

Factors of Deconsolidation of a Liberal Democratic Regime: The Case of the United States

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Introduction

The United States is one of the longest-lived democracies in the world, whose institutional framework has remained basically unchanged throughout its history. For political science, the United States has long been an example of a “reference” consolidated democracy. High indicators of socioeconomic development, along with stable institutions, ensured the survival of the democratic regime despite many serious challenges. Though the Great Depression, the struggle for civil rights, and the Cold War were serious challenges for the institutional structure of the United States, they did not lead to negative dynamics within the liberal democratic system. From the end of the Civil War until recently, not a single case of “subsidence” of the level of democracy has been observed (Lijphart 1977: 149).

At the same time, some researchers observe trends towards crisis in the most economically, socially and culturally developed democracies, namely in the Euro-Atlantic region. The deconsolidation of liberal democracy is especially evident in the United States (Norris and Inglehart 2019: 429). Some researchers, such as Barbara F. Walter, argue that the United States is sliding into “anocracy,” a transitional stage between democracy and autocracy. The presence of “anocracy” significantly increases instability and the likelihood of a civil war. After the events of January 6, 2021, rather bold statements are heard in modern political science, such as “In terms of executive constraints, the United States is now classified in the same category as Ecuador, Burundi, and Russia” (Walter 2022: 120).

Nevertheless, the United States still shows many of the traits identified by classic theories of democracy as the most significant for the consolidation (or stability) of a democratic regime. It remains one of the most economically developed countries in the world: in 2019, the United States was in the top ten countries in terms of gross national income (GNI) per capita (World Bank 2020a). On the World Values Survey culture map, the United States occupies a similar position to other democracies (World Values Survey 2020a). American society maintains a congruence of cultural values favorable to democracy, stable

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institutions, and strong economic indicators (Sheafer and Shenhav 2013). The United States has received consistently high scores for effectiveness of government in the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) databank (World Bank 2020b).

There is an apparent contradiction between existing theories of democracy and the observed political reality. Economic growth in the United States is combined with centrifugal trends in politics and the growth of populism, and WGI indicators remain high despite fierce political struggle. As a result, many researchers are currently attempting to explain the deconsolidation of liberal democratic regimes in the United State, as well as Western Europe. It is also of broader scientific interest to consider the deconsolidation of the “old” Western democracies, the reasons for which, according to many researchers, are poorly explained by modern political-scientific theory (Shin 2018: 126).

The novel contribution of the study is not to consider the current manifestations of the deconsolidation of democracy in the United States – disillusionment with the democratic system among young people and other social groups, or the deviant behavior of political elites (Foa and Mounk 2016; Norris and Inglehart 2019) – but to identify the structural causes and factors that started the process of erosion of the democratic structure and continue to contribute to the observed centrifugal tendencies in the United States, i.e. the alienation of political actors from the “political center.” The study builds on previous research arguing that the outbreaks of violence in the United States in recent years have been so widespread due to the presence of deep structural factors (Turchin and Korotayev 2020: 11–12).

The central problem of our study is thus the contradiction between existing theories of democracy and the observed political reality in the United States. We evaluate the relative importance of different factors for the crisis of the liberal democratic regime in a state has long claimed the status of consolidated democracy, and which, until recently, successfully resisted the destructive influence of populist politicians and curbed attempts to deploy political violence. Based on this, the research question can be formulated as follows: “which factors are most important in explaining the deconsolidation of the liberal democratic regime in the United States?”

The methodological paradigm of the research is the “ideal-typical” approach to the analysis of the transformation of the systemic properties of a social system, formulated by Lipset (1960: 82–86). This approach is presented in the work of Lazarsfeld, as the “interpretation of statistical relations as a research procedure” (Lazarsfeld and Rosenberg 1955: 112–15), and substantiates the extrapolation of universal schemes of total social systems to the analysis of specific historical realities. The implications of statistical data in relation to democracy suggest that there are aspects of total social systems that can be articulated in theoretical terms,

compared with similar aspects of other systems. At the same time, they are themselves inferred from empirical data that can be verified (or questioned) by other researchers. Thus, the assumption is made that there is a certain “perfect” democracy, which has the entire set of factors necessary for its formation and survival, the violation of which, in turn, leads to its deconsolidation or reverse.

Conceptual framework and definition of the constituent parts of the deconsolidation of liberal democracy

In modern political science, one of the most simplified typologies of political regimes divides them into three clusters: undemocratic, unconsolidated democracies and consolidated democracies (Dahl 2000: 8). Consolidated democracies are “old” democracies, which are distinguished on the one hand by robust political institutions that are designed in such a way as to reduce fragmentation and the likelihood of political crises, and, on the other hand, by effective and responsible decision-making that ensures the greatest possible political inclusiveness (certainly in accordance with certain historical conditions). In other words, the consolidation of liberal democracy occurs when democratic development is combined with a stable and predictable political process (Gunter et al. 1995).

Researchers of regime transformations are actively debating the list of conditions necessary for the survival of democracy, but most agree that the formation, stability and deepening of democracy is possible only in the presence of specific factors (Haerpfer et al. 2009: 148; Przeworski 1991: 62). It is customary to distinguish between structural and actor-oriented factors of the genesis of democracy.

The structure-oriented approach to the study of democracy views the emergence and consolidation of democratic institutions as the result of certain “objective” processes and prerequisites. Democracy successfully arises as a formulation of the results of other social and economic processes. These so-called “structural” processes and preconditions are various and relate to historical, social class-related and socioeconomic factors, peculiarities of national formation and state building, the type of political culture, features of economic development, the degree of homogeneity or fragmentation of society, etc. The main point is that these prerequisites are of a historical nature, they are objective and do not depend on the specific decisions and actions of political actors. Accordingly, the absence of these conditions and prerequisites sets limits and ceilings for possible democratic construction (Kaplan 1997). In contrast, actor-centered approaches examine the effects of “subjective” decisions and actions of key actors, primarily various elite groups, on the formation of democratic institutions and procedures.

In the countries of the Euro-Atlantic world, distinguished by high socioeconomic indicators, pro-democratic elites and a harmonized political culture, the influence of structural and actor factors until recently facilitated the process of consolidating liberal democracy. As Diamond (1994) noted, in consolidated democracies, the legitimacy of a democratic regime is so high and widely shared that the collapse of democracy becomes unlikely. Thus, according to modern political science theories, a consolidated democracy is ensured on the one hand thanks to the experience of the practical use of democratic freedoms, as a result of which consolidated democracy becomes a self-sustaining structure, and on the other hand, depends on factors exogenous to the political system that create the conditions for the existence of democracy (Rustow 1970).

The reverse of the process of strengthening and deepening democracy is the deconsolidation of the democratic regime. Various researchers distinguish different components of the deconsolidation of liberal democracy. According to political scientists, one of the manifestations of this process is the opportunism of the ruling elites. Thus, a sign of deconsolidation is the rejection by political actors of the democratic rules of the game, denial of the legitimacy of opponents' political claims, encouragement or lack of condemnation of violence by political leaders, and demands to restrict the civil liberties of opponents, including the media (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

In addition, they highlight the cultural components of the crisis of democracy, such as the development of "undemocratic" preferences among different groups of the population, especially young people. The manifestations of authoritarian aspirations as identified by modern political science include the decline in support for democracy as a generally recognized political norm, the development of paternalistic preferences in politics, and "illiberal" cultural norms: rejection of pluralism, hierarchism, collectivism, anti-individualism, cultural monism, etc. (Shin 2018)

Political scientists also note that the deconsolidation of liberal democracy is expressed in specific judicial and administrative measures, entailing transformations of the legal design of any public spheres, for example, elections, or the political system as a whole – in the event of a constitutional change. Thus, the decline in the quality or curtailment of democracy is visible in legal shifts towards authoritarianism, which, according to some researchers, occur at moments of serious political upheaval: insurgency, uprisings, revolutions, the development of terrorism, etc. (Moloney and Krislov 2016; Mathieu 2019)

Tendencies towards crisis in a democratic system may also be expressed in the erosion of democratic norms and the growing popularity of extreme political views. This process is due to the mismatch of expectations and demands with the results of the political system, and a decrease in trust in democratic institutions

and traditional political actors, which causes an increase in electoral support for populist parties and leaders, antisocial behavior (corruption, tax evasion), etc. These factors lead to a change in the sociocultural landscape, another sign of the deconsolidation of democracy (Howe 2017).

Among other things, some researchers link the deconsolidation of democracy and the attempts of the ruling elites to suppress the populist wave with repressive measures, the excessive tendency of the state bureaucracy to solve problems of inequality through redistribution, anti-democratic fluctuations within the ruling elites, the apathy of civil society, the partiality of justice, the emergence of new Internet media and “fake news,” institutional dysfunction, etc. (Mietzner 2018; Corbett 2020; Mărcău 2019)

Thus, within the framework of this study, we will consider the deconsolidation of democracy as a systemic crisis of the democratic regime, consisting of the repeated opportunistic behavior of the elites, the erosion of support for democracy on the part of society, the development of centrifugal tendencies in the behavior of the main political actors, as well as cumulative social, political and cultural trends towards a greater spread of anti-democratic practices.

Deviant behavior of political elites as a starting point of the process of deconsolidation of democracy in the United States

As mentioned above, according to traditional concepts, the “old” consolidated democracies are the most protected from crisis tendencies. Researchers have therefore focused mainly on finding ways to conduct a democratic transition in authoritarian states and on the consolidation of democratic institutions in countries where the transition to a democratic regime has taken place relatively recently (Dahl 2000: 98). The optimism of many classics of democratic theory made it possible to assert that after a democratic regime is properly consolidated, its longevity becomes inevitable because democracies tend to be more self-sustaining than other political regimes (Runciman 2013).

Recently, the unshakable postulate of consolidated democracy as a self-sustaining system, invulnerable to crisis trends, has been questioned. Many researchers record the deconsolidation of liberal democracy in the countries of the Euro-Atlantic world and, in particular, in the United States (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Inglehart 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Dasandi 2018; Mounk 2019). In addition, a significant research problem is the fact that states subject to deconsolidation of liberal democracy retain a leading position in terms of economic and social development (USA, France, etc.) or experience rapid economic growth (Eastern Europe), and also occupy comparatively favorable positions for the formation of democracy on the “map of cultures” by K. Welzel and R. Inglehart (World Values Survey 2020a).

Of particular interest in this regard is the United States, where, according to studies by Polity V and Freedom House, the level of democracy has decreased so far that the country cannot be called a consolidated democracy or full democracy, according to the designation of Polity V (Figure 1) (Polity V 2020; Freedom House 2020; Economist Intelligence Unit 2020). According to Freedom House reports, this downward trend in US democracy is due, on the one hand, to the failure of bipartisan leadership in upholding democratic standards, and on the other, to the erosion of democratic institutions under the influence of Donald Trump's presidency (Freedom House 2018, 2019). At the same time, as noted above, the United States retains a high level of economic development, cultural values favorable to democracy, and relatively effective government.

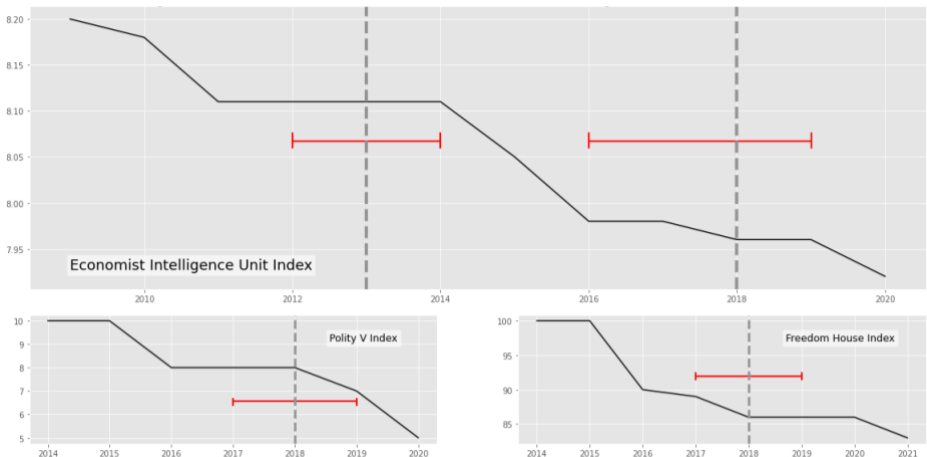


Figure 1. Dynamics of indicators of the level of democracy in the United States. Structural break points are indicated by a dashed line; confidence intervals are indicated by a red line.

This is a puzzle that requires explanation, and is not adequately addressed by existing theories of democracy. Some researchers argue that modern Western political science cannot explain the reasons for, or identify the factors of, the democratic deconsolidation taking place in many countries (Shin 2018) and that it is even necessary to revise some postulates regarding the factors of stability of consolidated democracy (Corbett 2020).

Taking into account the long-term preservation in the United States of relatively high indicators of structural factors conducive to democracy, the root cause of deconsolidation of democracy should be viewed through the prism of actor-oriented determinants.

In political science, actor-centered factors of the genesis of democracy include many components, but in general they are defined as the absence of influential political movements opposing liberal democracy. A special role in the formation and strengthening of democracy in classical theories is given to the ruling elites, which allowed Lipset (1960: 483, 503–4) to declare that democracy is a consequence of the policy of conformism of the elite of society and that democratic transition (and, consequently, the possible reverse of democracy) begins as a product of the creativity of the political class.

The main reason for the deconsolidation of democracy is considered to be the discrepancy between the expectations that the individual associates with democracy (economic well-being, order and legality) and political reality, which leads to disappointment and, together with social tension, the erosion of democratic institutions. This contradiction allowed the American political scientists Dye and Zeigler to reveal the paradox of democracy: “Democracy is government ‘by the people,’ but the responsibility for the survival of democracy rests on the shoulders of elites. This is the irony of democracy: Elites must govern wisely if government ‘by the people’ is to survive” (Schubert et al. 2014: 1–2).

According to some views, the main catalyst for a paradigm shift within the US political class was the victory in the Cold War, which became the starting point for the deconsolidation of the liberal democracy regime (and at the same time a catalyst for the crisis trends already unfolding in the United States at that time, such as growing inequality, polarization, etc.).

Douglass North held that the threat of internal strife in the face of an external enemy has a sobering effect, keeping people from attacking each other to avoid damage from which everyone will suffer in the end. According to North, the threat of an outbreak of mutual enmity is a constant factor that maintains order, because other members of society will suffer from strife. Deviations from the norms of behavior are not allowed because they pose a very serious threat to the stability and security of the whole society (North 1997). It is noteworthy that this behavioral model applies not only at the level of local communities or small-scale societies, but also within the framework of large states. Karl Popper, in his work *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, noted that the fear of total collapse among the upper classes in ancient cities pushed them to cooperate not only among themselves, but also with representatives of the lower classes (Popper 1971a: 222). As a consequence, the aggressive foreign policy of the ancient Romans is cited as one of the reasons for the survival of the Roman Republic over many centuries (Zhdanov 2020).

According to another point of view, the crisis tendencies within the American elite that emerged at the end of the twentieth century and developed further up to

the present moment are the product of long-term trends that originated in the second half of the twentieth century (Neal 2020).

Another possible factor that negatively affected the United States political class was a phenomenon called in political science “elite overproduction”: an increase in the number of applicants for a limited number of political positions. The growth of benefits from occupying positions at the head of the world hegemon leads to tougher political competition and the formation of competing elite groups, fighting for rent extraction. As a result, elites split due to growing competition and factionalism (Turchin 2012). This kind of penchant for political selfishness by the main players can create a situation in which actors care first of all about their own benefit and do not think about possible costs, thereby turning politics into a zero-sum game, which introduces an additional destabilizing element into the democratic system (Lijphart 1977: 91–93).

We view the destructive processes within the American elite, primarily the growth of polarization, as a key element that launched the process of deconsolidation of the democratic regime. At the same time, identifying the root causes of such negative processes in the second half of the twentieth century and their further development in the twenty-first century, whether victory in the Cold War, “elite overproduction,” or the result of other structural processes, is a challenge for future research. We treat the root cause of the development of the negative trends described below as an unknown exogenous factor.

