

# Evolution of the American Political and Comparative Political Analysis

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## Abstract

Existing approaches have difficulty capturing models of the American political system. It tends to focus on democratic indicators rather than the political structures, especially the organizational forms of the state and government. This research introduces a novel “4+4” analytical framework and provides a formal analytical formulation. From the analysis of these identified trends, the findings suggest a wide range of problems facing contemporary democratic governance as structural and governance distortions, not in policy failures or inherent flaws in democratic systems.

*Keywords: Democratic institutional erosion, Comparative political analysis, Institutional deformation, Governance failure, Political trends, State capacity*

## 1. Introduction

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West was widely understood to have ended in the victory of the Western liberal order. In 1992, Francis Fukuyama published the book *The End of History and the Last Man*. He argued that liberal democracy had triumphed as the final form of human government. In recent years, however, accumulating evidence suggests that the existing system cannot fully adapt to the new world. These tensions are reflected in a series of recurring structural problems that follow identifiable trends.

At present, one of the existing most cited political science metrics is the Democracy Index published by The Economist each year, which focuses on the measurement on civil rights, freedom of speech, and electoral fairness. It is designed as an indicator-based grading tool for democratic forms and procedures. Such indices aim to measure and assess levels of democratic performance. However, they are not designed to diagnose the structural patterns that lead to institutional dysfunction, which is the main objective of this study. This framework is designed to avoid the binary narrative of democracy and instead to capture the real function of the political system.

To address this limitation, this article constructs a unique “4+4” analytical framework to systematically explore the decline of democratic institutions. The framework divides institutional decay into two main categories: four structural alienations and four governance consequences. Rather than treating these phenomena as isolated events, the framework integrates them into a functional and comparative framework, aiming to observe, categorize, and compare institutional decline in different democracies (using the United States as an example). This framework focuses on revealing the operational logic of real-world politics by comparing institutional distortion instead of index-based country rankings.

The purpose of this study is not to provide a complete causal theory of why American democracy is declining, nor to trace the historical or ideological roots of each trend of institutional deformation. Instead, it builds a structured and practical analytical tool for evaluating the functioning of democratic institutions. By combining domestic and international case studies, this framework helps to understand, in a multidimensional way, how key democratic functions (such as representation) are distorted in practice and how patterns of institutional deformation differ across different political systems.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a descriptive comparative research design grounded in cross-national institutional analysis. It aims to identify, classify, and contrast patterns of institutional deformation observed across different political systems. The analytical foundation of the study is a diagnostic framework (see Figure 1) centered on the United States, which divides eight major trends in observed institutional alienation into structural mechanisms and governance consequences. This framework was constructed as a functional model derived from the observed institutional and governance issues in international contexts.

NO.	TREND	STRUCTURAL MECHANISM	CORE INSTITUTIONAL DISTORTION	GOVERNANCE CONSEQUENCE
1	Presidential Election "Reality-Showification"	Social media algorithms, emotional mobilization, campaign funding surge	Primary system amplifies extremes, Electoral College incentivizes performance over policy	Simplified policy discussions, distracted voter focus, governance assessment distortion
2	Congressional Election "NPC-ization"	Gerrymandering, primary filters, donor influence	State-level districting creates "safe seats," low turnout amplifies extremes	Reduced electoral competitiveness, limited policy flexibility, public voice constrained
3	Representation "Party-Centric"	Party discipline, polarized primaries, lobbying influence	Super PACs strengthen party control, Citizens United amplifies donor power	Limited public will representation, policies reflect party positions over constituents
4	Separation of Powers "Party-Divided"	Lifetime judicial appointments, partisan oversight, presidential nomination power	All three branches affected by partisanship, controversial rulings undermine neutrality	Increased constitutional challenges, reduced legal stability, trust erosion
5	Political Communication "Fragmented"	Algorithmic recommendations, outrage triggers, misinformation spread	Social media prioritizes divisive content, traditional media polarized	Reduced societal consensus, populism rise, democratic deliberation weakened
6	Citizen Participation "Marginalized"	High registration barriers, voter suppression, elite gatekeeping	Complex registration systems, weekday voting, lobbying dominates agendas	Insufficient democratic participation, policies favor wealthy interests
7	Lobbying System "Interest Group-Driven"	Legalized lobbying, unlimited donations, revolving door	Citizens United ruling, super PACs, lobbyist-lawmaker ties	Policies favor select interests, political trust erosion, democratic responsiveness decline
8	Administrative Bureaucracy "Partisanized"	Increased political appointments, partisan adjustments, politicized agencies	Presidential transitions replace thousands of officials, key posts partisan-influenced	Cyclical governance fluctuations, reduced administrative stability, efficiency decline

Figure 1. Trends in the Evolution of the U.S. Political System: Analytical Framework.

