
The Pillars of a Democracy in Decline

By: Otto Mendoza Pérez

03/11/2025



The breaking news is not good for the U.S. American democracy and institutions have come under pressure from several interconnected factors:

- **Crisis of Public Trust:** There's a deep divide between citizens and their traditional sources of information. The Oxford University report notes that there's "low trust" in traditional media and a "declining connection" with them. This distrust extends to the political sphere, where "national politicians" are identified as one of the main sources of false or misleading information for 47% of the global population, a perception that is especially acute in the United States.
- **Fragmentation of Public Space:** The information ecosystem has fractured. Social media and video platforms have gained influence over institutional journalism, fostering a "fragmented alternative environment." This environment allows politicians, particularly populists, to bypass the traditional press and turn to "personalities" and "influencers" who rarely ask difficult questions.
- **Platforms like X (Twitter)** have seen an increase in news use, but with an audience that leans markedly to the right, deepening polarization.
- **Erosion of Press Freedom:** Globally, press freedom is in a "precarious" situation, with a record number of countries where the situation is "very serious." Although the report does not detail the specific case of the United States, this global trend serves as a thermometer for the environment facing critical journalism in a context of growing authoritarianism and misinformation.

Economic Imbalance and Social Discontent

The American economic and social model shows clear signs of exhaustion that fuel unrest:

- **Systemic Inequality:** Americans have the highest income inequality in the rich world. For example, the ratio

between the income of a CEO and an average worker fell from 24:1 in 1965 to 262:1 in 2005.

According to a UN rapporteur, 40 million Americans live in poverty, and 18.5 million in extreme poverty, causing "the American dream to quickly become the American illusion."

Declining Social Indicators: Various indicators place the U.S. at levels unenviable for a developed country: it has a homicide rate "notably higher" than other developed countries, an education system that performs poorly in international comparisons, and a worryingly growing number of homeless people.

An Over-Indebted Economy: U.S. household debt will reach an all-time high of \$20,310,729 million in September 2024, reflecting the financial pressure on families. At the same time, federal government debt exceeds 124% of GDP, an unsustainable burden that limits the government's capacity for action.

Policies of Confrontation: Immigration and Trade War

The policies implemented by the Trump administration have exacerbated the crisis:

- **Tariff War and its Consequences:** The imposition of "reciprocal" tariffs has driven the average effective rate on imports to 18.2%, the highest since 1934. Although this has increased government revenue, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects that these tariffs will "undermine the growth of the US economy" in the long term. Contrary to its stated objective, the measure initially increased the US trade deficit and generated volatility in global markets, with significant declines on Wall Street and European and Asian stock markets.

- **Trade Isolation:** These policies have encouraged other countries to strengthen trade ties with each other, signing agreements that exclude the US, such as the one between the United Kingdom and India, or the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) with Mercosur. China, for its part, has diverted its soybean purchases from the US to Brazil.

- **Impact on the Ordinary Citizen:** Economists warn that tariffs will eventually be passed on to domestic prices. Research from Harvard University has already found that the prices of imported products and domestic products affected by tariffs "have risen more rapidly," eroding Americans' purchasing power.

Taken together, these elements paint a picture of a society facing an unprecedented stress tribulation in recent decades. The combination of a fractured democracy, a polarized economy, and policies of internal and external confrontation has led the United States to a scenario of institutional discredit and social tensions that is far from the paradigmatic image it long projected.

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff
