

# Socioeconomic and Political Trends of the United States Since 1935

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While the US has entered wars for varied reasons throughout its history, the unifying factor that drives American military action most prevalently is Americans being killed. Typically, there are numerous other factors that cause political tension, but Americans being killed intentionally by foreign nations is nearly always a catalyst for deploying American Armed Forces. Though the US is quick to take military action, it has not officially declared war since 1941, following the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan. This has led to the US fighting a series of undeclared wars, as part of defending vital national security interests, mainly against terrorism and communism (Koroma, 2014). Undeclared wars, while unofficial, have had drastic consequences in the United States and globally. In the midst of the most devastating global financial crisis in history, the US returned to ideologies of the Progressive Era with President Roosevelt's New Deal in order to assist the millions of Americans suffering in the Great Depression. While most of the New Deal's programs do not still exist, it has made a lasting impact. The program is outlived by its legacy of progressivism and has set intervention in the social and financial happening of the nation as a standard duty of the federal government (www.loc.gov, 2018). During this time of FDR's presidency, the Social Security Act was introduced in order to allow the elderly to live comfortably after being unable to work and make room in the workforce for the young and unemployed. This program has provided compensation to those over 65 in order for them to retire and care for themselves at an age where they are no longer capable of work. It created provides for the disabled, creating disability insurance for workers who suffer a total disability and are removed from the workforce before retirement age (findlaw.com, 2018). Medicare was added to the Social Security in 1965 to further provide for disadvantaged US citizens. From 1935 and onward, the United States government has

undertaken the ever growing role of protecting and providing; This has evolved from defending the rights of American citizens to maintaining order and prosperity around the world.

In the Constitution, war powers are divided among the executive and legislative branch. According to the Congressional Research Service, the Constitution declares, “Congress has the power to declare war and raise and support the Armed Forces (Article I, Section 8), while the President is Commander in Chief (Article II, Section 2),” (Grimmett, 2018). The definition of the exact powers held by each branch has been debated since the original drafting of the Constitution. Alexander Hamilton asserted war declaring powers belonged to the executive branch; James Madison argued that it is the duty of the legislative branch (go.galegroup.com, 2018). The debate of this issue continued until the passing of the the War Power Act in 1973, and still rages in modern day. According to this act, the President is required to consult with Congress before employing American Armed Forces into hostilities, unless there has been a declaration of war or other congressional approval for these actions. This resolution alter the constitutional war powers of either the President or Congress, it simply featured explicit requirements (Spong Jr., 1975). While this resolution was enacted to ensure that Congress and the President share in making decisions that may get the United States involved in hostilities, it has yielded little branch collaboration. “A review of instances involving the use of American Armed Forces since passage of the Resolution... indicates there has been very little consultation with Congress under the Resolution...” (Grimmett, 2018). Since the passing of the War Powers Resolution, each sitting president has deemed it unconstitutional, arguing the act is an infringement of the Commander in Chief’s powers by Congress. Receiving congressional support to deploy troops is largely seen as yet another obstacle they must circumvent in order to

declare military action. As result of the position presidents have taken on this resolution, the executive branch has often bypassed aspects of the law's restrictions, and continued to declare war without consulting Congress ([www.history.com](http://www.history.com), 2018).

Cooperation of the branches is difficult to achieve, but necessary in order to best solve the issues at hand. Due to this, it is unlikely the Supreme Court would accept a challenge to this act, as it is representative of the system of governing laid out in the constitution. In 2000, the Supreme Court refused to hold a hearing requested by 31 members of Congress; they claimed President Clinton was in violation of the War Powers Act due to his authorization of U.S. participation in a bombing campaign of Yugoslavia. The Supreme Court made no comment, but likely refused due to the constitutionality of the act. Louis Fisher, a constitutional scholar, says, "... 95% of the time, courts say, '30 of you are saying the president violated the law, 30 others in an amicus brief are saying he didn't. We're not going to get involved,' " in regards to the pattern members of Congress taking War Powers cases to court ([npr.org](http://npr.org), 2011). It is likely that the courts view congressional accusations of sitting Presidents violating the War Powers Act simply as a political ploy to criticize presidents of the opposite party. "Everyone in Congress wants to protect Congress, but they also want to protect the president of their party.," states Noah Feldman, a law professor at New York University (Feldman, 2007). The disregard of War Powers cases in the courts has resulted in challenges by the legislative and executive branches going unheard in the Supreme Court. The widely known neutrality of the Supreme Court on this issue has likely decreased attempts to challenge the act lawfully.