Determination of the main path for the deconsolidation of the democratic order in the United States

As argued in the previous section, the polarization of political actors in the US has provided an additional impetus to destructive tendencies within the American elite. This is supported by many quantitative data. According to Neal’s (2020) research, since the 1993–94 session of Congress (the first one elected after the collapse of the USSR), the polarization of legislators has significantly increased with each new session. First, the share of “negative relationships” (hostile relationships between legislators) exceeded the share of “positive relationships” (examples of cooperation between legislators). The higher the polarization index in this case, the more joint voting occurs between members of the same party. Second, both types of relationships have become more prevalent, indicating that members of the House of Representatives and the Senate are increasingly “taking sides” when drafting laws. Third, since the 1993–94 session, there has been a surge and further increase in “positive relationships” between members of the same party and “negative relationships” between members of different parties, which points to the increasing polarization of the political establishment. By the 2015–16 session, 98.8% of all positive relations in the House of Representatives were

between legislators of the same party, while only 1.2% of positive relations took place between a Republican and a Democrat. The peak of polarization is recorded in 2015–16 – it was then that such “extreme” politicians as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders saw their first successes on the federal political stage.

To define the period of increasing political polarization in American society, we use the calculation of structural breaks, which allow us, when analyzing the time series, to determine at what point in time the current trend intensified or reversed (Kantorovich 2002). On the graph, structural breaks in the dynamics of polarization in the United States are indicated by a dashed line, and confidence intervals are shown in red (Figure 2) (V-Dem Institute 2021). Evaluating the data obtained, we conclude that in the United States, the trend towards increased polarization originated in the 1980s, with the arrival of the 40th president, Ronald Reagan. From 1990 to 1994 we detect a significant structural break and the development of negative links between the parties in Congress (the arithmetic mean of the negative links in the Senate and House of Representatives, based on Neal’s data).

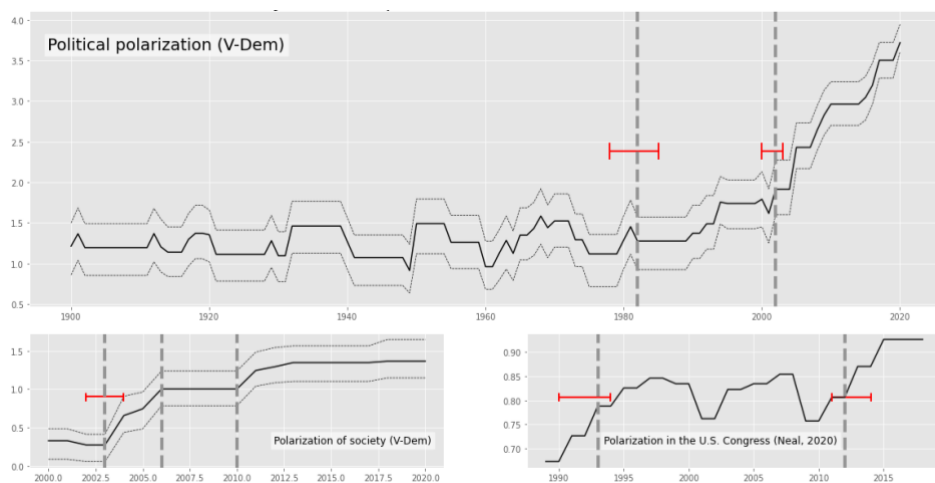


Figure 2. Dynamics of polarization indicators in the United States

The crisis tendencies within Congress and the curtailment of inter-party cooperation could not but affect the polarization of American society. Within the framework of modern theories of democracy, political parties are given great importance in relation to the consolidation of democratic regimes. They contribute to the stabilization of electoral behavior, the emergence of reproducible patterns of political competition, and the development of leadership. It is these phenomena

that paint an accurate picture of the ordering of relations between parties and civil society, which is a key element of the entire process of democratic consolidation (Haerpfer et al. 2009: 368–74).

Since the 2000s, a small increase in corruption has been recorded, which is quite consistent with these trends. Because the confidence intervals in determining the points of structural breaks overlap each other, it is difficult to determine a specific period during which resistance to corruption on the part of elites and institutions decreased, but we can note that the decrease in Corruption Perception Index and Control of Corruption Index occurred during the tenures of the 43rd and 45th presidents (the higher these indexes, the less corruption). (Figure 3).

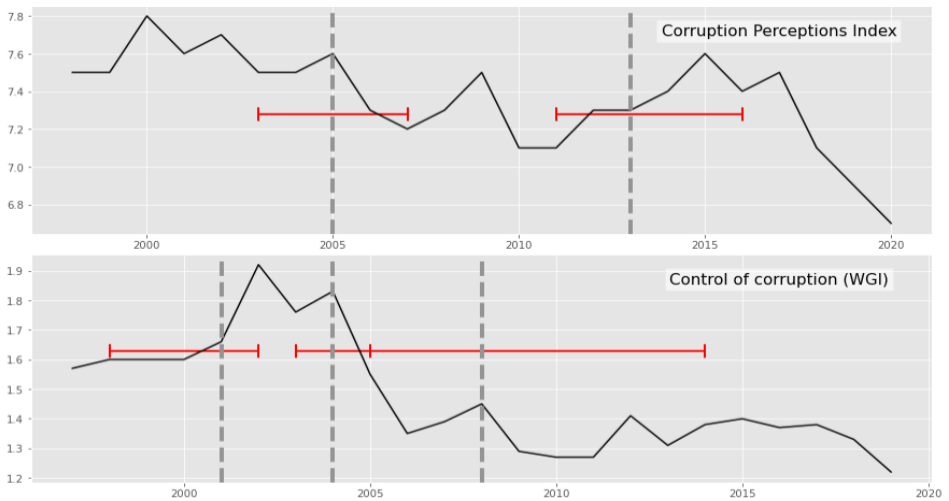


Figure 3. Trends in United States corruption indicators

In turn, we note that throughout the twentieth century, the indicators of corruption in the United States were worse than in Western Europe. In Europe, however, the overlap of confidence intervals does not allow us to say that there was a statistically significant difference between these structural breaks until the mid-1980s (V-Dem Institute 2021) (Figure 4).

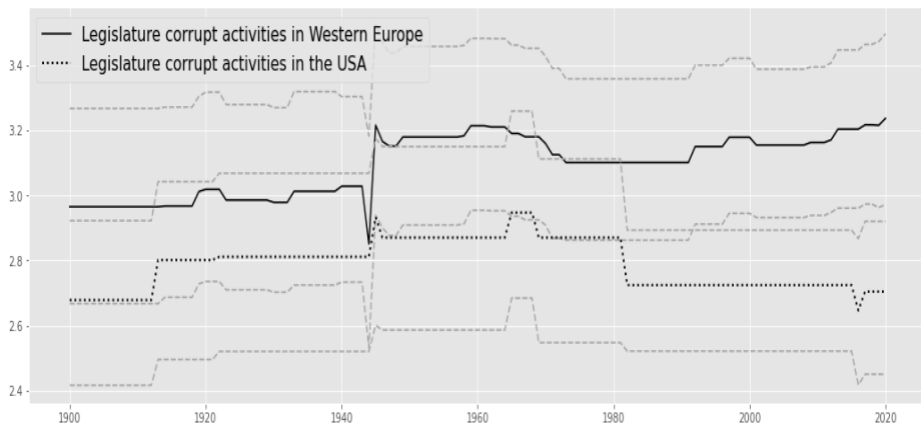


Figure 4. Dynamics of corruption indicators in the United States and Western Europe. The higher the value for Legislature corrupt activities, the less corruption in the country.

The growth of corruption has a negative impact on both the architecture of the democratic system and the political system as a whole. Corrupt activities impede economic development, forcing the government to abandon the necessary programs to combat poverty, reduce inequality and effectively protect the environment, thereby reducing the quality of public administration, which, as mentioned above in connection with the “paradox of democracy,” leads to the erosion of democracy (Haerpfer et al. 2009: 225–26). In addition to the indirect influence, the growth of corruption directly leads to the deconsolidation of the liberal democratic regime, since corruption weakens democratic institutions, and public distrust of corrupt politicians is projected onto the democratic system.

