

The 2024 Presidential Election: Shift or Continuation in the American Status Quo?

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Abstract

The 2024 Presidential Election has been covered by the media as a desperate fight for democracy, leading to higher than ever turnout at the polls. But under closer inspection, these candidates will not bring as much change as Americans give them credit for. Both will continue the capitalist status quo and oligarchic systems of government which have propped them up and continue to support them financially throughout their campaigns. This paper argues that as a result of the original framing of the United States' bureaucratic systems, the rich will continue to exert significant influence over political systems and capitalism will remain America's economic system. Yet despite these similarities, Trump poses a unique threat to some minority groups in the United States like women and immigrants. Therefore, this paper argues that regardless of who becomes president, namely Harris or Trump, the political and economic status quo will not change, but the lives of women and immigrants may be significantly impacted by the president elect.

The 2024 Presidential Election: Shift or Continuation in the American Status Quo?

In the 2024 Presidential Election, record breaking amounts of voters showed up to the polls to cast their ballots. By November 3rd, 2024, more than 4.2 million North Carolinians cast their ballots in the early in-person voting period, easily topping the previous early voting record of 3.6 million in the 2020 presidential election (Gannon, 2024). In Georgia, a key swing state where Joe Biden won by only 0.3% in 2020, about a million more voters cast their early in-person ballots as well (Lewis, 2024). While these higher than usual voter turnout statistics indicate that voters *feel* that this election will significantly shift the political or economic status quo, to either help or harm them, it may not result in as much change as they think. Ranked among some of the most important issues to voters were abortion, immigration and the economy; and while it is true that Republican candidate Donald Trump and Democratic candidate Kamala Harris proposed vastly different perspectives on how to solve these issues, there are also a number of other issues and systems that will remain intact no matter who takes the presidential office in January 2024. But while the American public can expect a general continuation of the economic and political status quo, some groups like women and immigrants, may be more affected by the president elect.

Historical Context

Since the United States was founded in 1776, debates surrounding the role of the American government in its citizens' lives have been constant and tend to fall along party lines. While modern Republicans (like the former Democratic party) tend to favor less government intervention and lower taxes, Democrats (or the former Federalist party) tend to prefer more government intervention in citizens lives and are more willing to pay higher taxes. For fear of developing too strong of a national government, like the British monarchy who once tyrannically

ruled over colonial Americans, the newly formed United States government seldom intervened in the economy- until the Great Depression began in the early 1930s. In the aftermath of the Gilded Age where mass speculation rocked the stock market and millions of Americans found themselves out of work, it was clear that the government needed to intervene. This led to the implementation of the New Deal under FDR, and the creation of government programs like Social Security, designed to put money back into the economy. As a result of this intervention, and the massive amount of economic activity generated during WWII to produce weapons, by the mid 1950's America saw a growing healthy middle class. By 1971, around 61% of American households were considered middle class. But three years ago in 2020 that number dropped to 50%, and now in 2024 the Top 1 percent makes up around 21% of the United States' income, doubling since 1976 (Kochhar, Sechopoulos, 2022; Pizzigati, 2024). Looking at these statistics, there has clearly been a shift in wealth distribution in the past 70 years, which has contributed to many Americans struggling to make a livable wage or survive in a country with rising costs of living. In order to understand how we got here, we must first examine the processes by which the political and economic status quo came to be.

The Economic Status Quo

As historian Carl Degler wrote in his book "Out of Our Past," capitalism "came on the first ships" to the United States- and he's right because unlike most other European countries who transitioned from feudal systems to capitalist ones, the United States has always been a capitalist society (McCraw, 1999). Capitalism is the economic system that has persisted through the centuries to land us where we are today. Although the United States' most prominent mechanisms of capitalism have changed, from agricultural to industrial to corporate, this economic system has remained constant (2021, Hahn). Both candidates in the 2024 Presidential

election, as can be seen through their policies, do not intend to shift this system. While Trump took a slightly more pro-business capitalist position, Kamala was more open to government intervention in her economic policies like her plan for tax credits and increased tax rates for corporations and high earners.

Most of Trump's economic policies align with traditional Republican economic policies because they take a pro-business position and oppose government spending and high taxes. For example, one of his economic policies is lowering the corporate tax rate to 15% from the current (already lowered) 21%. He also proposed some significant tax breaks, most notably for tips. While these policies do sound enticing, as it would mean more money in the pockets of tipped workers, it would also mean that they would get less money from Social Security after retirement and decrease the overall funding to Medicaid (2024, Luhby).