The Vietnam War began due to the US's containment policy during the Cold War, which aimed to prevent the spread of Communism throughout the world. Following World War II, the

Soviet Union took a strong influence over Eastern Europe and began spreading Marxist ideology. The US and their Western allies considered communism, specifically of the USSR, their greatest rival and threat to their democracy and capitalism. Following China's turn to Communism and the Korean War the US could not allow another newly independent state to fall to Communism. Military action was deemed a necessary intervention. Immense protest of the war and the draft led to Congress replacing the military draft with an all-volunteer force, as well as reducing the voting age to 18. The Vietnam war sparked massive protest, especially from college students who were expected to fight for their nation without being able to have say in elections. The passing of the War Powers Resolution was also a direct result of the Vietnam War. Fighting an expensive and ineffective war inspired Congress to attack the "imperial" presidency of Richard Nixon, by restricting a president's ability to send American forces into combat without explicit Congressional approval. The grueling eight year long war severely damaged the U.S. economy and caused a spike in inflation, due to President Johnson's refusal to raise taxes to pay for the war. U.S. military morale was weakened, along with the U.S. commitment to internationalism. The war undermined liberal reform, as many Americans became deeply suspicious of the government and any action it took. The war in Vietnam deeply split the Democratic Party, and resulted in it losing a significant amount of its support. The party had won seven of the previous nine presidential elections, but the war in Vietnam alienated blue-collar Democrats, many of whom became political independents or Republicans (digitalhistory.edu, 2018).

In January 1973, the United States and North Vietnam concluded a final peace agreement, ending open hostilities between the two nations. The US withdrew from due pressure from the media and the American people. Mass protests to extreme measures to end the war

pressured the American government to withdraw. The shootings at Kent State University resulted in the deaths of four student protesters, and sparked anger throughout the nation. Media coverage provoked additional demonstrations, and the political unrest was felt by all. War increased taxes, but the American people felt the fight was irrelevant. The US suffered over 50,000 casualties, and killed over 1 million vietnamese citizens (history.com, 2018). Following the Vietnam War, the US continued with greater caution in regards to their involvement anywhere else in the world. Although the defense budget rows drastically under President Ronald Reagan when he escalated the Cold War, his military actions were mainly small. Following this war, America developed “Vietnam syndrome”, the reluctance to commit troops overseas unless it is absolutely necessary. This is a stark contrast to the overzealous military action of the US previous to this war, demonstrated by the Korean War. The Vietnam War was the first true military loss of the United States, serving as a sobering reminder that no nation is invincible. Following this war, America remained a significant player in global politics, but began to take military action to a lesser degree. They continued to lead fight in the war on the communist ideology with NATO, but focused their efforts economically and developing more nuclear weapons, rather than large military action (thevietnamwar.info, 2016).

In order to provide increased support for the general welfare of the elderly, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act of 1935 into action, creating the Social Security Board. The act established a system of old-age benefits, along with benefits for those who cannot financially support themselves: victims of accidents, dependent mothers and children, the physically handicapped, and the unemployed, among others. Previous to the establishment of this law, a support system for the elderly was not a concern of the federal

government; State and local government, as well as families were responsible, but not accountable for the care of the elderly. It was not uncommon for the elderly to face poverty when they were no longer physically capable of working (ourdocuments.gov, 2018). This act has been highly effective in securing care for Americans, regardless a high price tag. While the program is often overwhelmed by the demands required of it, often leading to a lesser level of care and a series of red tape, Social Security has provided for those who would otherwise go without any form of support. This act also great shifted the structure of the lives of the American middle class. Previous to the Social Security Act, workers continued in their employment until they were unable or dead (Weisman, 2018).

Social Security is highly expensive program, and increasingly so, as the population grows and life expectancy increases (findlaw.com, 2017). Due to this, the future of Social Security is a polarizing issue among politicians. Prominent political figures from both the Democratic and Republican parties have argued for cutting social security funding, as it allows for tax reductions. On the other side of the issue, some democrats and independents have platformed their campaigns on the promise they will maintain funding for Medicare and Social Security. For example, US Senator Bernie Sanders has attempted to gain support by claiming that he will maintain Social Security in a way his opponents will not be able to. He states "... (they) want to pass something called a chained CPI, which, if it were imposed... seniors ... would lose about \$550... (or) up to 1,000 bucks a year... I am going to, as chairman of the Defend Social Security Caucus, do everything I can to prevent that," (Sanders, 2018).

