan Bank and U.S. Steel.

It is not clear what sector forms the base of Trump's financial support. His biggest backers are high-tech industrialist Elon Musk, likely to soon become the world's first trillionaire; Timothy Mellon, heir to an oil fortune; Miriam and the late Sheldon Adelson, casino operators; Linda and Vince McMahon of World Wrestling Entertainment; Diane Hendricks of ABC, building supply; Kelsey Warren, a pipeline builder; Timothy Dunn, a Texas oilman; Richard and Liz Uhlein, owners of a packaging-materials company; Jeff Sprecher and wife Kelly Loeffler of International Exchange, which owns the New York Stock Exchange, and a variety of other big corporations and wealthy individuals from different financial and industrial sectors. Trump running mate J.D. Vance has the backing of tech billionaire Peter Thiel.

As a former California Senator and a Democrat, it is not surprising that Harris' biggest donors are the high tech corporations of Silicon Valley and Hollywood, which are in any case traditional Democratic financial donors. Among them Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn, the social website; Dustin Moskovitz, a co-founder of Facebook; Melinda French Gates of Microsoft; Laurene Powell Jobs, former wife of Steve Jobs of Apple; Jeffrey Katzenberg, former chairman of Walt Disney Studios; James Murdoch, former CEO of 21st Century Fox; Jeff Bewkes of Time Warner; Barry Diller, former CEO of Paramount. In addition, George Soros, the billionaire businessman and investor and his son Alex Soros back Harris. More Hollywood stars back Harris than support Trump, most famously Taylor Swift. Of course, some Hollywood moguls and tech giants also support Trump, but Harris it seems is stronger in these most advanced sectors of the U.S. economy.

What will the U.S. government do in the event that there is a close election. There would not be a unified response. The United States today has a divided government. Joe Biden is the president, and Harris, is vice president, both Democrats. In the Senate, the Democrats have slim majority of 51 votes (from 47 Democrats and 4 independents) while the Republicans 49. The Republicans also have a very small majority in the House of Representative, 220 to the Democrats 211. The Supreme Court has effectively become Republican. Trump appointed three justices to the Supreme Court, giving conservatives a six to three majority, far more conservative than most other modern courts. This has made it possible for the Court to abolish Roe v. Wade, taking away women's federally protected right to abortion and leading to the banning of abortion in 14 states and strict limits in another 13. The Court has also passed a number of other conservative measures and most significantly voted 6 to 3 that the president has presumptive immunity from most of his official acts. As the American Civil Liberties Union wrote, "At bottom, though, the court's 6-3 majority freed presidents to use their official powers to engage in criminal acts substantially free of accountability."



Harris' Platform

Harris' strongest issue, one that has won her a very large advantage among women voters, is her pledge to restore federally protected abortion and other reproductive rights. Harris has Democratic Party candidates' usual coalition: labor unions, Black organizations, Latino, and Asian groups, but above all support of women's organizations.

In terms of domestic policy more generally, Kamala Harris, replacing Joe Biden as the candidate and entering the election quite late, had not developed a full-fledged program. Having been Biden's vice-president, she runs in large measure on the basis of his legislative achievements. Since the 1980s, under Republicans like Ronald Reagan and Democrats like Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, the United States and its allies had created a neoliberal, global economy based on deregulation, privatization, cuts in social spending, and the reduction of the power of labor unions. The Great Recession of 2008 was the crisis of that global neoliberal order, and led to both the conservative Tea Party movement and to Occupy Wall Street. The maverick campaigns of both Democrat Bernie Sanders and Republican Donald Trump in 2016 were reactions to that crisis and responses of those movements.

The crisis of neoliberalism that began in the Great Recession of 2008, then complicated by the COVID pandemic and its economic recession, led Joe Biden to adopt the most progressive economic and social programs since the era of Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969). Biden's most significant economic and social programs were the American Rescue Plan Act (\$1.9 trillion) to support business and workers during COVID, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (\$1.2 trillion), and the Inflation Reduction Act (\$369 billion) to deal with climate issues. These measures restored the U.S. economy, which grew at a rate of 5.7% in his first year in office, generated the highest growth rate in 40 years; and brought down unemployment to 3.9%, as the country saw the lowest new unemployment claims in 50 years. (Joint Economic Committee).