But perhaps his most widely known economic policy is tariffs. In accordance with his claims that tariffs will bring back and create manufacturing jobs in the U.S., he's proposed a 10%-20% tariff on all imported goods, and as high as a 60% tariff on all imported goods from China. For the manufacturing of cars, he's even floated a 100% or 200% tariff on all cars made in Mexico, or companies who move their manufacturing to Mexico, which violates the Mexico-Canada trade agreement that he himself brokered in July of 2020 (Lobosco & Luhby, 2024; United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, n.d.). But in the process of arguing for these policies, Trump has also misled a lot of voters into believing that it is foreign countries who will pay these tariffs, when in fact the money will be coming out of American's pockets (Lobosco, 2024). A report from the Peterson Institute for International Economics concluded that Trump's tariffs would make inflation 2 percentage points higher than it would have been without them and estimated that they would cost a typical family nearly \$4,000 a year (Wiseman, 2024). This is

because tariffs are paid by the American companies who import these products, and in turn pass high prices for production onto their consumers- the American public.

But tariffs have always been a staple of Trump's economic policy. In January 2018 during his previous term, Trump put a 30%-50% tariff on solar panels and washing machines, and in March he imposed a 10% tariff on aluminum and steel imported from most countries (Gonzales, 2018; Horsley, 2018). Unfortunately, these tariffs did not bring Trump's desired effect, and according to a study by the Division of Research & Statistics and Monetary Affairs, Trump's 2018 tariffs were associated with "relative reduction in manufacturing employment and relative increases in producer prices". They also claim that while the tariffs did protect some industries' imports, it was "offset by larger drags from the effects of rising input costs and retaliatory tariffs" (Flaen and Pierce, 2019). Therefore, by observing Trump's past economic policies to his currently proposed ones, it's clear that his administration would not offer a significant change in the economic, capitalist status quo. In fact, he would most likely shift the United States' economic policy to be more pro-business and traditionally Republican.

Next, let's shift our focus and examine the economic policies that Kamala Harris proposed during her campaign. Most of Harris's proposed policies revolved around higher taxes on businesses and high earners as well as more tax credits for children and first-time home buyers. In an attempt to calm the housing crisis and allow more Americans to buy homes, Harris proposed a \$25,000 down payment assistance and a \$10,000 tax credit for first time home buyers. She also proposed increasing tax rates for corporations and individuals who earn over \$1 million a year from the current 21% and 20% (respectively) to 28% - a policy that is projected to bring about \$1.4 trillion over the next decade (Popli, 2024). It's important to note that this increased tax rate is in opposition to Trump's 2017 Tax Law, The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA),

which tripled the tax cuts that top 1 and 5 percent received as compared to the bottom 60% (Marr, Jacoby and Fenton, 2024). By comparing these two policies, it's obvious that Trump and Harris strongly differ when it comes to their economic policy. But Harris' pro-middle-class policies should not be mistaken to imply that she would significantly shift the current economic system. In fact, throughout her campaign trail she framed herself as a capitalist who believes in an "active partnership between government and the private sector" (Polpi, 2024).

Therefore, while either candidate takes slightly different positions on what they believe will improve the economy, namely tariffs or tax credits, regardless of which candidate wins the 2024 Presidential election, it's safe to assume that the United States' economic system will not be shifting in the next four years.

The Political Status Quo

Since the United States was founded in 1776, it has prided itself on being the leader of the free world and a pillar of democracy for countries around the world to look up to. While it is true that we have maintained a democracy in that the general population is encouraged to vote in general elections, as capitalist interests have become steadily more intertwined with the government's, America has shifted farther away from representing the interests of the average American to those of the rich. But in looking at the history of the United States it is important to ask- is this truly a *new* trend?

America's Founding Fathers were some of the wealthiest of people living in the Colonies at the time, and that status did not go unrepresented in their framing of the political system. Andrew Wehram, as associate professor at Central Michigan University, explains this when he says that "[America} was never meant to be a sort of direct democracy...the vote itself, [the Founding Fathers] thought, ought to be reserved for people of wealth and education", a view that

is clear to see when observing the original structure of the voting system (Mekouar, 2021). In a conversation on May 26 in 1776 with James Sullivan, a colleague of John Adams, Adams explains his beliefs surrounding the right to vote.

Is it not equally true, that men in general in every society, who [are poor and do not own property], are...too dependent upon other men to have a will of their own? Few men, who have no property, have any judgment of their own...Depend upon it, sir, it is dangerous to...attempt to [change] the qualifications of voters. There will be no end of it. New claims will arise. Women will demand a vote. Lads from 12 to 21 will think their rights not enough attended to, and every man, who has not a [dime], will demand an equal voice with any other in all acts of state (John Adams Explains Why People Without Property Should Not Be Able to Vote, n.d.).

Adams, like many of the Founding Fathers, believed that it was the responsibility of the wealthy to manage the government's policies. Therefore, they implemented governmental processes which took away power from the general population, creating voting systems like the Electoral College, and allowing the President to hand pick Supreme Court Justices or senators who were originally selected by state legislators instead of the general population (Mekouar, 2021). A plethora of laws have been passed since then to expand the right to vote, including the 15th Amendment in 1870 which ensured that people would not be denied the right to vote due to their race, the 19th Amendment in 1920 allowing women to vote, the 24th Amendment in 1964 to ban poll taxes, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 which outlawed the use of discriminatory voting practices, such as literacy tests (Carnegie Corporation of New York Rights, 2019). Yet despite the legislative improvements that have been made to promote equality in the voting process, the interests of the rich continue to influence the way voters cast their

ballot by influencing and funding popular media outlets and investing massive amounts of money into the political system.

Currently, more than half of America's billionaire philanthropists have "serious policy interests and ambitions" in controversial policies like deficit reduction, gun reform or changes in immigration policy. In order to enact these changes, they not only engage in "philanthrocapitalism", or large donations to political parties, but directly influence media that American citizens consume (Gross, 2016). In 2013, Jeff Bezos bought *The Washington Post* for \$250 million, in 2017 Laurene Jobs bought a majority stake in *The Atlantic*, and in 2022 Elon Musk, founder of Tesla, bought Twitter for \$44 billion dollars. By buying up control of these organizations, billionaires are able to influence the news coverage of candidates or political figures which benefit them (Neate, 2022). For example, since Musk began his ardent support of President Trump reelection campaign, Twitter (now "X") became a breeding ground for voter fraud conspiracy theories. He also promoted the X Community called the Election Integrity Community (founded by his super PAC, America PAC) which was full of users spreading conspiracy theories and misinformation about voter fraud. Moreover, just weeks after acquiring the social media app, Musk also reportedly restored over 62,000 accounts previously banned for policy violations, some of which were white nationalist and Neo-Nazi accounts (Ingram, 2024). Therefore, as a multi-billionaire, Musk has successfully used his wealth to direct a platform of over 600 million users to consume exceeding more right-wing content, therefore having an extremely powerful influence on voters. As a reward for his loyalty, promptly following Trump's successful reelection, Musk was appointed by Trump to co-lead a new "Department of Government Efficiency" with Vivek Ramaswamny (Burns, 2024).

By taking just a quick look into the complex relationship between the rich and government affairs, it's clear that not much has really changed since the days of the Founding Fathers. If anything, the wealthy now have even more mechanisms to influence the government, both through the media and large political donations. As a result of these interventions, the United States political system currently finds itself in a complicated position. While many government officials embrace the *idea* of a democracy and the "American Dream", the reality is that the interests of only a few of the most powerful people are represented in the government- and can we truly call that a "democracy"?

In the status quo, "philanthrocapitalism" is rampant, Supreme Court Justices serve lifelong terms and the revolving-door between corporate America and political structures keep the capitalist machine well oiled, ensuring that only the most well-funded political candidates win their campaign. During their 2024 campaigns, Harris and Trump raised \$1,652,322,054 and \$1,092,560,385 respectively (Kamala Harris (D), n.d.; Donald Trump (R), n.d.). While this political system has always existed, the landmark 2010 ruling of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* exponentially increased the money involved in elections. In a 5-4 ruling, Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote that limiting "independent political spending" from private corporations and other groups was a violation of the first amendment right to free speech. This case gave rise to a later ruling, *Speechnow.org v. FEC*, that allowed outside groups to accept unlimited amounts of political donations, as long as that money does not go directly to candidates. This is the ruling that gave rise to Super PACs, which while required to disclose the source of their donations, are often funded by "dark money" groups, which often do not clearly disclose the source of their funds. Essentially, this case expanded the already large, and growing, federal allowances for campaign donations from private firms into candidates for public office

and has made it even harder to track where candidates funding is coming from (Lau, 2019). We can see these effects looking at the 2022 midterm elections; the top 100 donors to federal races together spend more than 1.2 billion dollars mainly through super PACs (which can raise infinite amounts of money from corporations, unions, associations, and individuals) (Super PACs, n.d.). That was about 60% more than the number of Americans who gave small donations, typically around \$200. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, this was a large reversal from pre-2010, where small donations “overwhelmingly” outspent the 100 largest donors (Weisman, 2024). Lawrence Lessig, a professor of Law and Leadership at Harvard Law School, states: “In the current (2024) election cycle, 158 families have given half the money to candidates...that’s not an American democracy” (Pazzanese, 2016). Both Republican and Democratic candidates benefit from this system, but are also ultimately at the will of, and influenced by, the companies and businesses that fund their campaigns.