The framework is used to integrate empirical events or cases from major political developments, democratic elections, risks beneath institutional arrangements, and failures of governance into a framework structure together. Case material includes reports from established international media sources, as well as quantitative data from global research and statistical institutions.

### 2.1 Framework Construction Rationale

The erosion of democratic institutions cannot be fully explained by isolated events or single-country observations. Therefore, this study adopts a typological modeling strategy. This study constructs a functional typology of democratic institutional deformation. Rather than enumerating isolated phenomena, the 4+4 model summarizes eight observable trends: structural mechanisms and governance outcomes. This distinction reflects the life cycle of institutions. The

failures in institutional structure (upstream design) often translate into governance failures (downstream performance decline). Governance failures also clearly indicate the alienation of institutional structures. This model provides not only descriptive trends but also a heuristic framework that enables others to study democratic institutions in a structured and actionable way.

These eight trends were selected based on theoretical and diagnostic analysis. Each represents a high-impact distortion observable in modern democratic systems.

The three core pillars of American democracy are the rule of law (including elections and democratic processes), representative government, and checks and balances. The four structural categories were chosen because they affect the core pillars of the democracy system that includes four upstream distortions: (1) personalized electoral theatricality (Presidential Election "Reality-Showification"), (2) low-competitive representative elections (Congressional Election "NPC-ization"), (3) the collapse of representational pluralism into rigid partisanship (Representation "Party-Centric"), and (4) checks and balances of power are broken by partisan control (Separation of Powers "Party-Divided"). These trends reflect deep changes in the core institutions.

These four governance consequences were chosen because they manifest at the basic part of public lives and directly affect everyday political life and public trust. They include: (5) collapse of coherent political discourse (Political Communication "Fragmented"), (6) low voter engagements and its high threshold (Citizen Participation "Marginalized"), (7) access to policy and control of the agenda by lobbying groups undermines broad representation. (Lobbying System "Interest Group-Driven"), and (8) instability of bureaucracy neutrality caused by party alternation (Administrative Bureaucracy "Partisanized").

In summary, the 4+4 structure provides a modular framework that captures the causal pathways and feedback in the erosion of institutional democracy.

## 2.2 Case Selection and Source Framework

The primary anchor case in the "4+4" framework is the U.S., while cases from other countries are used as reference cases. Each trend includes the U.S. corresponding social phenomena as well as evidence from other national contexts. In case selection, particular emphasis is placed on the important political events and high-impact institutional developments. The comparison does not follow the traditional regime to regime approach; instead it is organized around the parallel trends across different political systems.

This study draws on a mixed-method empirical foundation. The case selection is based on whether it demonstrates a recurrent and institutionally significant pattern of response to structural alienation or trends in the political system. Cases will be included only if they meet the following three conditions: (1) recur over time, (2) observable institutional or governance consequences, and (3) functionally consistent with one of the defined framework trends. These cases are not selected as statistically representative samples, but rather as diagnostic and illustrative cases for each trend. All cases were analyzed through typological interpretation. Most of the supporting evidence comes from authoritative statistical agencies both domestically and internationally, leading international media reports, official documents, and academic literature. All materials were used as evidence to identify and verify the existence of specific structures or governance trends. A case is categorized into a specific category only when a particular pattern recurs over time and has a noticeable impact at the institutional or governance level. Cross-border comparisons do not rely on institutional equivalence; instead, they are based on the similarity of patterns in institutional functions.

## 2.3 Comparative Design / Mode of Comparison

This study adopts a trend-oriented and modular comparative strategy. This comparison is not based on political systems or types of regimes, but rather on patterns and trends, employing a non-holistic approach that shifts the unit of comparison from the nation-state to trends. The functional contrast and trend-based mapping is used to identify recurrent patterns of institutional deformation and democratic erosion.

The reference cases are used to illustrate convergence or divergence from other nations compared to the situation in the United States. Cases from different institutional contexts illustrate the different manifestations of the same trend,

or structurally similar forms of institutional pressure.

