

**America's Status Quo and the 2024 Presidential Election**

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### **Abstract**

As excitement intensifies surrounding the 2024 presidential election, American citizens grow worried about what the future of America may look like under the rule of Trump or of Harris. The candidates' official political and economic stances raise concerns for many. Though specific policies may vary depending on who takes office in January, the political and economic status quo of America ultimately will not change. Through considering the current undemocratic methods of government and voting where democratic practices should prevail, the two-party political system that fosters hostility and restricts diversity throughout the country, examples of political corruption related to the effect of large quantities of money, and the uneven power dynamic between the wealthy and the masses, an argument is formed that the fundamentals of American politics and economics lie deeper than the extent of the presidential candidates' realm of influence and thus will remain the same regardless of the winner of the 2024 election.

## **America's Status Quo and the 2024 Presidential Election**

Many Americans have been eagerly anticipating or dreading the 2024 election, and as the election gets closer, the enthusiasm surrounding it has only heightened. The current political landscape of the country is incredibly divided. There is very little about which Democrats and Republicans see eye to eye. With the rising stakes from the election, the divide between the two political parties has widened. The Democratic Party as a whole leans further left; the Republican Party similarly moves further right. This election is the awaited opportunity to pull the country one way or the other. Both parties believe in their candidate — that they can improve the country as president, that they are a better choice than the other candidate, and that they will win the election. For some, the mere idea of the other candidate winning is horrendous, ridiculous, and downright wrong. Democrats find it unbelievable that people could wholeheartedly support and vote for a convicted felon. Republicans are appalled that their opposition is campaigning on the promise of legal abortions. Trump and Harris have noticeably different policies that could potentially change many things for certain citizens, either for the good or for the bad.

However, as much as Trump's or Harris' policies may affect America in the short run, the political and economic status quo of the country will not significantly change, regardless of who wins the election. Whether Harris wins or Trump wins, Democrats and Republicans will still be at odds, and the political sphere will likely polarize further. The two parties will still dominate politics, leaving little room for smaller, lesser-known parties. Lawmakers will continue to propose and pass laws that benefit themselves, even at the cost of the people. Corruption will still exist, hidden (or not so hidden) in the ranks of Congress, the Supreme Court, and billion- and trillion-dollar companies. The rich will keep getting richer, feeding off of the labor of their employees. The government will still have power over American citizens, toying with the

balance of proper use and abuse of that power. America as a somewhat democratic capitalist country will stay the same. No matter who comes out on top in the 2024 election, America's status quo is not going anywhere.

### **Democracy or the Lack Thereof**

The United States is considered a representative democracy, which is described by Britannica as a “political system in which citizens of a country ... vote for representatives to handle legislation and otherwise rule ... on their behalf” (Raikar, 2024). The purpose of a representative democracy is for more citizens to have a say in the government without having to be directly involved beyond voting. The elected representatives are supposed to speak and act on behalf of the citizens they represent, advocating for the citizens' ideas and desires. At its heart, America is intended to be governed by a system that responds to the people. However, citizens do not get as much power over their country as they should, and America's political status quo falls disappointingly short of the democracy expected of it.

According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in April of 2024, approximately 80% of Americans believe that the United States' current example of democracy is not a good example for other countries to follow. Of this proportion, 10% believe that democracy in America has never been a good example (Fetterolf & Hernandez Ramones, 2024). It is concerning that such a high percentage of Americans believe that the democratic system of the country is not what it is supposed to be. These results reflect the dissatisfaction of Americans with the policies enacted by the government — policies on LGBTQ+ issues, gun policy, abortion policy, immigration, and more. In fact, for each of these listed issues, over 50% of adult citizens believe US laws and policies do not accurately reflect the prevailing American opinion on them, according to an AP-NORC poll conducted in June of 2023 (Associated Press-NORC [AP-

NORC], 2023). Although the United States prides itself on being a democracy, the policies passed by lawmakers and other government officials do not match the majority of the citizens' positions. In reality, the United States is not much of a democracy at all, and American citizens are aware of this.