Ultimately, this system should prompt us to ask ourselves a question; if one person's opinion, and therefore political donations, have more of an influence than their middle-class counterpart, can we really call that system a democracy? And if both candidates engage in it, instead of questioning or trying to change it, can we really expect a significant shift in the political status quo? By analyzing both candidates under this lens, it’s clear that the answer is no. Regardless of the victor, we will continue to see the top 1 percent influence political campaigns to their benefit, leaving the majority of Americans voices to go unheard, and struggle to make ends meet. Yet despite their similarities in this area, Harris and Trump also have varying opinions on other political issues like immigration, abortion and foreign policy which are worth discussing.

Immigration Policy

Throughout the campaign trail, Trump has not been shy on his stance on immigration. “Migrant criminals.” “Illegal monster[s].” “Killers.” “Gang members.” “Poisoning our country.” “Taking your jobs.” “The largest invasion in the history of our country”, are just some of the phrases he has used that rather succinctly summarize the rhetoric that he has used to describe the “immigrant” communities here in the United States (despite the fact that most American families do not originate in the U.S.- and are therefore also immigrants) (Flagg, Calderon & Hing, 2024). Among Trump's immigration policy, changes include reinstating his “remain in Mexico” program, which requires immigrants to stay in Mexico during their immigration proceedings in the U.S. and mandatory detention of migrants instead of the current “catch and release policy” which exists because of limited federal resources. But his most famous, and controversial, policy is his mass deportation plan. Under this policy, Trump claims that he will deport the roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S., as well as all of those living under Temporary Protected Status (TPS) (Dobkin, 2024). November 11th, Trump appointed Tom Homan, his former acting U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director (ICE) to be his “border czar”, a man attributed with the implementation of the controversial family separation policy under Trump's previous administration. In an interview with CBS news in October, when asked if families would be separated as a result of this policy, Homan responded, “families can be deported together” and suggested that workplace raids, a practice ended under the Biden administration, could also return (Palmer, 2024; Debusmann Jr & Casas, 2024). When looking at all of these policy proposals and government appointments, it’s clear that Trump will hold a very strict immigration policy during his campaign.

In comparison, Harris's immigration policy has revolved more around tighter regulations for migrants to enter the United States. During her Vice Presidency, Harris's job was to focus on long-term ways to reduce migration from multiple Central American countries including Venezuela and Guatemala. She relied on this background to bolster her claim that she would bring back the Senate bill which was proposed earlier this year for strict asylum claim regulation and more funding to the border and sign it into law. On her website, Kamala also focused on enforcing stricter border security and crack downs on drug smuggling, drawing on her experience as a California attorney where she successfully prosecuted gangs that moved narcotics across the border (Santana, 2024).

Therefore, when comparing Trump and Harris's immigration policy, it's evident that immigrants will most likely be greatly affected by whichever candidate takes office. While Harris's immigration would most likely follow in the footsteps of the Biden administrations, albeit perhaps a bit stricter, a Trump candidacy could mean deportation and family separations for millions of undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States- thus meaning that the status quo in this policy area would be greatly affected.

Abortion

Two years after the overturning of Roe V. Wade, women across the United States have been steadily facing the reality of living in a country with no national right for abortion. On October 30th of 2024, Josseli Barnica, a mother of her one-year-old daughter, was experiencing a miscarriage "in progress". At that point, more than a dozen medical experts said that an abortion should have been offered to Barnica in order to prevent the risk of a deadly infection, but nothing was done. This is because in Texas, where she lived, it would have been considered a crime. Instead, she waited nearly 40 hours in anguish for her baby's heartbeat to stop and so that

the procedure could lawfully occur. Three days later, she died of an infection (Jaramillo & Surana, 2024). The reality is, the overturning of Roe V. Wade was made possible by Judicial nominations that took place under Trump's Presidency, namely Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett - all of whom ruled to have Roe overturned (Mendoza, 2022). As women across the United States, mainly living in Red States, continue to face the possibility of being denied medical care or IVF treatments, whichever candidate wins this election could significantly affect their lives.

Despite the severity of this issue, or perhaps because of it, Trump has not taken a clear stance on abortion. At times, he claims that he would not support a federal abortion ban but at other instances, brags about contributing to the overturning of Roe V. Wade. At the very least, Friedrich-Karnik, a director for federal policy at the Guttmacher Institute, said that Trump could reinstate some of the policies implemented during his previous term like prohibiting providers that receive federal grants from referring patients to abortion care (Bendix & Richardson, 2024). Sarah Boden and Elissa Nadworny who write for NPR also theorize that under another Trump presidency, Americans could see the prohibition of telehealth abortion, or restrictions on the prescribing and mailing of abortion pills - which make up roughly two thirds of all abortions (Boden & Nadaworney, 2024; Jones & Friedrich-Karnik, 2024).

Unlike Trump, Kamala has taken a strong pro-abortion stance her entire campaign- and even before she was a nominee. During her time in the Senate, she consistently supported abortion rights, cosponsoring legislation that would have banned “common state-level restrictions” like requiring specific tests or hospital admitting privileges in order to have an abortion. Her campaign website claims that she “would never allow a national abortion ban to

become law” and would sign a bill to “restore reproductive freedom nationwide” if elected (Qinn, 2024).

Due to his wafering on the issue, it’s unclear what exact restrictions women can expect on abortions during a Trump presidency. But there's no doubt that of the two candidates, he would be more willing to sign into law abortion restrictions- and that is what is worrying many women. Essentially, Trump might be the harbinger of some change to the status quo around abortion care in the U.S.

Foreign Policy

Since the end of victory of the allied forces at the end of World War II the United States emerged in the eyes of many Americans, as an “exceptional nation with a special role to play in human history” (Exceptionalism - The leader of the free world, n.d.). That perception has since guided many of the United States foreign policy decisions including their involvement in The Cold War with Vietnam and Korea, and the later War on Terror with Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries. The constant, and at times excessive, involvement by the U.S. into foreign wars or conflicts has therefore been a continuity of U.S. foreign policy, regardless of political affiliation. The next election cycle will be no different.

In regard to the Ukraine Russia conflict, despite the fact that Trump has said he could end the war in 24 hours, the reality would, obviously, be much different. During the September Presidential Debate and conversations with President Zelenskyy in July, Trump has emphasized that he wants the “war to stop” and says that he would “get them together...and negotiate a deal” to end the conflict (Hubbard, 2024). At the same time, he has also been staunchly against continuing to send aid to Ukraine, and at a campaign stop in Detroit told the crowd that the demand for aid “never ends”, an issue which he claims he will “have settled prior to taking the

White House as president-elect”. Comparatively, Kamala Harris has largely campaigned on continuing to send aid to Ukraine, even proposing a \$1.5 billion dollar aid package on June 15th (Hayden, 2024).

On the issue of the Israel-Palestine conflict, while both Presidents want a ceasefire it will most likely occur on very different terms depending on who is president. The circumstances under which this ceasefire would be under Trump’s Administration can be deduced by analyzing his foreign policy during his previous administration. In 2017, he recognized Jerusalem, a plot of land long desired by Palestinians to be a capital of a future Palestinian state, as a part of Israel and moved the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv. In 2019 he signed a presidential proclamation declaring the Golan Heights, a piece of land Israel annexed from Syria in 1967, as territory of Israel (Stack, 2024). On the other hand, Kamala has taken a lot of the same stances as Biden. While asserting Israel's right to exist, she has also called the “scale of suffering” in Gaza “heartbreaking”. Harris has remained determined to reach a two-state solution, which while promising, has failed to result in any noticeable effects on that region of the Middle East (Mathis, 2024). Therefore, due to all of the aforementioned reasons, analysts from Lebanon and Gaza think that “Trump would give Netanyahu a freer hand, while Israel would need to make more compromises under Harris” (Estrin, 2024).

Conclusion

While highly anticipated, the 2024 Presidential Election may not present as many changes as many Americans thought. But while the political and economic status quo will largely stay the same, other groups such as women and immigrants may be greatly affected by whoever takes the Presidential office in January. For them, the next four years will be coupled with uncertainty about their rights or status as a citizen and could therefore result in a significant

shift in the status quo from the past four years. At the same time, life for many Americans will stay the same- albeit with potentially higher grocery bills if Trump's tariffs are implemented. At the very least, unlike Trump's former campaign for President, this one will not end with an insurrection at the Capitol.

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