The trends identified in the framework (Figure 1) can explain whether the manifestation or degree is similar or different. This comparison focuses on the existence of functionally similar deformation patterns and how the strength or form of these patterns changes in different contexts. Evidence is drawn from institutional manifestations, social phenomena in public life, media environments, legislation or policies. Evidence is aligned by functional equivalence and pattern similarity. Instead of comparing formal institutional structures, analysis focuses on the political system distortions against its designed goals.

The purpose of the framework-based comparison is structural diagnosis. The full analysis of this article unfolds in the form of a narrative discussion, but its comparative logic follows an analytical structure. To illustrate how these comparisons are operationalized, we provide an example—the “Extended Comparative Political Analysis Figure”—as a visual reference (Figure 2). The figure condenses the broader comparative logic into five dimensions: topic summary, heterogeneous international data, similar data, and corresponding social phenomena (including support and opposition). Each of the following sections uses this comparative framework to illustrate an institutional trend.

No.	Topic Summary	Other countries heterogeneous data	Similar data from other countries	Corresponding social phenomena (support aspect)	Corresponding social phenomena (contradictory aspects)
1	Presidential "Draft Pick"	France: 72% policy-focused debates vs US 38% <sup>[1]</sup>	Brazil: 65% personality-driven campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2024 campaign spending hit \$14B</li> <li>• 66% recall candidates' memes vs 34% policy positions<sup>[2]</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased youth engagement (turnout up 11%)</li> <li>• 42% better informed via social media</li> </ul>
2	Congressional "NPC-ization"	UK: 38% marginal seats vs US 10% <sup>[1]</sup>	Japan: 15% competitive districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 92% incumbent reelection rate (2022)</li> <li>• Only 32 competitive districts out of 435</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy stability benefits</li> <li>• Reduced extremist fluctuations</li> </ul>
3	"Party-Centric" Representation	Switzerland: 62% cross-party votes vs US 5% <sup>[1]</sup>	Hungary: 90% party-line voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 95% party-line votes in 118th Congress</li> <li>• 78% of bills single-party sponsored</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative efficiency improved</li> <li>• Clearer party accountability</li> </ul>
4	"Party-Divided" Powers	Germany: 85% judicial approval vs US 25% <sup>[1]</sup>	Poland: 30% judicial approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 government shutdowns since 2000</li> <li>• SCOTUS approval at historic 28% low</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger opposition oversight</li> <li>• Prevents power concentration</li> </ul>
5	"Fragmented" Communication	Norway: 88% trust major media vs US 34% <sup>[1]</sup>	Turkey: 35% media trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 58% in partisan media bubbles</li> <li>• 62% distrust opposing-side facts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More diverse viewpoints accessible</li> <li>• Niche community empowerment</li> </ul>
6	"Marginalized" Participation	Sweden: 82% voter turnout vs US 58% <sup>[1]</sup>	Switzerland: 45% turnout (non-mandatory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only 15% attend local meetings</li> <li>• 72% feel "no influence" on policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital participation increasing</li> <li>• Advocacy groups more active</li> </ul>
7	"Interest Group-Driven" Lobbying	EU: 2.1 lobbyists per lawmaker vs US 4.7 <sup>[1]</sup>	South Korea: 5.2 lobbyists per lawmaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$4.1B lobbying spending (2023)</li> <li>• 42% of lawmakers become lobbyists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert input into legislation</li> <li>• Stakeholder concerns addressed</li> </ul>
8	"Partisanized" Bureaucracy	UK: 85% permanent civil servants vs US 45% <sup>[1]</sup>	Mexico: 40% political appointees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4,000+ political appointees per admin</li> <li>• Agency morale at 22% positive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faster policy implementation</li> <li>• Better executive alignment</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Evolutionary Trends of the American Democratic Political System: Comparative Analysis.

Extended comparative political analysis framework (the complete framework used in the analysis is more extensive and detailed). This example figure shows how each institutional deformation trend compares with international cases and related social phenomena. The figure presented here is provided solely as an illustrative example.

### 3. Results / Trend-by-Trend Analysis

The following section provides a detailed analysis of each institutional trend identified in the 4+4 framework. Each of the 8 subsequent sections next allows the methodological framework shown before in Figure X. Each trend is examined through four sections: (1) conceptual definition, (2) manifestations within the United States, (3) cross-national illustrations, and (4) structural implications for system governance. The comparative logic stays the same

across all trends. Each analysis is centered on the U.S. as the anchor case, while other countries are used to show either similarities or differences in how the trend appears or develops. There are two main aspects, Structural Mechanisms of Institutional Deformation and Alienation of governance results.

