

# Independence Day 2026

## AMERICA AS A DINO (DEMOCRACY IN NAME ONLY)

TEXT: LARS BROZUS

This essay is not a prediction. It is rather a thought experiment that deliberately exaggerates selected developments and projects them into the future. The goal is to sketch a foresight scenario that will not unfold exactly as described but is plausible enough to come to pass in a similar way.

On 4 July 2026 the USA marks the 250th anniversary of its Declaration of Independence. Throughout the land people throng the streets to celebrate. The biggest party takes place in Washington. Hundreds of thousands of supporters of President Trump have made their way to the capital to pay tribute to their idol. There is a palpable tension in the air. Rumours have been circulating for weeks that the President will announce a historic decision on Independence Day, and he does not fail to live up to expectations. Donald Trump indeed announces something extraordinary when he appears before the vast crowd that has gathered in the evening in front of the White House. He declares that he is willing, with a "heavy heart", to give in to the urging of his admirers and stand again for further terms beyond 2029. Given the solid majority the Republicans have in both houses of Congress, the necessary repeal of the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution seems little more than a formality.

This bombshell sets the seal on the end of American democracy as we know it. For decades, the US system of government has been a model admired and envied around the world. Many states have sought to emulate the legendary checks and balances; others have outdone one another to portray the system as unfair, ineffective, and incapable of reform. Yet now the enemies of democratic government are rejoicing, China and Russia foremost among them. The EU, most of its member states and the UK express dismay and sharp criticism, while NATO ally Turkey, Brazil and India all welcome the announcement. Iran, North Korea and Saudi Arabia all congratulate Trump. The stock markets in Australia, Japan and South Korea, on the other hand, plummet. The geopolitical consequences (Edsall 2021a) of this step appear incalculable.

### How Could It Have Come to This?

The decline of democracy began three decades ago (Skellery 2021a). Critical junctures were the 1994 congressional elections that delivered the first Republican majority in both legislative chambers since 1952; the contested presidential election of 2000, which was decided in favour of George W. Bush; the rise of the Tea Party Movement following the election of Barack Obama as the first—and perhaps

the last—black president in 2008, and Trump's first term, which accelerated the breakdown of democratic legitimacy.

The extreme ideological and party-political polarization (Packer 2021) that began in 1994 in Washington was to spill over to the whole country in the following decades. The Republicans radicalized the content and tenor of their attacks on the Democrats and reduced cross-party cooperation with their political opponents to a minimum. The 2000 elections ended up in the Supreme Court, where a majority of conservative justices ordered a halt to the recounts in Florida (Schwartz/ Thimm 2017), thus propelling the Republican candidate into the White House. Throughout the whole of Obama's presidency, political adversaries sought to delegitimize the President through the accusation that he had been born outside the USA and was thus ineligible to serve as president. One of the most stubborn adversaries was Trump, who consistently refused to acknowledge his 2020 election defeat to Joe Biden. Instead, he incessantly repeated the charge that he had been the victim of a conspiracy. The Democrats had ostensibly caused millions of ballots cast for him to disappear, and countless illegal aliens had been enabled to vote for Biden.

Although recounts and ballot audits in several states failed to uncover any evidence of this or similar allegations of manipulation and forgery, the accusations struck a powerful chord in the conservative section (Heritage Foundation 2021) of American society. Almost two-thirds of supporters of the Republican Party continued to question (Skelly 2021b) the legitimacy of Biden's election victory. Trump repeatedly called on them not to allow the election to be "stolen". On 6 January 2021, thousands heeded his call and stormed the Capitol in Washington.

### Why and How Republicans Are Corroding Democracy

The Republican voter base is steadily shrinking due to demographic, economic and social change in the USA. Since 1992, only one Republican presidential candidate has managed

to win the nationwide popular vote. Given an increasingly diverse society, the Democrats' structural advantage threatens to become entrenched. The Republican Party's reaction is voter suppression (Edsall 2021b): many individual states where Republicans control the legislature (30 of 50 states in 2021; Wikipedia 2021) have responded by restricting voter access. Voter registration, early voting, mail-in or absentee voting, ballot collection or casting a provisional ballot have all been made harder. On election day, fewer polling places make for longer waiting times. All these restrictions have a disproportionate impact on non-white sections of the population. However, the Supreme Court has dismissed lawsuits against the accompanying discrimination against minorities, citing modest burdens (Hasen 2021)—as in the case of Arizona ("Razing Arizona" 2021) in July 2021.

As well as these concrete measures, Republicans rely on election subversion (Brennan Center 2021). This undermines confidence in the integrity of elections. Independent election boards are brought under political control (Cohn 2021). In addition, there is a reversal of the burden of truth: Where in the past lawsuits alleging irregularity had to prove that election fraud occurred, now the requirement is to prove that no election fraud took place. This opens the door to the almost unlimited assertion of even seemingly absurd possibilities of electoral fraud. Even if they are patently without substance, they still have to be disproved. The goal of these tactics is to sow doubt about the legitimacy of elections ("Elections" 2021) through permanent confrontation with fabricated accusations.

Success is already evident in the 2022 congressional elections. The Republican secure majorities in the House of Representative and the Senate. Most of the legislators taking up their seats are Trump loyalists who pursue a policy of fundamental opposition during Biden's remaining time in office. This prepares the ground for Trump's return to the White House. As in 2016 and 2020, he trails hopelessly in the 2024 election in the nationwide popular vote. However, the legislatures in the Republican-controlled

swing states of Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin award their electoral votes to him, although the Democrats lead by a narrow margin in all four states. That gives Trump a comfortable majority in the Electoral College. The Supreme Court dismisses challenges, citing the Independent State Legislature Doctrine (Mayer 2021). This says that the individual states can decide autonomously how their electors are assigned.

Trump picks up seamlessly where his first term left off; the failures of his erratic way of governing promptly reveal themselves anew. The resurgence of the viral epidemic triggers a severe economic depression that primarily affects those in insecure jobs and the low-skilled. The non-white population suffers heavy repression at the hands of state security forces. Around the turn of the year 2025/2026, violent unrest spreads across the USA. The situation at the beginning of "America250" looks sombre. The rampant dissatisfaction in the country leads the Republicans to fear heavy losses in the congressional elections due in November—despite extensive manipulation of general conditions and regulations for administering the elections. The early announcement that Trump is considering running in 2028 will reenergize the Republican camp, so the thinking goes.

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