The polarization of political players also influences the effectiveness of the political system and the level of democracy. Fragmentation of political elites complicates the political process and slows down decision-making, which makes state institutions less responsive to the needs and expectations of society, and the political system becomes less durable and stable. In addition, consolidated democracy requires elites to be able to reconcile the diverging interests and demands of their subcultures and to compromise to overcome divisions that divide society and join forces with counter-elites (actors striving for the possession of political power). This depends on how committed the elites are to the idea of preserving and maintaining the operability of the state machinery (Dahl et al. 2003: 119–20). As mentioned above, the disappearance of the USSR as the main competitor of the United States and the country’s achievement of world hegemony changed the hierarchy of preferences of political players in interaction with each

other. In addition, excessive polarization, by promoting emotionally demonstrative and expressive behavior in politics, disturbs the stability of democracy, which requires relatively moderate tension between the opposing political forces existing in it (Lipset 1960: 105, 141).

Another danger of excessive polarization is that certain political projects begin to posit themselves as an absolute idea, demanding unquestioning obedience and considering ideological opponents as an absolute evil. By cultivating hatred and bigotry, polarized political actors rule out any opportunities for the dialogue and compromise that are the foundation of a consolidated democracy (Popper 1971b: 485–86).

Based on the results of calculating points of structural breaks in a time series displaying indicators of the effectiveness of the political system (World Bank 2020b), we note the emergence of a trend towards decreasing effectiveness of the political system in the United States in the 2000–2005 period (Figure 5).

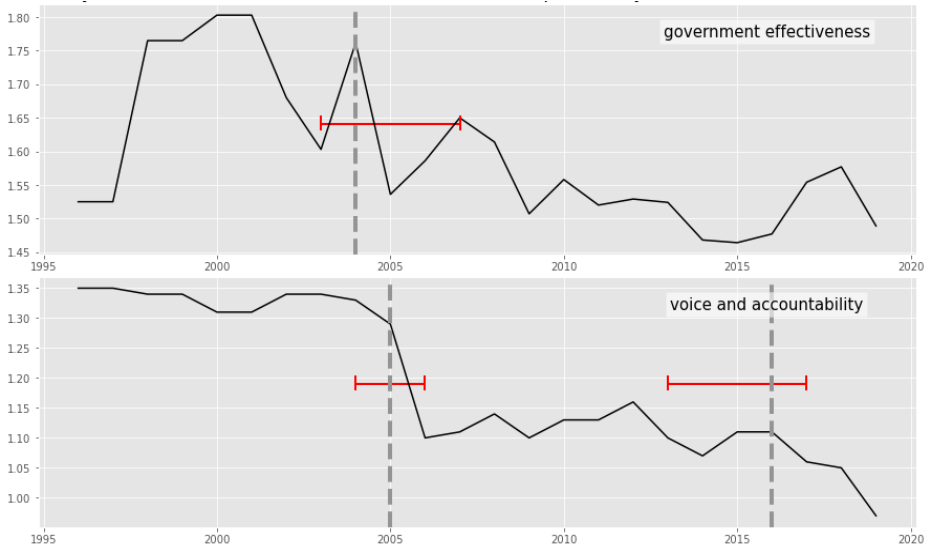


Figure 5. Dynamics of indicators of the effectiveness of the political system in the United States.

The decline in the effectiveness of the United States political system over the past 20 years could not but affect the living standards of Americans and their political moods, as well as the indicators of democracy in general. According to the research of Samuel Huntington, the ineffectiveness of the political system is a significant obstacle to democratization and, among other things, can cause a

rollback of democracy in the state, undermining its legitimacy (Dahl et al. 2003: 81).

According to Easton (1953), the main purpose of the political system is the ability to adequately respond to incoming requests (influences) and allocate limited resources in accordance with the significance of certain requests. Accordingly, the main consequence of the violation of the effectiveness of the political system is an increase in the imbalance in the distribution of benefits between different social strata.

To assess inequality in the United States, we use a comparison of the income shares of the richest 1% and the poorest 50% of Americans. This is because, in what Inglehart (2018) calls an Artificial Intelligence Society – one in which almost all jobs are at risk of being automated due to the dominance of computer programs – the main socioeconomic conflict is between the top 1 percent of the population and the other 99 percent, not between the working and middle classes (Inglehart 2018: 201). Analyzing the empirical data – the share of total income before taxes – we note that the trend towards inequality originated in the first half of the 1980s, but the key shift – when the income share of the top 1% exceeded 50% for the first time since the 1940s – occurred in 1995, at the peak of United States hegemony (Figure 6).

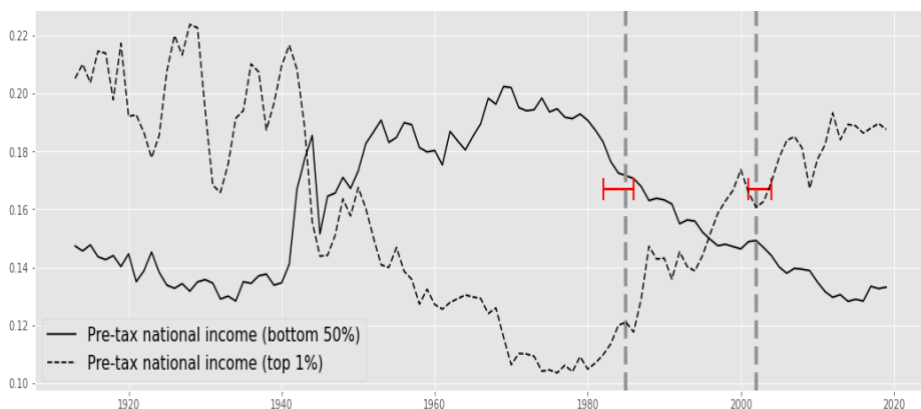


Figure 6. Trends in inequality indicators in the United States

This phenomenon is due to the concentration of benefits from economic growth at the “top” of society – the less educated strata in the United States experience a decline in real incomes and an even sharper drop in their relative position in society. Both trends are developing against the backdrop of large-scale immigration, which is intensifying support for populist authoritarian forces.

The erosion of the middle class in the United States contributes to the deconsolidation of the liberal democratic regime in several ways. First, because economic resources can be transformed into political ones, the concentration of economic power in the hands of the elite can give them the opportunity to prevent the spread of democratic freedoms that expand the rights of citizens. With a sharp difference in the way of life between those at the top of the social pyramid and those at its base, political elites may also begin to view the lower strata as naturally inferior. Therefore, political elites in such a situation tend to treat the rights and freedoms of citizens of the lower strata as something absurd and immoral, according to Lipset in his book *Political Man* (1960). Second, economic inequality can cause resentment and frustration among the poor, eroding the sense of community and the legitimacy that democracy is believed to be based on. Thus, not only are the upper strata opposed to democracy, but their often arrogant political behavior serves to intensify extremist reactions from the lower classes. In contrast, a large middle class mitigates conflict by supporting moderate and democratic parties and countering extremist groups (Dahl et al. 2003: 46–54; Haerpfer et al. 2009: 210, 305; Lipset 1960: 74–76).

At the same time, the decline in the effectiveness of the political system and the widening of the social gap between different sections of American society undermine the credibility of a democratic political regime and institutions fundamental to democracy. One of the reasons for such tendencies is the nature of the priorities and values of individuals within the framework of determining the most rational political behavior. As a rule, in democratic states the broad public places a high value on freedom, respect for rights and democratic procedures. However, in the conditions of the inability of the political systems of many states to effectively respond to the global financial and economic crises of capitalism and to growing social tensions, these desires are replaced by others: economic prosperity, social justice and legality. Accordingly, if a democratic political system is prone to “failures” and cannot meet the expectations that society associates with democracy, this leads to disillusionment, both with the existing institutions and with the democratic order as a whole (World Values Survey 2020b).

Analyzing the dynamics of disapproval of the democratic order, we note that since the end of the 1990s there has been an increase in the number of those who believe that democracy is “bad” or “very bad” (Figure 7).

