

2024 Presidential Election and The Status Quo

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Abstract

The 2024 presidential election resulted in the re-election of Donald Trump. His return to the White House was portrayed as a significant change in American politics. However, by examining the oligarchic structure prevalent in the United States, this paper argues that changes in administration every four years would not bring a meaningful shift. From the judicial ruling of legalizing corporate funding beginning with the *Citizens United v FEC* decision to the powers of the president, this paper demonstrates how oligarchy forms and persists. Also, with some specific examples, such as the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and bipartisan consensus regarding the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), it shows how both parties get influenced by elite interests. Moreover, by discussing the structural barriers of third-parties or alternative movements such as Cornel West's campaign in 2024, it also reveals how the two-party system effectively sustains the oligarchic structure. Ultimately, by noting the importance of recognizing reality, the analysis insists that the current status quo would be the same.

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More than one year has passed since Trump's victory over Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election. During the election, the rivalry between the two parties made the public think they are choosing between the two candidates who would offer a completely different future. When the election ultimately ended with Donald Trump elected 47th president, the reactions of the Republican party and the Democratic party were sharply divided. While the Republicans celebrated Trump's victory believed that he would "Make America Great Again" (Volle, 2026), the Democrats believed that Trump's victory was a severe threat to democracy, with some predicting that the whole country is moving closer towards fascism (Green, 2024; Reich, 2024; see also Harris "Trump's Project 2025 Agenda", 2024).

All of the reactions and even the fierce rivalry during the election itself can make one think that America's future would be significantly different if Kamala Harris had won. This paper explains why such an assumption is wrong. By examining the specific status quo and its persistence, this paper argues that no matter who becomes the president, the current status quo does not fundamentally change. Politically, the United States could be understood as an oligarchy, which refers to a form of government that is run by the few. Economically, the oligarchy is fully in support of and leverages capitalism for profit; elite individuals maintain ownership over the means of production and aim primarily to make themselves richer.

How Fragmentation Is Designed for Oligarchy

Detailed observation of America's political history with its basic political structures suggests that the country might have never completely represented the best interests of its people. One core reason for this is in the design of the Constitution. Traditionally, officials, such as the people in Congress and presidents, are understood to have been elected by their

constituents and operate in branches of government that represent the people's needs. Cohen & Rogers (1986) argue, however, that this fragmented system of separating the national powers was intended to "limit the potential cooperation among people of ordinary means" (4). This was to prevent the fears of Founding Father and statesman James Madison, which was that the economically disadvantaged masses would organize and overthrow the class division of the landed elite and the public majority. "In [their] constitutional scheme, Madison and other framers accordingly sought both to prevent majorities from forming common programs, and to impose barriers to the implementation of those programs, should they be formed" (5). Regardless of the Founding Fathers' intention, these barriers remain the mandates present today to ensure a fragmented government structure that has allowed oligarchies to operate.

One mandate that acts like a barrier is the separation of powers at the national level. A democratic point of view of America would see that Congress, like presidents, are freely elected representatives of the people. In addition, with the judiciary, these officials would act as each other's checks and balances (Shapiro, 2026). However, these checks and balances seem to work against the interests of the people. Instead, the separation of powers has acted as a shield for authorities to further corporate interests with legal support.

This is clearly seen in the expansion of presidential powers over time. The President has what Parenti (1995) calls "executive privilege" (p. 251), which has allowed them to remain unaccountable in their extra-constitutional decisions to control information and execute policies and actions without the approval or knowledge of the legislative and judiciary branches. One example is that executive orders do not need congressional approval, which Bush and Reagan have leveraged to deregulate the leading industries of their times (Parenti 1995, p. 250). In addition, the President can pressure uncooperative agents in Congress into acting according to

the chief executive's goals through media exposure, punish them by withholding their pork and other presidential favors, or incite wars without additional approval due to their control of the military (ibid.) An example of these two in action is recent. In April 18, 2026, two months after Trump declared war on Iran, he signed an executive order to relax restrictions ahead of the FDA on psychedelics, including ibogaine (Al Jazeera Staff and the Associated Press, 2026).