Biden later faced the problem of high inflation, which grew from 1.4% in January 2021 to peak at 9.1% in June of 2022, a very serious problem, though inflation is now negligible. Harris, who as vice-president had no economic program of her own can claim the successes and accept the failures of the Biden administration. The problem is that many Americans judge the economy not in terms of business reports but quite personally. The cost of gas, food prices, and housing costs above all. Yet, though gas in much of the country is now below \$3.00 per gallon, interest rates have come down more than a percentage point, and grocery prices have fallen, half of all Americans believe the economy is doing poorly—and for most people, that's the most important issue in the election.

Today Harris calls her economic program an "opportunity economy" that will lower costs for families. In short, it is a plan to stimulate American capitalism and it would take no measure that would fundamentally change the current economic structures. She calls for a tax cut for middle-class and working-class families; she pledges to build three million homes and apartment buildings; she promises more support for small business, offering them tax deductions; she says she will strengthen and expand the Affordable Care Act and protect Medicare and Social Security; she wants to bring

families affordable childcare and also improve care for the elderly; and finally, she wants to “lower energy costs and tackle the climate crisis.” Once very progressive on energy and climate issues, she has moderated her positions, and, for example, now accepts fracking. Still unlike Trump she understands that fossil fuels are contributing to the climate crisis and her view is still moderately progressive.

Biden—and therefore also Harris—have had strong support from the unions, above all because of his support for the autoworkers’ strike last year when he became the first president to stand with workers on their picket line. The Biden administration also helped to settle a strike by the dockworkers of the International Longshoremen’s Association that represents 45,000 dockworkers at 36 ports on the East and Gulf Coasts from Maine to Texas. These workers handle about half of the national shipping industry’s freight. The strike was about automation and wages. Biden took the side of the union from the beginning. “They [the corporations] made incredible profits, over 800% profit since the pandemic, and the owners are making tens of millions of dollars from this,” Biden said. “It’s time for them to sit at the table and get this strike done.” With pressure from the Biden administration on the corporations, the union won a big wage gain and the difficult issues around automation were postponed to future negotiations.

Harris has completely supported Biden’s foreign policy, backing Israel and its war on Gaza, supporting Ukraine’s war against the Russian invasion, and opposing China’s rival imperial ambitions. The big problem for Harris especially with liberals, progressives, and the left, as well as with American Arabs and Muslims is her complete support for Israel. Harris’ reputation for being more progressive than Biden on the question of Israel’s war on Gaza is based on statements like one she gave after meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, “What has happened in Gaza over the past nine months is devastating,” she said. “The images of dead children and desperate, hungry people fleeing for safety, sometimes displaced for the second, third or fourth time — we cannot look away in the face of these tragedies,” she said, adding, “I will not be silent.” Her remarks in her acceptance speech were weaker: “The scale of suffering is heartbreaking. President Biden and I are working to end this war such that – Israel is secure – the hostages are released – the suffering in Gaza ends – and the Palestinian people can realize their right to dignity, security, freedom and self-determination.” Unlike Trump and Netanyahu, she supports a two-state solution.

Now, of course, the situation is complicated even more by the war between Israel and Hezbollah, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Iran’s attack on Israel, and the looming war between them.



Harris’ fine words, however, have not been accompanied by any proposal or action on her part. And this could cost her the election. Michigan has between 200,000 and 300,000 Arab American voters, and in the primary over 100,000 of them declined to vote for Harris and instead voted uncommitted. A Council on American-Islamic Relations poll released in September showed that in Michigan, 40% of Muslim voters backed the Green Party candidate, Jill Stein; 38% supported Trump; and only 18% would vote for Harris.

Trump’s Campaign and Project 2025

At Trump's campaign rallies—and he has held scores of them over the last four years—he argues that the United States is a failing nation because it has not been able to defend its borders from what he calls the immigrant invasion. He argues that at the end of his first presidency he left the country in wondrous shape economically, but that the immigrants have brought crime and have taken the jobs of American workers, particularly Latinos and Blacks. Trump promises that as president he will launch a national effort to round up millions of illegal immigrants and deport them and then improve the economy. His central economic plan is to cut taxes for the wealthy and increase tariffs on imported goods. He is a climate change denier and one of his mantras is “Drill, baby, drill,” expressing his commitment to rebuild the economy on coal, oil, and the internal combustion engine—though since he became friends with Musk, he is not so critical of electric vehicles. If he touches on foreign policy, it is to say that he would cut support for Ukraine, but on the other hand he promises, “I will give Israel the support that it needs to win but I do want them to win fast.”