## Part 1 Upstream institutional deformation

### 3.1 Presidential Election "Reality-Showification"

#### Trend Definition

Reality-showification of presidential election refers to the competitiveness of elections as increasingly restructured as a form of political entertainment. Electoral success becomes increasingly dependent on emotional performance or personal image instead of candidate's achievements or ability. This shift is associated with a cult of personality among supporters, where loyalty is based on image and charisma instead of the policies debates.

#### U.S. Manifestation

From the earliest days of his presidential campaign to a news conference at Trump Tower on Friday during the 2024 election, his campaign rhetoric was characterized by personal attacks and a confrontational performance style. Trump also appeared on a Kick livestream with Adin Ross. Trump emphasized celebrity-style visibility and symbolic displays of personal branding.

#### Cross-national Illustration

The Finnish presidential candidate debate centered on policy, with relatively limited performances or personality cult dynamics, reflecting the tradition of rational discussion in political culture.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party have a huge fan base. Modi's personal image is highly centralized and personalized crafted as a strong leader. Supporters spread his image through social media and actively disseminate him as a strong leader.

#### Structural Impact

As an upstream structural distortion, reality-show politics tends to transform democratic elections to a symbolic competition, weakening their original role in policy accountability or improvements and rational discourse.

### 3.2 Congressional Election "NPC-ization"

#### Trend Definition

"NPC-ization" refers to a phenomenon where legislative elections are structurally less competitive and procedurally more of a formality than a truly competitive election. Here, it is used as an ideal type of analytical metaphor, rather than a normative judgment. This term is an analytical analogy to describe systems as China's National People's Congress's essence for reducing competitiveness and promoting consultative democracy. The election is less competitive, and indirect elections are implemented through the statutory margin rate (about 15%). Most candidate nominations are dominated by parties. Therefore, the term "NPC-ization" is used to describe the performative and procedural characteristics of low-competition legislative elections, rather than to imply institutional equivalence or regime similarity.

#### U.S. Manifestation

In the United States, congressional elections are increasingly characterized by low competitiveness and the secure positions of incumbent representatives. The reelection rate for incumbent members of the United States House of Representatives has been over 85%-95% since 2000-2020 according to OpenSecrets. The midterms in 2018 had a 91% reelection rate for incumbent members of the House of Representatives. The 2018 midterms saw Republicans win 10 of North Carolina's 13 congressional districts, despite party support among voters in the state being relatively equal among both parties.

Republican candidate Carlos Jimenez won by a narrow margin during Florida's 26th district in 2020 against the Democratic incumbent, 51.7% of the vote. These cases illustrate that while some districts can become more competitive, districts can still limit competition on a larger scale.

#### Cross-national Illustration

NPC-ization trends are not exclusive to the United States. Switzerland represents a contrasting case, where the election adopts a proportional representation system + multi-party system, the turnover rate of parliamentarians is high, and political parties rotate frequently. The allocation of parliamentary seats is based on the national vote, and there is no concept of safe seats; In the German parliamentary election, a mixed system is adopted. In addition, there are multiple parties in power, and political parties have limited influence on the allocation of seats. There are frequent rotations within political parties, high pressure, and high competition.

Russia illustrates a near-ideal-typical case of safe seats, most seats are actually firmly controlled by United Russia. Independent candidates find it difficult to break through media blockades and legal barriers; In Japan's parliamentary elections, many local constituencies have long been controlled by the dominant Liberal Democratic Party. About 60% of the single-seat constituencies in the House of Representatives are considered safe seats and are mainly controlled by the Liberal Democratic Party.

#### Structural Impact

Citizens' political apathy intensifies, elections increasingly tending to serve a confirmation rather than a competition. The specified election results spread "perceived decline in political efficacy" among citizens. The link between representatives and voters is declining. That causes the democratic response from representatives standing for minority interest groups and contributes to declining public trust in representative democracy.

### 3.3 Representation "Party-Centric"

#### Trend Definition

Representation "Party-Centric" refers to the erosion of pluralistic democracy. The elected officials no longer stand for the voters and their selection and legislative behaviour mainly depends on party loyalty or interest groups. From the structural point of view, the representative system(Congress) becomes an organization increasingly driven by internal party incentive mechanisms and disciplinary structures. The structure was reoriented away from voter-centered representation.