Speaking of lawmakers, the United States House of Representatives is structured in a way that decreases the opportunity for democracy. The current Congress (the 118th Congress) has 435 representatives, which is the same number of members the House of Representatives has had since the 63rd Congress in 1913, barring the 86th and 87th Congresses (1959-1961 and 1961-1963), which had 436 and 437 representatives, respectively (United States House of Representatives, n.d.). According to the United States Census Bureau (2023), in that same time, the population of the United States more than tripled, going from approximately 92 million in 1910 to approximately 331.5 million in 2020. Despite the much larger population, the country still has the same number of representatives as it did over 100 years ago. According to CNN, "where the average House member used to represent around 200,000 people in 1910, today it is approaching 800,000" (Wolf, 2022). On average, almost 800,000 Americans are being represented by one person in Congress. That is 800,000 citizens, all with vastly different political views and backgrounds, assigned to a singular government official who realistically has very little in common with a majority of those people. Furthermore, some House members represent many more citizens than others. For example, in 2020, Delaware had one representative for its 989,948 citizens, and Montana had two for its 1,084,225 citizens. Though the two states have approximately the same population, "Delaware's House member will represent nearly 1 million people ... [while] Montana's two House members will represent about 500,000 people each" (Wolf, 2022). The uneven allotment of House seats leads to an inadequate and disproportionate

representation of citizens in Congress, directly threatening the state of democracy in the government.

Given the principle of representative democracy in place in the country, perhaps the most important aspect of democracy is voting. In theory, voting is set up to be democratic: every adult citizen of the United States who is registered to vote (and who meets other qualifying criteria) is generally allowed to vote in federal, state, and local elections (USAGov, n.d.). Each registered voter gets one vote, and their vote is meaningful in deciding the result of the election — in the case of this election, the result is the president of the United States for the next four years. However, the voting system is not as simple as it should be. Instead of a popular vote deciding the next president, the election result is determined by the Electoral College. The Electoral College has been in place since the beginning of America, which is exactly how long its necessity has been debated. Each state gets one elector for every US representative and senator it has in Congress. Washington, D.C. also gets three electors. Then, after tallying up the votes, all of the state's electoral votes go to the candidate that received the most votes in that state. The candidate who wins the majority of the 538 electoral votes, or the first to 270 electoral votes, wins the election (Esteban & Rivero, 2024). The number of electoral votes a state gets is related to its population, but the state's proportion of votes within the Electoral College does not always line up with its proportion of the nation's population. For some states, their population is underrepresented in the Electoral College; for others, their population is overrepresented. Thus, not all votes have the same weight. A vote in more populous states such as California, Texas, Florida, and New York will not mean as much as a vote in less populous states like Wyoming and Vermont. California, the state with the largest population, is majorly underrepresented in the Electoral College. In 2016, California had 54 electoral votes, one for every 712,000 people. At

the same time, Wyoming had three electoral votes, one for every 195,000 people. This meant that a vote in Wyoming held almost four times more value than a vote in California (Lu, 2016). Deciding elections by the Electoral College goes against a fundamental principle of democracy: that all citizens have an equal opportunity to participate. Yet the Electoral College is still standing, deciding who wins the presidency regardless of who wins the popular vote.

### **A Country Divided Against Itself**

Another key part of the political status quo is the two-party system. This system has been a feature of America since the 1790s, starting with the Federalists and the Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans competing in the election of 1796. The Federalist Party died off by 1815, kickstarting the single-party Era of Good Feelings from 1816-1824, until the election of 1828 brought about the new Whig Party to contend with the Jacksonian Democrats, the descendants of the Democratic-Republicans. Some smaller parties arose during this time, but the prevailing parties were the Whigs and the Democrats. After the Whigs fizzled out over the issue of slavery in the 1850s, the Republican Party rose to prominence, taking its place as the Democrats' main opposition by 1865 (Heineman et al., 1995, pp. 91-93). Since then, America's two major political parties have been the Republicans and the Democrats. In recent years, the hostility between the two parties has intensified, and there is very little common ground.

