



Critical Reasoning

Telegram: http://t.me/Daily_CR

A shift in the U.S. to autocratic trends

Since the Second World War, Washington has defined its foreign policy as a moral conflict between democracies and dictatorships, though this definition proved malleable and redacted to those siding with the United States and those against. The binary between democracy and autocracy is now further blurred by political trends within the U.S. itself.

A different situation prevails

In the past, American presidential politics comprised differences over policy and principle, when Presidents and Congress jostled for advantage and the boundaries of executive authority were negotiated. Despite serious disagreements, the norms of civility and forbearance prevailed in a mood consistent with democratic governance.

That situation no longer prevails. The populist faction, perhaps majority, that dominates the Republican Party, embraces a strongman vision of leadership that operates beyond customary democratic norms. This is now centre-stage in U.S. politics, endorsed by the July 1, 2024 ruling of the Supreme Court which granted former U.S. President Donald Trump's desire to guarantee that that his attempts to overturn the 2020 presidential election would not go to trial before the presidential election in November.

The Supreme Court allowed American Presidents an absolute immunity from prosecution for core official acts and Chief Justice John Roberts summarised the decision of the majority comprising six conservative Justices thus; "We conclude that under our constitutional structure of separated powers, the nature of Presidential power requires that a former President have some immunity from criminal prosecution for official acts during his tenure in office. At least with respect to the President's exercise of his core constitutional powers, this immunity must be absolute. As for his remaining official actions, he is also entitled to immunity."



Krishnan Srinivasan
a former Foreign Secretary

The Supreme Court decision does not place Presidents above the law, but removes restrictions on possible presidential abuse of power placed by both Democrats and Republicans since the 1970s, when growing executive authority and abuse of power were checkmated after Watergate.

Three liberal judges dissented from this decision, warning that granting presidential immunity would impact American democracy. Justice Sonia Sotomayor said, "the category of presidential action that can be deemed unofficial is destined to be vanishingly small."

Phases of transformation

The American presidency has undergone periods of transformation in the modern era, each involving a dramatic expansion of power. The first was the rise of the administrative state under Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, which grew in size and cost under Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, when bi-partisan values broadened the scope of government intervention and generated a complex bureaucracy to address social problems and social welfare. This administrative state, with its resources and agencies, enabled Presidents from both parties to direct public policy and construct their legacies. They needed to bring the administration under their direct control, which led to the centralised apparatus that reposes in the Executive Office of the President.

Far-right opinion began to regard the ever-expanding administrative state as unconstitutional, socialist and opposed to individual liberties. With growing Republican strength in the southern States and political activation by evangelicals, the conservative movement led to the conviction that the answer lay in a leader wielding top-down power and a different orientation towards laws that impeded his ambitions. President George W. Bush signed the Patriot Act that assumed some autocratic

powers, expanded the surveillance capabilities of the administration, and allowed torture of prisoners contrary to statutory law.

The populist tendency of Republican conservatism is concentrated among less educated, blue-collar, white, rural, religious populations disadvantaged by globalisation, threatened culturally and economically, and driven by grievance and anger. They seek a leader to attack the prevailing system, flout its procedures and take remedial action on their behalf. Democrats are seen as their enemies rather than political opponents, the contest pitting the people against big government and the corrupt and illegitimate Washington establishment.

The new normal

In Donald Trump, the populists found their natural leader. From the moment he announced his intention to seek the presidency, he made it clear that he had little use for the legal limitations of democracy. During his tenure, Mr. Trump waged a campaign against the norms and institutions of two-party politics, the climax being shortly after his 2020 election loss, when, despite his deploying the authoritarian actions of a strongman presidency, he was prevented from overriding Joe Biden's electoral victory.

Populist extremism is the new normal of the political Right that has taken over the Republican Party. It energises the party with hatred for the administrative state and embraces a strongman presidency as the panacea for its grievances, thereby threatening the basic fundamentals of democracy. This is given substance by Mr. Trump himself through ambiguous but ominous pronouncements to supporters such as in Florida on July 26 - "you don't have to vote again, we'll have it fixed so good you're not going to have to vote." Unless such sentiments are blunted in the years to come, democracy in the United States faces an uncertain future