#### U.S. Manifestation

In the United States, the rise of party primaries and partisan gerrymandering has led to a pursuit of ideological correctness rather than consensus building. In the fall of 2023, the Republican Party and the Democrats were deadlocked on the federal budget issue and refused to compromise, eventually forcing Kevin McCarthy to be removed by the party; The medical problem in the United States has been prominent throughout history, and costs are high around the world. Gallup polls in recent years show that 75% are dissatisfied with the cost of medical care in the United States (D or F), 27% cannot afford high-quality medical services due to the cost, and 18% have worsened their health as a result. Although the ACA (Affordable Care Act) was introduced in 2010, the situation has not improved ideally. In 2024, "Lower Costs, More Transparency Act" passed by the House, but it was not passed by the Senate finally.

The US Congress has passed the Chips and Science Act, providing tens of billions of dollars in new funding to promote US semiconductor research and manufacturing. According to the 2024 Department of Commerce data, the bill has facilitated more than 50 semiconductor projects with an investment of more than \$200 billion. It is expected to create 20,000 direct jobs in 2025. On a few key issues, the representative system still delivers bipartisan outcomes.

#### Cross-national Illustration

The German Bundestag emphasizes the independence of its members. Free voting is allowed on important issues, and parties cannot force a unified position, so the control of party groups is relatively low. The Swiss Parliament

implements a multi-party consultation mechanism, with multiple parties in power. Cross-party cooperation between members is common, and the control of political parties is relatively weak. Members often vote based on local public opinion or cross-party consensus, and are highly representative.

These cases demonstrate that political parties have a high degree of control over individual legislators. Since Viktor Orbán's second term in office began in 2010, Hungary has experienced a democratic backslide. Under his proclaim of illiberal democracy, promoted euroscepticism, opposition to liberal democracy, Hungarian Fidesz has dominated the parliament, the party's will is the policy, and the MPs are completely obedient to the leadership; The anti-defection law in the Indian Constitution means that if the MPs go against the party's will, they will be disqualified. Party control has weakened the representativeness of MPs, and cross-party bills have almost disappeared.

### Structural Impact

The collapse of representational diversity into rigid partisanship undermines legislative responsiveness and weakens marginal constituencies that are out of step with the mainstream party agenda. Parliament has increasingly transformed into a party-controlled institution with narrowed policy determination space.

## 3.4 Separation of Powers "Party-Divided"

### Trend Definition

Separation of Powers "Party-Divided" refers to a structural condition in which the institutional balance between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches is subordinated to partisan positions and inter-branch political alliances. This transformation undermines the horizontal accountability necessary for democratic governance.

### U.S. Manifestation

In 2016, Democratic President Obama nominated Merrick Garland to replace the deceased Justice Scalia; However, the Republican-controlled Senate refused to hold a hearing for 293 days, indicating that judicial appointments have become a tool for partisan strategic control, rather than the result of institutional deliberations; The U.S. government has experienced 21 shutdowns in the past 60 years, reflecting divergences of two parties to reach an agreement on the government funding budget. In 2018, the government was shut down for 35 days due to the issue of "border wall funding"; In 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* with a 6:3 ruling, and voting patterns aligned almost entirely consistent with the division of conservative and liberal judges, reinforcing perceptions of "politically motivated verdict."

In the 2020 DACA repeal case, Justice Roberts joined the liberal justices, ruling 5:4 that the Trump administration's repeal of the DACA program was invalid; In the 2022 Biden administration environmental protection bill (*West Virginia v. EPA*), the court ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency had no authority to set comprehensive carbon emission restrictions, reflecting the limitations on executive orders.

### Cross-national Illustration

In Russia, the formal separation of powers has been severely undermined. The Putin government has strengthened presidential power to make the judiciary completely subordinate to the executive branch; Turkey represents a case of executive consolidation. In 2017, Turkey passed a referendum to amend the constitution, transforming the parliamentary system into a presidential system, giving the president almost complete control over legislative and executive powers; In 2018, four Indian Supreme Court judges held a press conference and publicly accused the then Chief Justice Dipak Misra of favoritism in case allocation.

Some countries still maintain strong separation mechanisms. German politics does not interfere with the judiciary. The Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) is highly independent and has ruled that the federal government and parliament are unconstitutional on many occasions. In 2011 the German Constitutional Court gave its verdict on the legality of the EU rescue fund. Judges are elected jointly by the Bundestag and the Bundesrat and have to be elected with a two-thirds majority, thus warding off party politics.