Republicans and Democrats have contrasting ideas about how the country should be run. According to the previously mentioned AP-NORC poll, "About 8 in 10 Democrats say the Republican party is failing at upholding democratic values, and a similar number of Republicans say the same about the Democratic party" (AP-NORC, 2023). Democracy according to the Democrats is not the same as democracy defined by the Republicans. Regardless of who wins the 2024 election, there will undoubtedly be a significant number of people who will not be satisfied

with the winner's approach to democracy. The difference in political beliefs of the two parties is a constant cause of contention throughout the country.

It has been established that the public as a whole disagrees with the way the government has handled issues of abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, gun laws, and immigration, but how the government should handle these issues is another place of disagreement. On the topic of abortion, most Republicans believe that life starts at conception, and therefore abortion is the taking of innocent life and should be banned in the United States. However, Democrats believe that abortion should be protected as a reproductive right, and women should be able to have autonomy over their own bodies (Closson, 2024). For the LGBTQ+ community, Democrats push for equal rights as well as advocate for protected gender-affirming healthcare, whereas Republicans (though not as staunchly opposed to gay rights as they have been in the past) stand firmly against trans rights by planning to restrict gender-affirming healthcare and banning trans athletes from their sports (Rauch, 2024). While gun violence is generally considered a concerning issue by both parties, views about gun policy differ by party: “79% of Republicans and independents who lean toward the Republican Party say that gun ownership increases safety, while a nearly identical share of Democrats and Democratic leaners (78%) say it decreases safety” (Pew Research Center, 2023). Regarding immigration, according to a recent Gallup poll, 88% of Republicans believe that immigration levels should be decreased, whereas only 28% of Democrats have the same opinion (Jones, 2024). The Republican and Democratic official stances on these major political topics and the statistics from citizens who align with either of the two parties clearly show the political conflict that is dividing America into opposite sides.

The Green Party and the Libertarian Party, two main third parties running against the Democrats and the Republicans, present their own opinions on these topics. The Green Party, a



left-leaning party, is pro-choice, in favor of keeping abortion legalized. They are pro-LGBTQ+ rights, supporting equity and access to healthcare for the LGBTQ+ community. They also support immigrants' ability to gain legal status and advocate for stricter gun laws (Green Party, n.d.). The Libertarian Party, which has a mix of liberal and conservative views, offers no definitive stance on abortion, saying that views within the party are varied (Libertarian Party, 2022). They are also in support of LGBTQ+ rights (Libertarian Party, 2015). Their opinion on immigration is that individuals should be able to freely immigrate if they are peaceful. The party stands against increased gun laws, believing the right to bear arms should be protected (Libertarian Party, n.d.).

Though these third parties definitely have a presence in politics, the two-party system of America only allows a realistic opportunity for success for the Democrats or the Republicans. Every citizen who does not align with or lean toward one of the two major parties faces low odds for their political beliefs to be represented and acted on by the government. This is problematic because Democrats and Republicans, though together comprising the majority of American voters, do not encompass all American citizens. In fact, on the Political Compass' scale from left to right and authoritarian to libertarian, Kamala Harris and Donald Trump both fall in the Right-Authoritarian quadrant, as do their running mates (The Political Compass, 2024). The leading presidential candidates in the 2024 election only represent a limited range of views. In comparison to citizens who align with Trump or Harris, the citizens who land in the second, third, and fourth quadrants of the Political Compass (economically left and/or socially libertarian) are vastly underrepresented in politics, occasionally acknowledged but generally allowed to fall by the wayside. Jill Stein of the Green Party falls in the third quadrant

(economically left and socially libertarian) and Chase Oliver of the Libertarian Party lies in the fourth (economically right and socially libertarian).

