



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on May 16, 2026

Is the Republic Falling — With a Sudden Collapse in Our Future?

“A democracy will continue to exist up until the time that voters discover that they can vote themselves generous gifts from the public treasury,” goes the famous apocryphal warning. “From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates who promise the most benefits....” The result of this “is that every democracy will finally collapse due to loose fiscal policy.” This is then “always followed by a dictatorship.”

The warning also holds that the “average age of the world’s greatest civilizations” has historically “been about 200 years.” Given that the United States is now 250 years old and \$39-trillion fiscally loose, what should be said about her?



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Commentator and ex-State Department official Ron MacCammon has his answer. “Our republic is falling gradually,” he wrote earlier this week. “Total collapse will be sudden.”

MacCammon says that the United States’ problem is, essentially, “the tragedy of the commons.” That is, when “people pursue short-term interests at a shared resource’s expense, they eventually destroy it for everyone,” he [explains](#). “Fisheries collapse this way. Pastures go barren. And right now, something similar is happening to the American republic.” For when everyone is responsible, no one is responsible.

“What’s being depleted isn’t land or water,” MacCammon continues. “The constitutional ecosystem — the institutional integrity, fiscal discipline, and civic trust that make American self-governance possible — is what’s running dry.”

Like a Drunken Sailor

Consider finances, an all-important factor in economic soundness. Washington behaves as if it has a money tree. And why not? Imagine a politician who considered being frugal; i.e., not “bringing home the bacon” for his state or district. It’s not just that he might lose to a challenger who promised freebies. It’s also that he knows the other 534 legislators would still raid the treasury. So he might as well join the frenzy. Those paying the tab, largely the unborn, can’t complain.

As a result, MacCammon informs, between

fiscal 1998 and 2025, Congress enacted 134 interim continuing resolutions [temporary, “kick the can down the road” spending bills], an average of five per year. Scheduling failure doesn’t begin to cover it. What Congress has abandoned is stewardship.

Abandoning the regular appropriations process lets leaders dodge the hard trade-offs that



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keep the whole arrangement solvent. Debt expands. Short-term fixes compound. The fiscal commons get grazed a little thinner each year.

Congress' Egress From Duty

MacCammon also asserts that Congress has actually stopped operating as a legislature. He says that safe districts, performing kabuki for ever-present media, and pressure to toe party lines make compromise unattractive. Obstruction results.

Consequently, he notes, presidents increasingly rely on executive orders and agency actions for major policies (e.g., student loans, immigration). This creates, however, a situation much as under a corrupt dictatorship.

That is, policies made with a pen stroke can be reversed with one, creating instability. How can businesses plan around policies that can change with the political winds? How less likely are they to invest in an unstable country? And local governments twist in the wind, buffeted by ever-morphing priorities.

In reality, though, legislators often like this in a way. This is for the same reason they may secretly cheer judicial action that usurps legislative power. It frees them from having to decide divisive issues and suffer ballot-box consequences.

MacCammon laments, too, that this and other problems cause an erosion of public trust, stating:

A functioning republic depends on the shared belief that institutions are legitimate, that elections are binding, and that courts are referees, not partisans.

But then there's what he doesn't say.

The Necessary Ingredient

Many people love speaking of "American exceptionalism." But the only way in which America was exceptional *that really mattered* — and which bred further exceptionalism — was morally. As the encapsulation of French historian Alexis de Tocqueville's ideas goes, "America is great because she is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

Sure, we can complain about constitutional trespass. Yet generally ignored is that Congress is now *expected* to transgress constitutional constraints. As to this, Professor Walter E. Williams estimated decades ago already that approximately two-thirds of congressional acts lack constitutional justification.

In other words, this happens with at least tacit public enablement. Apropos here, I remember years ago the response of a *conservative* commenter at Free Republic to a call for constitutionalism.

"Constitutionalism is good sometimes," he said. Yet this is like saying "Doing the right thing is good sometimes." Of course, if it's only practiced sometimes, it ain't constitutionalism.

But it *is* convenient — especially if you want federal-government entitlements.

Inviting Trouble

Another factor in this is (im)migration-born demographic change. And it isn't just that many newcomers aren't the "moral and religious people" John Adams said our Constitution was made for. It's also what



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[multiple studies](#) have [shown](#): Increasing balkanization (ethnic, racial, or cultural fragmentation) [yields](#) declining civic duty. That is, civic engagement, social trust, volunteering, charity, public-goods cooperation, voter turnout, and generalized reciprocity all diminish.

Put simply, people don't feel obligated to do as much for strangers as for their family — or their *national* family.

A Substack writer named Kari Stark recounted a story, from her time in Minnesota, that well illustrated both immigration-related phenomena. It involved a conversation with a Somali “friend” — an exchange that moved her “to the right.” After mentioning to the individual that lying for political gain is short-sighted, he [replied](#), “Why would I care about that? They’re not my tribe. Those are your rules, not ours.”

The bottom line is that profligate spending [reflects a lack of virtue](#). Given this, something else John Adams expressed explains the problem. “Public virtue cannot exist in a nation without private,” he wrote, “and public virtue is the only foundation of republics.”

It is not, though, the only foundation of failing ones.



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