Medicare was added to the Social Security Act in 1965 in the XVIII Amendment of the original act. Medicare is broken into four different parts (A, B, C, & D), each designated to

fulfilling distinct services. Medicare Part A, also known as hospital insurance, covers hospital stays, skilled nursing facility, home health, and hospice care at varying degrees, depending on how long one has worked and paid social security taxes. Medicare Part B, also known as medical insurance, covers doctors services and visits, preventive care, durable medical equipment, hospital outpatient services, laboratory tests, x-rays, mental health care, and some home health and ambulance services with a monthly premium. Part C is the part of Medicare policy that allows private health insurance companies to provide Medicare benefits through Medicare Advantage Plans. Medicare Part D, also known as outpatient prescription drug insurance, covers outpatient prescriptions. This aspect of medicare is not provided by the government directly as original Medicare is, but by private insurance companies that have made agreements with the government. Coverage for this aspect of medicare most often comes with a monthly premium (medicareinteractive.org, 2017).

The proper role of the government is to serve the needs of the people. This is accomplished by providing citizens with basic resources and rights so they may live happy and prosperous lives, as well as, protecting citizens from injustices on a global and local scale. Senator Bernie Sanders has stated, “The job of the Senate is to represent the middle-class working families of this country, all of the people...” (Sanders, 2018). The core of these program’s ideals are based in ensuring all citizens, regardless of income, receive the critical care they need to survive and stay healthy. This being said, Medicare and the Social Security program are representative of the United States’ attempt at filling the government’s innate duty to its people. While the goals of Medicare and Social Security are well placed and have been widely successful, they fail to completely achieve the goals set out for them and are destined for failure



unless reform is made. Marilyn Moon, a Medicare expert, explains that “more than 90 percent of retirees covered by Medicare earn less than \$32,000 per year for individuals or \$40,000 for couples. In 2003, Medicare beneficiaries will spend an average of 23 percent of their income on health care!” in defense of Medicare’s success. While the program has flaws even the most adamant defenders of the system will admit: the lack of prescription drug benefits for Medicare beneficiaries, etc. Despite this, it has been overall successful. Medicare has provided essential care for those who would not be able to receive it otherwise due to their financial status (www.hopkinsmedicine.org, 2018). The Medicare program is an important step towards the United States providing universal health care for its citizens, and while not perfect, it has greatly improved the affordability of healthcare for those living in and near poverty.

The largest issue of Social Security and Medicare is the amount of funding required to keep these programs running. Social Security, including Medicare, makes up about a quarter of overall government spending (findlaw.com, 2017). These programs are continuing to grow more and more expensive, as the population receiving benefits from Social Security and Medicare grows; increased life expectancy and the massive size of the Baby Boomer generation which is now at retiring age has increased the stress placed on an already stretched budget. The programs continuation is in jeopardy due to this, as it began paying out more in benefits than it will receive in funding in 2010. Due to this, it is unlikely that it will be sustainable in its current state for future generations. The Social Security Administration admits that its current level of benefits will likely only be available until 2035. The existence of Social Security will most likely remain, but with serious alterations to close the gap between budget and spending (cnn.com, 2018). As the program is so expensive, many politicians are calling for decreased social security benefits.

House Speaker, Paul Ryan, has proposed that Medicare be cut all together and replaced with a privatized program. Ryan, alongside a majority of the Republican Party are attempting to reduce Social Security benefits, which would drastically hurt seniors and future generations financially. The consensus of the Democratic Party is that they want to maintain social security, and disagree with the Republican plan, but have made no clear plans on how this will be executed or how the program will be improved (latimes.com, 2018). Politicians are taking little action for those who need care to get it, and it is likely that in order for my generation to receive senior benefits the program will need to be greatly improved.

Since 1935, the United States has greatly changed socially, politically, and economically. Though the United States of today is nearly completely different from the United States of the past, the nation's core values of freedom and justice for all have remained the same. While crucial mistakes have been made in our nation's history, they were not made without good intentions. Undertaking the role as the world's police, creating a social security system, and increasing checks between branches all reign true to the US's classical liberal values. In today's world the US not only provides and protects its own citizens, but also the oppressed peoples from around the world.

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