The 2024 election will certainly come down to the Republican and Democratic parties. The map of America will be colored red and blue. There is essentially no chance that any of the 50 states' majority vote will go to Jill Stein, Chase Oliver, or the independent Cornel West. Knowing this, many non-party-affiliated citizens will be voting not for the candidate they actually support, but for either Trump or Harris, depending on which candidate they consider to be the lesser of two evils. Rather than giving every political ideology an equal chance to succeed, the political status quo has consistently favored the Republican and Democratic parties over all other parties and ideologies in every election. Therefore, the political status quo restricts political diversity by inadvertently forcing citizens to support a party they do not fully believe in. The Democratic and Republican parties dominate politics by default, and as they are in such a powerful position, they would not make any efforts to change the system that favors them. Thus, the two-party system likely will not be replaced any time soon, instead outlasting Trump, Harris, and the 2024 election.

### **Corporations and Government: Friends with Benefits**

The intersection of the political status quo and the economic status quo in America comes in the form of government corruption. Time and time again, government officials have engaged in shady behavior for their own benefit or for the benefit of the wealthy, damaging the American public's trust in the government. The powers of money and status come together to create a sinister cycle of corruption in the government and the corporations it associates with. Whether it is in the form of Congress members using their access to stock information in order to increase their wealth or corporations pouring money into lobbying to manipulate the vote in their favor,

corruption is ingrained in the structure of America, and it has long affected the way the country is run.

The love of money opens the door for countless chances for corruption to pervade politics, and even (or, perhaps, especially) government officials are not exempt from such greed. One example of corruption in politics is the use of IPOs by Congress members for personal benefit. An IPO, or an initial public offering, is where companies initially sell their stock at a lower price to people such as Congress members before almost immediately upping the price to what the stock is actually worth in the eyes of the market. Those who have early access to the stock and buy it at the opening price get an instantaneous profit because they pay a lower price for the stock than those who buy the stock at the market price. Congress members gain access to IPOs by trading in favors (Johnson, 2011). Congress members hold a high position in the government, and many take advantage of their privileges by using them to gain money or benefits. Their unique access to certain information allows them opportunities to benefit themselves at the cost of others, and their desire for more money often leads them to take those opportunities.

The government is not the only group with corrupt movements. Wealthy organizations are just as guilty. In fact, big corporations often have a large hand in deciding political outcomes, including who will win the 2024 election. Corporations enter the playing field by tossing their wealth around, funneling money into the political groups they believe will best suit their needs. According to an article published by the Washington Post that outlined the 50 biggest donors in this election cycle, Tesla co-founder and billionaire tech executive Elon Musk was the fourth largest donor in this year's presidential election, giving a total of \$132.2 million worth of large donations to political action committees (PACs) and funds that directly support Donald Trump or

the Republican Party. Additionally, billionaire Facebook co-founder Dustin Moskovitz donated \$38 million to FF PAC, which supports Kamala Harris' campaign. FF PAC also received \$136.4 million from Future Forward USA Action, a Democratic-aligned nonprofit. Coinbase, a cryptocurrency firm, donated \$93.6 million to bipartisan, Democratic-leaning, and Republican-leaning PACs, all of which are pro-crypto. In total, the top 50 donors of this election cycle donated approximately \$1.6 billion to Republican-leaning committees, \$752.3 million to Democrat-leaning committees, and \$214 million to committees supporting both parties (Morse et al., 2024). Individuals and organizations with an abundance of money have the luxury of donating millions to PACs that support their candidate or party of choice. These donations can make a huge difference in the outcome of the election because funds are a significant part of a presidential campaign. As author and activist Chuck Collins put it in his book about the effects of wealth inequality, "Inequality is disenfranchising us, diminishing our vote at the ballot box and our voice in the public square. As dollars of the 1 percent displace the votes of the 99 percent as the currency of politics, the 1 percent wins. Not every time, but enough so that the tilt continues toward the agenda of the 1 percent" (Collins, 2012, p. 60). Some citizens and organizations have the resources to unfairly rig the election for their benefit, though it comes at the cost of true democracy because the election is not decided on a majority political view alone. By contributing millions of dollars to the election, the wealthy give their preferred party an edge, and even a slight monetary advantage can give a party a significant boost.