### Structural Impact

The checks and balances of power in state organs under party control are increasingly functioning as instruments of partisan competition, the democratic system increasingly loses its capacity to provide neutral oversight mechanisms, judicial independence is restricted. This transformation constitutes a structural shift from constitutional governance to persistent partisan constitutional conflict.

## Part 2 Downstream governance consequences

### 3.5 Political Communication "Fragmented"

#### Trend Definition

The fragmentation of political communication refers to the phenomenon caused by media polarization, the online social media environment, and the algorithm-driven "echo chamber effect." This trend reinforced social polarization and undermined the prerequisite for rational democratic consultation.

#### U.S. Manifestation

Between June and November 2016, groups aligned with supporting Trump and against Clinton engaged in what has been retrospectively described as the "The Great Meme War" on platforms such as Reddit. These activities involve influences on public opinion by creating and spreading political meaning memes. This activity has exacerbated information barriers, and groups with different political stances have deepened prejudices in their respective online communities; The United States has long been indecisive on climate change and energy policies. Liberals emphasize scientific consensus and green transformation, while conservatives question the severity of climate change and oppose environmental protection policies, believing that they undermine economic freedom. This confrontation has evolved into a polarized climate issue to become a cultural and ideological cleavage.

The response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11 demonstrated the power of unity in a crisis. President George W. Bush delivered a nationally televised address, placing the attacks within the framework of a cohesive national narrative; Congress subsequently passed the AUMF "Authorization for Use of Military Force" and the "Patriot Act". Media such as CNN, Fox News and NBC interrupted their regular programs to report on the scene. Public opinions from Gallup indicated that Bush's approval rating rose to 90%. The centralized and unified release of information mobilized national unity and public support.

#### Cross-national Illustration

In the 2019 Indian general election, the BJP raised hundreds of thousands of volunteers to set up WhatsApp groups to spread personal propaganda and political achievements. It had a huge effect on rural and semi-urban areas; Hungary's political communication is composed of traditional media and social platforms controlled by the government. Under the centralization policy of the Orban government, a large number of private television and radio media were acquired and reorganized into "pro-government media", and the consistency of public opinion was facilitated through state advertising budgets and personnel intervention.

After the 2017 election, the South Korean government strengthened its cooperation with social media platforms; Germany implemented the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) in 2017, forcing social platforms to delete hateful or false political content within 24 hours of receiving a report. These cases illustrate different regulatory responses to communication fragmentation

### Structural Impact

The fragmentation of communication has eroded the information foundation of democracy, replaced communication with confrontation, and weakened democratic consensus. It also significantly constrains effective policy-making.

### 3.6 Citizen Participation "Marginalized"

### Trend Definition

Marginalization of citizen participation refers to high threshold barriers that constrain meaningful democratic involvement. Although formal channels exist, their democratic efficacy is undermined by low turnout and the dominance of organized elites, especially party control in agenda-setting processes.

### U.S. Manifestation

Since the 1990s, the voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections has been below 65%, except for 2020 as a special case, and the midterm election turnout has been below 55% for decades. Some states require strict voter identification, which demonstrates additional barriers to voting accessibility; Winning elections requires substantial financial resources. The average cost of a House of Representatives campaign in the 2022 midterm elections was about \$2 million, while Senate campaign cost tens of millions of dollars (OpenSecrets). Candidates rely on large-scale financial support. Ordinary people find it hard to afford campaign expenses, limiting opportunities to run for office.

In recent years, California has continuously reformed voting convenience to increase participation. In 2015, California passed the "California New Motor Voter Act", which automatically registers voters when they obtain or renew their driver's licenses; In some states in the U.S. (such as California and Oregon), ordinary citizens or groups can draft and submit the policy proposals directly to a referendum by collecting a certain number of signatures, by passing parliamentary and government procedures with legal effect and are enforced.

### Cross-national Illustration

The frequent social protests in France in recent years indicate that institutional channels have failed to effectively absorb social demands. The "yellow vest" movement that broke out in 2018 began with rising oil prices, but quickly expanded to express anger against the entire political class. The 2023 French pension reform strike expressed dissatisfaction with the policy of extending retirement by two years, and further intensifying social unrest; Japanese citizens' political participation has been at a low level for a long time. Most young people reported they did not understand the candidates' policies and made choices based on family or media impressions, or simply gave up voting.