Though the executive branch may often seem antagonistic to the other branches, there is ample evidence where the democratic elements of the Constitution had been skewed to fulfill ideological and economic interests by the judiciary. If the current issue has been in the use of the Second Amendment to defend against gun control, the longer debate has been in the use of the 14th Amendment to guarantee political inequalities between groups (Parenti 1995, p. 291) and the rise of Super PACs, with additional interpretations of the First Amendment (Duignan, 2026, Weiner, 2019; see also Pruitt, 2025).

When it comes to the economic status quo, the United States is a capitalist nation. In this economic structure, the country prioritizes capital accumulation and corporate interests. This kind of economic structure does not change even though the administration changes. This is because the leaders themselves pursue a capitalist country. According to Parenti (1995), the political leaders including the president act as a core of a system that protects corporate interests whether it's international or domestic (p. 245).

Bipartisan Rivalries Sustain the Illusion

One might still perceive that the two parties pursue a completely different structure as the two parties conflict with issues such as taxes or corporate regulations. However, it is important to note that all the issues that they are conflicting with are confined in the same broader framework of capitalism. What actually changes is the specific level within this structure. A critical question

arises then, which asks the reason why the rivalry between the two parties seems to persist in people's eyes. Cohen & Rogers (1986) suggest that Federalism and the separated branches generate an inability to generate a consensus between the different branches as well as between the national and state-level units. On the ground, this division is expressed through bipartisanship (5). It is in the elite's best interests to fuel the cultural war in order to prevent people understanding their common interest. In addition, the Democrat and Republican parties have been present since the beginnings of American government and add an illusion of tenure. Their historic clashes and grievances across history continue today, furthering the divide between them. Though the two parties share several commonalities that are aligned with oligarchic agendas, their modern images based on the historical legacies that these parties once had trick the voters believe they are making a meaningful choice.

For instance, the Democratic party's image relies on its shift to liberal values in 1964. This was the civil rights era, when Democrats like Lyndon B. Johnson stood for those who were relatively marginalized and the working class (Britannica Editors, 2026; see also Heineman et al., 1989, p. 105). The image made through this contributed to the modern image and eventually the illusion. In particular, during the 2024 election season, Kamala Harris focused on women's abortion rights or sexual minorities' rights (Harris, 2024, p. 7). These physical features that Harris leveraged likewise reassured the voting public of who the Democrats are despite the reality that they also work toward business interests.

Similar can be said for Donald Trump, especially due to his slogan of MAGA (Make America Great Again). Trump strategically used the same slogan as Reagan during his elections. The slogan also pushed for a return to the Republican party's conservative, traditional values and minimizing government intervention to protect the economy (Republican party, 2026). By

turning the cause of the economic problems of the country to that he considered culturally corruptive to him, such as DEI policies, LGBTQ rights, and immigration problems, he encouraged people to vote for him (Smith, 2025; Laterza & Romer, 2024).

Ultimately, as seen from the examples above, the political elite would benefit from the polarization and conflict between people over cultural issues such as race, gender, gun control, and patriotism (Hedges, 2020). Through this, they would also prevent the public from demanding a reform or a change. Consequently, as issues that could be used to mislead people exist, both parties would pretend to battle these issues, causing the people to be fragmented and stand on either side. This would naturally force them to vote between the two limited options, Republican or Democrat, eventually creating a win-win scenario where the ruling-class suffers no loss regardless of which gets elected.

Persisting Status Quo

As a result of illusion through cultural war, the oligarchic structure also persists regardless of administration as officials including presidents reproduce it. Whether it's a Republican or Democrat, the system has not changed for a long time. This is because, through their authoritative status of getting easily publicized, the leaders shape the public to be in a system in favor of the elites (Parenti, 1995, pp. 225, 264, 309-310). The actual specific examples of this oligarchic persistence can be seen in various parts of society and even in some judicial decisions.

The Healthcare System

When it comes to the healthcare system, the fundamental structure largely has not changed whether it was a Republican or Democratic government. In a superficial interpretation, one might perceive that the Republicans advocate for a less regulated free market, while it's the

Democrats that are actually committed to social welfare, including universal healthcare. However, the reality is that both parties are influenced by treating healthcare as a commodity rather than a fundamental human right.