While Trump has no clear plan for the administration—he is not much of a planner—a number of his advisors working with the conservative Heritage Foundation, produced a 900-page plan for his next administration called Project 2025. Trump claims he knows nothing about it, but nine of his former cabinet secretaries helped to write it and another 140 former Trump administration officials and bureaucrats had a hand in it. The American Civil Liberties Union, long a defender of our rights, called it, “a roadmap for how to replace the rule of law with right-wing ideals.”

American democracy is by no means perfect—far from it—but while there are abuses, by and large we still have fundamental democratic rights and civil liberties. As the ACLU explains, Project 2025 proposes to reorganize the executive branch of government and to use it to further limit abortion; to target “immigrant communities through mass deportations and raids, ending birthright citizenship, separating families, and dismantling our nation's asylum system;” to increase the power of police and to repress social protests; to limit access to voting; to censor discussions of race, gender, and carry out systematic oppression in schools and universities, and to roll back trans rights among other things. Project 2025 would also eliminate tens of thousands of federal civil service workers and replace them with political appointees loyal to the president. It represents the first step in dismantling American democracy and creating an authoritarian government. It will begin with Trump's election or his seizure of power through a coup.

The Two Dangers

There are two looming dangers. One is that if Trump wins decisively, he will establish an authoritarian regime and could abolish democratic institutions and civil rights and usher in a truly fascist order. Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut recently stated, “There are an array of horrors that could result from Donald Trump's unrestricted use of the Insurrection Act. A malignantly motivated president could use it in a vast variety of dictatorial ways unless at some point the military itself resisted what they deemed to be an unlawful order. But that places a very heavy burden on the military.” (NBC news, January 14, 2024)

Remember that when Trump was president threatened to deploy the military to suppress the enormous national Black Lives Matter Protests of 2020, but both civilian and military officials resisted and checked him. They may not be able to next time. William Cohen, a former Republican senator from Maine and former Secretary of Defense, recently warned, referring to Trump, “We're about 30 seconds away from the Armageddon clock when it comes to democracy.” (NBC news, January 14, 2024)

The other danger is that if the election is close, Trump and the Republican Party will use an array of tactics, legal and illegal, to carry out a coup and seize power. They are already prepared to make legal challenges to every aspect of the voting process, from challenging individual voters, to

disputing the election count in every state, to raising objections to the certification by the U.S. Congress. Such legal challenges will likely be accompanied by militant protests and violence at the polls, at the offices authorized to count the votes, and at state legislatures. Trump will mobilize large Republican states with reactionary governors such as Texas and Florida to support his challenges and to slow or stop the post-election process. The might mobilize their state national guard forces to support Trump. There are also militant armed far right organizations—some 1,400 have been identified—that can be expected to take violent action in state capitals and at the national Capitol in Washington, D.C. Already during the COVID pandemic, armed groups opposed to masking took over some state capitals, for example in Michigan. Other militia groups went to the border in Texas and illegally arrested undocumented immigrants. The goal of all of this will be to prevent Harris from taking office and to install Trump in the presidency instead. Such action would lead to a political crisis of the federal government and might indeed lead to mass violence in some regions

Donald Trump, Republican right-wingers, and militia groups attempted a coup d'état on January 6, 2021, after Trump riled up a rally of thousands that then marched to the Capitol where hundreds invaded the building, searching for Democratic Party leader Nancy Pelosi and threatening to hang Republican Vice-President Mike Pence for his failure to support Trump's claim that he had won the election. The violent insurrection succeeded in delaying the counting of the Electoral College votes and the certification of the new president, took the lives of six people, left several police officers injured, and did millions of dollars in property damage. Subsequently 1,424 people were indicted, and hundreds were convicted and imprisoned. That coup attempt failed, but is another coup possible?



Could there be another insurrection? A coup? A civil war?