This unrestricted spending, despite directly affecting how citizens vote in the election, is completely legal due to the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (FEC)* decision of 2010. This case went to the Supreme Court of the United States, which ruled that corporate independent expenditures were protected under the First Amendment as free political speech.

The Court claimed that “the rule that political speech cannot be limited based on a speaker’s wealth is a necessary consequence of the premise that the First Amendment generally prohibits the suppression of political speech based on the speaker’s identity” (Kennedy, 2009, p. 350). In theory, this reasoning makes sense and upholds Constitutional values, given the caveat that a corporation is to be treated as an individual. Any individual, no matter what their wealth, has a right to free political speech. Interestingly, the government had previously decided that corporate political speech could be restricted in order to inhibit corruption. Yet, in *Citizens United v. FEC*, the Supreme Court overruled the previous ruling with this: “[I]ndependent expenditures, including those made by corporations, do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption. That speakers may have influence over or access to elected officials does not mean that those officials are corrupt” (Kennedy, 2009, p. 314). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines corruption as “dishonest or illegal behavior especially by powerful people” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Considering their wealth, corporations definitely have power — and by donating large sums of money with the intention of swaying an election to one side or the other instead of letting the election play out as it should, they are responsible, at least in part, for the resulting dishonesty of the election. Even though “offering something of value to a government official with the intent to influence what that official does is bribery,” which is generally agreed to be a form of corruption, excessive corporate campaign spending “is legal, because what’s offered is considered ‘speech’” (Johnson, 2011). *Citizens United v. FEC* legalized a form of corruption that affects the US voting system, which is supposed to be the heart of American democracy. This ruling essentially permitted corporations to use their funds to influence elections.

Copious donating has another detrimental point, aside from being inherently corrupt — it further increases the lead of the Republicans and the Democrats, leaving third parties behind in

the dust. One author claims that “[a] huge handicap faced by third-party candidates — and progressive candidates within the major parties — is the lack of funds needed to win office. Money is the lifeblood of present-day electoral campaigns” (Parenti, 2011, p. 184). The Democratic and Republican parties get monetary benefits to an extent that third parties can only dream of. While the two major political parties receive large donations with which they can do whatever they want, third parties are comparatively limited in their campaign efforts without a constant influx of money from overwhelmingly wealthy individuals and organizations who support them. Similar to the two-party system, this practice of donating millions to support a certain party very clearly works in the Democrats’ and Republicans’ favor. The status quo in America allows for the government to turn a blind eye to this kind of corruption and for wealth to influence elections, and as Harris and Trump are both recipients of these funds, neither one will be particularly keen on changing this system.

### **The Rich Get Richer — Everyone Else Gets False Hope**

The overarching theme of America’s economic status quo is that the rich are always prioritized over the general population. SmartAsset determined that there are currently about 800 billionaires in America, and their collective net worth is equivalent to 20% of the nation’s gross domestic product, or approximately \$6 trillion (Reed, 2024). According to Americans for Tax Fairness (2024), “The nation’s 800 billionaires alone now hold roughly 3.8% of the entire nation’s wealth, while the roughly 66 million American families in the bottom half control just 2.5%.” The ten wealthiest people in America each have a net worth of over \$100 billion, and these ten alone are worth a total of \$1.5 trillion as of 2024. The three richest Americans are Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg. These three men get their wealth primarily from the companies they run — Tesla and SpaceX for Musk, Amazon for Bezos, and Facebook for

Zuckerberg (Americans for Tax Fairness, 2024). For Musk, Bezos, and Zuckerberg, American citizens are directly adding to their wealth by buying Teslas, shopping on Amazon, and using Facebook or Instagram. A significant portion of America's wealth is concentrated in a very small circle of rich people who get increasingly richer due to the contributions of the masses. This is possible because America is a capitalist country. In America's economic system, billionaires continuously accumulate more wealth and therefore more power.