One example that reflects this is the Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as Obamacare. On a closer look at this act, which mandated increased coverage and health insurance subsidies for people, both parties were favoring the corporations and some few groups through this Act. According to Wax (2017), through this new system, the Democratic party made a structure that only favored a few groups such as insurance companies, hospitals, and some middlemen instead of the American citizens. When the Republican party, as well as Donald Trump, exposed these problems and made a promise of fully abolishing this Act, it generated further support for Donald Trump to be president in 2016 (Jacobson, 2024). However, then-Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, a Republican, suddenly changed the position to abolish just thirty percent of the Act, which Congress eventually passed (Wax 2017). This suggests that even though it may look the parties are making a change that seems to favor the American people, regardless of the party, both of them try to keep the fundamental structure.

Besides this, the ACA barely has a difference between the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which started from the conservative Heritage Foundation and was conducted by Mitt Romney in 2006 because the Act itself was actually based on this (Hedges, 2012). This demonstrates that the Act the Democrats think of as one of their biggest accomplishments is actually much closely connected to the Republicans. Moreover, it shows that even the Republicans also wanted an oligarchic healthcare system that advantaged the corporations and those in special interest. Overall, the example of the healthcare system regarding the ACA lets us know that even though the United States citizens vote for either party

expecting for a medical reform. The larger capitalist structure of corporate-controlled oligarchy would not change.

Domestic Policies

Consensus around national issues is also tense with bipartisan animosity, even when the evidence ought to indicate a consensus between the two. In fact, upon closer observation of the policies that the government makes, one may notice that the differences between the two parties hardly include opposition to business interests.

The clearest things that show this is the military policies of each party. One might believe that the Republican and the Democratic party show a significant difference regarding military policy as both of them criticizes the opposite party's military action, which can be clearly seen in the case of the Ukraine War and the recent military operation in Iran (Fegan et al. 2026). The traditional and common belief of Republicans having a more tough line and Democrats having a more conciliatory attitude contribute to this as well. However, the bipartisan legislative decisions and lobbying data demonstrate that such conclusions are significantly wrong.

One example is the constant increase of the National Defense Authorization Act, also known as NDAA. For decades, both the Republican and Democratic party have supported and been passing this act for decades and even until now. For instance, the recent FY 2026 NDAA, which authorized 900.6 billion dollars for the Department of War, was passed by a wide margin in 312–112 in the House of Representatives and 77–20 in the Senate (Donnelly, 2025). This becomes the 65th consecutive pass of this Act, which makes it the most enduring bipartisan legislation in the whole US history (Wilson, 2025).

Yet, one may still question why this bipartisan consensus becomes an example of persistence of the oligarchic status quo. What makes it in such a way is the corporate-affected

structure. An analysis says that corporations, in this context, defense firms, spend lots of money lobbying for their interests to both parties, which results in them shaping the government policies, including the NDAA to their tastes (TL_Contributors, 2025).

Besides this, the complex relationship between corporations and the government also contributes to oligarchy. To be more specific, the revolving door occurs between them, and they form a partnership with each other. These phenomena are not confined to a certain party. Examples of revolving doors are James Mattis, the former Secretary of Defense who worked in the Trump administration and is now working for a defense company (Hartung, 2023) and Anthony Blinken, a businessman who became Secretary of State during the Biden administration (TL_Contributors).

Taken together, specific bipartisan consensus of a certain act and the corporate-affected structure that applies to both parties demonstrate that the public's perception that the party's champion people's interests over business interests is not true. Rather, it proves that the oligarchic structure will continue.

Judicial Decisions

When it comes to the judicial decision, one example that reveals this is the decision of the Supreme Court regarding the case of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Committee* (FEC). Referring to the freedom of speech of the first amendment, this was a decision that abolished a hundred-year-old law that banned independent spending to candidates or parties (Weiner, 2019). The reason why such a decision becomes an example can be seen from the specific outcomes of it.

The main changes because of this decision happened later in 2010 through the court case *Speechnow.org v. FEC*, which referred to the *Citizens United v FEC* ruling. As they would no

longer be restricted from the barrier that prevented them from having influence in political advertising, the few elites such as corporations or special interest groups would have started to spend money without any limitations and without needing to reveal their identities. Eventually these led to the incredible influence of Super PACs, which are a decisive factor of oligarchic persistence. Specifically, Super PACs and dark money groups controlled by the lobbyists became a pathway to influence the officials in government (Pino & Fishman, 2025).