Many elected officials, military generals, and media commentators think it is. In December of 2021, three generals— Paul D. Eaton, Antonio M. Taguba, and Steven M. Anderson—in a guest editorial published in the Washington Post wrote, that in the event of a contested election result, where it is not clear who has become president, “The potential for a total breakdown of the chain of command along partisan lines — from the top of the chain to squad level — is significant should another insurrection occur. The idea of rogue units organizing among themselves to support the ‘rightful’ commander in chief cannot be dismissed.... Under such a scenario, it is not outlandish to say a military breakdown could lead to civil war.”

Public acceptance of a coup has also grown. A poll published in the Washington Post on January 6, 2022 found that, “The share of Americans willing to tolerate a coup increased from 28 percent in 2017 to 40 percent in 2021. That’s a 43 percent increase, and the highest rate we’ve seen in the United States since we began asking the question more than a decade ago.”

If Trump loses in a close election, it is possible that we could see another coup attempt, this one involving the military and possibly national in scope, and with the possibility of inciting a civil war. Some military officers might attempt to lead an uprising for Trump. But standing in the way of a

military coup would be the Biden-Harris Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austn, and their Joint Chiefs of Staff, the commanders of the military, and it is hard to conceive of them supporting a Trump attempt to seize power. Still, we would be foolhardy to ignore the dangers of another coup attempt.

What about the Left?

The American left—social democratic, socialist, anarchist—is quite small, perhaps 1% of the population, and it is divided into myriad groups and many individual activists with no affiliation. The Democratic Socialist of America (DSA), the Communist Party, and some former Maoists will support the Democratic Party's candidate Kamala Harris, even if like DSA, they have not endorsed her. The far left—anarchists, Trotskyists, neo-Stalinists, and campists—will not participate in the election. Some small sects pretend to participate in electoral politics, such as Socialist Action, which in 2020 ran its leader Jeff Mackler for president. He did not appear on even one state ballot. This year the Party of Socialism and Liberation is running Claudia De la Cruz and Karina Garcia for president and vice president. They only appear on the Florida ballot. These are not really political campaigns but propaganda campaigns intended only to promote the party and recruit.

The two most important left candidates in this election are Jill Stein of the Green Party and Cornel West. The Green Party, founded in 1984, is a very real and serious party with a quite progressive quasi-socialist platform and a serious commitment to preventing global warming. It defines itself as "ecosocialist." Its one serious political weakness is its lack of support for Ukraine's defensive war against Putin's Russia and in fact Stein often seems to be following Putin's talking points. It appears that the Green Party will have gathered enough signatures to qualify to appear on the ballots in 38 of the 50 states though they hope to appear on ten more. The Democrats have everywhere worked to block the Greens and the Republicans have tried to help them get on the ballot. As Trump said, "Jill Stein, I like her very much. You know why? She takes 100% from [Democrats]." In the past, Stein has won about 1% of the presidential vote and zero Electoral College votes, of course. But, as already mentioned, this year she could win votes of Arabs and Muslims, perhaps taking enough votes from Harris to cause her to lose the state of Michigan and to guarantee the election of Donald Trump.

The other left candidate is Black theologian, Cornel West. He originally planned to run on a ticket of the crisis-ridden People's Party, then switched to the Green Party, then decided on running independently, and finally created his own Justice for all Party, so far without a founding convention, with perhaps half a dozen state affiliates, and a very meager membership. He has done little campaigning and receives little publicity. At present it seems that he will appear on the ballot in 14 states. His campaign is a futile and rather pathetic gesture. Still, West's campaign like Stein's could take votes from Harris and deliver the election to Trump.

Many Americans, especially young people, Arabs, and Muslims, but also Jewish activists and many others have been appalled by the Biden-Harris administration's support for Israel's genocidal war against the people of Gaza and other Palestinians. Israel's war with Hezbollah and invasion of Lebanon will only exacerbate the sense of alienation of these voters. But this may not be decisive for Harris, since politicized youth makes up only a small segment of the population, many young people don't vote anyway, and those who do vote, may still well vote for Harris to defeat Trump.

On the other hand, many liberals, progressives, and non-sectarian leftists believe that there must be a united front in this election against Trump and fascism, and though they may be highly critical of Biden's and Harris' support for Israel's genocidal war, they see Trump as an existential threat to American democracy. Like them, I will be voting for Harris, while still supporting the call for a cease-fire in Gaza and an end to Israel's war with Hezbollah.