Kamala Harris pledges to increase the tax on the rich if she wins the election. This includes raising the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28% and ensuring that the richest Americans are paying income taxes proportionate to their wealth. Donald Trump, on the other hand, plans to decrease corporate taxes to 15% for domestic producers and extend tax cuts for the rich (Cameron, 2024). Donald Trump and the Republican Party in general promote the system of supply-side or "trickle-down" economics, which is the belief that allowing rich corporations to accumulate more money will cause them to invest more and increase their production, stimulating the economy and eventually leading to that wealth trickling down to the lower classes, benefiting everyone in the long run (Puckett, 2024). Kamala Harris' economic policy is quite the opposite, taxing corporations and extremely wealthy individuals upfront and inserting the money back into the economy on the Democratic Party's terms. In both cases, low- and middle-income households would have to pay lower income taxes, but Harris' policy more overtly helps citizens in these economic ranks by providing them with more credit opportunities (Cameron, 2024). Though the lower classes seem to benefit from these policies, in reality, the policies are not as helpful as they sound for the majority of Americans. Neither policy is ideal — Trump's trickle-down economics predominantly benefits the wealthy, allowing them more economic freedom to use for their personal gain, which will likely come at the expense of the

working class; Harris' raising of corporate taxes may interrupt the free market and cause corporations to be less productive, while also failing to largely benefit upper- and upper-middle-class families, who make up about 20% of America's population. Furthermore, neither policy actually takes a significant amount of power away from corporations, even Harris' — while 21% to 28% is definitely a clear increase in taxes, seven percent more is insignificant in terms of these corporations' overall wealth. These policies are marketed as good for the country and good for citizens, but at the end of the day, regardless of who wins, those already in power will get to decide where money should be allotted. Whether it is big businesses using their wealth to expand their fortune or the government putting tax dollars into credit for the lower classes, the general population still has little to no say in where America's money is going. That privilege has always gone to the wealthy and the powerful, and this part of America's economic status quo will not change.

### **Conclusion**

Early on November 6, 2024, it was determined that Republican candidate Donald Trump won the 2024 election. Soon, Trump will step into the role of President of the United States once again. His policies will have varying impacts on all American citizens, and the country will certainly change — in the short run. However, the political and economic status quo of the country will not change; instead, it will be perpetuated by Trump, just as it would have been perpetuated by Harris.

America will remain a “democracy,” referred to as one despite struggling to uphold the basic features of a democracy. Citizens will continue to disagree with the direction America is going, just as government officials will continue to misrepresent and potentially even do harm to citizens in the laws passed, policies enacted, and decisions made. The two-party system will



remain in place, drowning out the less popular political views and stances of third parties while amplifying the constant back-and-forth between the Republican and Democratic parties.

Politics, as well as the government, will continue to be heavily influenced by the wealthy, reinforcing the idea that anything and almost everything can be bought with enough money. The rich will consistently take full advantage of this, pumping funds into any part of the government that will take it, and in return, the government will act in accordance with the will of the rich. Significant power and wealth will stay in the hands of very few Americans and accumulate there, and these individuals will have a large say in the immediate future of the country.

Although Trump won this election, the structure of America as it exists today will not change. Even if Harris had won, the outcome would still be the same. The people in power benefit from the current system too much to challenge it or demand a better system for the country as a whole. Maybe there will eventually come a time when the political and economic status quo of the country changes from the way it is now, but that time is not 2024.

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