The influence of Super PACs and dark money also appeared in the recent 2024 election. Both of them played a significant role in shaping the election by affecting both parties. For instance, Donald Trump was able to catch up with Kamala Harris with the help of Super PAC and benefitted from the dark money. This is not confined to the Republican party. In fact, Kamala Harris, as well, was helped by them that were backed by the tech companies in Silicon Valley (Pino & Fishman, 2025).

Taken together, the Citizens United decision institutionalized a system where money becomes the political power. By letting private capital influence politics, it caused an inequality between the interests of the public and the elites, favoring the wealthy and powerful. Ultimately, by marginalizing the public from politics, this decision proves how oligarchy is maintained.

Barring Entry to Third Parties and Alternative Movements

If both parties remain ineffectual for change and keep being tied up to capitalist oligarchy, a follow-up question arises: Why are there no alternative, feasible options in the ballot? Historically, the United States has had outside movements and different third parties over its lifetime as a democracy. For example, there are historic third parties that are most well-known including the Libertarian, Green, and Constitution parties (Second Thought, 2020).

These parties have different ideologies that would make the congress diverse if they were able to join politics. For example, the libertarian party is a party that supports a virtual sole authority over people's lives and the minimal intervention of the government (Britannica, 2026). When analyzed from the political compass, they would be situated in the purple quadrant (The Political Compass). The Green Party is a party that pursues progressive policies in particular, environmentalism (Matthias, 2026). In terms of The Political Compass, they would be on the purple quadrant (The Political Compass).

Besides these, there are also some alternate movements that have significantly different thoughts from the two major parties. One example is the campaign of Cornel West, a civil rights activist, who ran as a People's Party candidate in the 2024 presidential election. According to an interview, during his campaign, he showed the public that he pursues quite different values from the Republican and the Democrat. He criticized both the Republican and the Democrat party by claiming the Republican party is a neofascist party that tied up with Big Military and Big Business and the Democrat party a party that is incapable of taking the needs of poor and working people (Goodman, 2023). He also criticized American militarism and empire (Hedges, 2023). All of these claims show that Cornel West is a person who aims to shift significantly from the two parties' ideologies.

However, neither of these third parties or alternative movements have a significant influence in American politics. None of them have a single seat in the congress and are not exposed in the media compared to the Republican and the Democrat party. This is because the duopoly system limits the third party or alternative movements from getting involved into politics.

One limit has to do with the structural system. For example, systems include the single member district with a plurality, where whoever gets the most votes win regardless of the presence of majority, and the single-member-district system prevents third parties from involving in politics (Heineman, 1989, p. 90). Another way has to do with the intentional blockage done by the major parties. This can be seen in the case where the Democratic party sent an open letter to the Green Party urging them to stand down and not to run a candidate during the 2020 election (Hoeing, 2020).

All these barriers may prevent some advantages of having various parties, such as invigorating additional points of views and solving problems often considered the biggest including trivial rivalry and irrational partisanship (Cooper, 2024). It would also consequently limit the public to have a limited choice of two, in other words, the duopoly system. This system has been often criticized by historical people and even until now. This can be seen from the warning of having only two parties from George Washington, claiming that “the alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism”. John Adams also criticized it from the quote of “a division of the republic into two great parties...is to be dreaded as the great political evil” (as cited in Cooper, 2024).

Ultimately, as all these effects of not having third parties to join the politics and criticisms suggest, the duopoly system would keep the status quo unchanged, because of these structural and intentional exclusion of other movements.

Conclusion

More than one year has passed since Donald Trump was elected for the second time and started working in the White House. His re-election raises a key question: Does a change in presidents lead to a change in political economy or is it just business as usual? Through his massive re-organization based on his conservative beliefs, people were encouraged to experience a significant change. However, based on the various examples of the persistence of the status quo discussed previously—from ACA to the Citizens United decision—it becomes clear that the answer is the latter. The capitalist oligarchic structure would not change. This would be the same even if Kamala Harris was elected. As discussed, the current status quo is not only confined to a certain party. Therefore, it is difficult to expect a fundamental change every four years.

Although there are third parties or alternative movements aiming for a revolutionary change, due to the barriers that block them from having influence, the duopoly system would continue the current status quo. Overall, having a larger view with the political economic structure and the 2024 election reassures that the system designed for the elites will sustain, which also demonstrates the importance of recognizing reality and taking action.

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