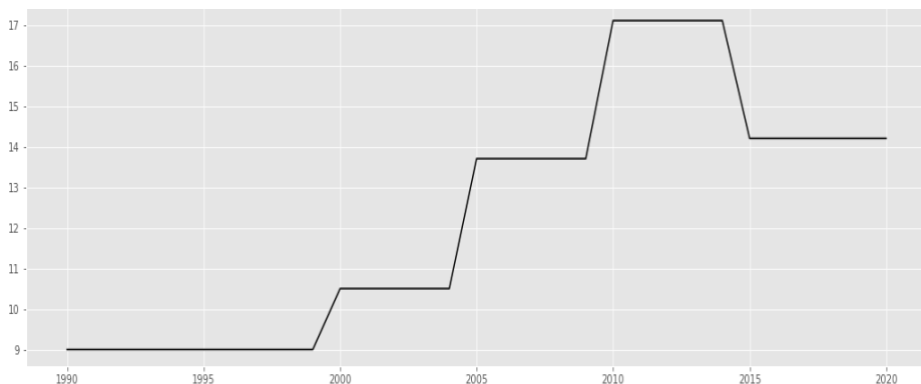


Figure 7. Dynamics of disapproval of democracy in the United States. The disapproval of democracy is obtained by summing up the percentages of respondents who think that democracy is "bad" or "very bad".

The number of those who have a negative attitude towards the main institutions of American democracy – the presidency, Congress and the Supreme Court – is also growing, judging by the arithmetic mean of those who disapprove of these branches of government (Gallup 2021). The analysis of the time series reveals a structural shift in the period from 2005 to 2006, characterized by an increasing trend towards dissatisfaction with the main democratic institutions in the United States (Figure 8).

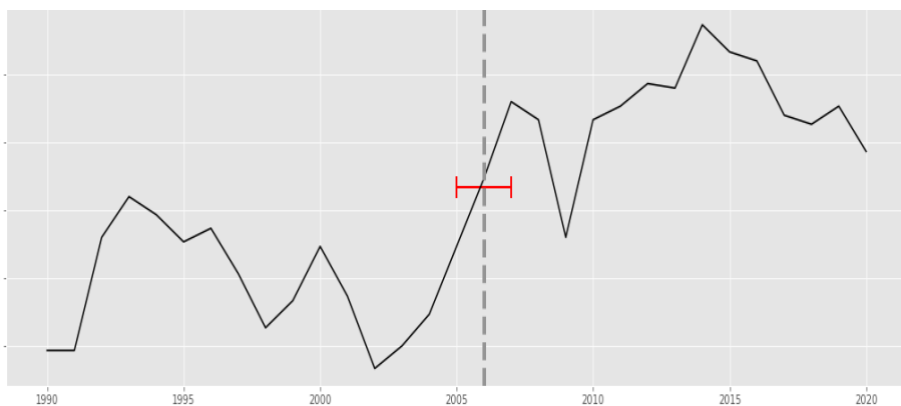


Figure 8. Dynamics of disapproval of political institutions in the United States

Such tendencies are highly undesirable for the liberal democratic regime and, as mentioned in the previous section, are one of the signs of its deconsolidation. According to Almond and Verba (1963), harmonization of political culture and institutional structures is vital for a consolidated democracy. In other words, emotional and evaluative loyalty to the main elements of the architecture of a democratic regime – including the elected authorities, in this case the Congress and president – is necessary among different groups of the population. Only a harmonized political culture generates stable polities. And vice versa – the fragmentation of political culture (the orientation of certain strata of society towards different political models) leads to political instability (Almond and Verba 1963: 56–58). This idea was developed by Louis Hartz, who argues that “natural liberalism” is required for the implementation of democratic practices, irrational adherence to democratic procedures and the “moral unanimity” of society towards liberal values (Dahl et al. 2003: 105–6).

Similar tendencies of disillusionment with democracy and dissatisfaction with traditional institutions are characteristic of both American society in general and smaller groups within it. Radical political movements or authoritarian populist politicians appeal to unsettled individuals, who may be socially isolated and deprived of protection from political institutions and, accordingly, economic security (Lipset 1960: 211). The growth of inequality, caused by the ineffectiveness of the political system, has led to the “dropout” of certain social strata from it, which entails their disillusionment with democracy and further radicalization. According to a study by the Federal Reserve System (2021), millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) are the largest and, at the same time, the poorest generation, owning only 4.6% of the national wealth in 2020. This fact explains the popularity of Bernie Sanders among young Americans aged 18–26, 31% of whom preferred him above other candidates, according to a 2016 study by Frank Lutz, (LutzGlobal 2016). Since 1995, the gap has widened between the majority of the population and the richest 1% of Americans, making Sanders the most popular incumbent Democrat politician (YouGov 2021). The situation is similar on the right of the political spectrum. As a result of the political and economic globalization supported by American elites in the 1990s, many American industries were moved overseas, as a result of which the so-called “Rusty Belt” formed: a group of states in the Midwest that have fallen into a deep industrial crisis. This kind of loss of connection between the elites and their social base predetermined both the further deconsolidation of democracy in the United States (Lijphart 1977: 206–7) and the high levels of support in this region for Donald Trump (like Sanders, an anti-systemic politician) in the 2016 presidential election (Frieden 2020).

“Anti-democratic” sentiments among young people in the countries of the Euro-Atlantic world and in the United States in particular have been recorded by many

researchers since the beginning of the 2010s. Classical theories of democracy rested on the assertion that economic growth and improved living standards protect the democratic order from deconsolidation, but such concepts pay little attention to the factor of inequality and the fact that Western youth can be frustrated due to their lower economic security compared to their parents, all against the background of the growing wealth of the top 1% (Foa and Mounk 2016; Corbett 2020). Thus, the radicalism characteristic of young people is superimposed onto structural factors (economic, cultural and demographic shifts in the United States), which gives an additional impetus to the erosion of the democratic regime and the development of political instability (Turchin 2013: 242–43). Norris and Inglehart (2019: 429–30), continuing their study of these tendencies in the deconsolidated Western regimes, note that a decrease in support for a democratic system leads to an increase in the popularity not of authoritarian leaders, but of populist politicians and radical political movements of both the left and the right.

We analyzed the growth of “extreme” political sentiments in the United States, designating as “radicals” those who ranked themselves from 1 to 3 and from 8 to 10 inclusively on the World Values Survey left–right political scale. We note the emergence of a trend towards growing radical sentiments in American society starting in 2005 (Figure 9). By 2020, slightly less than half of Americans did not identify themselves as centrists (World Values Survey 2020b).

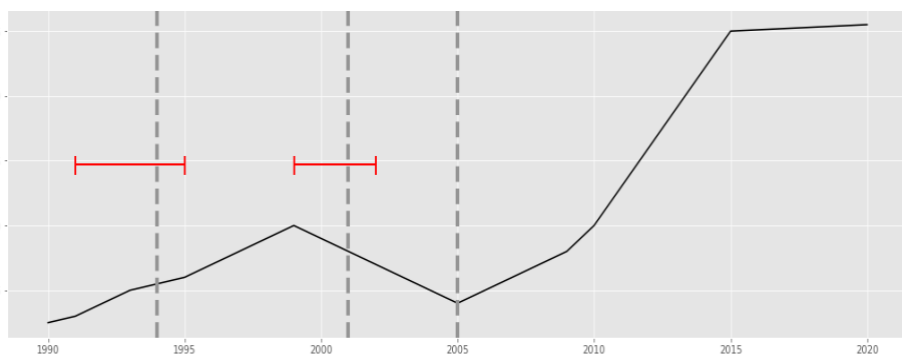


Figure 9. Dynamics of growth of radical sentiments in the United States

Thus, the extreme sentiments in American society on the one hand arise from disappointment in the “traditional” political process, and on the other, are fueled by political elites and counter-elites. Popper (1971a: 363–64) wrote that the drivers of social change can be the volitional actions of a part of the ruling class remote from power. In other words, in certain circumstances the “counter-elite” can broadcast its values to the rest of society. Many modern researchers adhere to

this point of view. For example, Rose-Ackerman (2010: 153) noted that political instability can be caused not so much by popular protest movements as by the members of the ruling elite themselves, who, out of irresponsibility and opportunism, seek to eliminate their political rivals in order to increase their chances of gaining power. Lipset (1960: 55, 92, 169) also believed that a strong democratic regime requires the absence of major political movements whose strategy entails accelerating extreme political sentiments. For a democratic regime to survive, he argued, it is imperative that political actors do not build communication with the broad masses of the population on the basis of values and platforms opposed to liberal democracy, and do not perceive the “traditional” democratic process as illegitimate.