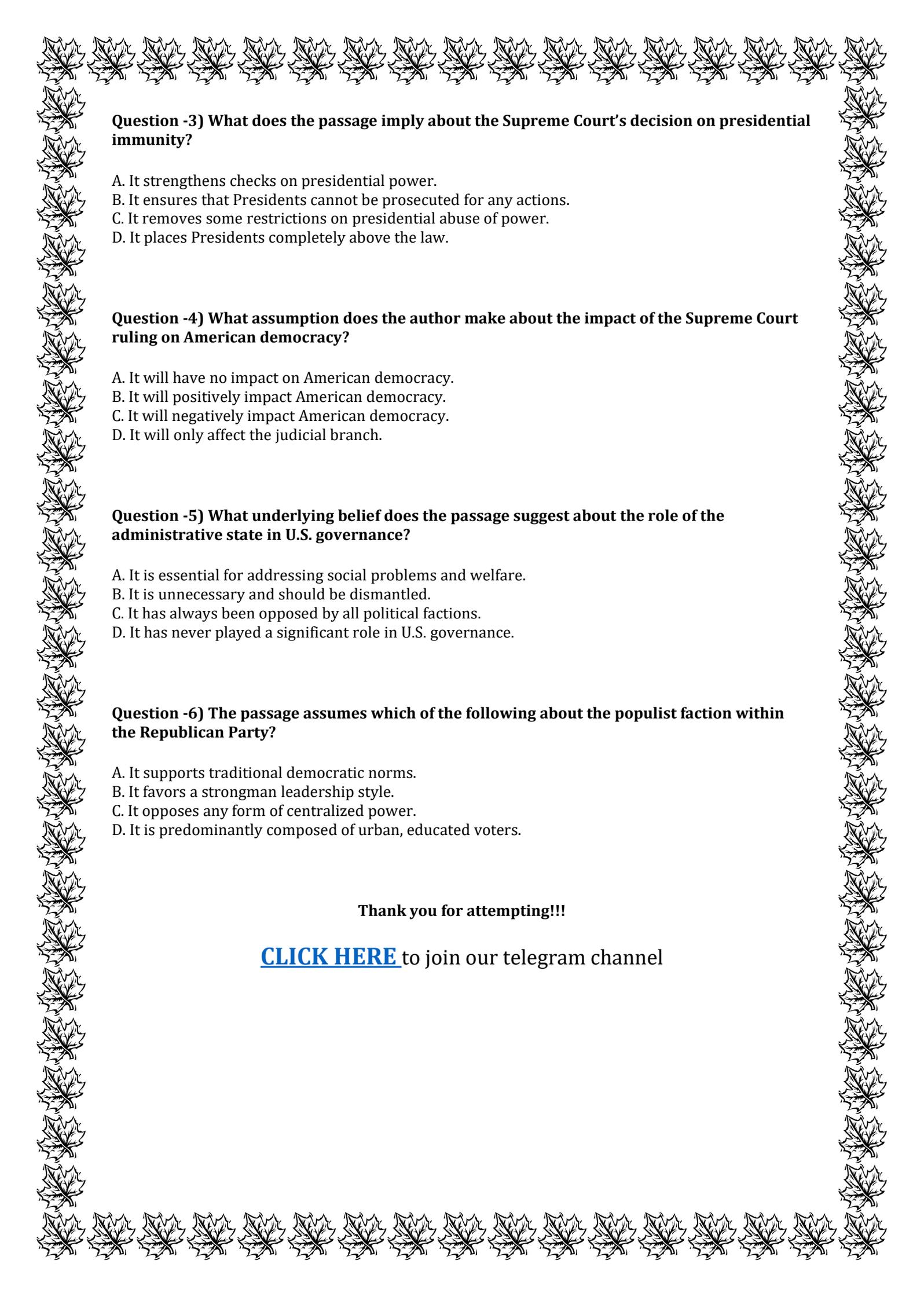
The binary between democracy and autocracy is getting blurred by political trends within the United States

Question -1) What underlying assumption is made about the nature of American democracy in the early years post-World War II?

- A. American democracy was unchanging and rigid.
- B. American democracy had clear distinctions between democracies and dictatorships.
- C. American democracy was flexible and influenced by international alliances.
- D. American democracy had no influence on its foreign policy.

Question -2) The author assumes which of the following about the current state of civility and forbearance in U.S. presidential politics?

- A. Civility and forbearance are stronger than ever.
- B. Civility and forbearance are no longer prevalent.
- C. Civility and forbearance have always been weak.
- D. Civility and forbearance were never part of U.S. politics.



Question -3) What does the passage imply about the Supreme Court's decision on presidential immunity?

- A. It strengthens checks on presidential power.
- B. It ensures that Presidents cannot be prosecuted for any actions.
- C. It removes some restrictions on presidential abuse of power.
- D. It places Presidents completely above the law.

Question -4) What assumption does the author make about the impact of the Supreme Court ruling on American democracy?

- A. It will have no impact on American democracy.
- B. It will positively impact American democracy.
- C. It will negatively impact American democracy.
- D. It will only affect the judicial branch.

Question -5) What underlying belief does the passage suggest about the role of the administrative state in U.S. governance?

- A. It is essential for addressing social problems and welfare.
- B. It is unnecessary and should be dismantled.
- C. It has always been opposed by all political factions.
- D. It has never played a significant role in U.S. governance.

Question -6) The passage assumes which of the following about the populist faction within the Republican Party?

- A. It supports traditional democratic norms.
- B. It favors a strongman leadership style.
- C. It opposes any form of centralized power.
- D. It is predominantly composed of urban, educated voters.

Thank you for attempting!!!

[CLICK HERE](#) to join our telegram channel