The Swiss system is the most participatory, extensive and in-depth in the world. Citizens can initiate a constitutional amendment with 100,000 signatures, or request a referendum on a law passed by Congress with 50,000 signatures. The country holds an average of 3 to 4 federal referendums each year. Switzerland thus provides a model for incorporating citizen participatory institutions into binding governance outcomes.

### Structural Impact

As participation becomes concentrated among politically active elites, the democratic process loses its representativeness and marginalizes citizen voices in policy making.

## 3.7 Lobbying System "Interest Group-Driven"

### Trend Definition

The Lobbying System "Interest Group-Driven" refers to the uneven influence on the policy-making process by organized lobbying groups, corporations, and donors. This trend distorts the policy process to serve a narrow band of well-funded interests, weakening the extensive responsiveness and fairness of democracy.

### U.S. Manifestation

In 2021, the federal government proposed the U.S. Health Care Reform Act to negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies, but was facing intensive opposition by the pharmaceutical lobbying group PhRMA. The organization spent more than \$330 million on lobbying in 2021 and maintained contact with more than 250 members of Congress, and ultimately many clauses were eliminated, with the reform goals reduced; Purdue Pharma promoted the widespread prescription of OxyContin as a safe painkiller through intensive lobbying and coordinated influence over medical discourse. The company downplayed the risk of addiction by providing "educational funding" to doctors, publishing industry journals, and financing front organizations, and influenced the FDA to make favorable revisions to its instructions through lobbying; These trends are not confined to traditional legacy industries.

In 2010, despite massive lobbying by the financial industry, the U.S. Congress still passed the Dodd-Frank Act in response to the 2008 financial crisis; In 2022, the Railroad Strike Prevention Act received bipartisan support. The bill was signed by then-President Biden to protect railroad workers' working hours and vacation rights despite lobbying pressure. It suggests that mobilization can break through industry lobbying blockades in specific conditions.

#### Cross-national Illustration

India has been implementing the "election bond system" since 2017, allowing companies or individuals to donate to political parties anonymously with limited oversight mechanisms. Giants such as Adani Group and Reliance Industries are believed to be closely connected with the ruling elite and have gained significant benefits; although Canada has a "federal lobbying register", the industry's influence is uneven. During the review of carbon emissions legislation in 2021, oil companies submitted more than 900 lobbying registrations, ten times more than environmental organizations.

#### Structural Impact

As policy responses become controlled by well-funded groups, democratic representation is weakened. Policymaking is shifting from being accountable to voters to prioritizing the needs of narrow interest groups.

### 3.8 Administrative Bureaucracy "Partisanized"

#### Trend Definition

Bureaucratic politicization refers to the loss of administrative neutrality. It refers to government agencies and civil servants becoming subject to partisan influence. Frequent leadership change and ideological loyalty become implicit expectations. It undermines policy stability and the integrity of public services.

#### U.S. Manifestation

Between 2017 and 2021, the Trump administration relied on the appointment of "acting officials" to avoid Senate confirmation. A large number of cabinet positions were not formally confirmed, and were instead filled by "acting officials" temporarily appointed by the president. The Trump administration appointed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to be led by former oil lobbyist Scott Pruitt, under his appointment, several consultants with prior ties to the fossil fuel industry were placed into technical departments and systematically weakened the Obama-era "Clean Power Plan." Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos reduced the public education budget which reflected clear partisan policy priorities, favoring charter schools and private models.

The U.S. federal civil service system adopts the framework of "merit-based recruitment-performance evaluation-lifetime tenure", and most ordinary civil service positions are institutionally insulated from electoral turnover. The Merit System Protection Board protects civil servants from being arbitrarily dismissed due to party changes.

#### Cross-national Illustration

Since the Law and Justice Party came to power in 2015, Poland has carried out a systematic partisan restructuring of the national administrative system. The neutral selection mechanism for most positions has been abolished; Following the failed coup attempt in 2016, the Erdogan government has dismissed a series of civil servants through a state of emergency and special decrees. According to official figures, more than 120,000 civil servants were dismissed in three years; Italy has experienced dozens of government changes from the late 20th century to the early 21st century. Due to the frequent alternation of the left, center and right camps, the administrative system is constantly disrupted by institutional discontinuities.

In contrast to these trends, some countries have maintained bureaucratic insulation through institutional safeguards. Singapore's civil service is highly institutionalized. The Public Service Commission, chaired by the President, is independently responsible for the appointment, promotion and discipline of all senior civil servants. In international governance assessments, Singapore's public service system is often rated as the most stable and high-quality in Asia.