If there are sufficient grounds for any social strata to abandon democracy, the demands of this part of society resonate with the desire for domination of charismatic leaders. As a result, the development of centrifugal tendencies in society becomes a self-sustaining process: anti-systemic political leaders cultivate in society a distrust of democracy, and the expanding base of supporters enhances the spread of politicians with this type of platform. A similar influence on the political culture of the United States is exerted by far-right and far-left politicians, who have recently been gaining more and more political capital. Under the influence (among other factors) of such politicians as Trump and Sanders, Americans' preferences on the left–right scale have shifted significantly from the center to the radical right and left poles, as evidenced by data from the World Values Survey (World Values Survey 2020b).

As Lijphart (1977: 44–66, 61) wrote, for the survival of democracy, the moderation of political leaders and the masses, the absence of influential extreme right and extreme left trends, and centripetal tendencies in politics are vital. The development of extreme political trends, the shift of voters from the political center to the right and left poles, and the erosion of traditional political norms contributes to the transformation of politics into a “zero-sum game,” destroying the consensus of society on the desirability of democracy and contributing to its further deconsolidation (Howe 2017).

Political polarization, an a priori negative perception of one's political opponents, fueled by opportunist politicians, entails the most significant component of the deconsolidation of democracy: growing tolerance of political violence. Analyzing the dynamics of the V-Dem index “Election other electoral violence” (*v2elpeace*) V-Dem (V-Dem Institute 2021), which measures shows was the electoral process free from political violence, we note that in American society, the trend towards tolerance of political violence originates in the period from 2014 to 2016, on the eve of Donald Trump's election as the 45th president (Figure 10).

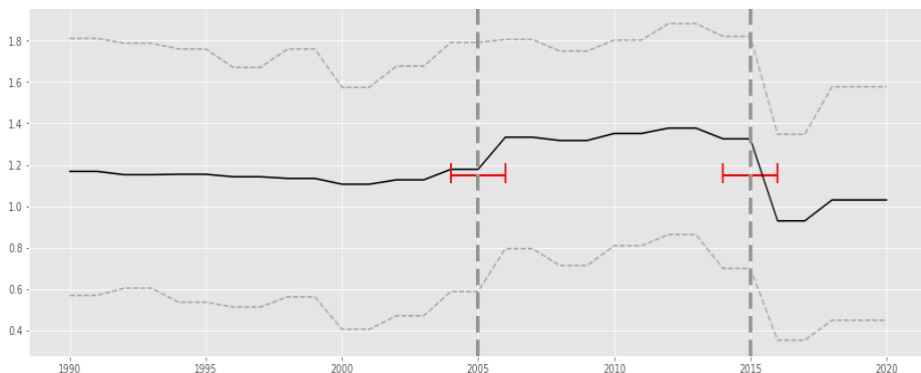


Figure 10. Dynamics of preference for peaceful resolution of political conflicts in the United States

The rise in approval of political violence in the United States can be attributed to a variety of factors. North (1997: 117) substantiated the point of view that broad public support for violent actions against political opponents is due to the excessive ideologization of political actors. According to Moore (1966: 103), large-scale spread of political violence becomes possible only when popular impulses are directed by the organizing force of political elites or counter-elites to achieve their narrowly political goals. In addition, Turchin (2012) has examined the effects of long-term political cycles determined by structural-demographic factors on bursts of political violence – the study predicted that the next peak would be in approximately 2020.

Thus, the current polarized American society, lacking points of contact between political opponents and opportunities to reach a compromise, as well as being influenced by economic and sociocultural factors, demonstrates an increasing commitment to the practice of political violence. Berg-Schlusser noted that cultural, linguistic and religious homogeneity, the absence of strong anti-system forces, both left and right, and fundamentalist groups, as well as the absence of political violence and instability are favorable for consolidated democracy (Berg-Schlusser D. 2018: 109). This statement is supported by Larry Diamond, according to whom liberal democracies should be, among other things, “constitutional democracies”. The lack of a constitutional spirit or of an understanding of the central role of constitutional stability has a negative impact on the democratic structure (Diamond 1999).

Above, we have identified the main path of deconsolidation of the liberal democratic regime in the United States. Victory in the Cold War led to the development of centrifugal tendencies within the American elite, increased abuse

of power and, as a result, fierce political competition. These factors reduced the responsiveness of the political system to the demands and expectations of society, which alienated the general population from the democratic system and allowed radical political movements, as well as right- and left-wing populists, to flourish. Disappointment in the traditional political process, combined with the volitional actions of new charismatic politicians, deepened polarization in American society and led to an increase in radical sentiments and increasing tolerance of violence. The result has been a series of civil conflicts starting in 2020 and still ongoing at the time of writing.

Determination of the hierarchy of factors of deconsolidation of the democratic system in the United States

To determine the hierarchy of factors of deconsolidation of the democratic structure in the United States and to confirm the hypotheses and conceptual relationships described above, we use the method of path analysis. Path analysis is a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions that test hypotheses about the indirect effect of one variable on another (Manheim and Rich 1995). To simplify the model, we assume that it is recursive and includes no feedback – otherwise, for example, the growing polarization of society does not induce the elite to further fractionalization. The interaction of the model's components is unidirectional.

The model specification is as follows:

1. Unknown exogenous factor
2. The democracy indicator is operationalized through the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index. Based on data from Polity V and Freedom House, we assume that democracy indicators were constant until 2006 (Economist Intelligence Unit 2021).
3. Polarization is operationalized through the V-dem (2021) political polarization variable.
4. We operationalize corruption with the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International (2020) (the higher it is, the less corruption).
5. The effectiveness of the political system is measured using the World Bank's (2020b) government effectiveness indicator.
6. We operationalize inequality by calculating the difference between the tax-free share of income of the richest 1% of Americans and the poorest 50% (World Inequality Database 2021).
7. We operationalize disapproval of democracy by summing up the percentage of Americans who view democracy as "bad" and "very bad" (World Values Survey 2020b).

8. Disapproval of the political system is operationalized by calculating the mean of those who do not trust the president, Congress and the Supreme Court (Gallup 2021).
9. We operationalize radical sentiments by summing up the percentage of those who ranked themselves from 1 to 3 and from 8 to 10 on the World Values Survey (2020b) left-right political scale.
10. Political violence is analyzed using the V-Dem “Election other electoral violence” index (the higher it is, the less people are subject to political violence in connection with electoral campaigns) (V-Dem Institute 2021).

According to the results of the application of the Durbin-Watson test, we detect the presence of autocorrelation in all of the specified data (Bazilevsky 2018). To neutralize the effect of autocorrelation, we add lagged variables to the regression models, choosing for the path analysis a model characterized by the least information criteria of Akaike and Schwartz (Acquah De-Graft 2017). A series of regressions produced the following results (Tables 1–6). For ease of understanding, we have not added to the regression tables those regression indicators included in the path analysis which did not produce statistically significant results when adding lagged variables.

Table 1. Deviant behavior of political elites as a factor in the deconsolidation of democracy in the United States, exploring both effectiveness of the political system and level of democracy.

