

## **THE MYTH OF AN AMERICAN PEOPLE**

By

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President Trump frequently claims to have received a mandate from “the American people” to pursue extreme change rapidly by Executive Order. Journalists and commentators also often speak of the results of the presidential election as the voice of “the American people” thus lending credibility to the president’s claims. But in truth there is no American people. There are American people, but quite obviously they are far from unitary.

The presidential and congressional elections certainly made this clear. No voice of an American people emerged from it. Yes, President Trump won both the popular and the electoral votes, but not by much. Not even a majority of the Americans who voted, let alone of Americans overall, voted for Trump. He got 49.9% of the votes vs. 48.3% for Harris.<sup>1</sup> Hardly, a mandate for anything, let alone for extreme, rapid change.

The election reflected the political division that has grown more and more vituperative and dangerous in America. Two (or more) sides that not only differ but have nothing but disdain for each other. Two (or more) sets of values, two (or more) fundamental perceptions of reality, two (or more) views about how the United States should be governed, two (or more) fundamental beliefs about the meaning of democracy.

Clearly, there is not an American people; there are divided Americans.

In addition, America is, by design, a pluralistic society. It is made up of many cultures, many religions, several races, many lifestyles, and more. This is not an accident of immigration. It was inherent in the founding vision of America. And this pluralism has been a source of great strength, a source of the possibility and achievement of progress. A culture of competition, a culture of cooperation, a culture of compassion, a culture of warrior courage, a culture of creativity, a culture of conformity, a culture of sexual liberty, a culture of moralism, a culture of spirituality, a culture of materialism. All of these combined, and in confrontation, have made America an historically dynamic society. America’s strength is that it is a society of many peoples not a society of one American people. Pluralism is the essence of the American society.

So, when President Trump or any other politician or when journalists and commentators speak of “the American people”, we should all take a deep breath and understand that they are spouting rhetoric designed to give them power or credibility. But in truth they are distorting the reality of what makes America great—diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/USA-ELECTION/RESULTS/zjpqnemxwvx/?form=MG0AV3>

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