### Structural Impact

As bureaucratic neutrality erodes, governments risk losing their ability to plan for the long term and public trust in administrative institutions.

### 3.9 Summary of Structural and Governance Trends

These eight trends can be clearly divided into two analytically distinct but causally related groups. Sections 3.1 to 3.4 describe structural mechanisms of institutional deformation, while Sections 3.5 to 3.8 capture the downstream consequences of governance outcomes. Each pattern forms a causal chain of functional deformation's relation with governance failure.

From 3.1 to 3.4, the elections have transformed from an accountability mechanism into a theatrical performance; parliaments have shifted from competitive structures to low-mobility structures; representatives have changed from agents of the electorate to party functionaries; and the separation of powers has evolved from a system of checks and balances into a weapon for political factions.

From 3.5 to 3.8, the basis for consensus in communication has collapsed; people are being marginalized in terms of participation; policies are being captured by capital/corporations; the bureaucracy has lost its neutrality and continuity. Institutional alienation is a systemic challenge that appears worldwide. The following section will examine the broader implications of these findings.

## **4. Discussion / Synthesis**

### 4.1 Trends beyond the U.S. with global significance

In the broader literature on institutional decline, the trends are not unique among other countries. This suggests they are not specific isolated events but different structural patterns of institutional stress. From Japan to India, from Norway to Germany, comparative observations demonstrate that similar functions can merge under different institutions. The cross-country convergence indicates that structural alienation and governance failure are a widespread democratic issue that cut across regime types and institutional forms, directly challenging the traditional regime-centered explanations.

### 4.2 Comparative Advantages of a Trend-Based Model

Traditional comparisons always focus on regime categories, like presidential versus parliamentary systems, or democratic versus authoritarian. This framework does not take regime type or ideological labels as its primary analytical starting point. The framework offers a different approach to focus on observable functional trends. It isolates specific trends within democratic practice and compares these trends across countries. Rather than judging democracy by scores based on democratic forms and procedures, the framework system is designed to measure the performance on practice. This makes the assessment more pragmatic, especially for countries that formally meet democratic standards but have functional problems. It is an observational tool that transcends institutional labels. It does not replace existing democracy indices, but rather complements them.

### 4.3 Limitations

First, there are limits on empirical scope. This study relies on open data, international news, statistics from public organizations and books while lacking field research, detailed case explorations, or original primary research. Furthermore, the selection of international comparative cases is uneven, which limits the general applicability of some of the comparative observations.

Second, there are methodological limitations. The framework is designed as a descriptive and diagnostic tool rather than a causal model. The framework is designed to categorize events into eight trends and some cases may involve rare or specific circumstances, or a dual nature. This cannot fully explain the causes of institutional alienation

and may overlook interactions or intersectionality between different structural factors. Moreover, no quantitative methods are applied in this study.

Third, this study has limitations in terms of applicability and generalizability. The framework is primarily based on representative democratic systems and hard to apply to other forms of government. Its diagnostic logic is more suitable for cases where institutional forms formally exist but are functionally weak. The framework emphasizes structural symptoms rather than explanatory mechanisms, making it more suitable for observation than prediction. The framework also does not include additional adjustments for federal or unitary countries. Furthermore, this approach may underestimate the role of specific political cultures and different national contextual factors. Future research could improve this framework by incorporating field studies, longitudinal analysis, or regional adjustments to the framework.

## 5. Conclusion

This article proposes a comparative framework – a 4+4 analytical framework – to identify and classify two key patterns of deformation at the institutional and governance levels. This model links the upstream institutional structural function with the downstream governance performance. When the cases of the United States and other countries are placed together within the framework, the analysis indicates that institutional distortions are not isolated phenomena, but rather structurally interconnected patterns. Furthermore, patterns of institutional reversal are not unique to the United States, but instead reflect a broader global structural trend observable across different political systems and regime types. The framework reveals the structure and governance coupling, while the roots are systemic deformation at the level of institutional function instead of policy failures. This provides a framework to identify the deviation from institutional design. While the model is not intended to predict the future, it provides a systemic perspective for identifying institutional deviations from democratic functions. Analysis suggests that institutional erosion is structural and pervasive, with governance failure being its downstream manifestation. This study does not end the discussion, but opens a new path for institutional observation and comparative insight.

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