	The effectiveness of the political system						Democracy	Democracy	Democracy
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6			
Polarization	-0.15*** (0.02)	-0.06* (0.02)	-0.07* (0.03)				-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.2* (0.009)	-0.2* (0.01)
Effectiveness (lag-1)		0.05** (0.1)	0.4* (0.2)		0.6*** (0.11)	0.55** (0.2)			
Effectiveness (lag-2)			-0.01 (0.1)			-0.007 (0.2)			
Perceptions of corruption				0.37*** (0.07)	0.11 (0.05)	0.12 (0.06)			
Democracy (lag-1)							0.95*** (0.07)	0.99*** (0.2)	
Democracy (lag-2)									-0.05 (0.2)
Number of observations	31	30	29	31	30	29	31	30	29
R ²	0.62	0.7	0.71	0.5	0.75	0.7	0.73	0.96	0.97
AIC	-59	-78	-73	-50	-75	-70	-93	-150	-142
BIC	-56	-73	-68	-47	-71	-65	-90	-146	-136

Standard errors are in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Behavior of political elites as a factor in the deconsolidation of democracy, exploring level of democracy only.

	Democracy					
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>
Effectiveness				0.45*** (0.09)	0.06 (0.03)	0.07 (0.04)
Perceptions of corruption	0.22*** (0.04)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)			
Democracy (lag-1)		1*** (0.05)	1.1*** (0.2)		1*** (0.05)	1*** (0.2)
Democracy (lag-2)			-0.15 (0.2)			-0.09 (0.2)
Number of observations	31	30	29	31	30	29
R^2	0.42	0.95	0.96	0.4	0.96	0.96
AIC	-69	-146	-138	-70	-147	-140
BIC	-66	-141	-133	-67	-143	134

Standard errors are in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3. The impact of the effectiveness of the political system on sociocultural indicators

	<i>Inequality</i>	<i>Ineq.</i>	<i>Ineq.</i>	<i>Disapproval of the pol.sys.</i>	<i>Dis. pol. sys.</i>	<i>Dis. pol. sys.</i>	<i>Dis. of democracy</i>	<i>Dis. of dem.</i>	<i>Dis. of dem.</i>
Effectiveness of the pol. system	-0.18*** (0.03)	-0.04* (0.017)	-0.04 (0.02)	-36*** (7)	-9 (8)	-11 (9)	-13*** (3)	-0.71 (2)	-0.44 (2.5)
Inequality (lag-1)		0.82*** (0.06)	0.73** (0.2)						
Inequality (lag-2)			0.09 (0.17)						
Disapproval of pol. system (lag-1)				0.72*** (0.13)	0.87*** (0.2)				
Disapproval of pol. system (lag-2)					-0.2 (0.2)				
Disapproval of democracy (lag-1)								0.9*** (0.08)	0.91*** (0.2)
Disapproval of democracy (lag-2)									-0.009 (0.2)
Number of observations	31	30	29	31	30	29	31	30	29
R^2	0.61	0.94	0.93	0.5	0.72	0.73	0.4	0.88	0.88
AIC	-148	-201	-191	194	168	165	142	91	91
BIC	-145	-196	-185	197	173	170	145	95	96

Standard errors are in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4. The impact of inequality on cultural factors of deconsolidation of democracy

	<i>Disapproval of democracy</i>	<i>Dis. of dem.</i>	<i>Dis. of dem.</i>	<i>Disapproval of pol. system</i>	<i>Dis. of pol. sys.</i>	<i>Dis. of pol. sys.</i>
Inequality	77*** (7.5)	24* (11)	27* (13)	171*** (24)	69* (28)	78* (30)
Disapproval of democracy (lag-1)		0.7*** (0.1)	0.76** (0.19)			
Disapproval of democracy (lag-2)			-0.1 (0.2)			
Disapproval of pol. system (lag-1)					0.6*** (0.1)	0.8*** (0.2)
Disapproval of pol. system (lag-2)						-0.23 (0.2)
Number of observations	31	30	29	31	30	29
R ²	0.78	0.9	0.9	0.6	0.78	0.77
AIC	111	86	86	186	164	160
BIC	114	90	91	189	168	165

Standard errors are in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5. Influence of sociocultural factors on radical sentiments

	Radical sentiments								
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>	<i>Model 7</i>	<i>Model 8</i>	<i>Model 9</i>
Inequality	183*** (26)	21* (10)	15* (6.5)						
Disapproval of democracy				1.6*** (0.4)	0.3** (0.08)	0.15** (0.55)			
Disapproval of political system							0.76*** (0.1)	0.16*** (0.03)	0.08* (0.03)
Radical sentiments (lag-1)		0.95*** (0.04)	1.7*** (0.1)		0.96*** (0.03)	1.69*** (0.1)		0.93*** (0.03)	1.57*** (0.15)
Radical sentiments (lag-2)			-0.8*** (0.1)			-0.74*** (0.11)			-0.62*** (0.15)
Number of observations	31	30	29	31	30	29	31	30	29
R ²	0.6	0.97	0.99	0.37	0.98	0.99	0.5	0.98	0.99
AIC	190	100	67	205	93	65	198	84	66
BIC	193	104	72	208	98	70	201	88	72

Standard errors are in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6. Direct influence of the studied factors on the deconsolidation of democracy

	Democracy					
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>
Perceptions of corruption				0.06* (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Polarization				-0.07** (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)
Effectiveness of political system				-0.05 (0.05)	-0.004 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)
Inequality				1** (0.3)	0.6 (0.03)	0.5 (0.4)
Disapproval of political system				-0.0007 (0.001)	-0.0005 (0.001)	-0.0006 (0.001)
Disapproval of democracy				-0.002 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.0004 (0.0004)
Radical sentiments	-0.01*** (0.001)	-0.004** (0.001)	-0.004** (0.001)	-0.008*** (0.001)	-0.004** (0.002)	-0.005** (0.002)
Political violence				0.17** (0.05)	0.09 (0.05)	0.09 (0.05)
Democracy (lag-1)		0.79*** (0.1)	0.87*** (0.2)		0.44 (0.16)	0.46 (0.25)
Democracy (lag-1)			-0.09 (0.1)			-0.1 (0.21)
Number of observations	31	30	29	31	30	29
R^2	0.89	0.97	0.97	0.97	0.98	0.98
AIC	-123	-153	-145	-147	-150	-146
BIC	-120	-149	-140	-134	-136	-130

Standard errors are in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

For the path-analysis model, we use only those indicators that correspond to the smallest Akaike’s Information Criteria (AIC) and Bayesian Information Criteria (BIC) (with a slight difference between the information criteria, we choose the most economical model, i.e., with the smallest number of lags). For example, to assess the impact of polarization on the effectiveness of the political system, we use the indicators of Model 2 (-0.06*) because $-73 < -68 < -53$ (Table 1). Through path analysis, we have obtained the following diagram (Figure 11).

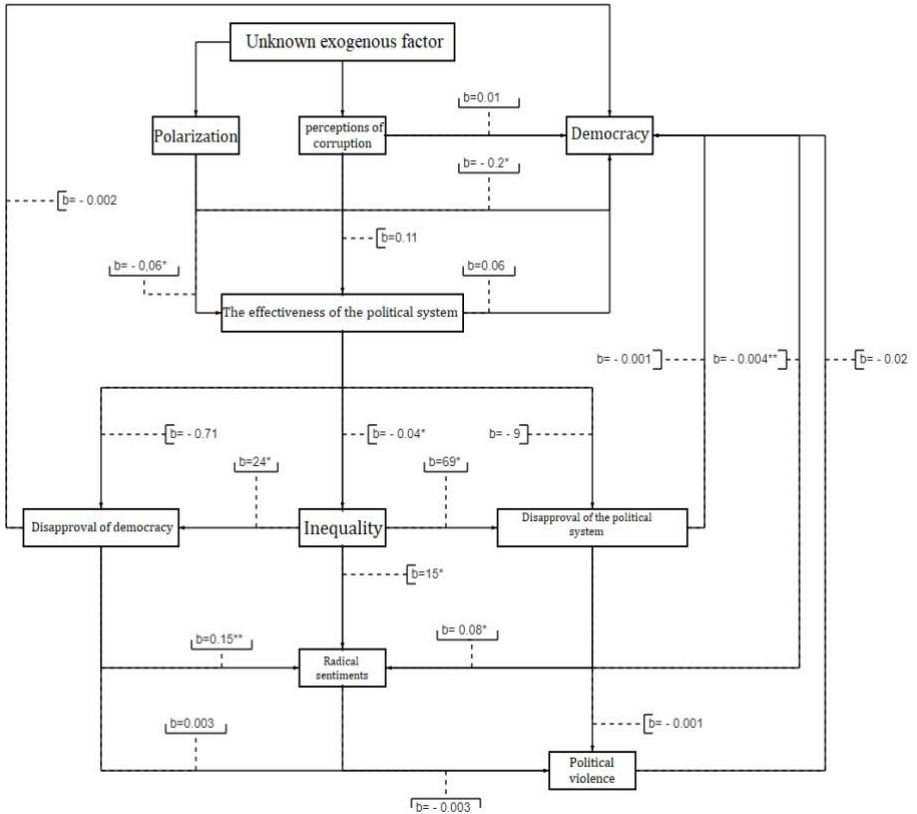


Figure 11. Path analysis results.

