

'American Democracy' – The End of the Myth

“美式民主”神话的终结

SOURCE

People's Daily 人民日报

Jan. 13, 2021

AUTHOR

Li Yunlong 李云龙

Professor, Institute of International Strategy,
Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China

On January 6, a violent demonstration took place in D.C., the capital of the United States. Some demonstrators stormed the Capitol and clashed with the police. Four protesters died, and one Capitol Police officer died after being seriously injured. The congressional procedure to confirm Biden's victory in accordance with the Constitution was also interrupted. This is a major setback of the American political system. The United States has always portrayed itself as a "beacon of democracy," pretending to be a model of democracy in the world, fabricating countless myths about American democracy, and trying its best to sell and export it to other countries, even through the use of force. However, this violent attack on Congress has exposed the myth of "American democracy," proving that the United States is not a democratic Garden of Eden. There are fundamental flaws to "American democracy."

Under "American democracy," the peaceful transfer of power cannot be guaranteed. One of the myths of "American democracy" is that fierce conflicts and civil wars caused by power struggles can be avoided through elections so as to achieve the smooth transition of power. The United States continues to promote the superiority of "American democracy" in the routine and peaceful change of government and even demands that other countries learn from it. Whenever other countries have problems with the transfer of power, the United States will attribute the problem to the absence of an "American election." However, conflicts and civil wars have frequently occurred in many countries that adhere to "American democracy." When these things happen, the United States either feigns ignorance or claims that these countries failed to fully apply "American democracy." Now, this "American Democracy" that incited protesters to attack Congress and broadcast it live to the entire world proves that elections may not guarantee the peaceful transfer of political power.

"American democracy" does not bring about political stability. The United States claims that elections provide the most stable basis for legitimacy and effectively solves the legitimacy issues of modern countries, thereby achieving long-term stability. This is an utter lie. After the Second World War, especially after the end of the Cold War, many countries imitated "American democracy," transplanting the American electoral system only to fall into vicious cycles of political instability. In recent years, the domestic political conflict in the United States has intensified. Black Lives Matter protests against racism swept across the United States, high-ranking government officials came in and out of office through revolving doors, and the impeachment of the president was passed by the House of Representatives. Not only failing to bring stability, the 2020 U.S. presidential election rather triggered a new wave of greater political unrest.

"American democracy" does not deliver effective governance. The United States has repeatedly claimed that only routine elections can achieve effective governance because elected officials must be accountable to voters and that the tenure system and decentralized checks and balances can prevent major decision-making errors. There is no factual basis for this claim. Historically, the system of American democracy has failed to

prevent the U.S. government from launching major erroneous decisions such as the Vietnam War and the Iraq War. The poor performance of the U.S. government in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic proves once again that “American democracy” cannot bring about effective governance. After the outbreak, some American politicians bore no responsibility for the lives of the people, ignored science, and did not take active measures to deal with the pandemic, allowing it to continue to spread, causing a major failure in pandemic prevention. According to statistics from Johns Hopkins University in the United States, as of January 10, Beijing time, the total number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the United States exceeded 22 million, and the total number of COVID-19 deaths reached 371,862. The U.S. population is less than 5% of the world, but its number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 accounts for 24% of the world, and the cumulative deaths account for 19% of the world, far exceeding the global average. It is especially ironic that no U.S. official has been dismissed because of poor pandemic prevention. The failure of pandemic prevention has stripped away the emperor’s new clothes of the American democratic system and exposed the political and governance failures of the United States.

“American democracy” cannot guarantee the effective political participation of citizens. The United States proclaims that under “American democracy,” everyone can participate in the political process and express their interests and demands. However, money politics has blocked the means by which the general public can participate in politics. Money in politics runs through all aspects of American elections, legislation, and governance. Elections have become a game of money. “Decision by vote” has become “decision by money.” Ever more money is being spent on U.S. presidential elections. From \$700 million dollars in 2004, spending increased to \$1 billion in 2008, \$2 billion in 2012, and \$6.6 billion in 2016. According to a report published by the Center for Responsive Politics, a non-partisan research organization in the United States, the total cost of the 2020 election was nearly 14 billion, more than twice the spending of the 2016 election, making it the most expensive political election in U.S. history. Spending in the United States on midterm elections has also risen rapidly, from \$2.18 billion in 2002 to \$5.2 billion in 2018. In the 2018 midterm elections, the average cost of winning a Senate seat was \$19.4 million, and the average cost of winning a House seat was more than \$1.5 million. The high election costs have greatly increased the threshold for participation and ruled out the possibility of the vast majority of people participating in elections. Only a few people who have the ability to raise large amounts of campaign funds can join the electoral contests of American politics. This undoubtedly creates a breeding ground for the rich and for interest groups to win over candidates through money. Political participation has actually become a privilege of a few wealthy people.

“American democracy” is unable to guarantee the equal political rights of citizens. “American Democracy” has fabricated a myth of “majority rule,” claiming that one-person, one-vote democracy is decision-making by majority, whereby a country is governed according to the will of the majority. However, “American democracy” is neither “the rule of the people” nor “majority rule.” Voter turnout in various elections in the United States has generally been low. Because the United States implements the Electoral College system, a candidate with the support of a majority of voters may not be elected president. Since the beginning of this century, there have been two U.S. presidents elected despite losing the popular vote. In the American political system, the Senate, which shares legislative power with the House of Representatives, is constituted in such a way that every state elects two senators, regardless of their population. In this way, in Rhode Island, only more than 500,000 people can elect a senator, while in California, it takes nearly 20 million people. This is a serious case of “malapportionment.” After all, the American electoral system cannot fully realize the political rights of the American people, and elections are only a tool for a few people to manipulate politics.

READ RELATED ANALYSIS

<http://opensource.csis.org/features/beijing-narrative-us-decline>.

CITE THIS DOCUMENT

Li Yunlong, “American Democracy’ – The End of the Myth” [“美式民主神话的终结”, People’s Daily, January 13, 2021.