In order not to complicate the path analysis model, we deduce the direct influence of the factors of deconsolidation of democracy that have shown their importance on the growth of radical sentiments in a separate table (Table 7). Analyzing the results obtained, we can conclude that Karl Popper’s assertion that the masses of the population adopt the patterns of behavior of political elites is confirmed at the empirical level. In addition, the hypothesis of Dye and Zeigler that the survival of democracy requires certain behavior among the elites (primarily regarding the prevalence of corrupt practices and the effectiveness of public administration) also demonstrates its relevance to current processes in the United States.

Table 7. Direct influence of the factors of deconsolidation of democracy on the growth of radical sentiments

	Radical sentiments								
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>	<i>Model 7</i>	<i>Model 8</i>	<i>Model 9</i>
Polarization	9.3*** (1)	1 (0.5)	0.89* (0.3)						
Corruption				-17*** (4)	-1 (1)	-1.62** (0.55)			
Government effectiveness							-38*** (7.3)	-4 (2.5)	-4* (1.6)
Radical sentiments (lag-1)		0.93*** (0.05)	1.7*** (0.1)		0.99*** (0.03)	1.82*** (0.1)		0.97*** (0.04)	1.77*** (0.1)
Radical sentiments (lag-2)			-0.8*** (0.1)			-0.89*** (0.1)			-0.83*** (0.1)
Number of observations	31	30	29	31	30	29	31	30	29
R^2	0.7	0.97	0.99	0.46	0.97	0.99	0.5	0.97	0.99
AIC	181	100	65	200	103	65	198	102	66
BIC	183	104	70	202	107	70	201	106	72

Standard errors are in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Thus, we can be convinced that the main path of deconsolidation of the liberal democratic regime, built by us on the basis of classical theories of democracy and the elitist approach, proves its applicability to destructive political processes in the United States. The described factors of the deconsolidation of the democratic system, with the exception of political polarization and the development of radical ideologies, do not have a direct impact on regime dynamics in the United States, but they trigger sequential processes that together lead to the development of centrifugal tendencies within the political system. Separately, the model contains a factor of increasing tolerance to political violence, for which it was not possible to find a statistically significant predictor. Accordingly, it is logical to assume that the trend towards the preference for civil conflicts over traditional democratic procedures is caused by reasons not considered here: the deterioration of interracial relations in the United States, cultural and historical rifts, volitional actions of other political actors, and so on.

The growth of radical sentiment (the factor that is a statistically significant predictor of the decline in the level of democracy in the United States), in turn, is due to a number of interrelated factors: the polarization of American elites, the growth of corruption, the decline in the effectiveness of public administration, increasing inequality, and disillusionment with democracy and fundamental American institutions. This fact suggests that the deconsolidation of democracy is

an extremely complex and multilevel process that affects many areas of American society – political, economic and cultural.

Conclusion

A consolidated democracy presupposes the presence of many “fuses” to ensure its survival even during the most severe social and economic crises. At the same time, the constituent parts of a stable democratic system (strong institutions, centripetal sentiments of elites and counter-elites, civic culture of the population, etc.) are so interconnected that disruption in one of them can lead to the gradual destruction of other elements that support democracy. Consolidated American democracy, having successfully overcome the Great Depression, faced fewer global difficulties, but conditions of weakened institutions led for the first time since the American Civil War to the subsidence of the level of democracy and its deconsolidation.

The relevance of classical theories of democracy is confirmed here: they successfully pinpoint the signs of deconsolidation of the liberal democratic regime in the United States. In particular, the hypothesis that the growth of inequality causes disapproval of democratic institutions, disillusionment with democracy and the popularity of extreme political trends, which, in turn, led to the erosion of the democratic system, has been statistically supported in this study.

However, modern political science does not fully specify the hierarchy of factors that have contributed to the development of centrifugal tendencies within the American political system. The growth of inequality originated long before the current crisis trends, and sociopolitical “splits” (racial, class-based, cultural, generational, etc.) have been present since the founding of the American state, but until recently this did not interfere with the stable development of consolidated democracy. These negative factors were mitigated by a political system receptive to external demands, thanks to which a peaceful analogue of revolution became possible in the 1960s, helping to reduce segregation and disenfranchisement. Responsible political elites did not allow, on the one hand, the transformation of politics into a zero-sum game, or on the other, the exclusion of any social strata from it.

Accordingly, the fundamental reason for the exacerbation of sociopolitical conflicts in the United States, which has led to the deconsolidation of the liberal democracy regime, is not “out-of-nowhere” populist politicians or the influence of characteristic features of the United States (high inequality and racial tension), but a decline in the quality of government and political elites who have disrupted the balanced interaction of the political system and civil society. The decline in the effectiveness of the state apparatus in mounting a timely response to new demands and expectations of society, which occurred under the influence of the growth and

polarization of political elites, ultimately led to the deconsolidation of the democratic system in the country.

In sum, the process of deconsolidation of democracy can be defined as follows: the growing polarization of American elites has led to disruption of the political system, which, in turn, has led to an increase in inequality, to popular disillusionment with democratic ideals and reduced confidence in democratic institutions. These factors, together with the growth of corruption, led to an increase in radical sentiments and polarization not only of the political class, but of American society as a whole, which caused a decrease in the indicators of democracy in the United States.

We would like to note that currently the most logically coherent and empirically supported hypotheses in modern social science that explain the reasons for the growth of corruption, polarization of elites and increased tolerance for political violence are based on Structural-Demographic Theory (SDT) (Goldstone 1991; Korotayev et al. 2011; Korotayev and Zinkina 2022; Ortmans et al. 2017; Turchin 2012, 2013, 2016; Turchin and Korotayev 2006, 2020; Turchin and Nefedov 2009). From this point of view, elite overproduction can be caused by the erosion of the economic base – a decrease in real wages accompanying population growth, growing wealth inequality and the transfer of the rewards of economic growth from commoners to the elites. Elite overproduction engenders increased intra-elite conflict, a decrease in government effectiveness and, as a result, a decrease in trust in it and the deconsolidation of democracy (see, e.g., Turchin 2016: 246). Note also that this explanation has already been empirically tested with respect to the United States (Turchin 2013, 2016). The explanation of democratic deconsolidation in the United States offered in this article does not contradict SDT, but rather complements it.

While the hierarchy of factors we developed has found statistical confirmation for the United States, the described main path is applicable to similar processes in other “old” democracies. However, the United States is the most striking example of deconsolidation of liberal democracy. Because the elites of European states are much less powerful than their equivalents in Washington, similar processes do not manifest themselves so clearly. Nonetheless, we can find similar patterns of behavior (disillusionment with the elites and a tendency towards extreme measures and political movements) in the countries of Western Europe (see, e.g., Ortmans et al. 2017). These tendencies were most clearly manifested in Britain (Brexit) and France (the yellow vests movement).

At the same time, it should be noted that although unconsolidated democracy is the most unstable type of political regime and rarely “freezes” in its position for a long time, political cataclysms in the United States are not inevitable in the near future. It takes time for tangible consequences of the erosion of democratic

institutions to appear. In addition, given certain objective conditions and volitional actions of political actors, this process is reversible. This is why the deconsolidation of liberal democracy in the United States and other Western countries does not guarantee the onset of the catastrophic consequences predicted by many researchers; yet, it revives the possibility of new revolutionary events in the West (Goldstone et al. 2022).

Acknowledgment

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